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## Hyperbolic Naturalism: Nietzsche, Ethics, and Sovereign Power

Peter R. Sedgwick

**ABSTRACT:** This paper addresses whether Nietzsche's naturalism is best understood as exemplifying the principles of scientific method and the spirit of Enlightenment. It does so from a standpoint inspired by Eugen Fink's contention that Nietzsche's endorsements of "naturalism" are best read as hyperbole. The discussion engages with Enlightenment-orientated readings (Walter Kaufmann, Maudemarie Clark, and Brian Leiter), which hold Nietzsche's naturalism to endorse of the spirit of empirical science and an alternative view (provided by Richard Schacht and Wolfgang Müller-Lauter), which holds Nietzsche's "extended naturalism" to be an informing ethos of historically aware thought rather than a mere "method." The ensuing discussion endorses the latter approach in terms that seek to take more seriously the implications of Fink's point about the hyperbolic and figural aspects of Nietzsche's naturalism. I argue that Nietzsche's naturalism is indeed often hyperbolic and figural but that this exaggerated form of naturalizing thought allows insights that invite explicit theorization. Turning to an approach suggested by Adorno and Horkheimer, I argue that Nietzsche's exaggeratedly 'naturalistic' take on morality is best appreciated as a form of disturbing and disruptive political intervention in the dominant discourse of modernity in which it overtly situates itself, namely, the instrumentalizing, methodologically fixated liberal discourse of scientific Enlightenment. If we approach his thinking in this way, Nietzsche's naturalism serves as a valuable resource for critical reflection on the hegemony of contemporary scientific culture. The context for such critical reflection is provided by Giorgio Agamben's work on sovereign power and modernity. Nietzsche's naturalism, I argue, is foremost biopolitical in its implications. These implications invite critical reflection

on aspects of Agamben's work; they also, following Agamben's lead, suggest that we must step beyond the fundamental concepts of liberalism.

KEY WORDS: naturalism, biopolitics, liberalism, Enlightenment, method

Is Nietzsche's naturalism best understood as exemplifying the principles of scientific method and the spirit of Enlightenment? If not, then what are we to make of its implications? In what follows I seek to address these questions from a perspective inspired by Eugen Fink's contention that Nietzsche's endorsements of "naturalism" should be taken as hyperbole. With Fink's point in mind, I engage initially with Enlightenment-orientated readings offered by Walter Kaufmann, Maudemarie Clark, and Brian Leiter. Such readings hold Nietzsche's naturalism to be an endorsement of the spirit of empirical scientific method. Having considered significant problems that beset this approach, I turn an alternative view suggested by Richard Schacht, which commits us to the rather different view (shared to a large degree by Wolfgang Müller-Lauter) that Nietzsche's "extended naturalism" is concerned precisely with the extent to which humans are not mere pieces of nature susceptible to being described solely in scientific-methodological terms. Naturalism, comprehended in this way, is more of an informing ethos of Nietzsche's historically aware thought than a strictly adhered to "method" that slavishly emulates the empirical sciences. I endorse the latter approach, but I do so in terms that seek to take more seriously the implications of Fink's point concerning the hyperbolic and figural aspects of Nietzsche's naturalistic discourse, which even the "extended naturalism" approach underplays. Taking Nietzsche's hyperbole seriously has significant implications for his status as a thinker of Enlightenment and for the political significance of his thought. Turning to some relevant passages from *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I argue that Nietzsche's naturalism is indeed often hyperbolic and figural in its presentation but that

his exaggerated naturalistic invocations allow us to glimpse insights that point beyond mere exaggeration in so far as, if properly acknowledged, they invite explicit theorization. Hyperbole and metaphor are not coincidental to the possibility of such theorization. They must be counted as being amongst its necessary and enabling conditions and consequently as intrinsic to it. Nietzsche's hyperbolic naturalism, in short, offers theoretical possibilities that cannot be arrived at through the mere application of a "method" derived from the paradigm of the sciences, or indeed any form of pure "theory." On the contrary, turning to an approach suggested by Adorno and Horkheimer, I argue that Nietzsche's exaggeratedly "naturalistic" take on morality is best appreciated as a form of disturbing and disruptive political intervention in the dominant discourse of modernity in which it overtly situates itself, namely, the instrumentalizing, methodologically fixated liberal discourse of scientific Enlightenment. This political intervention is evident in Nietzsche's naturalizing imagery in *On the Genealogy of Morality* and, most especially, in his portrayal of the figure of the noble<sup>1</sup> as the origin both of evaluative discourse and institutionalized state power. What is important about the naturalizing language Nietzsche deploys in these contexts is that it shows more than it can simply say. Nietzsche's imagistic way of thinking, in other words, trumps any view that one begins with method and theorizes facts and practices by subordinating them to it. Rather, the relation between theory and practice is, in Nietzsche's texts, an immanent one. If we approach his thinking in this way, the naturalistic elements in Nietzsche can serve as a valuable resource for critical reflection on contemporary culture rather than contributing to an uncritical endorsement of its hegemonic "scientific" ethos. The context for such critical reflection is provided by Giorgio Agamben's work on sovereign power and modernity. Nietzsche's hyperbolic presentation of sovereignty and power reveals the violence inherent in both to turn on the fashioning and administration of the naked animality that characterizes biopolitical discourse. Nietzsche's naturalism, I argue, is foremost biopolitical in its

implications. These implications pose important questions for liberal politics; they are questions that, if taken with sufficient seriousness, suggest we must step beyond the fundamental concepts of liberalism.

## 1. Stone

“Stone,” Nietzsche comments in section 218 of *Human, All Too Human*, “is more stone than before.”<sup>2</sup> He is considering architecture. Generally speaking, Nietzsche suggests, we moderns are obliged to admit we no longer understand the architecture of the past. Reflection on the built environment in which we dwell jars us into confrontation with our own fragmented historicity. In the consideration of past architecture, everyday familiarity vanishes. We encounter traces of a world made by sensibilities radically other than our own. In noticing this, we open ourselves to the discovery that we have outgrown the symbolism and formality of lines and figures traced across the contours of ancient buildings no less than we have lost touch with the ethos that would render us prey to being affected by out-dated rhetoric. Putting things more bluntly, although we dwell alongside structures associated with religious sensibility, we cannot draw in from them the kind of educative nurturing that once swelled powerfully up to constitute a world charged with the religious. We who believe, however hazily, in the power of science can no longer swallow the miraculous as our forebears did. Our grasp of the aesthetic is changed by this. The beauty of architectural construction, Nietzsche points out, was peripheral in relation to its being the conduit through which the holy made itself manifest. All ancient religious buildings and constructs speak of a humanity that discovers itself amidst this divinely inspired terror; they stand as bulwarks of appeasement to the storms and rages of the angry divinity howling over the heads of a humanity powerless in the face of unrelenting nature. At most, their beauty only mediated the terror of the godhead that the sublime edifice was built to communicate. We moderns have

lost sight of all this. “What to us today is the beauty of a building?” Nietzsche asks. His answer: it is a façade, “something mask-like” (*HH* 218). A condition of mask-like beauty suggests something frozen and dead. What lies “behind” the beauty of the mask is the embodied, unyielding and inorganic stoniness of stone. Even deeming such a world “indifferent” to the sphere of human concerns would be asking too much of it by making of it something that is too “involved.” We are all “naturalistic” to the extent that we have ceased to believe the super-natural lurks behind the world in such a way as to soften its stony indifference.

