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Nietzsche, il ribelle aristocratico. Biografia intellettuale e bilancio critico, Domenico Losurdo, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002, Paperback 2004

Re-Reading Nietzsche with Domenico Losurdo's Intellectual Biography

Domenico Losurdo, Professor of History of Philosophy at the University of Urbino and a well-known figure in Rifondazione Comunista, is one of the world's leading Hegel scholars and an expert on nineteenth and twentieth-century intellectual history. He also exemplifies the cultural gap that still persists between the theoretical cultures of continental Europe and the Anglo-American world. While strongly influencing Italian academia with over twenty monographs, only two of them have made it to an English translation so far: *Heidegger and the Ideology of War: Community, Death, and the West*[1] and *Hegel and the Freedom of Moderns*. And, whereas his book *Nietzsche, il ribelle aristocratico* has sparked off a heated debate in Italy stretching from *L'Osservatore Romano* to *Il Manifesto,* from *La Repubblica* to *Ll Corriere della Sera*, from *La Stampa* to *l'Unità*,[2] it has been received with few review articles so far in the Anglophone press.[3]

A German translation is on its way and will be published by Argument Verlag. An English edition should be prepared as soon as possible. It is especially the Anglo-Saxon humanities, with their strong underpinnings of postmodernist Nietzscheanism, that are in urgent need of a critical-historical reconstruction of the ideological processes underlying their own practice. Losurdo's voluminous book, about 1,150 pages in length, could become a landmark for the renewal of critical Nietzsche research. It is not only the most comprehensive study on the connections between Nietzsche's philosophy and his politics, but also the most thorough and analytical.

In the following pages, I will take his interpretation as both a starting point and guide for a re-reading of Nietzsche, on the basis of which I will, in turn, look back at the way that Losurdo reads him.[4] In this way, I will try to arrive at some criteria for specifying Losurdo's methodological approach and critically evaluating his interpretation.

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1. See Milchman.

2. See the collection of articles available at: <http://www.filosofia.it/pagine/argomenti/Losurdo/Losurdo.htm>.

3. See Santi 2004 and Thomas 2005.

4. Since there is no critical edition of Nietzsche in English (the planned Stanford edition based on the Colli and Montinari edition collapsed after three volumes), I have translated parts of the *Unpublished Fragments* myself. In what follows, I will give the respective number of the aphorism and add the volume and page of the German edition (KSA). See bibliography for abbreviations.

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Losurdo's distance from Lukács

'And He Was a Destroyer of Reason After All' was the title of a review in a well-known German newspaper praising Losurdo's book for countering the predominant softening-up of Nietzsche's image with a critique 'in the sense of Lukács'.[5] The review is certainly right in pointing out Losurdo's opposition to a 'hermeneutics of innocence' that subjugates even Nietzsche's bluntest statements – from the support of slavery to the annihilation of the weak and degenerate – to an allegorical pattern of interpretation, thereby diluting them into metaphor, for instance when Gianni Vattimo explains Nietzsche's celebration of war as a 'negation of the unity of being' (pp. 653, 781ff, 798ff). But can it really be true that Losurdo wants to take up this battle once again in the conceptual framework provided by Lukács's paradigm, including Nietzsche under the rubric of a philosophical 'irrationalism from Schelling to Hitler' and thus treating him as an immediate intellectual forerunner of the Nazi state? This interpretation has become as popular (far beyond the account provided by Lukács) as it is methodologically disputable, because it forces Nietzsche's philosophy into a teleology directed towards fascism and skips over a considerable historical distance. As convincingly shown by Martha Zapata Galinda, among others, the relation between Nietzsche and Nazism is neither to be conceived of as an automatic consequence of his philosophy nor as an external manipulation, but rather as a process of 'fascisation [*Faschisierung*]', in terms of an ideological transformation consisting of determinate interventions into specific constellations of bourgeois hegemony.[6]

Fortunately, the Lukács label is a result of the reviewer's misunderstanding, caused most likely by a widespread image that makes Lukács the representative for any Marxist critique of Nietzsche (as well as the scapegoat for an anti-Marxist reaction). To defend Lukács, as Losurdo does, against the denunciation that he has adopted the Nazis' interpretation of Nietzsche and merely added a negative value judgement (pp. 781, 798), or to recall Lukács's project of a political deciphering of Nietzsche's thinking – in contrast to Foucault's coquettish presumption to be entitled to 'deform' it and make it 'squeak' and 'cry' without caring for textual accuracy (p. 791)[7] – has nothing to do with a continuation of Lukács's approach but testifies instead to Losurdo's integrity as a scholar. When Losurdo describes hostility to the French Revolution and socialism as an ongoing trait that traverses the different periods of Nietzsche's work, he does not convey anything specifically Lukácsian, but rather summarises a conclusion quite common among those scholars who take seriously the question of the political embeddedness of Nietzsche's philosophy. Even the radically anti-Marxist historian Ernst Nolte comes to the conclusion that 'Losurdo is right in pointing out that the hostility against socialism was the continuous fact in Nietzsche's intellectual existence'.[8]

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5. Flasch 2003.

6. Zapata Galindo 1995, p. 14.

7. 'The only tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest' (Foucault 1980, pp. 53–4).

8. Nolte remains faithful to his vehement anti-Marxism when he criticises Losurdo for siding with Marx and overlooking the 'excess' of the latter's idea of communism: 'Is the image of the "blonde beast" really so much more absurd than the ideal of those classless and eschatological human beings no longer subject to any division of labour…?' (Nolte 2003). Translations mine.

Losurdo's approach is new and productive, not least in the fact that it takes its distance from Lukács' *Destruction of Reason* in some decisive respects: according to Losurdo, to assume an immediate connection between Nietzsche and Nazism is a 'historiographical distortion' that is to be overcome by a 'comparative analysis of ideological processes' (pp. 657, 661). Like so many others, Lukács was caught in the paradigm of a German *Sonderweg* (special path) and did not take into account that the ideological constellation in late nineteenth-century Germany was not so different from those in other Western countries (p. 659). It is only after having carefully reconstructed Nietzsche's discourse in the ideological network of his own time that one can approach the problem of how to investigate continuities and discontinuities with the Third Reich (pp. 654, 660). Finally, if one searches, as Lukács does, for examples of Nietzsche's 'irrationalism', one runs into trouble when dealing with Nietzsche's 'enlightened' texts, which come out against any irrational mythology and in favour of the progress of science (p. 898).

The case of slavery

Let us take an example. According to Losurdo, Nietzsche's recurring justifications of slavery can neither be understood as innocent metaphors nor as an anticipation of the Nazi enslavement of Eastern Europe, but, rather, must be grasped in the context of contemporary struggles around the abolition of slavery in the US. When the young Nietzsche was writing on Theognis of Megara in 1864 and becoming excited about a Dorian-Aryan slaveholder aristocracy (against the infiltration of 'communism'), the Civil War was still under way. Slavery was not abolished in North America before 1865, and in Brazil not before 1888. Whereas postmodernist interpretations read his concept of slavery as a fascinating metaphor, Losurdo sees Nietzsche as referring to a 'quite material reality' and a field of passionate intellectual struggles (p. 406). Those who opposed its abolition pointed out, like Nietzsche, the importance of slavery for the high culture of ancient times. Nietzsche's assumption that slaves are in every respect more secure and better-off than modern workers belonged as much to the standard repertoire of anti-abolitionism as his remark that blacks are not so sensitive to pain as Europeans (pp. 407ff, 411).[9] When the late Nietzsche considered Christianity, the French Revolution and socialism as three manifestations of an ongoing moralistic 'slave revolt', this was not simply a bizarre idea but, rather, expressed a specific hegemonic constellation: the opponents of slavery derived their abolitionist demands from Jacobin programmes; after Napoleon's restoration of colonial slavery, the movement in France was mostly organised by early socialists, while, in England and the US, it was dominated by the churches (p. 405ff).