It is against the backdrop of this distanced indifference even to “indifference” that any consideration of Nietzsche’s conception of naturalism needs to be set. Such a world is one of interminable suspension; a realm of indefiniteness. A world like this, which has lost all determinate “meaning” with which to grasp it as a whole, he notes in *The Gay Science*, is one to which not even the notion of “accident” is applicable any more—never mind notions of purpose, life and order, or concepts of substance, matter and the like. In the face of this Nietzsche formulates a demand. A new language is needed that will allow us to embrace a “de-deified” and hence “redeemed nature” liberated from the “shadows of God” that disturb the modern mind. This embrace initiates the moment when we can “begin to *naturalize* humanity” (*GS* 109).<sup>3</sup>

With how much seriousness should we take this urging of a project of “naturalization”? Eugen Fink offers one answer to this last question. As a rule, naturalism in Nietzsche, he comments, is best taken as “hyperbole, and intentionally coarse hyperbole at that.”<sup>4</sup> The section from *The Gay Science* just quoted can be taken as offering good evidence for this view. Nietzsche’s language here is full of evocative sentiment, including a quasi-religious one of redemptive “release [erlösen]” invoking thoughts of salvation. Here, as elsewhere, Nietzsche raises many questions concerning how we think about “nature” but at

the same time says very little about what nature is, or about what a redeemed condition might amount to beyond its being one of deliverance. The mode of expression is richly and darkly metaphoric, its tone emphatic, yet its object is elusive, conjuring powerful imagistic feelings that are not easily translated into definitions. If we were to read this in accord with Fink, then we would be forced to admit along with him that the hyperbolic character of this kind of naturalizing talk, whatever else it might do, in no way warrants the claim that Nietzsche is seeking to “return” humanity to “nature” or deliver it into the hands of those who take themselves to be the aspiring masters of nature, i.e. “the natural scientists.” We would, in other words, be well-advised to ponder carefully whether Nietzsche’s endorsements of naturalism signify a straightforward dedication on his part to anything associated with the project of Enlightenment, with its emphasis on liberating humanity from illusion and myth through the refinements of technique associated with reason, science and an accompanying faith in method. At this juncture, it is useful to set this point in the broader context of two significant approaches to Nietzsche’s naturalism.

## 2. Enlightened Naturalism versus Extended Naturalism

Although, as has been noted above, much has been made of Nietzsche’s philosophical project “to translate man back into nature” (*BGE* 230), as Christopher Janaway and Simon Robertson confirm, he “offers rather little in the way of more exact and detailed characterization” of what such a naturalistic translation amounts to.<sup>5</sup> In a manner that effectively endorses the existence of grounds for Fink’s suspicions of taking such things too seriously, they admit that Nietzsche’s thought lacks (either through deliberate refusal or casual omission) a formal definition of naturalism. We are thereby left with the task of amplification. One distinctive response to the challenge posed by this task involves welding Nietzsche’s naturalism as closely as possible to the paradigmatic conception of enquiry offered by the sciences. Walter

Kaufmann, in his well-known study, must be counted as being among the first to have resorted to endorsing this approach in explicit terms. For Kaufmann, Nietzsche is naturalistic in so far as he “began with the assumption that *all* men were essentially animals, and [...] he took over this assumption from the empirical sciences.”<sup>6</sup> For Kaufmann, this scientifically inspired naturalism runs so strongly through Nietzsche’s thinking that it propels his philosophical development, forcing the abandonment of the early metaphysics extolled in *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations* and initiating him on the path of thought that ultimately leads to the late philosophy of power.

Kaufmann takes naturalism in Nietzsche to be a “method.”<sup>7</sup> This method is “experimental” in the sense that, following the paradigm provided by the image of the careful scientist working patiently and laboriously at the laboratory bench, each of Nietzsche’s texts is envisaged as a multitude of little thought experiments. What is immediately problematic about Kaufmann’s reading is that its enthusiasm for the idea of experimental method trumps the suspicion of systematic formality that is integral to the tone and argumentation of Nietzsche’s writing.<sup>8</sup> A lack of systematic, methodical structure is, on Kaufmann’s account, Nietzsche’s most profound shortcoming. This lack, Kaufmann claims, leads to Nietzsche’s “experiments” being “often needlessly inconclusive.”<sup>9</sup> Inconclusiveness renders any experiment ultimately pointless since no firm structure of related conclusions can be elaborated from it. It follows that Nietzsche’s thought, while “coherent and noteworthy” and full of scattered riches, does not culminate in “a great harvest.”<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche is thereby diagnosed as suffering from a methodological deficiency: his lack of investment in the idea of “internal coherence” hampers his best insights. On this reading, Nietzsche is ultimately a glorious failure. Kaufmann’s inevitable conclusion is that had Nietzsche adhered to the spirit of scientific method more closely in his textual practice he would have realized the experimental spirit that motivates his thought more fully and truly. The task of the interpreter,



as Kaufmann understands it, thereby becomes one of methodological midwife, patiently teasing out the experimental structure that Nietzsche would have articulated had he thought better about it in the first place.

Kaufmann's viewpoint begs questions on two levels. First, the idea that a lack of systematicity and "internal coherence" leads to failure is no more obvious than the opposite view that Nietzsche expressly advocates. Second, such a criticism presupposes that one already knows what success and failure amount to, not least in relation to Nietzsche's works and philosophical project. It presupposes, in short, that had Nietzsche thought better about it, he would have *wanted* to bask in the success ensured by systematically formalizing his thoughts according to the dictates of "experiment" and "method."

In spite of these obvious reservations, subsequent interpretations of Nietzsche offered by Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter endorse in more emphatic terms Kaufmann's embracing of the spirit of scientific experimentalism, and in doing so likewise assume that Nietzsche's texts can be decoded and evaluated according to its strictures. For Clark, Nietzsche's late writings<sup>11</sup> abandon any earlier radical scepticism and display "a uniform and unambiguous respect for facts, the senses, and science."<sup>12</sup> Nature, in other words, is for the mature Nietzsche best understood as the world according to the Enlightenment paradigm of the factual and the sensuous defined by way of the rigors of natural scientific empiricism. Leiter, following Clark's cue, abandons even Kaufmann's cautious reservations about Nietzsche's methodological failings. He effectively claims not to be presenting what is latent in the spirit of Nietzsche's thought but to be simply telling us what is already there had we the sense to see it. Scepticism about Nietzsche's possible shortcomings is abandoned in favor of the desire to demonstrate that Nietzsche's naturalism is "fundamentally methodological" in so far as directly it copies the "experimental method" and "styles" of the "successful sciences."<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, in other words, emulates not only the patterns of enquiry offered by

the sciences but also the scientific stipulation of what genuine “success” amounts to. Naturalism, on Leiter’s view, is in this sense implacably opposed to the “postmodernist” rejection of the enduring truth of scientific method.<sup>14</sup> Against postmodernism, Leiter offers us a Nietzsche assured of a place within the canon of natural scientific “*philosophers of human nature*.”<sup>15</sup> He interprets Nietzsche’s naturalism as attempting to emulate the causal efficacy of scientific explanation in philosophical form. Naturalism becomes method pure and simple. This method is taken as the main *tool* with which Nietzsche conducts his polemic against conventional morality.<sup>16</sup> In this way, naturalism is claimed to offer a causal account of moral phenomena that, in so far as it is conducted as a means of establishing a descriptive account of “facts about persons,”<sup>17</sup> is “fundamentally natural,” in the sense that such an account is devoid of any taint of sinister proto-postmodern tendencies.

Rejecting the idea that Nietzsche might be engaged in a critique of the socio-historical conditions and hidden interests underlying moral discourse, Leiter asserts that he is really concerned with these interests only in so far as they are taken to be natural (i.e. given) scientific facts.<sup>18</sup> His approach thereby seeks to neutralize any possible historical, social, and political aspects that might be attributed to Nietzsche’s treatment of morality by endowing it with the aura of the neutrality and respectability that springs from commitment to method.<sup>19</sup> The problem with this approach is that, even more than Kaufmann’s, it presupposes Nietzsche to have both the same interest in, and conception of, “success” as that which motivates scientific method. This approach effectively assumes that if one can find some evidence of Nietzsche playing a game that looks like the kind of methodological game that is played by the sciences, then that is what Nietzsche must be doing. What is not entertained is the possibility that Nietzsche, even when he follows the rule-like stipulations characteristic of science, might be playing another game.<sup>20</sup> In other words, it takes the post-metaphysical commitments that Nietzsche clearly and frequently endorses (in the shape of “historical

philosophy” and genealogy<sup>21</sup>) to be equivalent to an endorsement of the right of scientific method to claim possession of the sphere of critical thought.