On closer inspection, we can thus say that Losurdo is fighting on two fronts. He criticises the imposition of a false alternative: either to hold Nietzsche's philosophy 'responsible' for Fascism and the Holocaust, which always has the side-effect of easing the burden of the non-Nietzschean components that had their share in the ideological preparation of fascism;[10] or to exonerate him of this responsibility, as do the allegorical interpretations of a 'hermeneutics of innocence' from Kaufmann to Ottmann and Vattimo. As soon as this

9. See HH I, Nr. 457 (KSA 2/296); GM II, Nr. 5 (KSA 5/303).

10. 'Whether we look at the main interpretations of Nietzsche or at those of Plato or of Hegel, whether at the debates on humanism, or at phenomenology, the philosophy of value, ontology or anthropology: the different strands… endeavoured, each in its own way, to articulate

false alternative is given up, an ideological network comes into sight which weaves Nietzsche into a wider European as well as Anglo-American current aimed at overcoming the French Revolution and the cycle of revolutions (1832–1848–1871) it engendered. Nietzsche's specificity lies in an uncompromising 'aristocratic radicalism', as he himself called it,[11] combined with a peculiar capacity that connects him to his great antagonist Marx, namely to decipher every domain of history, morals, religion, science and art as a 'status and class struggle'[12] – with the difference, however, of considering it ahistorically as an eternal struggle between masters and slaves (pp. 901ff).

The shockwaves of the Paris Commune

What was the driving force behind Nietzsche's search for a pre-classic, virile-aristocratic, 'tragic' Greece opposed to Goethe's and Winckelmann's 'soft' image of Greek antiquity? Losurdo's investigation starts with the European intelligentsia's perception of the Paris Commune as an omen of the downfall of Western culture. When Nietzsche was told that the Communards had set fire to the Louvre, his entire philosophical and artistic existence up to that point struck him as an absurdity. Even in hindsight, when the rumour about the Louvre blaze had long been proved false and the Commune had been mowed down with atrocious cruelty, Nietzsche wrote melancholically: 'Very similar to the supposed burning of the Louvre – a feeling of the autumn of culture. Never a deeper pain.'[13]

Losurdo reads Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* as a coded exorcism of an imminent revolution. Its subtitle could have been: 'The Cultural Crisis from Socrates to the Paris Commune' (p. 16). Nietzsche attributes the decline of modern culture to Socrates's optimism of reason and to his 'belief in the earthly happiness of all', which undermined the healthy institution of ancient slavery in the 'Alexandrian culture' of Hellenism: 'There is nothing more terrible than a barbaric slave class [*Sklavenstand*], which has learned to regard its existence as an injustice, and now prepares to take vengeance, not only for itself but for all generations'.[14] According to Losurdo, it is not the opposition between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, but rather the one between the 'German' and the 'Socratic' that constitutes the deep structure of this text (p. 114). He compares it to Wagner's *Judaism in Music* (1850) and observes that Nietzsche's descriptions of Socratism – abstract, detached from a native soil, from popular instincts and myths – correspond with those employed by Wagner regarding modern Jews, especially educated ones (p. 117ff).[15] The opposition German *versus* Jewish in Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* is reproduced in *The Birth of Tragedy* as the antithesis between (Jewish) Socratism and the tragic Dionysian spirit, which Germany

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Nazism and its leader as a philosophical fact, to supply them with the powers of their specific traditions, to offer their discourses as connecting and legitimising forces' (Haug 1989, p. 7; translation mine).

11. See his letter to Georg Brandes from 2 December 1887, KSB 8, 206.

12. 'Stände- und Classenkampf', Unpublished Fragments, Autumn 1887, 10 [61] (KSA 12/493).

13. *Unpublished Fragments*, Spring–Summer 1878, 28 [1] (KSA 8/504).

14. BT, Nr. 18 (KSA 1/117).

15. See BT, Nr. 13, Nr. 20, Nr. 23 (KSA 1/91, 132, 145ff, 148). When Nietzsche expects the awakening German spirit to 'slay the dragons, destroy the malignant dwarfs, and waken

had inherited from pre-Socratic Greece (p. 124). In his publications, Nietzsche followed the advice of Cosima Wagner, to be careful 'not to name the Jews… particularly not *en passant*', but in his unpublished fragments, he identified Socratism with 'today's Jewish press'.[16] The term 'optimism', mostly used as the compound 'superficial optimism', stands for and connotes both the spirit of French Enlightenment and 'Jewishness' (p. 125ff).

Contender for hegemony or lonely rebel?

In general, Losurdo follows the traditional tripartition of Nietzsche's works into an early period influenced by Schopenhauer and Wagner and centred on *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872); a middle, 'enlightened' period, in which he writes, among other texts, *Human, All Too Human* (1876); and a late period comprising *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), and the *Antichrist* (1888–9). But Losurdo differentiates his periodisation by dividing the early period again in two parts, namely a populist period, influenced by Wagner, and a period of disappointed renunciation. At the time of the *Reichsgründung* of 1871 (the foundation of the German Reich), Nietzsche was contending for hegemony in the definition of the 'German spirit', which he claimed to derive and rejuvenate from its sources in pre-Socratic Greece. With reference to Wagner's populism, he took part in the ideological competition among different original mythologies: purely Germanic, Germanic-Christian, Greek-German, German-Lutheran, Indo-European/Aryan. It soon turned out, however, that this Greek-German original myth, despite Nietzsche's attempt to connect it to the Indo-European/Aryan myth, had no immediate chance to prevail, especially not against the dominant German-Protestant one (pp. 144ff, 232ff, 283). According to Losurdo, the second and third of the *Untimely Meditations* (both from 1874) mark a second period, in which Nietzsche turned away in disappointment from Bismarck's politics, which he deemed incapable of containing the 'modern ideas' of democracy and above all the rise of the labour movement (p. 366). Nietzsche presented himself more and more as a 'solitary rebel', who had broken with the German '*Volksgemeinschaft* [people's community]', which Wagner and Treitschke insisted in celebrating (pp. 228ff, 232ff).

I would like to argue that the Nietzsche texts to which Losurdo is referring show not so much two consecutive periods but, rather, two poles in a contradictory moment: an important motivation for withdrawing his support from the dominant power bloc of the German Reich was its educational policy, but, already in 1871–2, Nietzsche condemned general education as a 'preliminary stage of communism'.[17] At the same time, he declared that the 'German spirit' is opposed to the current 'state's tendency' and a 'foreigner' in the system of education.[18] As Losurdo himself observes (p. 197), from its very beginnings the

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Brünnhilde' (GT, Nr. 24; KSA 1/154), he implicitly refers to the Jewish dwarfs in Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* (p. 123).

16. Cosima Wagner's letter from 5 February 1870 continues as follows: 'Later, if you want to take up this awful battle, do it for heaven's sake' (KGB, III, 2, 140). As far as the 'Jewishness' of Socrates and Plato is concerned, see *Unpublished Fragments*, KSA 7/83, KSA 12/580, KSA 13/114, 264, 331.

17. *Unpublished Fragments*, Winter 1870–1 to Autumn 1872, 8 [57] (KSA 7/243).

18. 'On the Future of our Educational Institutions', Lecture III (1872), KSA 1/709f.

German Reich represented for Nietzsche the Socratic ideal he opposed in *The Birth of Tragedy*. On the other hand, Nietzsche's admiration for Wagner's 'populism' finds its clearest expression in the fourth *Untimely Meditation* from 1876: his art 'no longer speaks the cultivated language of a caste and in general no longer even recognises the distinction between cultivated or uncultivated. It thereby places itself in opposition to the entire culture of the Renaissance.'[19] The abnegation of the Renaissance will be completely reversed in the middle and late periods. One could compare this with Gramsci's contrast between the popular-democratic Reformation and the Renaissance, which Gramsci described as distanced from popular culture, and conclude that Nietzsche's early approach contains something of a rightwing Gramscianism *avant la lettre* – an attitude that finds a precarious and brief concretion in his self-celebration as a 'solitary rebel'. We can also turn to Gramsci's reflections on 'passive revolution' by which the emerging European states of the nineteenth century react to the Jacobin Revolution while trying to 'overcome' it [*reazione-superamento-nazionale*].[20] Nietzsche wanted to take part in the ideological superannuation of the French Revolution, but he was not ready to pay the price for the 'passive revolution', namely, the partial adoption of some of the revolutionary achievements. When he railed against the state – which many of his interpreters have misunderstood as a sort of anarchistic individualism – he mistook the elements that had been absorbed from Jacobinism, and bureaucratically domesticated, for Jacobinism itself.

Whereas Wagner 'resolves' the contradiction with his anti-Semitism – in the political attempt to retract the emancipation that guarantees civil and juridical equality of the Jews – Nietzsche breaks with the Wagnerian concept of a German *Volksgemeinschaft* (190ff, 195ff, 232ff): 'the "solitary rebel" turns "enlightened"' (p. 231).

Nietzsche's construction of an anti-Jacobin Enlightenment

One of the strongest points of Losurdo's book is the precision with which he depicts the ruptures and fissures between Nietzsche's different periods. In fact, we can see that Nietzsche's earlier 'frontlines' are almost completely reversed in his 'enlightened period': he breaks with romanticisation of the German spirit [*Deutschtümelei*] and, in this context, turns against the Lutheran Reformation and switches sides to the Renaissance (p. 239ff).[21] In opposition to German nationalism, Nietzsche now supports a European cosmopolitanism underpinned by a 'cultural' concept of Europe that comprises also the 'daughter-country [*Tochterland*]' America, but not Russia (p. 334ff).[22] Within Europe, the main role is attributed to the French, who are 'by nature much more closely related to the Greeks than

19. 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth', UB IV, Nr. 10 (KSA 1/503); see *Unpublished Fragments*, Spring–Summer 1875, 5 [109] (KSA 8/69).

20. Gramsci 1975, see Notebook 1, §150; and Notebook 10. II, §61.

21. Against the Italian Renaissance with its 'liberation of thought, disdain for authorities… enthusiasm for science… unfettering of the individual', the German Reformation rose up as 'an energetic protest of the spiritually backward' that arrested humanity and thus delayed for two or three centuries the 'dawn of the Enlightenment' (HH I, Nr. 237; KSA 2/199ff).

22. Cf. WS, Nr. 215 (KSA 2/650). Losurdo infers the exclusion of Russia from Nietzsche's claim that Europe only comprises 'those nations and divisions of nations which have their common past in Greece, Rome, Judaism and Christianity' (ibid.).

are the Germans', and who have generated, with Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère and others, the really 'European books' (p. 248).[23]

The original myth of Greek antiquity is maintained, but its ideological function is altered in several respects: first, it no longer relates to Germany, but to 'Europe' (and, here, primarily to its 'successors', the Renaissance and the French Enlightenment); second, its exemplary character now lies in the very quality that the early Nietzsche had denounced as 'Socratism', namely, that of being the source of reason, of critical thinking, of the sense of science, of argumentation and communication (p. 250ff). Concerning Judaism, the 'enlightened' Nietzsche undertakes a transvaluation that subverts the prevailing Judeophobia: it is because of their nomadic 'uprooting' and polyglot existence that the Jews have to play a vanguard role in the emergence of Europe.[24] They 'defended Europe against Asia', and, by opposing the 'orientalising' force of Christianity, Judaism has helped to 'occidentalise' Europe once again, that is to make its mission and history 'into a *continuation of the Greeks*'.[25]

Not everything, however, has changed. The enemy-image of the repulsive 'stock-exchange Jew' can be found in the 'enlightened' period as well.[26] Nietzsche's discourse was still founded on a dichotomy that could well be characterised by Edward Said's concept of orientalism: European history is determined in its deep structure by the antagonism between 'Europe' and 'Asia' (p. 251). Above all, Nietzsche's turning to the Enlightenment tradition was an integral part of his attempt to sever Europe's historical links to the French Revolution: true Enlightenment is essentially foreign to the revolution that became 'flesh and spirit' in Rousseau. Left to itself, it would have 'pierced silently through the clouds like a shaft of light, long content to transfigure individuals alone'. This work is to be continued, in order to 'nip the revolution in the bud and nullify its effects'.[27] In that perspective, Nietzsche claimed to ally himself with Voltaire, whom he praised as 'the last of those people who could combine in themselves the highest freedom of the spirit and an absolutely un-revolutionary disposition', against the 'moral tarantula' Rousseau, whose myth of the 'good man' Nietzsche saw at the root of the 'moral fanaticism' of the Jacobins (p. 291).[28]

As Losurdo shows in a careful textual and contextual analysis, the 'moral Enlightenment' of the middle Nietzsche aims at deconstructing two complementary ethical attitudes, namely the popular sense of justice and the 'religion of compassion' as the respective response of the higher social strata (p. 285ff). Both are attacked in the name of a 'spirit of science', a 'psychological dissecting table', a 'school of suspicion' – the latter term is frequently attributed to Paul Ricoeur, but, in fact, originates in Nietzsche himself.[29] The

23. HH I, Nr. 221 (KSA 2, 182); WS, Nr. 214 (KSA 2/646ff).
24. HH I, Nr. 267 (KSA 2/221ff), Nr. 475 (KSA 2/310); Dawn, Nr. 192 (KSA 3/166).
25. HH I, Nr. 475 (KSA 2/310ff).
26. Ibid.
27. WS, Nr. 221 (KSA 2/654).
28. On Voltaire, see HH I, Nr. 221 (KSA 2/182). Nietzsche supports his interpretation with a quote from Voltaire: 'quand la populace se mêle de raisonner, tout est perdu' (when the masses get involved in reasoning, everything is lost' (HH I, Nr. 438; KSA 2/285); on Rousseau, see *Dawn*, Preface, Nr. 3 (KSA 3/14).
29. 'Schule des Verdachts' (HH I, Preface, Nr. 1; KSA 2/13); 'Geist der Wissenschaft' (HH I, Nr. 35; KSA 2/59); 'psychologischer Seziertisch' (HH I, Nr. 36; KSA 2/59).

dissecting leads to the result that what the unenlightened spontaneously consider as justice, virtue, altruism and compassion, is nothing but the manifestation of self-love, egoism, vanity and 'the will to possess'.[30] Nietzsche's distance from his earlier period can clearly be seen also in his adherence to the enlightenment project of Socrates.[31]

Nietzsche's criticism of popular discourses of justice not only refers to Rousseau and the Jacobins, but also to socialism, which 'pounds its word "justice" like a nail into the heads of the half-educated masses'.[32] It stands to reason that Nietzsche has in mind the 'League of the Just' that preceded the 'League of the Communists'. With respect to Weitling, Lamennais and other early socialists, Nietzsche's polemic seems to overlap with Marx and Engels's ridiculing of their sentimentality and mawkishness.[33] But, whereas the latter were searching for a 'more mature expression' of social resistance, Nietzsche aims at destroying the social-political movement that finds its expression in such sentimental forms (p. 292). Losurdo also questions Mehring's argument that Nietzsche was referring solely to an early romantic period of the socialist movement, thereby missing the new object of 'scientific socialism': by condemning the moral discourse of justice together with socialism and democracy, Nietzsche was clearly aware of an inner connection that Ernst Bloch famously expressed in his *Principle of Hope*: 'Socialism is what has been sought in vain for so long under the name of morality'.[34]

Determining Nietzsche's late period

At what point and according to what criteria can we determine the transition to Nietzsche's late period? Losurdo supports the periodisation proposed by Lou Andreas-Salomé, who considered the *Gay Science* of 1882 as the first work of the late period (p. 343). To this end, he quotes some passages in which Nietzsche ascribes to the book a 'newly awakened belief in a tomorrow and after-tomorrow' as well as 'cheerfulness' and 'thawing-wind', from the vantage point of which the middle period appears as a deserted time of 'unbelief', doubt, scepticism and crisis.[35] If we take Nietzsche's new faith as a criterion, we could add Nietzsche's discovery of the eternal recurrence of the same in Sils Maria, which took place in August 1881, during the preparation of the *Gay Science*. A fragment from the same year describes scepticism as an indispensable phase that has already been overcome.[36]

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30. GS, Nr. 5 (KSA 3/377); about 'self-love' cf. (KSA 8/556), about the 'willing to possess' (KSA 9/450).