Rejecting metaphysics is one thing, but uncritically endorsing science and its method is another. As Richard Schacht has pointed out, it is possible to argue that although Nietzsche is committed to the view that we should regard people “as instances of a general type of animate existence, the complex nature of which it is the task of philosophical anthropology to comprehend,”<sup>22</sup> a sensitive elucidation of the naturalism this implies does *not* have to be “wedded to the view that everything that happens in human life [...] can be adequately explained and fully comprehended in terms of natural-scientific or natural-scientifically-modelled concepts and processes.”<sup>23</sup> According to Schacht, this is especially shown by the fact that Nietzsche’s naturalism seeks to come to terms with a significant and puzzling feature of human beings, namely, with the fact that they are “disanimalized.” A being that is “disanimalized” is an animal, but the animality that pertains to such a being is not “natural” since the question of “who” such a being is cannot be answered by simply drawing up a descriptive table of natural type facts.<sup>24</sup> This is another way of saying that Nietzsche is at least as interested in culture and history as he is in nature and biology. Indeed, Nietzsche is open to being construed as considering them as intimately connected in ways that the causal-scientific account cannot countenance. Reinterpreting humanity back into nature does not simply mean seeking to understand human beings by proffering lists of “natural” descriptions (scientific “facts,” or as Nietzsche himself might have called them, labels<sup>25</sup>). It requires we attend to the rather more demanding task of understanding humankind as an animal that is biological and yet, at the same time, more than mere biology since it is also its history and that history is constitutive of it. In other words, human history, which is a socio-cultural phenomenon, has in a decisive way constituted the questions and possibilities that confront us in the shape of human identity. What Schacht terms Nietzsche’s “*extended* naturalism” thus

involves starting from the standpoint of conceiving of humanity as having emerged from nature and subsequently *broken* with it in a manner that is revealed by our historicity. Naturalism, so conceived, obliges us to grasp the subtle insight that although humanity springs from, and is organically tied to, nature in so far as we are embodied beings, our human world “is no longer merely natural” and cannot be adequately interpreted as being entirely such.<sup>26</sup>

An analogous point is made by Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, who elaborates Nietzsche’s desire to translate humanity back into nature in the following terms: “Man’s origin lies in nature, and he is not ‘more’ in any qualitative sense, but surely [is ‘more’] in a quantitative one. The total organic world lives on in him. And insofar as every inorganic thing is a synthesis of inorganic forces, the inorganic also ‘lives’ in him. What is oldest, ‘firmly embodied’ in him, is locked in conflict with newer elements. Man contains multiplicity in himself and he interprets it.”<sup>27</sup> On this view, the naturalistic insight suggests humans are a synthesized multiplicity of inorganic and organic elements. Qualitatively speaking, humankind has kinship with the organic and non-organic. This kinship denotes an interpretative activity in which the synthesizing and overlaying of layers continually combines and recombines the most ancient yet persistent of origins with “newer elements.” Humankind is hence always already a kind of sandwiched interpretation that stands before itself as a synthesis of the non-organic, the organic, of animality, of the prehistoric, and of features of more recent provenance. Decisive among such newer elements is the “disanimalized” aspect. This aspect is all that is contained within the realm of human history and culture: the accumulated mishmash of practices, customs, traditions, observances, etc. that fashioned the human animal in the primitive world of the earliest communities in such a way as to constitute what is distinctive about it by marking it out as a creature uncannily at odds with itself, a being which is simultaneously animal and yet set apart from (and

consequently also against) the mere fact of its animality.<sup>28</sup> As such, we are creatures that always already discover ourselves as multiplicities of concatenated elements; some of these are “natural,” but a good deal are cultural and historical and hence open to being regarded as profoundly “unnatural.”<sup>29</sup> Naturalism understood in the light of this claim does not involve the application of a rigidly prescriptive method associated with the sciences, even though it nevertheless springs from an engagement with them. As Müller-Lauter comments, Nietzsche approached science with an attitude of informed engagement and careful reflection, in so far as he “was constantly aware that the sciences had to be taken *critically*, that the path of his philosophizing had to lead through them [...]”<sup>30</sup> Going *through* science is not the same as *following* it. Equally, endorsing it in some ways is not the same as endorsing it unreservedly, either with regard to its substantive claims or its methodological commitments. Extended naturalism, therefore, seeks to offer an account of Nietzsche’s approach, which, while taking science seriously, does not cleave to the more rigid methodological approach advocated by Leiter.

### 3. Hyperbolic Naturalism

As Schacht and Müller-Lauter show, there are good reasons to take a naturalistic approach to imply something different from the mere mimicry of scientific method proposed by critics like Leiter. It is not sufficient simply to assert that there are passages where Nietzsche appears to extol the virtues of science and method to conclude that always and everywhere he is simply following its example.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, *neither* a scientific-methodological conception nor even a “disanimalized” view of naturalism is immune to Fink’s point about Nietzschean hyperbole. If we take Nietzsche to be using overstatement and irony when he writes “naturalistically,” then it becomes extremely hard to suggest his “naturalism” refers to anything that can be easily separated from the rhetorical function it serves on any specific

textual occasion in which it is invoked. What one ends up with, in consequence, is a general, naturalistic ethos (i.e. a standpoint opposed to super-naturalism) that nevertheless remains firmly rhetorical and textual in its implications. Nietzsche's non-reductive naturalism is non-reductive in so far as it is irredeemably figural.

Take, by way of illustration, the first essay of the *Genealogy*. Here, Nietzsche typically offers up a text that problematizes any attempt to disentangle reasoned argument and naturalistic exaggeration. A relatively casual and limited survey of just the *Genealogy*'s first essay quickly reveals the extent to which a naturalizing hyperbole of animality, processes and affects permeates the discussion in a manner that is not methodical but disruptively normative in tone: English psychologists are “frogs,” “animals” (*GM I:1*); *ressentiment* springs from the “tree” of “Jewish hatred” which “gives birth” to slave values (*GM I:9* and *10*); slave morality is a “poisoning of the blood” and “intoxication” that passes through “the whole body of humanity” (*GM I:9*), as well as an anaesthetic; spiritual hurts are “worms” that burrow into the metaphorical body of one's feelings (*GM I:10*); nobles are “beasts of prey” (*GM I:11*); the socialized person of culture is a domesticated “pet,” and modern humanity a “stunted,” “poisoned,” “teeming mass of worms” (*GM I:11*). We are also invited to enter a darkened “cellar” where values are created by “cellar rats” (*GM I:14*). Nietzsche's text here plays on the power of naturalizing imagery to make its un-erasable mark on the reader, and it would be hard to claim that he is making a point that could be easily disentangled from this, never mind endorsing a “method” akin to those of the sciences.

Such hyperbole, however coarse-grained in its pursuit of polemical effect, is not easily dissociated from Nietzsche's arguments. One of Nietzsche's central contentions about nobles—the beings who are the original coiners of values in their own affirmative self-image—demonstrates this entanglement clearly enough. Nobles, Nietzsche suggests, are aggressive cultural beings who have been subjected to processes of socialization. Policed by

the severe norms of their own social order (norms they strictly observe with regard to one another, as all well-behaved communal people must if the community is to survive—a contention that apparently draws on naturalistic, Darwinian premises), such beings strain against the feelings of containment that the carefully fenced boundaries of peaceful communal life foster. Release from these constraints happens when the noble steps outside the bounds of the community and traverses cultural domains. This release uncorks pent-up and violent energies, which the nobles discharge on populations situated in other social orders that are “strange” and “alien” to them. The noble, in other words, is envisaged as unconsciously seeking gratification in compensation for the cost of internalizing the inhibitions that social life necessitates. Desire for such gratification is expressed as a craving for victims. When this craving is allowed expression, acts of violation ensue. Such violation, Nietzsche is at pains to point out, is carried out with the innocent “good conscience” characteristic of a merciless and lawless predator that, in the absence of constraint, suddenly feels itself incapable of doing any wrong (*GM* I:11). The effect of Nietzsche’s “naturalistic” sketching of the noble is deliberately disturbing precisely in relation to what the image of his or her instinctive and joyous violence invokes. These unharnessed semi-animals (Nietzsche’s notorious “blonde beasts”) become creatures of the hinterland. They occupy an uncanny space between culture and nature since they are neither exactly human in their predatory exultation nor wholly animal due to their being, at the same time, complex social animals. Nietzsche’s exaggerated “description” communicates vividly what no mere theory (Darwinian or otherwise) can: the irreducibly disturbing identity that bursts out of the human visage when it assumes the look of barbarity that is only possible in relation to the subjection characteristic of civilization. The nobles’ violence is a mirroring and inversion of the social violence of containment and control from which they are constituted as persons in the first place. That persons of this near bestial kind are also asserted to be the inventors of morality

(of “good and bad” talk and, in the shape of the priest, “good and evil” talk) is a claim calculated to overturn all “civilized” ideas of moral order. That the idea is offered up in exaggerated, imagistic form is not coincidental to its content. The violent hyperbole of the text is itself a refined and carefully executed enactment of the intimate connection between culture and barbarism that it asserts. Naturalism, in this sense, is never natural. It is cultural violence writ large, insofar as a “pure” nature could never meaningfully be deemed “violent” or otherwise. Nietzsche, even in a late work like the *Genealogy*, thereby never steps into the realm of a “redeemed” nature of the kind invoked in section 109 of *The Gay Science*.