31. *Unpublished Fragments*, Summer 1878, 30 [185] (KSA 8/555).

32. HH I, Nr. 473 (KSA 2/307f).

33. See Engels's remark, in *On the History of Early Christianity*, about 'the most vulgar sentimental nonsense rendered in half-biblical expressions à la Lamennais' and shared by the 'good Wetlingers' (Marx and Engels 1975–2005, Volume 27, p. 451).

34. Bloch 1986, Volume 2, p. 550. The context is Fichte's closed commmercial state.

35. GS, Preface to the Second Edition, Nr. 1 (KSA 3/345f); cf. BGE, Nr. 31 (5/49f), EH, 'The Gay Science' (KSA 6/333f).

36. 'Are you prepared now? You have to have lived through every degree of scepticism and bathed with lust in ice-cold streams' (*Unpublished Fragments*, Spring-Autumn 1881, 11 [339]; KSA 9/573). On Sils Maria, see EH, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', Nr. 1 (KSA 6/335) and *Unpublished Fragments*, Spring–Autumn 1881, 11 [141] (KSA 9/494).

If we look at the materials used by Losurdo, the periodisation is not as indisputable as it may seem. Nietzsche's announcements of a hopeful new beginning are hardly a reliable source for a precise time-sequence, and it seems that their vacillations depend more on his cycles of illness and recovery than on anything else. According to an account in *Ecce Homo*, the 'lowest point' of his vitality was in 1879, whereas the 1880 winter in Genoa brought about the 'yea-saying… clear and kindly' book *Dawn*.[37] On the other hand, Losurdo himself has already used the *Gay Science* several times as an example of the middle Nietzsche (e.g., pp. 241, 243, 289ff, 301, 309). Another problem is that several of the main references meant to back up his interpretation of the *Gay Science* as a part of the late period actually stem from its fifth book, which belongs to the second edition from 1887.[38] When Losurdo argues, for example, that with the concept of the expectation of an 'undiscovered country' ahead, 'over-rich in the beautiful… the frightful, and the divine',[39] the *Gay Science* indicates the transition to a new period (p. 343), he is making, contrary to his intention, an argument for a much later transition.

A narrow concept of the political

Losurdo's main argument, however, is political and related to his interpretation of Nietzsche as a 'philosopher *totus politicus*' (p. 897). The decisive turning point, he argues, was the famous speech of William I before the Reichstag on 17 November 1881 announcing new laws concerning accident and old-age insurance in the name of the 'dignity' of labour and the labourer (pp. 346ff). An aphorism in the *Gay Science* can indeed be read as a direct response to William I, interpreting the speech as a symptom of a lack of distance between the workers and 'even the most leisurely of us': 'The royal courtesy in the words: "we are all workers", would have been a cynicism and an indecency even under Louis XIV'.[40] In Nietzsche's view, the government's socio-political concessions, presented as a requirement of 'practical Christianity' (Bismarck), went hand in hand with a further radicalisation of the Social-Democratic Party, instead of defusing the revolutionary fervour, and would add up to a menace no less dangerous than the Paris Commune of ten years earlier. Losurdo summarises Nietzsche's response as follows: abolition of the parliamentary system; annulment of any right to vote and of the right of association; a radical aristocratism that does not aim, however, at a nostalgic return to feudal property and rural life, but is articulated on the level of a 'reactionary modernism', namely, to provide the industrial age with the breeding of a new élite defined by the 'noble forms' that make a 'superior race' (pp. 350ff, 367ff, 375ff).[41] When the *Genealogy of Morals* proclaims an aristocratic 'pathos of distance',[42] it is to be read as a signifier for Nietzsche's political project of a 'social *apartheid*' (p. 378).

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37. EH, 'Why I Am So Wise', Nr. 1 (KSA 6/264f), and EH, 'The Gay Science' (KSA 6/333).

38. Together with the 'Preface to the Second Edition' and the 'Songs of Prince Free-as-a-Bird' (see KSA 3/663, 14/231, 15/162).

39. GS, Nr. 382 (KSA 3/636).

40. GS, Nr. 188 (KSA 3/503).

41. 'It is probable that the manufacturers and great magnates of commerce have hitherto lacked too much all those forms and attributes of a superior race, which alone make persons interesting' (GS, Nr. 40; KSA 3/407ff).

42. GM I, Nr. 2 (KSA 5/259).

Certainly, it was already the 'enlightened' Nietzsche who railed against the party system and questioned the legitimacy of the universal franchise, but it was clear to him at that point that the democratisation of Europe was not only 'an unavoidable process', but also a characteristic by which the modern era would overcome the Middle Ages.[43] It makes sense, therefore, that Losurdo considers antidemocratic radicalisation as an important feature of the late Nietzsche.

The question is, however, whether Nietzsche's hostility to the Bismarckian welfare state is a sufficient motive for explaining the ideological turn that characterises the late Nietzsche's philosophy. Let us tentatively consider some other angles: as David McNally has demonstrated, Nietzsche initially used Darwinism for a naturalist critique of Kant's transcendental idealism and then operated a 'hyper-voluntaristic' and idealistic turn towards a new metaphysics of power that fended off the potentially democratic consequences of Darwin's approach and replaced it with a radical-aristocratic perspective.[44] If we take such an idealistic turn as a criterion, we would have to consider that the first edition of the *Gay Science* still argued in the framework of the Darwinian (and Spinozist) notion of self-preservation, whereas the fifth book of the 1887 second edition replaced the term with the more expansive and aggressive 'will to power', and, from that new perspective, ridiculed the former as an expression of a 'state of distress' due to a plebeian class status and reflecting the 'suffocating air . . . of humble people in need and in dire straits'.[45] We could also take the *Gay Science*'s programme of studying moral questions and compare it with the first paragraphs of the *Genealogy of Morals*: the former outlines an everyday life history of various 'human impulses' and 'moral climates', e.g. a 'history of love, of avarice, of envy, of conscience, of piety, of cruelty . . . different divisions of the day . . . moral effects of the alimentary substances', which is not yet informed by the *Genealogy*'s classism from above, which posits the mythological origin of an aristocratic 'pathos of distance' which was later opposed by a plebeian and primarily 'Jewish' dichotomy of 'good versus evil'.[46] Between the two books lies a turn that could be described as a movement of ideological 'verticalisation' propelled by the perspective of an unfettered aristocratic rule.[47]

From a biographical angle, one might consider Nietzsche's break-up with Lou Andreas-Salomé and Paul Rée as a decisive turning point, taking place as it did at the end of 1882 and during the preparation of *Zarathustra* – a time of crisis in which Nietzsche desperately tried, as he wrote to Overbeck, 'to transform these faeces into gold', and 'to lift myself up "vertically" from this lowness to my elevation'.[48] It is this new and precarious 'elevation' that marks Nietzsche's late period until his collapse. Also, the term 'will to power' makes its first appearance at the end of 1882,[49] and, from then on, Nietzsche's rhetoric takes up again the Judeophobic articulations of his earlier period, which had significantly receded during his friendship with this 'brilliant Jewish intellectual' Paul Rée, as Losurdo rightly observes

43. WS, Nr. 275 (KSA 2/671f); to the critique of the party system, see for example MMO, Nr. 318 (KSA 2/508); to the questioning of the franchise, cf. WS, Nr. 276 (KSA 2/672f).
44. McNally 2001, p. 22ff.
45. Cf. GS I, Nr.1, Nr. 4 and GS V, Nr. 349.
46. Cf. GS I, Nr. 7 and GM I, Nr. 2, Nr. 4, Nr. 7.
47. Rehmann 2004, p. 131ff.
48. Letters from 25 December 1882 and from 1 February 1883 (KSB 6, 312, 324).
49. *Unpublished Fragments*, November 1882–February 1883, 5 [1] (KSA 10/187).

(p. 272). It was only after the split with Rée that Nietzsche also distanced himself from Spinoza, who had an important influence on his 'middle' period – one of the fundamental misunderstandings of Deleuze and other postmodernist interpreters can be seen in the way they overlook the late Nietzsche's hostility towards Spinoza and the underlying opposition between his hierarchical concept of power, on the one hand, and Spinoza's cooperative *potentia agendi*, on the other.[50] In the fall of 1883, during the preparation of the third part of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche talks about the problematic but unavoidable transition from the free spirit [*Freigeist*] to the obligation to rule [*Herrschen-Müssen*],[51] which could be considered as another significant step towards a doctrine of domination.

Losurdo could (and might perhaps) argue that such transformations are to be considered as delayed philosophical effects of a political shift occurring in the *Gay Science*. However, this raises the methodological question of whether such an explanation would not be all too one-dimensional, as well as based on a narrow concept of the political, neatly separated from Nietzsche's cycles of illness, depression, and ideological crises. This does not mean that Nietzsche's hostile reaction to the Bismarckian welfare state would not be an important factor in the process. In any case, for an understanding of the transformation – in which the elements of a naturalistic critique of ideology prevailing in the 'enlightened' period were subjugated to and redefined by the perspective of an unmitigated aristocratic class rule – it seems useful to consider the transition to the late period not as a single event, but, rather, as a series of intermittent thrusts.

Nietzsche's 'party of life'

Losurdo sees the late Nietzsche acting like a 'party leader' who takes up the example of the Jesuits during the Counter-Reformation for founding a new 'party of struggle [*partito di lotta*]' (p. 377).[52] However, in this respect too, the differences with the 'enlightened' Nietzsche are not always easy to define: from his middle period onwards, Nietzsche proclaims the necessity of a 'new belligerent era',[53] whose wars, however, should not be nationalistic ones among Europeans, but colonial wars, ideally undertaken by a unified Europe.[54] In the *Dawn*, he called on the workers not to indulge in the illusion 'that merely by means of higher wages the essential part of their misery, i.e. their impersonal enslavement, might be removed': only by taking part in the 'heroism' of vast colonisations can they overcome the shame of their slavery.[55] Losurdo sees the specificity of the late period in the

50. Rehmann 2004, p. 52ff.

51. *Unpublished Fragments*, Autumn 1883, 16 [51] and 16 [86] (KSA 10, 516, 529).

52. 'Our nature must remain concealed: like the nature of the Jesuits, who exercised a dictatorship in the midst of a general anarchy, but by introducing themselves as a mere tool and function' (*Unpublished Fragments*, Spring–Autumn 1881, 11 [221); KSA 9/527).

53. BGE, Nr. 209 (KSA 5/140).

54. Losurdo infers this from Nietzsche's praise of Napoleon, 'who, as one knows, wanted one Europe, which was to be mistress of the world' (GS, Nr. 362; KSA 3/610). The 'enlightened' Nietzsche maintained already that European culture 'requires not only wars, but the greatest and most terrible wars – and thus, temporary relapses into barbarism' (HH I, Nr. 477; KSA 2/312).

55. *Dawn*, Nr. 206 (KSA 3/183ff): 'Every one of you should on the contrary say to himself: "It would be better to emigrate and endeavour to become a master in new and savage countries,

perspective of a 'Caesarist' solution that gets rid of any parliamentary impediments (p. 384ff): by analogy with the French Revolution, which generated its Napoleon, anarchy and socialist 'fermentations' were going to lead to new experiments in state domination with an increasing tendency to 'military violence'. This is a constellation in which 'tyrants', the 'forerunners' and 'firstlings' of the individuals, make their appearance, and finally, there 'arises the Caesar, the final tyrant, who puts an end to the exhausted struggle for sovereignty, by making the exhaustion work for him'.[56]

The late Nietzsche proclaims to found a new 'party of life, strong enough for *great* politics', that is for taking on the task of a 'breeding of mankind, as well as the relentless destruction of all degenerate and parasitical elements'.[57] Nietzsche was not only opposing socialism and democracy, but had broken with liberalism and conservatism alike, confronting them with a firm anti-conformism and the desecration of any dominant religious and political traditions. This shift compelled him, on the other hand, to work on maintaining the distance between his notion of a 'free spirit' and the 'freethinkers' who were more aligned with the Left – in Germany, the head of the 'league of freethinkers [*Freidenkerbund*]' at this time was Georg Büchner.[58] According to Losurdo, Nietzsche deliberately and explicitly intends to 'absorb' the figure of the freethinker into his concept of free spirit and thereby to 'neutralise' it (p. 776; cf. p. 372).

'We cannot be anything else than revolutionaries'

By challenging dominant ideological values, Nietzsche's discourse intersects at times with Marxist rhetoric. For Habermas, this was reason enough to lump together Nietzsche, Adorno and Horkheimer as representatives of a 'totalised, self-consuming critique of ideology' that does not acknowledge the normative achievements of Western rationality (as indicated by Weber).[59] Against the backdrop of such a superficial conjunction, Losurdo performs an indispensable work of clarification by confronting Nietzsche's criticism with the young Marx's critique of religion: whereas Marx claims to pluck the imaginary flowers from the chain, not so that people will wear the chain without consolation but so 'that they will shake off the chain and pluck the living flower', Nietzsche's critique does the exact opposite, tearing up the imaginary flowers with the aim that the popular classes 'wear the unadorned, bleak chain', without comfort and chance of liberation (pp. 455ff, 460).[60] Losurdo also refers to Gramsci's distinction between a progressive and creative 'sarcasm'

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and especially to become master over myself, changing my place of abode whenever the least sign of slavery threatens me"' (ibid.; KSA 3/184).

56. *Unpublished Fragments*, Spring–Autumn 1881, 11 [222] (KSA 9/527); GS, Nr. 23 (KSA 3/396f).

57. *Unpublished Fragments*, December 1888–early January 1889, 25 [1] (KSA 13/638); EH, 'The Birth of Tragedy', Nr. 4 (KSA 6/313).

58. 'Up to the present nothing has been more strange and more foreign to my blood than the whole of that European and American species known as *libres penseurs*' (EH, 'Unfashionable Observations', 2; KSA 6/319).

59. Habermas 1987, pp. 97, 107, 120, 123, 420 FN 8.

60. 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction', Marx and Engels 1975–2005, Volume 3, p. 176.

that intends to help the living core of ideology to find a new and more adequate form, and a right-wing sarcasm, which is 'always "negative", sceptical and destructive, not only in respect to the contingent "form", but also to the "human" content of these sentiments and beliefs'.[61] Nietzsche's 'radical aristocratism' takes on the rebellious rhetoric and gestures of 'anarchism', but in the perspective of 'stripping the revolutionary movement it wants to oppose and to liquidate the flag of liberty and unscrupulousness of spirit' (p. 373). As Nietzsche remarks in *Ecce Homo*, 'we cannot be anything else than revolutionaries'.[62]

The tensions between aristocratic reaction and authoritarian populism

But does this not come down, despite Losurdo's dissociation from Lukács, to an interpretation that makes Nietzsche an immediate precursor of the Nazis? As Ernst Bloch has shown in his *Heritage of Our Times*, the 'revolutionary' outbidding and dispossession of the labour movement belongs to the very ideological weaponry of the fascist movement.[63] Losurdo would object that Nietzsche's adoption and absorption of a 'freethinker' type of critique of ideology is to be distinguished from a fascist takeover of the symbols of proletarian movements.