The “naturalistic” account of the noble as the source of value is meant to disturb and unsettle. But Nietzsche wants to shock us further. Nobles are not merely semi-wild barbarians. As the text of the *Genealogy* unfurls, it turns out that, as the first organizers and overseers of the form of the state, they are also born administrators. It is nobles who, in the second essay of the *Genealogy*, the reader witnesses descending on their victims not as mere plunderers but as colonizers, assuming suddenly the form of “a conqueror and master race which, organized on a war footing, and with the power to organize, unscrupulously lays its dreadful paws on a populace which, though it might be vastly greater in number, is still shapeless and shifting” (*GM* II:17). From the standpoint of their victims, such terrible beings simply appear: they are “there” just as lightning is “there”—in a flash, without “cause” or “reason” to explain or justify their sudden arrival and violent imposition of will. Nietzsche thereby moves in the text of the *Genealogy* between the naturalized wilderness of the spaces separating primitive communal orders, which can be crossed and plundered, to the constrained and defined space of organization of the political state through a vivid invocation of acts of seizure and possession. Sovereignty is in this way portrayed as being rooted in an original act of cultural (rather than “natural”) violence. That the origin of state power thus conceived is profoundly illiberal hardly needs commenting on, although Nietzsche cannot



resist: “I think we have dispensed with the fantasy that it began with a ‘contract.’” That such naturalized violence is held too easily to be “creative,” in that the state emerges in a welter of unconsciously creative “hammer blows” raining down on a crude population that is malleable and so susceptible to the strokes of wild “artists” who wield the most violent force, ought to give us reason to pause. With this, the *Genealogy* has not merely asserted the fundamental conjunction of the pairings “nobility-morality” and “nobility-sovereignty,” thereby challenging the assumptions that what are subsequently deemed “good” and “legitimate” originate in the virtues of selflessness and fair-handedness. Nietzsche has, at the same time, articulated a profound link between nature, culture, violation, power, subjection, political organization, and identity. He has effectively asserted that this chain of links constitutes the formative condition of political life. Nietzsche, in short, has, in the course of his violently naturalizing, deeply speculative (to the point of being fictional) and over-stated narrative, conjured up the image of sovereign power as alienating organization and containment. “Naturally,” the text implies with a degree of irony possible to suspect but impossible to measure, such sovereign power produces resentful feelings, just as “lambs bear a grudge towards large birds of prey” (*GM* I:13). Sovereignty, that in the end gives rise to law, fairness and justice, is in its origins fundamentally and paradoxically as blameless as it must initially be lawless, unfair, and unjust. Sovereignty’s violent origins cannot be held accountable, just as there “is no reason to blame the large birds of prey for carrying off the little lambs,” since accountability only emerges with the law that sovereign violation of the communal victim makes possible.

As I have hinted, Nietzsche’s apparently indifferent irony is more complex and hard to define than it might initially appear to be. As section 13 of the *Genealogy*’s first essay unfolds, the naturalizing language used extends beyond characterizing noble and victim to a discussion that traverses considerations of free will and identity before engaging in critical

reflection concerning moral responsibility and the adequacy and authority of descriptive scientific language. In this eccentric traversal, rather than conforming to the conventional demands of systematic argument and consistency that the topic might be assumed to require, Nietzsche's thinking remains permeated by the ambiguous imagistic and hyperbolic aspects that propel it. Although he generally rejects all talk of oppositions as metaphysical,<sup>32</sup> here Nietzsche unhesitatingly allows the "natural" rhetorical effect of naturalistically presented opposition to do the work for him as he denies the moral accountability of the primitive aggressor: "It is just as absurd to ask strength *not* to express itself as strength, *not* to be a desire to overthrow, crush, become master [...] as it is to ask weakness to express itself as strength." (Naturally...) weakness cannot become its opposite, any more than strength can become what it is opposed to, namely weakness. (Naturally...) the strong must vent their strength on the weak. They cannot do otherwise, for there is no "indifferent substratum behind the strong person which has the *freedom* to manifest strength or not." The doer and the deed are one and the same thing: "there is no 'being' behind the deed, its effect and what becomes of it; the 'doer' is invented as an afterthought,—the doing is everything" (*GM* I:13). Life, in other words "nature," is essentially and exclusively activity—life is expression of strength and its affects. As soon as one ignores this and embraces a world of doers separate from deeds, one thinks unnaturally and metaphysically: "The [natural] scientists [Naturforscher] do no better when they say 'force moves, force causes' and such like [...] all our science [...] still stands exposed to the seduction of language and has not ridded itself of the changelings foisted upon it, the 'subjects' (the 'atom' [...] for example [...])" (*GM* I:13). The figure of the natural scientist is thereby suddenly inserted into the midst of a domain populated by talk of origins, imagery of eagles slaughtering lambs, patterns of drives and affects, to be accused of metaphysical and moral naivety in its endorsement of the

anthropomorphic “I.”<sup>33</sup> Can any reader not be left wondering how he or she was transported to such a surprising conclusion?

One can address to this last question in the following terms. In its refusal to adhere to conventions of argument the exaggerated naturalizing critique offered in section 13 of the *Genealogy*'s first essay reveals more than it ought initially to be able to say, given where it started. What it says is only expressible through a traversal that encloses in an apparently seamless circle a range of heterogeneous discursive fields: origins (the historicization of values), victim and prey, speaking animals (anthropomorphism, fictional narrative of struggle), force (units of power), drives (biology), will and action (embodiment), mythical agency (the “subject,” “freedom”), lightning (energy of inorganic nature), strength and weakness (power of the organic), science (cognitive discourse, “knowledge”), the founding errors of reason (metaphysics), the need to blame (*ressentiment*). This naturalizing conflation does not argue its case directly. Indeed, it is marked by a rigorous *refusal* to argue. Rather, what Nietzsche does is to *show* us something about the limitations of moral and cognitive discourse by blending together the methodologically discontinuous discursive fields of organic and inorganic, power and selfhood, reason and unconscious behavior in a stream of concept-images that are paradoxically conceptually disruptive and confusing and yet vivid in what they seek to communicate. Nietzsche manages to convey the idea that the cognitive-descriptive discourse of the sciences, precisely in its aversion to the exaggeration and violence enacted by rhetoric, that is, in its acceptance of the notion of a neutral and unbiased “subject,” is no less prey to fiction and hyperbole than the victim is prey to the noble. Natural science suddenly stands accused of being in thrall to the victim-language of resentment morality due to its uncritical embrace of the grounding “errors of reason” that *slave* morality ultimately uses to defeat the nobles by persuading them that they ought to feel accountable for being who they are. Science's *methods*, its founding presuppositions, are here rendered

akin to self-delusion. “Reason” is just as deluded, mythical and subterranean in its innermost workings as the unnatural reasoning which seeks to blame the strong for (“naturally”) being what they are. Science is no different from the “common” person who after seeing a lightning flash is inclined to attribute an agency behind it doing the deed. In this way, the violent excess of Nietzsche’s hyperbolic traversal makes manifest a hidden, “unnatural” violence of reason, no less than it has scandalously inverted conventional moral “prejudice” by celebrating “natural” noble excess. Here we are confronted with an exposure of the concealment and distortion involved in denying the original condition of violation that underlies morality and sovereignty alike. With this, we stand confronted by the paradoxical stance of a “violence-against-violence” that, for Nietzsche, typifies the most naïve faith in value-freedom and scientific objectivity. What is one to make of this exposure?

#### 4. Sovereignty, Instrumental Reason, and Colonial Power

While the above account accords with Eugen Fink’s comment mentioned above, it also, in a provisional way at least, takes us beyond it in a manner that can be illuminated by a point made by Theodor Adorno in *Minima Moralia*. Nietzsche, Adorno comments, conducts his polemics in provocatively eccentric style, attacking like a horseman riding into battle on a charger mounted tail first.<sup>34</sup> As we have seen, even a relatively brief consideration of the *Genealogy* illustrates this eccentric reversal well enough. Imagery, exaggeration, and rhetoric drive apparently cool rational argument before them, threatening to permeate and overwhelm it. In so doing, Nietzsche reveals what argument from rational principles could not:

Nietzsche’s text suspends uncritical belief in the neutrality of reason.

For Adorno, the extremity involved in Nietzsche’s strategy is dictated by the critical demands he makes of himself as simultaneous accomplice and bad conscience of the most questionable tendency of Enlightenment thought. Nietzsche is caught within the historical

moment of triumphant Enlightenment's successful reduction of reason to a mere tool in its pursuit of the mastery of violently unreasonable nature, and he knows it. His response is to follow Enlightenment's instrumentalizing trajectory ruthlessly and faithfully in equal measure, driving it to the point where any attempt to derive high moral principles and methods from rational precepts crumbles.<sup>35</sup> There are no rules, instrumental reason tells us, only the manipulation of conditions in the quest for control. Enlightenment lacks the self-reflexivity to become aware of this. With Nietzsche Enlightenment is exposed to the implication of its own searing manipulative gaze: the moral limitations of modern reason are demonstrated by turning its strategic inclination back on itself by any possible means. The instrumental rhetorical tail which ought to be reason's obedient servant and supplement suddenly appears to lead the methodologically rational head, dragging it helplessly through a thicket of images, metaphors and contentious evaluative claims. The aim of this, however, is not mere madness. Nietzsche's achievement, for Adorno, is to sketch the potential for Enlightenment's transformation of reason into unlimited violence by drawing out its consequence: an uncanny, topsy-turvy world that is by turns almost as comical as it is terrifying.

One should bear in mind in this connection a clue offered in Nietzsche's concluding poetic afterword to *Human, All Too Human*. In it he suggests that we would be well advised to understand that text as a "fool's book," that is, as a piece of eccentricity. Foolhardiness is the opposite of self-interested rational calculation. Only through such foolishness, Nietzsche tells us, is it possible to discover a path whereby "reason comes—'to reason'!" (*HH* "Among Friends: An Epilogue"). In contrast to its occasional superficially positivistic garb,<sup>36</sup> *Human, All Too Human* is in this way presented as a work that situates itself at the margins of respectable methodological society. It is through such a questionable situation that the text claims entitlement to reveal reason's inherent unreasonableness. The reader is invited to bear

witness to an inversion whereby, in a manner that prefigures the *Genealogy*'s overturning of the presuppositions of disinterested reason and the autonomy of the "rational" morally accountable subject, any confident affirmation of reason's independent status as autonomous, objective judge of reality is pulled up short and unmasked as careless complacency. In so far as he thereby questions what has been celebrated as "reason," Nietzsche finds himself obliged to take on the exaggerated guise of someone foolish, fanciful, and speculative. In other words, he must appear deeply unreasonable when regarded from the stern standpoint of strict and sober method. The extremity of Nietzsche's gesture towards his own "foolishness" serves to puncture presuppositions: it urges suspicion of any viewpoint that sets objective, calculative reason over its opposite, unreason.<sup>37</sup>

The extent to which Nietzsche is prepared to engage in "unreasonable" behavior is captured well by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Prefiguring Adorno's comment in *Minima Moralia*, they argue that Nietzsche, like de Sade, refuses to suppress "the impossibility of deriving from reason a fundamental argument against murder," but instead unashamedly shouts it out to the whole world.<sup>38</sup> With this point in mind, it is possible to grasp the outlandish, hyperbolic and naturalistically presented "celebration" of violence in the *Genealogy* to be indicative of something else—whatever Nietzsche's supposed "intentions." It indicates the condition of modern rationality ruminating on its own moral redundancy. Just as reason discloses the essential contingency of the world and hence its fundamental amorality, so Nietzsche's self-avowed naturalistic "immoralism" discloses what reason has been obliged to sacrifice with this disclosure: it has sacrificed the right of reason itself to comment on right and wrong. Thus, reason, Nietzsche can comment with unnerving casualness in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "is only an instrument" (*BGE* 191).<sup>39</sup> Like every instrument, reason should not to be confused with the realm to which its practical nature permits it to be efficiently related. It is, it follows, one thing to claim for rationality a

specific (even positive) instrumental value (a facet of reason exploited by the sciences), but quite another to claim that this instrumental value sets the standard for value “as such,” and that one can thereby determine the “good” in terms amenable to instrumental reason’s “success.” Taken this way, Nietzsche’s violently hyperbolic narration of the origins of morality and sovereignty in the *Genealogy* enacts precisely what Horkheimer and Adorno indicate. Ethics and sovereign power (consequently, also legality) are not opposed; they are co-conspirators in the anguish that is an essential condition of “civilized” life.<sup>40</sup>

What is challenged with this contention is nothing less than the integrity of philosophy itself, at least as hitherto understood. We “knowers,” Nietzsche says at the opening of the *Genealogy* (neither confirming nor denying whether any of his readers might actually be counted amongst this “we”<sup>41</sup>), “are unknown to ourselves” (*GM P:1*). The seeker of knowledge is, “with good reason” it turns out, not endowed with transparent self-awareness. One either has *one’s taste for knowledge* or one does not. The task is constitutive of the identity of the one who desires knowledge such that he or she could not do (and hence be) otherwise. Like a honey-gathering insect driven to capture sweetness, like the noble lust for conquest, the knower’s identity is realised in the pursuit of its goal. Nietzsche’s naturalistic imagery thereby fuses the worlds of thought and nature in the implied existence of an unrelenting search for sustenance as characterizing the “hungry” intellect. The intellect becomes a body. With this, the lover of wisdom is divested of his or her popular cultural garb as a creature of pure, untainted thought.<sup>42</sup> In this way, the naturalization Nietzsche continually deploys in the *Genealogy* also disrupts the standard portrayal of the “natural” condition of the philosophical mind as the bearer of reason through a life of unworldly reflection in pursuit of value-free objectivity no less than it disrupts conventional moral and political wisdom. The image of the knower is profoundly unnatural, perverse even, in its unashamedly inhuman invocation of an identity that is allied with a violence that, for all its

subtlety, is of no lesser magnitude than the violence which will later in the text be attributed to the noble, or the violence of the natural scientist's naïve attribution of an agency where there is none. The intellectual insect in pursuit of honeyed sweetness is, after all, no mere worker bee or drone, no member of a collective hive engaged in a common pursuit, but akin to an outsider and raider, one who seizes on the hives of knowledge it desires in order to plunder and take possession of what they offer. Nietzsche here, as in *GM I:13*, "naturalizes" and de-naturalizes at one and the same time as anthropomorphic imagery is used to expose other, hidden anthropomorphic illusions in hitherto unsuspected nooks and crannies of thought and value ("disinterestedness," "pure" self-knowledge, and the like).

Thought (not even—or perhaps especially—philosophical thought) is no more method than "naturalism" is ever straightforwardly natural. Naturalism of the order unleashed in the *Genealogy* does not seek to describe. More especially, it does not even pretend to emulate the good manners of "scientific," value-free description. It is not "method." It is lived. As such, Nietzsche's naturalism is a rejection of the notion that 'method' should ultimately guide us. The "fundamental will to knowledge" which, in the *Genealogy's* Preface, Nietzsche immediately allies with the "naturalized" knower when describing his own intellectual path makes this point forcefully enough. A real philosopher's thoughts and values have "no right to stand out *individually*" but must spring from an inner demand: they must "grow from us with the same inevitability as fruits born on the tree," irrespective of consideration as to whether or not others like such fruits (*GM P:2*). The path of thought must go its own way and must be content with the only comfort available to it: that in doing so, it remains faithful to itself. The end product (in this case the text of the *Genealogy*) is what it is. It hangs as an eccentric and stubborn testimony of faithfulness to the "tree" that bore it. This, too, is "natural."



The *Genealogy's* naturalizing hyperbole is thus much more complex in implication than a merely "methodological" conception would allow. Nietzsche's extended naturalism is also and always already hyperbolic in the sense that its presentation of nature cannot be divorced from its imagistic and exaggerated mode of expression. Through the collision between nature and culture that this conjoining enacts the distinction between them is rendered ambiguous. Natural and cultural are revealed as not being different in kind in Nietzsche's discourse: the boundaries that separate them are rendered porous. What really matters about Nietzsche's naturalism, especially in the context of its relationship to the problem of morality, is hence not something that needs to be established (or perhaps even can be established) by way of reference to how much or how little he may on this occasion or that he have presented himself as extolling the virtues of the sciences or dressed himself in the guise of their critic.<sup>43</sup> Rather, the object of interest in addressing the question of naturalism should be Nietzsche's practice. Consideration of Nietzsche's practice in this context concerns the way in which he deploys naturalistic discourse and, above all, that discourse's critical relation to the Enlightenment ethos it draws upon.