In fact, the argument that the two phenomena are separated by a social gap plays an important role in Losurdo's theoretical evaluation: Nietzsche belongs to an aristocratic reaction that penetrated the higher strata of political institutions between 1890 and 1914. The confrontation of the feudal-bourgeois power bloc with democratic and socialist movements had generated a specific 'mercilessness [*spietatezza*] of the élite' that found an appropriate ideological expression in Nietzsche's polemics against compassion and softness towards the lower classes (p. 785ff). At the same time, and competing with this élitism, we see the appearance of an 'authoritarian populism' that tries to integrate the popular classes into an organic *Volksgemeinschaft*, defined by its opposition to other peoples and races (p. 834). This project is clearly rejected not only by the middle but also by the late Nietzsche, because it would lead to a fatal confrontation between the ruling classes of Europe and generate patriotic blocs that blur the antagonism between masters and slaves (p. 835).

This distinction is also relevant for disentangling some of the deadlocked debates on Nietzsche's anti-Semitism or anti-anti-Semitism, which tend to fizzle out by playing off anti-Jewish against pro-Jewish Nietzsche quotes. Losurdo differentiates between three Judeophobic 'figures of the Jew', namely the poor migrant worker from Eastern Europe, the 'subversive' Jewish intellectual, blamed by major parts of the European intelligentsia for the cycle of revolutions, and Jewish finance capital (p. 603ff). In a letter, published in 1890, titled 'On Anti-Semitism', Friedrich Engels not only praised the first two figures, but also the third: since he considers anti-Semitism (mistakenly) as being 'merely the reaction of declining medieval social strata against a modern society' and expects it to be overcome by a rapid economic development, the capitalist class – whether Semitic or Aryan, circumcised

61. Gramsci 1975, Notebook 26, §5, p. 2300.

62. EH, 'Why I Am So Clever', Nr. 5 (KSA 6/288).

63. 'The most dreadful white terror against populace and socialism which history has ever seen camouflages itself as socialist. To this end its propaganda must develop sheer revolutionary appearance, garnished with thefts from the commune' (Bloch 1990, p. 64)

or baptised – is seen as playing a progressive modernising role.[64] Nietzsche, however, after his break with Rée, intensified his Judeophobic statements not only against the proletarian Eastern Jews, but also against the 'subversive intellectuals' whose prototype he considers to be Saint Paul.[65] In this regard, his stance coincides with that of the leading anti-Semitic journal of this time, the *Antisemitische Correspondenz*, whose editors and supporters see Nietzsche, after the publication of *Zarathustra*, as their natural ally (pp. 605, 608ff).

It is different with the third figure, however. The late Nietzsche did not simply return to the Judeophobia of his early period, but, rather, maintained the 'European' perspective of the middle period: the higher strata of the Jews are to be integrated in the European élite. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he proposes to marry the members of Prussian nobility with Jews, in order to combine the hereditary art of commanding and obeying with the genius for money, patience and intellectuality. For this, it would be fair 'to banish the anti-Semitic bawlers out of the country'. The third figure of Jewishness is to be co-opted in the 'rearing of a new ruling caste for Europe', eugenically and therefore irreversibly.[66] This re-alignment would make it possible to launch a unified assault against the 'slave revolt' as a whole, which comprises, in Nietzsche's view, both the first and second enemy images of the Jewish and populist anti-Semites, the latter representing the protest of the 'rabble', which August Bebel dubbed the 'socialism of the stupid' (pp. 613ff, 617ff).[67]

Horizontal and transversal racialisation

To allow for a better understanding of Nietzsche's position, Losurdo introduces the analytical distinction between 'horizontal' and 'transversal racialisation [*razzizzazione orizzontale e trasversale*]'. The terminology is not easy to grasp at first, since the normal semantic opposition would not be between 'horizontal' and 'transversal' (going crosswise), but rather between 'horizontal' and 'vertical'. The meaning becomes clearer, however, when Losurdo describes the late Nietzsche's view of Judaism as part of a social conflict that tears

64. See Marx and Engels 1975–2005, Volume 27, p. 50ff. About the first figure: 'The anti-Semite… doesn't even know the Jews he decries.… There are here in England and in America thousands upon thousands of Jewish proletarians; and it is precisely these Jewish workers who are the worst exploited and the most poverty-stricken. In England during the past twelve months we have had three strikes by Jewish workers. Are we then expected to engage in anti-Semitism in our struggle against capital?' (p. 51). About the second figure of the 'subversive' Jewish intellectual, Engels expresses our indebtedness to Heine, Börne, Marx, Lassalle, Victor Adler, Eduard Bernstein, Paul Singer, and concludes: 'After all, I myself was dubbed a Jew by the Gartenlaube and, indeed, if given the choice, I'd rather be a Jew than a "Herr von"!' (52)

65. 'Let no more Jews come in! And shut the doors, especially towards the East…!' (BGE, Nr. 251; 5/193); 'We would no more choose the "first Christians" to associate with than Polish Jews – not that one even required any objection to them: they both do not smell good' (AC, Nr. 46; KSA 6/223). About the 'subversive' Jewish intellectuals, see e.g. GS, Nr. 348, Nr. 361 (KSA 3/584f, 609), *Unpublished Fragments*, June-July 1885, 36 [42-47] (KSA 11/568ff); about St. Paul, see e.g. AC, Nr. 58ff (KSA 6/246ff).

66. BGE, Nr. 251 (KSA 5/194ff).

67. See Nietzsche's polemics against Eugen Dühring, 'that apostle of revenge from Berlin… today's biggest loud-mouth of morality, even among his kind, the anti-Semites' (GM III, Nr. 14; KSA 5/3670). See also GM III, Nr. 26 (KSA 5/407ff).

up both the Greek-Roman world and the modern world 'transversally' (p. 519). The term refers directly to the social antagonism of ancient as well as modern class society. Whereas 'horizontal' racism racialises the differences between peoples and nations, Nietzsche's 'transversal' approach consists in an immediate racialisation of the lower classes, corresponding to a theory of international civil war (pp. 823, 826, 828). I have come to a similar conclusion in the case of Nietzsche's *Antichrist*, where the term 'Jewish instinct' directly describes a social position together with a correspondent plebeian social moralism – 'it is a marker for an international subaltern class'.[68]

As Losurdo convincingly shows, Nietzsche's racialisation of the lower classes cannot be explained by a German *Sonderweg*, but is aligned with racist tendencies of an early liberalism (e.g. Locke, Mandeville, Constant), that regularly came to the fore during social crises (pp. 417ff, 824ff). Losurdo's approach also helps, in part at least, to understand the paradox of a 'Jewish Nietzscheanism' that is often used as a trump to debunk any attempt to associate Nietzsche with anti-Semitism. In fact, Nietzsche also calls on the higher strata of Judaism to define themselves as 'masters' and to get rid of the 'servile' features of their tradition, i.e. of the first and second figures of the Jew (p. 874). On the other hand, Nietzsche's 'transversal' fusion of racism and aristocratic classism had to come into conflict with the main anti-Semitic tendencies of late nineteenth century: 'If racism consisted solely… in the naturalisation of nations and national differences, it would be difficult to find a philosopher further from racism than Nietzsche, at least in the case of Europe' (p. 828).

Since this is not the case, the question of Nietzsche's part in the ascendance of fascism is far from being off the agenda.