This critical relation has a moral-political aspect: it engages with nothing less than the question of modernity's legitimacy. If Adorno and Horkheimer offer an insight into the problematizing of instrumental reason that Nietzsche's thought enacts through his practice of critical reflection on Enlightenment, Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* offers a plausible standpoint from which to extrapolate the political and moral implications of this problematization. Agamben's thought engages directly with the issue of naturalization, in so far as he holds modern political discourse to be dominated by the consideration of life processes. Following Foucault's lead,<sup>44</sup> Agamben argues that in the Western tradition life (biological nature) is inexorably bound up with the political as such: domination over life (in the form of brute, "naked life") is a defining characteristic of sovereignty. This tendency

finds its fullest expression in modern society, where biology has come to subvert the place of the citizen as the locus of political talk and action.<sup>45</sup>

We can elaborate Agamben's point about the body and life processes in terms that open up the possibility of a theoretical articulation of the political implications of Nietzsche's hyperbolic naturalism. In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche's naturalistic narrative elaborates the constitutive role of sovereignty in political discourse such that the biological ("natural") body (the unit of bio-political discourse) is exposed as an object amenable to critical reflection. However, he does this by what one must term "non-theoretical-critical"<sup>46</sup> (that is, by exaggeratedly figurative and imagistic) means. In its portrayal of the noble in the "wilderness" as a being who exists beyond the law, joyfully hunting down the alien outsider, the *Genealogy* narrates in figural terms the emergence of the "human animal" from brute nature in a way that illustrates how the body is transformed into an object of sovereign domination—a mode of domination that is no longer that of communal norms but commanding state power. Nietzsche does not theorize this transformation methodologically, that is, he does not analyze and thereby *say* it explicitly by following the steps dictated by rigidly rule-like procedures to arrive at a conclusion. Rather, he portrays it: Nietzsche does not *say* it, he *shows* it. Through this act of showing, the political (understood as the lived-in space which emerges only with the fashioning of the state) is revealed as a moment of violent subjugation of largely unformed and pliant 'natural' bodies. Just as communal violence underlies the emergence of the primitive promising animal depicted in the opening sections of the *Genealogy*'s second essay, so later the founding of the state within that account (*GM* II:13) is portrayed vividly as an act of enclosure in which one set of primitive promisers closes in on and surrounds another: violent and powerful nobility encloses its victims within an organized web of power.

Such enclosure signals the forced transformation of rudimentary normative humanity from a communal and customary entity to a being of sociality dwelling in the rigidly rule-like domain of the state. Here, in the image of domination, Nietzsche stakes a claim to reveal the nature of state power, law, formalized notions of moral duty, and thus the terrain of the political itself. Sovereignty appears in Nietzsche's text in a manner that does not so much prefigure Agamben's account as threaten to outstrip it. Sovereign power (the power of command that organizes individuated communal bodies into social bodies) is constituted through the organized incarceration and shaping of potentiality (the primitively customary human community) into socialized, organized actuality. Understood in this way, Nietzsche's deliberately visceral naturalism can be read not as mere rhetoric surrounding a theoretical core, nor as merely as performing an inversion of the Western tradition's privileging of reason over sensibility, but as enacting and thereby exposing the moral-bio-political implication concealed within the opposition that separates reason from embodiment, method from practice, instrument from aim and value.

Nietzsche's naturalizing narrative in this way forces us to consider the possibility that a specific kind of violation (that of incarceration) is productive of the sensibility that is amenable to what is commonly called "political reason" or reason of state. This sensibility, one symptom of which is the self-reflexive sense of shame called "bad conscience," exemplifies the condition of a propensity to "inner" reflection that is necessary in order for an ordering and organizing sovereign reason to exert its power. In other words, reason, for the socialized animal that has been battered and tyrannized into the condition of moral-political existence, is always already reason of state, i.e. the belief that there is such a thing as a national identity and interest represented by the image of the sovereign. In feudal society, this image centers on the monarch as the representative of order. In the modern era it is reiterated as the representative governmental administration, which claims the right to dictate a nation

state's assumed political, economic, cultural, and social goals, its friends and enemies. Questions of political reason are thereby always already framed within the instrumentally fashioned enclosure of state power and the brutal forging of selfhood that it presupposes. Bad conscience is, in this regard, akin to a kind of scar that testifies to the presence of an inaugural moral violation lurking within the political.<sup>47</sup>

The second essay of the *Genealogy* informs us that this violence is doubled on itself. It is worth recalling here that the most primitive human community, Nietzsche argues, emerges as a community of promisers (*GM* II:1 and 9). Every community of promisers inhabits a world of traditional, customary morality. In the nobles' barbaric pursuit of those from alien communities and, ultimately, in one community's falling prey to another's noble tyranny, the violence of one moral form is visited on the other as the sinister promise of politics. The promiser-victim has no choice when faced with the promiser-noble's threat: accede to domination or else become naked life and risk being killed with impunity. A doubled promise thereby encircles the victim as their own (now threatened) customary world meets the custom and tradition of the stranger who is more powerful. It is only in virtue of this doubling that the victim is encircled "within" the boundaries of rudimentary political society. Nietzsche's elaborate and imagistic story-telling has thereby rendered sovereignty open to being thought of as a seizing, instrumental incorporation and putting to use of brute "alien" resources. Is it necessary to point out that this kind of incarceration is paradigmatic not merely of the camp but of the imperial colonization that characterized the emergence of political modernity? The state, which is for liberalism the paradigm of neutrality, the disinterested arbitrator contracted to negotiate between the interests of individual disputants, is rendered by Nietzsche an instrumental structure and façade of colonial power.

However eccentric the means, Nietzsche's exposure of the state as a façade affirms his place as a thinker in whom the collusion of ethics and political power is exposed as bio-

politics. This exposure is made by naturalistic means, in so far as its springs from Nietzsche's picturing of a world in vividly and figuratively "naturalized" terms. What Nietzsche does thereby is to show something that cannot (initially) be said. He extrapolates the dark implications of naturalism by stepping beyond the boundaries of the possibilities of what can be identified, theorized and said from within the confines of "method," in order to create something new for conceptual thought to wonder at by *showing it*. The image of "natural" violence proffered in the *Genealogy* coagulates into a perspective according to which the nation state is seen to originate in the specific violence and violation of colonization. In this way, it drives us toward the acknowledgement and subsequent attempt at a theoretical saying of this perspective. Nietzsche's thought suggests that "natural," naked life is not a given material of political manipulation but, rather, is what is produced through seizure and possession. The "natural" is a construct and this construct is the enabling condition of politics.

The victim, ironically perhaps given Nietzsche's overtly ambivalent celebration of the victimizer, is in this way thrust to the fore as a central moral-political-biological category. In the victim, biology, morality, and politics meet up in such a way as to reveal that only through this meeting do they become what they are. Biology, in this sense, is a kind of historical text scarred with its heritage of moral and political practices. Morality is the scarring of the body, politics the body's subjugation to a centralized order of command. A victim, it follows, never approaches sovereignty by stepping out of a Lockean-style "state of nature" as a fully-formed "individual" endowed with self-interested rational traits in order to have his or her "natural rights" upheld in the face of disputes. He or she does not stand before state power as a contracting proto-citizen. The image of the individuated political subject, as Nietzsche presents it, is of a being standing before overwhelming domination, bloodied,

battered, replete with self-loathing, but endowed with a sense of selfhood and hence an image of the articulate “disanimalized” being of culture and history.

Nietzsche’s disturbingly celebratory portrayal of this violence in a welter of image and assertion may seem devoid of pity. But to the extent that his naturalistic exposure of colonizing power is an exposure it provokes critical reflection and elaboration of what it shows of the stony world of brute power. It brings the question of politics as violation rather than consent to the fore. In doing so, Nietzsche’s thought drives us to question the legitimacy of conventionally accepted discourses concerning sovereignty and power. As Horkheimer and Adorno comment, in his proclamation of “the identity of power and reason,” Nietzsche may appear without compassion, but his is nevertheless a standpoint “more compassionate than those of the moral lackeys of the bourgeoisie” who would like to subordinate reason to domination by scraping around for “good” “scientific” reasons to justify it.<sup>48</sup> Taken this way, the task of reading Nietzsche’s naturalism poses a political challenge. His hyperbole proffers a path to speculating on new and sympathetic imagistic imaginings of the political and moral status of a compassion for the body that is capable of transcending the contractarian liberal political discourse of sovereignty which he so rightly scorns.

## 5. Biopolitical Nietzsche

Biopolitics, Agamben argues, characterizes politics as such. It is rooted in the tension that inheres in the Western tradition between the way in which the notions of *zoē* and *bios* are figured in relation to one another. *Zoē*, the mere “fact of living,”<sup>49</sup> denotes the element of animality that is necessarily incorporated into all forms of political existence. *Bios*, which is “the way of living proper to an individual or group,” signifies the specifically “human” dimension of social life wherein political existence as such (i.e. existence in a state) is lived. Whenever statehood is withdrawn from the individual, *zoē* re-manifests itself as bare or

naked life. The person beyond the law is reduced to being a mere living entity that has been stripped of politico-biographical content and transformed into something akin to a zoological specimen consisting of skin and bones. Politics, Agamben holds, exists “because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion.”<sup>50</sup> The Western tradition of political organization, in other words, springs from a “fundamental categorial” dichotomy through which social life is conceptualized by way of the threat of its removal and the ensuing condition of privation characteristic of one who, having been expelled by sovereign power from legal society can, in consequence, be killed with impunity.<sup>51</sup> The dangerous consequences of the political erupt as *bios* falls prey to the possibility of becoming divided against itself at the hands of tyrannical sovereignty. The victim of this division is denuded of his or her status as a legal person and left as a mere remnant of *zoē*, as is exemplified by the victim of a death camp.

In elucidating his critique, Agamben invites us to think beyond this model. At the same time, he points to Nietzsche as one of the thinkers who might allow us to “think a constituting power wholly released from the sovereign ban.”<sup>52</sup> Tellingly, perhaps, this possibility concerning Nietzsche is never fulfilled in Agamben’s text. This is perhaps because Nietzsche’s rethinking of the political does not turn on the tension between *zoē* and *bios* in the same way as Agamben’s does. In Nietzsche, the biopolitical is already laid bare, so to speak; but it is exposed in a manner that might lead us to question aspects of Agamben’s theorization of it. As has already been argued, what characterizes Nietzsche’s exaggeratedly “naturalistic” portrayal of the emergence of the state, sovereignty and politics is colonization. The noble conquest of another population gives rise to the state. Contrary to Agamben, one might say that for Nietzsche the political does not simply emerge when the animality of *zoē*, once incorporated into the sociality of *bios*, is subjected to the threat of expulsion and

reduction to the mode of brute existence characteristic of “naked life.” In Nietzsche’s depiction, the political erupts when incommensurable forms of *bios* meet in a clash of *zoē*, i.e. when a colonizer encounters and then subjugates the colonized. The political, in other words, does not turn on *zoē*’s relation to *bios* so much as on the fact that different communal identities and normative structures become entangled with one another so as to constitute a field of conflict. Politics, on such a view, presupposes not merely the biopolitical subjection of animality to sovereign authority outlined by Agamben, but also the supplanting of one kind of authority characteristic of *bios* (that of a community’s customs and traditions) by the imposition of an external form of subjection by one population on another (*GM* II:17). It is important to note that only with this moment is the condition of intellectuality and personhood characteristic of the “human animal” rendered possible through what Nietzsche here calls the “internalization of man” (*GM* II:17). Internalization occurs because the primitive communal being who is suddenly subjected to the irresistible will of another is obliged to seek alternative means of satisfying his or her conjoined customary and natural dispositions. Unable to express themselves outwardly, these dispositions turn back in on the primitive self, giving rise to imagination and creative thought.<sup>53</sup> Only with internalization does the self-reflexive subject necessary for politics emerge. Primitive pre-political humanity, on this view, is thus already a form of *bios* that has been articulated from *zoē*, in so far as such communal beings live according to dictates stipulated by customary normative conditions that are nevertheless devoid of sovereignty. With colonial invasion, however, the *zoē* of one form of *bios*, in the form of a violent animality that glories in temporary release from the constraints of the social bond, gets turned against another form of *bios*. The state crystallizes out of the threat of a reduction of one form of *bios* to mere *zoē* at the hands of another and, at the same time, this threat gives rise to political self-understanding through internalization. The political, it follows, has conflict underwritten into it, since the state and



formalized law emerge as instruments of domination with which to contain the subjugated victim that, through this act of containment, becomes a political subject. All struggles of the subject, it follows, are political struggles in this sense.

This suggests that for Nietzsche politics is not only always already biopolitics but that biopolitics, in turn, is always already cultural politics in so far as the political category of the state springs from the colonial conflict that arises when distinctive communities endowed with incompatible normative characteristics meet. Biopolitics, in this regard, presupposes a primitive cultural plurality that is subsequently subordinated by an instrumentally organized sovereign order. With this insight, Nietzsche's hyperbolic thinking is revealed not only as having an underestimated significance for how we ought to make sense of his naturalism and his approach to the questions of method and rationality. His form of disruptive and exaggerated naturalism also invites a re-theorization of the biopolitical that takes us beyond Agamben's conceptualization of the relation between *zoē* and *bios*. It is with this re-theorization that Nietzsche offers the possibility of a radical rethinking of the legitimacy of the liberal state in modern social orders. Above all, when interpreted in this way, his thought can be used to pose the question of whether a liberal politics that endorses a conception of the state as disinterested arbitrator between disputants can ever adequately encompass the potential violence that can be unleashed through the tension between the biopolitical and administrative aspirations of governmental forms of power and global cultural diversity.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As is generally known, noble morality (which Nietzsche sometimes calls "master morality") is held by him to be the founding form of ethical discourse. It is the code that characterizes the noble classes of the ancient world and also the realm in which the birth of values as such

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occurred. Nobles are the most powerful class in ancient social formations and are beings of action rather than contemplation. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2004), section 260, and *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), I, 2ff.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Eugen Fink, "Nietzsche's New Experience of the World," in *Nietzsche's New Seas: Experiments in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*, ed. Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Michael Allen Gillespie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 206.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Janaway and Simon Robertson, "Introduction," in *Nietzsche, Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. Janaway and Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 176.

<sup>7</sup> The title of Chapter 2 of Kaufmann's *Nietzsche* is "Nietzsche's Method."

<sup>8</sup> See, famously, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Maxims and Barbs, section 26: "The will to system is a lack of integrity."

<sup>9</sup> Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 94.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. The fuller development of Nietzsche's ideas, according to Kaufmann, was achieved by "Freud and Adler, Jung and Klages, [...] Scheler and Hartmann, Heidegger and Jaspers."

<sup>11</sup> By which Clark means "the six books that follow *Beyond Good and Evil*." See Maudmarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 103.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002), 6 and 4.

<sup>14</sup> Such “postmodernists” include Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and the like. Perhaps the best example of what Leiter dislikes is offered by David B. Allison’s 1977 edited volume *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 3. On this view, Hume and Freud stand in Nietzsche’s company as theorists of human nature and opposed to supposed relativists such as Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault. Deleuze’s own sense of kinship with Hume might give us pause to question such an assumption. See in connection, Jeffrey Bell, *Deleuze’s Hume* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> See, Brian Leiter, “Morality in the Pejorative Sense: On the Logic of Nietzsche’s Critique of Morality,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 3 (1995): 123-4. Understood thus, naturalism becomes little more than a means of Nietzsche’s furthering his normative commitments.

<sup>17</sup> Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>19</sup> I have considered the issue of the politics of Nietzsche’s thought in relation to these approaches in “Nietzsche, Normativity and Will to Power,” *Nietzsche-Studien* 36 (2007): 201-29.

<sup>20</sup> A person with an interest in securing a pay-rise might, for example, play a game of tennis with his or her boss and lose rather badly. It is perfectly reasonable to say that although this person was following the rules of golf he or she might well have been playing another game altogether... Nietzsche, by the same token, might be “playing another game.”

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<sup>21</sup> See *HH* 1ff; *BGE* 1; *GM* I and II; *TI* “Reason” in Philosophy. All these, in different ways, extol the virtues of an approach which, through its emphasis on history, overturns metaphysics.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 268.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Schacht, “Nietzsche’s Naturalism and Normativity,” in *Nietzsche, Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. Janaway and Robertson, 240.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche’s characterization of humanity as the “human animal” in the *Genealogy* is a case in point. We may be animals, as the term suggests, but we are also human. The implications of this are explored in the third essay of the *Genealogy*, where humankind is deemed “the sick animal” (*GM* III:13). This precisely is what makes it human.