Nietzsche and the ideological preparation of fascism

Whereas it does not make sense to construe a direct line linking Nietzsche to the Third Reich, it is no less erroneous to conclude that there is no connection at all. Losurdo goes through different strategies for exonerating Nietzsche and demonstrates their inconsistencies and fallacies. Best-known is the story of the malicious sister Elisabeth who had, in both her biography and her edition of *Will to power* (1901), falsified Nietzsche's philosophy in the direction of Nazism by smuggling in anti-Semitic passages. As Losurdo carefully demonstrates, this legend, which is still being presented as academically sound research,[69] overlooks that Elisabeth's manipulations consisted in exactly the opposite: Nietzsche's break with Wagner's anti-Semitism was not silenced at all in her biography, but clearly reported; what was silenced, however, were both the young Nietzsche's violently anti-Semitic letters and his polemics against the 'Jewish press' (p. 768ff). Her compilation *Will to Power* is certainly an 'interpretation', but primarily one that takes the edge off the most pungent remarks, for instance on Christianity and the church (p. 771).[70] Far from transforming

68. Rehmann 2005, p. 153; cf. AC, Nr. 27 (KSA 6/197ff).

69. See Santaniello 1994, p. 148, and Ottmann 1999, p. 249ff.

70. For example *Will to Power* includes Nietzsche's note that a man's rights are related to his duties and tasks, and that the great majority 'have no right to existence, but are a misfortune to higher men'. But it omits what follows: 'I do not yet grant the failures the right. There are also peoples that are failures' (Cf. WP, §872 and *Unpublished Fragments*, Spring 1884, 24 (343], KSA 11/102).

Nietzsche into a Nazi, Elisabeth tried to clean up his image from as many anti-Semitic and social-Darwinistic brutalities as possible in order to present him as a good European – not so dissimilar from the softening up by 'liberal' interpretations that blame her for the Nazi use of Nietzsche.

To assume that Nietzsche could not have anything to do with Nazism because he was an unpolitical 'man of art [*Kunstmensch*]' is a fallacy: Mussolini and Hitler themselves maintained an 'anti-political pathos' and claimed to lead the masses like 'artists'. Nietzsche's cult of the genius resonates well with what Walter Benjamin described as 'aestheticisation of the political' widely utilised by fascism (p. 795ff). His 'European' orientation is not an anti-fascist guarantee either, since it was the Nazis that defined themselves as a pan-European movement and appealed to 'European man' (p. 841ff). In Hitler's 'table talks', various relevant topics of Nietzsche's political philosophy were praised, including those of his 'enlightened' period (p. 882). What is striking is the immediacy with which Nietzsche's polemics against revolution, against a Rousseauian 'good nature of man', and against Saint Paul as the leader of a 'communist' slave revolt, were taken up and applied to the current situation (pp. 875, 880ff).

But it would be fallacious to confuse such evidence with an analysis. As Losurdo reminds us, 'the continuist approach is not more persuasive than the "allegorical" one' (p. 861). In order to resist the appearance of an immediate link, one must reformulate the problem on another level: what are the socio-historical, political, and ideological processes by which 'radical aristocratism' was incorporated into the fascist movement and the Nazi state? One must not forget the catastrophic events of World War I and the October Revolution which lay between Nietzsche's death and the rise of European fascism. A 'heterogeneity' of time separated the actual political movement from the complex ensemble of its ideological preparation (p. 836ff). Nietzsche's relative distance from the Nazis can then be explained by the circumstance that both fascism's rise to a hegemonic force and its mobilisation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* for World War II were in need of a 'horizontal' racism. 'Transversal' racism was already in crisis before World War I: why should soldiers risk their lives for their 'fatherland', when they were considered by its elites as Chandala (untouchables) (p. 848)? Correspondingly, a right-wing literature[71] criticised Nietzsche for celebrating a power-ideal without a people and overlooking the German worker's predisposition to becoming a master. Heidegger addressed the problem with another strategy by arguing that the 'mass' scorned by Nietzsche referred not to the workers and peasants but rather to the mediocre cultural philistines (pp. 847, 849). One can conclude from Losurdo's account that the Nazification of Nietzsche consisted largely in transvaluating his 'transversal' fascism into a 'horizontal' one.

That the aristocratic dichotomy between élite and people did not simply vanish is well demonstrated by the example of Mussolini's confidant Julius Evola, who referred to Nietzsche in order to criticise a fascist 'degradation' of the concept of race (p. 851ff). Ludendorff employs a similar pattern when he warns against socialist revolution and subversion, but he drops his élitism as soon as he tries to mobilise the people against foreign enemies (p. 851). These and other examples make clear that Losurdo's opposition between 'transversal' and 'horizontal' racism is an analytical and ideal-typical one which is

71. From Tille 1895 to Böhm 1938.

hermeneutically fruitful for dissecting a complex reality where, in fact, both types overlap and permeate one other. In terms of a Marxist theory of ideology, one could even argue that the functioning of racism presupposes a certain oscillation between 'transversal' and 'horizontal' interpellations. Regarding the example of a Hitler speech, W.F. Haug has observed that, at a certain point, the discourse abruptly jumps from the semantics of an imminent socialist revolution to 'Jewish world domination'.[72] The social antagonism that is being displaced onto a racist discourse has not been dissolved but remains present, at least latently. Losurdo does not delve into such considerations, but some of the ideological material he investigates points in this direction, for instance when he shows that racialisation may start at first 'transversally' against the colonised and the domestic poor, and then be transposed onto neighbouring nations. Or that racialisation proceeds from the subversive Jewish intellectual to the 'racial Jew'. In each of the decisive moments when the Jew was identified as 'homo ideologicus' and the 'revolutionary virus' was ethnicised, the reference to Nietzsche played a crucial role (p. 877ff).

An over-politicising interpretation?

The philological and theoretical soundness of Losurdo's book becomes obvious as soon as one compares it to the mainstream of Nietzsche scholarship, which always knows beforehand, and eagerly assures us, that 'aristocracy', 'rabble', 'war', 'annihilation' and the like are never to be understood literally, because of Nietzsche's concern for higher values or deeper truths or the joyful game of it all. Losurdo takes time to look closely at the material, to unfold patiently the connections between texts and political contexts, and to submit his empirical findings to a theoretical reflection.

To say that Losurdo's methodological focus is selective and one-sided is not yet a critique, but rather points to a limitation that is true of any approach. It is worthwhile, however, to reflect for a moment on the specific limitations of Losurdo's approach, which are due to the major 'frontlines' defined by his intervention. He rightly opposes an interpretation that, on the pretext of rescuing Nietzsche as a pure 'philosopher', actually degrades him to an apolitical 'idiot' (in the classical Greek sense of *idiotés*), as Nietzsche himself did with Jesus of Nazareth.[73] But, while fighting against such a caricature, Losurdo seems at times to bend the stick too far in the other direction: in each period of his philosophy, Nietzsche appears to be completely consistent and to grasp fully the then current political constellation. One could object that already in his time, it had become evident that an anti-revolutionary strategy betting on an ancient model of social apartheid and opposing any kind of corporatist integration of the Social Democrats and the trade unions was, from the perspective of the political élite, an anachronism. Shortly afterwards, Max Weber and other social reformers were pleading for a class compromise with the 'labour aristocracy' (the term is here Weber's not Lenin's) that later constituted the predominant social axis during the Fordist stage of capitalist development.[74]

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72. Haug 1980, p. 61ff.

73. See AC, §29 (KSA 6/200) – suppressed by Nietzsche's sister in the first edition of the AC in 1895.

74. Concerning Weber's anticipation and ideological preparation of Fordism, see Rehmann 1998, p. 101ff.

Losurdo's consideration of Nietzsche as a 'philosopher *totus politicus*' can certainly help to uncover significant determinants, but it sometimes risks moving towards an over-politicisation that short-circuits a wide range of ideological and psychological dynamics: for instance, it neglects the impact of Spinoza's critique of morality on the 'middle' period and therefore overlooks the importance of the late Nietzsche's sharp turn against the 'consumptive' and 'revengeful' Spinoza,[75] which is clearly a symptom of Nietzsche's understanding that his own aggressive merging of power and domination is at odds with Spinoza's *potentia agendi*. And, while Losurdo is well aware of Darwinism's influence on the middle period (pp. 277ff, 300ff, 748, 778), he fails to evaluate Nietzsche's later polemics against its 'plebeian' character.[76] Losurdo convincingly points out that neither Nietzsche's departure from Wagner nor his later concept of 'degeneration' can be explained by means of a 'psychological and biographical reductionism' (pp. 281ff, 981ff), but he seems to conclude that biographical turning-points – be it Nietzsche's failed romance with Lou Salomé or his cycles of illness and recovery – are not worthy of consideration at all. One could object that such an abstraction has a negative effect on the political analysis itself. For example, it misses the enormous tension between Nietzsche's existential articulations of pain – the intense transposition of his own sufferings into the discourse of philosophy, on the one hand, and the exterminating hatred against those who suffer and are weak, on the other. This tension that could help to explain why Nietzsche's philosophy was not only attractive for sections of the reactionary elites, but also for quite a few coming from rebellious movements and 'plebeian' classes. Adorno visualises a piece of this alienated structure when he describes Nietzsche's passionate yes-saying to destiny [*amor fati*] as the attitude of a prisoner who 'cannot help but be in love with the prison cell in which he is incarcerated'.[77] A Marxist critique of Nietzsche's philosophy is not bound, in my view, to keep its distance from psychological explanations, but could integrate them into its analysis of alienated ideological structures and dynamics.[78]

'Reactionary coherence' and 'theoretical surplus'

It would be equally one-sided, however, to pin an over-politicising interpretation on Losurdo. Especially in his concluding parts (6 and 7), he confronts us with an interesting strategy, which is aimed at catching some of the aspects he had earlier excluded from his political analysis: only by putting forward the 'coherently reactionary character [*carattere coerentemente reazionario*]', he claims, can critique do justice to the 'theoretical excess [*eccedenza teorica*]' of Nietzsche's thinking (pp. 893, 935). This term, probably drawn from Ernst Bloch's concept of a 'utopian excess [*utopischer Überschuss*]',[79] serves Losurdo to bring

75. Compare, for instance, the famous postcard from 30 July 1881, in which Nietzsche declares to have finally found in Spinoza his 'predecessor' (KSB 6, 111), and the pungent remarks of the late Nietzsche in GS, Nr. 349, Nr. 372 (KSA 3/585, 624).

76. GS V, Nr. 349 (KSA 5/585).

77. Adorno, in Horkheimer 1985–96, Volume 13, p. 120. Translation mine.

78. See Rehmann 2004, pp. 49ff, 91, 93.

79. By this term, Ernst Bloch tried to grasp that bourgeois ideologies consist of utopian elements which go beyond their class function and are to be inherited as well as transformed by socialist movements (e.g. PH II, 539, 542, 547).

together different achievements that define the 'radicality and greatness' of Nietzsche's critique (p. 944). First, a 'philology-philosophy', propelled by a strong political passion that does not trifle with singular events at the level of governments and political parties, but challenges the entire historical cycle of modernity (p. 936). Here, 'philology' means an anti-sensualistic and anti-metaphysical epistemology that is opposed to the illusions of immediacy and evidence and looks at what turns into habit 'from the outside' (939ff).[80] Second, a 'meta-critical' approach that skilfully dissects the different types of intellectuals: the 'theoretical man' and his will to truth, the metaphysician, the philosopher as a disguised priest (p. 947ff). Third, an extraordinary capacity to combine different disciplines, which Losurdo evaluates by using Gramsci's idea of 'translatability of languages' (p. 952ff).[81] Fourth, a historical sense that allows Nietzsche, for instance, to understand the early Christians' 'God on the cross' as a tremendous scandal for antiquity's value-system.[82] Finally, Nietzsche was dealing with real problems, which are also of interest to the Left, for example, with 'resentment' as an expression of narrow conditions of life. This is an attitude from which in fact no revolution can be developed, but which has itself to be overcome by a determined politics of broad alliances: Gramsci's 'cathartic moment' as a starting point for any philosophy of praxis (p. 989ff).

It is clear that Losurdo is not only an expert on Hegel, but also knows the art of the dialectical analysis of contradictions. Even the most brutal and reactionary statements are something to be learned from: Nietzsche's open support of slavery occurs at the same time as European colonialism brandishes the flag of universalism and disguises itself as a humanist endeavour against the barbarism of slavery. Nietzsche's perspective of unmediated class domination can also be used for laying bare the hypocrisy of an 'imperialism of human rights' and its recent 'humanitarian wars' (pp. 1030ff, 1057). Compared to Locke, the 'sacred space of culture [*spazio sacro della civiltà*]' has diminished, but, at the same time, the freedom of individuals in such a space is conceived more radically, not only as freedom from tyranny, but also from narrow concepts of morality. But Nietzsche's fascinating utopia is directly and explicitly built upon the appalling dystopia of an enslaved and despised multitude (p. 1075ff). Politically, Nietzsche is certainly more reactionary than Locke, Losurdo concludes, but, theoretically, he is head and shoulders above him: by the very indication of the exclusive character of liberal society, whose individualism presupposes the existence of a mass of labourers that are denied the status of individuality (p. 1076).

In a way, the world of academic Nietzsche interpretations is stood on its head. It was postmodernism that claimed to submit Nietzsche to a subversive reading and thereby reveal him to be a subtle prophet of counterculture who, as Gilles Deleuze put it, 'decodifies' the

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80. 'The known is the accustomed, and the accustomed is the most difficult of all to "understand", that is to say, to perceive as a problem, to perceive as strange, distant, "outside of us"' (GS, Nr. 355; KSA 3/594). Compare Nietzsche's description of a philologist as a 'teacher of slow reading', who teaches to read 'profoundly, attentively, prudently, with inner thoughts, with the mental doors ajar, with delicate fingers and eyes' (*Dawn*, 'Author's Preface', Nr. 5; KSA 3/17).

81. 'Traducibilità dei linguacci scientifici e filosofici', in Gramsci 1975, Notebook 11, §46ff, pp. 1468ff.

82. 'God on the cross – are the horrible secret thoughts behind this symbol not understood yet? All that suffers, all that is nailed to the cross, is divine. All of us are nailed to the cross, consequently we are divine.' (AC, Nr. 51; KSA 6/232).

institutions of modern society and creates, through his aphorisms, a nomadic 'war machine' against the state.[83] However, in contrast to the hyper-radical rhetoric of their 'leftist Nietzscheanism' however, Deleuze, Foucault, Vattimo and others do no more than apply the well-known tradition of *allegorical* interpretation, which eliminates any social meaning and context.[84] Paradoxically, it is Losurdo's Marxist critique that actually puts into practice a subversive reading which wants to set free some of the critical and potentially emancipatory elements in Nietzsche. Ernst Bloch proposed such a transformative reading as part of a 'multi-layered revolutionary dialectic' against fascism.[85] And, on this point, Losurdo is absolutely correct: a leftist 'appropriation' of Nietzsche cannot do without a thorough deciphering of his utterly reactionary position in the ideological configuration of the late nineteenth century. Skipping such a critical analysis, as postmodernist neo-Nietzscheanism has done, leads to a depoliticised transvaluation that is philologically dishonest and helps to stabilise the mainstream 'hermeneutics of innocence' (pp. 653, 781ff, 798ff).

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83. Deleuze 1973, pp. 142ff, 148ff.
84. For Deleuze's allegorical misinterpretation of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, see Rehmann 2004, p. 26ff.
85. Bloch 1990, p. 113ff.

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AC	*The Antichrist*
BGE	*Beyond Good and Evil*
BT	*Birth of Tragedy*
Dawn	*Dawn*
EH	*Ecce Homo*
GM	*On the Genealogy of Morals*
GS	*The Gay Science*
HH	*Human, All Too Human*
KGB	*Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* 1975ff, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazino Montinari, Berlin and New York: De Gruyter.
KSA	*Kritische Studienausgabe* 1999 (1980), edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Munich: De Gruyter.
KSB	*Sämtliche Briefe. Kritische Studienausgabe* 1986, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin and New York: De Gruyter.
MMO	*Miscellaneous Maxims and Opinions*
TI	*Twilight of Idols*
UM I–IV	*Untimely Meditations I–IV*
UF	*Unpublished Fragments*
WP	*The Will to Power*
WS	*The Wanderer and his Shadow*
Z	*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

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