<sup>25</sup> Consider *BGE* 14. Physics, Nietzsche comments there, is an arrangement of the world that is concocted in the wake of us being the kind of creatures we are. It labels; it does not explain.

<sup>26</sup> Schacht, “Nietzsche’s Naturalism and Normativity,” 241. Schacht makes telling reference to Nietzsche’s treatment of music in Book V of *The Gay Science*. A causally inclined scientific view, Nietzsche notes, can tell us nothing of interest about what it is of music that is contained in a piece of music (*GS* 373).

<sup>27</sup> Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy*, trans. David J. Parent (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 158.

<sup>28</sup> I am thinking here especially of Nietzsche’s accounts of the “morality of custom” (*D* 18) and its elaboration in the second and third essays of *On the Genealogy of Morality*. I have dealt with this in *Nietzsche’s Economy: Modernity, Normativity and Futurity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007) and *Nietzsche’s Justice: Naturalism in Search of an Ethics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013).

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<sup>29</sup> Needless to say, Nietzsche's famous and notorious discussion of perspectivism in the third essay of the *Genealogy* exemplifies this conception. We can adopt different perspectives because being a person involves 'seeing' in more ways than one. This view can be traced back at least as far back as *HH* 32. For some discussion of this, see my *Nietzsche's Justice*, chapter 2.

<sup>30</sup> Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche*, 162. Thus, the mechanistic methodology associated with the sciences might well be in error, but it is a good starting point for critical reflection. A point of departure, one might add, is not a goal.

<sup>31</sup> For a well-known case in point see *The Antichrist*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003), section 13: "the most valuable insights are methods." As Christoph Cox insightfully points out, when Nietzsche does praise the methods of the sciences in this way what is actually being lauded is not so much the methods as the attitude of skepticism and distrust that he sometimes associates with them. Read with care, Nietzsche's "praise of 'method' is nothing but a reiteration of praise of the 'intellectual conscience'." See Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche, Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999), 216 and 62. Thus, Nietzsche's praise of "Our objectives, our practices, our quiet, cautious, mistrustful manner" is advocating *an attitude, not a method*.

<sup>32</sup> Consider the discussions offered in *HH* 1 and *BGE* 2. Metaphysics thinks that nothing can originate in its opposite. "The fundamental faith of the metaphysician is *the faith in antithetical values*" (*BGE* 2).

<sup>33</sup> Here is an exemplary instance of what Günter Wohlfart has referred to as Nietzsche's critique of "egology." For Wohlfart, this critique makes Nietzsche a thinker of Enlightenment against itself and hence the forerunner of Horkheimer and Adorno's attack on unreflective Enlightenment. See Günter Wohlfart, „Die Aufklärung haben wir jetzt weiterzuführen [...]"

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in *Nietzsche: Radikalaufklärer oder radikaler Gegenauflärer?*, ed. Renate Reschke (Berlin: AkademieVerlag, 2004), 129-32.

<sup>34</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 73 (section 45).

<sup>35</sup> See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), “Excursus II: Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality.” Nietzsche’s most famous attack on Socratic reason exemplifies his take on this crisis. Socrates’s turn to reason is portrayed as a desperate measure in the face of the decadence and chaos of the instincts that pervades both him and the culture of his times. See *TI* “The Problem of Socrates” 9. Nietzsche’s attack takes on the form of a strategic inversion of the autonomous rational principles it lampoons: Socrates’s presentation of reason as an objective measure of reality and morality masks its primary instrumental importance as a tool for coping with the “sickness” he both confronts and exemplifies. Reason, which is meant to ground morality in autonomous principles, is revealed as being passive, empty and conformist—a mere form awaiting colonization by whatever content happens to be foisted upon it.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the outlining in *HH* 1 of the need for “a chemistry of the moral and religious sensations.”

<sup>37</sup> It is worth recalling here that the opening sections of *Human, All Too Human* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, both seek to expose the view that there are such things as opposites as metaphysical mythology springing from a lack of historical sense. This approach perhaps finds its most forceful expression in the treatment of “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” in *Twilight of the Idols*.

<sup>38</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 93.

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<sup>39</sup> Consider in this connection Nietzsche's response to Kant's attempt to derive a rational basis for morality by way of the categorical imperative. Against this, Nietzsche proffers the view that every morality is merely the symptom of a hidden instrumentalism, or, to put it in more elegant terms, "a *sign-language of the emotions*" (*BGE* 187). Nietzsche's elaboration of this point is telling: every morality is "a piece of tyranny against 'nature,' also against 'reason': but that can be no objection to it unless one is in possession of some other morality which decrees that any kind of tyranny and unreason are impermissible" (*BGE* 188). In this passage, morality is deftly severed from "reason" and denied support by way of reference to it, while reason itself is rendered morally impotent.

<sup>40</sup> See in connection *GM* III:13. The history of violation constitutes and patterns humankind decisively, making it both "the great experimenter" with its own identity and a creature that in consequence pays the price of suffering from itself simply in virtue of being here. The cost of culture, in short, is human anguish.

<sup>41</sup> The ambiguity of the "we" is interesting. Either one is a member of this "we," which presupposes a self-knowledge that one must be denied as a condition of membership; or one is not, in which case one remains stubbornly excluded from the company of knowers and hence equally, if differently, ignorant and condemned to do no more than bear witness to what is said—which I now do.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche comments in a notebook entry from the Spring of 1888 that the popular image of the "wise" philosopher is of a figure detached from the world of action and in close commerce with their inner thoughts; consequently, a person of clumsy impracticality. The lack of practical competence gives a reassuring sense of philosophical neutrality and objectivity. Schopenhauer was sufficiently "wise," he adds, to allow himself to be photographed with his waistcoat buttoned up wrongly. In doing so, Schopenhauer reassured

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the viewer that he was *far too objective* to take heed of the tedious conventional demand that his buttons should sit in parallel with his waistcoat threads. See *KGW* VIII/3:14[143].

<sup>43</sup> As Christoph Cox notes, Nietzsche may on occasion link himself with the scientific insights associated with the physics and biology of his own era, but he is at the same time “a sharp critic of both mechanistic physics and evolutionary biology” and of the scientific attitude associated with them for the simple reason that “they are still *not naturalistic enough*.” See Christoph Cox, *Nietzsche, Naturalism and Interpretation* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999), 216. Cox adds insightfully that when Nietzsche does praise the methods of the sciences what is being lauded is not so much the methods as the attitude of skepticism and distrust that he sometimes associates with them. Read with care, Nietzsche’s “praise of ‘method’ is nothing but a reiteration of praise of the ‘intellectual conscience’” (*ibid.*, 62).

<sup>44</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998). See especially Part 3: “The Camp as Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern” (119ff). Modernity is, in this sense the era of “biopolitics”—a politics of the containment, regulation and putting to use of biological processes which in the twentieth century received its most telling and horrific articulation in the Nazi death camps.

<sup>46</sup> As opposed to “critical” in the Kantian sense of “critical philosophy.” This does not, of course, stop Kant from being richly figurative when it suits him, as the famous image from the First Critique of reason as an “island,” the land of truth surrounded by stormy seas, reveals. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1990), B294.



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<sup>47</sup> One might add, although this is not the place to elaborate upon it, that Nietzsche's extolling of "good Europeanism" indicates a new possible political discursive space that overturns this instrumentalized form of rationality.

<sup>48</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 93.

<sup>49</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> This is what Agamben terms "naked life." Such beings are exemplified for Agamben by the notion of the "scared man" (*homo sacer*). In Ancient Roman law this legal category denoted a "life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be [legally] killed" (*ibid.*, 82). The "sacred" person is thus thrust into a paradoxical dilemma. He or she is afforded legal status in such a way as to be excluded from the very protection that law affords: his or her inclusion in law takes the form of violent exclusion (*ibid.*, 8). According to Agamben, the mode of existence characteristic of naked life "gradually begins to coincide with the political realm" (*ibid.*, 9).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>53</sup> In this regard, my reading of internalization accords with that offered by Nandita Biswas Mellamphy, *The Three Stigmata of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 3-4. Internalization is the moment at which the proto-human being becomes properly human and, with this, a political being.

<sup>54</sup> Although I lack the space to discuss them here, I am thinking of the versions of liberal pluralism proposed by writers such as Will Kymlicka and John Rawls. See Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), and John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).