NIETZSCHEAN AGONISM AND THE SUBJECT OF RADICAL DEMOCRACY

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"A democratic society," Ernesto Laclau writes, "is not one in which the 'best' content dominates unchallenged but rather one in which nothing is definitely acquired and there is always the possibility of challenge." Laclau goes on to note that "the danger for democracy lies in the closure of [ethnic] groups around full-fledged identities that can reinforce their most reactionary tendencies and create the conditions for a permanent confrontation with other groups."[1] Contrary to much recent discussion of Nietzsche's political views, and contrary to what was most likely Nietzsche's own undemocratic political inclinations, I want to suggest that there are conceptual resources in Nietzsche's texts that are worth pursuing for a politics of radical democracy. In the following remarks, I would like to explore two of these conceptual resources: Nietzsche's destabilization of the subject and his affirmation of agonism. More specifically, I will show how, borrowing from Gilles Deleuze, one can frame the Nietzschean critique of the subject in a way that facilitates the reconstruction of a notion of the subject amenable to the project of radical democracy. I will conclude by showing what sort of a politics might result from such a reconstruction.

Becoming-*Übermensch*

Gilles Deleuze, perhaps the most significant "philosopher of becoming" since Nietzsche, has argued that "Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling,' or 'producing.'"[2] For Deleuze, the central feature that distinguishes becoming from other transformative processes with which it can be confused, and in particular from evolution, is the absence of fixed terms. Where evolutionary language focuses our attention on the beginning and endpoint of a process in a way that obscures the passage between them, the language of compound becoming draws our attention to what happens *between* these ever-receding endpoints. Becomings take place between poles; and to attend to becomings is to attend to process rather than what is produced.

Deleuze's notion of becoming allows us to avoid the standard interpretations of the *Übermensch* as Nietzsche's model of the ideal subject or perfect human being. Nietzsche himself cautioned his readers against interpreting the word *Übermensch* either as "a higher kind of man" or in a Darwinian, evolutionary fashion. "The last thing *I* should promise," he wrote in the preface to *Ecce Homo*, "would be to 'improve' mankind. No new idols are erected by me" (EH Preface 2).[3] Later in *Ecce Homo*, he notes that "The word '*Übermensch*,' as the designation of a type of supreme achievement . . . has been understood almost everywhere with the utmost innocence in the sense of those very values whose opposite Zarathustra was meant to represent—that is, as an 'idealistic' type of a higher kind of man, half 'saint,' half 'genius.' Other scholarly oxen have suspected me of Darwinism on that account" (EH, "Why I Write Such Good Books" 1). Remarks like these make clear that one should understand the *Übermensch* in the context of Nietzsche's consistent hostility toward any teleological perspective, and it is, therefore, a mistake to read Nietzsche as a philosopher of the Superman or as someone who seeks, like Feuerbach, to exalt Man as that being who will serve as God's replacement in terms of

some new anthropo-theology following the death of God.

Rather than taking Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as a model of ideal humanity, a Deleuzian approach would experiment with how the *Übermensch* functions in the Nietzschean text. The first thing we notice is that we are told very little about what an *Übermensch* is like, as Nietzsche nowhere gives us as detailed a picture of the *Übermensch* as we have of the last man, the higher men, the free spirit, or the slave and master moralists. We should not, therefore, ask "Who is Nietzsche's *Übermensch*?" for "*Übermensch*" does not name a particular being or type of being. "*Übermensch*" is, rather, the name given to an idealized conglomeration of forces that Nietzsche refers to as an "achievement [*Wohlgerathenheit*]" (EH "Why I Write Such Good Books" 1). Nietzsche does not provide, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* or anywhere else, a philosophical guidebook for *Übermenschen*; he provides instead suggestions for steps to take in order to become-*Übermensch*. As I have argued elsewhere,[4] I think we should adopt the Deleuzian gesture and construe becoming-*Übermensch* with a hyphen as a compound verb marking a compound assemblage. In so doing, we draw attention to the active process of assembling rather than hypostatizing or reifying the endpoint to be assembled. We can only speak of the becoming-*Übermensch* of human beings, of the process of accumulating strength and exerting mastery outside the limits of external authoritarian impositions. Nietzsche called this process of becoming-*Übermensch* "life-enhancement," and he indicated by this a process of self-overcoming and increasing of will to power rather than an ideal form of subjectivity.[5]

Nietzsche's failure or, more accurately, his *refusal* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to present an *Übermensch* suggests two things. First by employing the rhetorical trope of *aposiopesis*, Nietzsche's silence invites and empowers his readers to imagine and create for themselves what traits an *Übermensch* will manifest. As David Allison has written, "what lends aposiopetic rhetoric its strength is that the reader or interlocutor feels he has come to his own conclusion—quite literally—in his own terms and in function of his own judgment, thereby personalizing his understanding of what the author may, or may not, have intended."[6] This, I would suggest, is one of the principle attractions of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, which can be imagined by Hitler to be the Aryan blond beast even as it is conceived by George Bernard Shaw as the revolutionist libertine John Tanner or by Abraham Maslow as the model of self-actualized psychological health. Nietzsche presents to his readers not a universal type but a radically individualized singularity, and in print at least, he usually confesses to being willing to accept that his readers will in fact invent the *Übermensch* in their own images.

There is a second, and in the context of reflections on the subject of democracy, more important interpretive consequence of Nietzsche's emphasizing the process of becoming-*Übermensch* rather than presenting a definite image of an *Übermensch*, namely, that the answer to the question "Is so-and-so an *Übermensch*?" will always be "No" insofar as "*Übermensch*" does not designate an ontological state or way of being that any particular subject could instantiate. By experimenting with the different possibilities of becoming-*Übermensch*, we should read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* not as providing the blueprint for constructing a centered super-subject called "Overman," as was tragically the case in several readings of Nietzsche offered in the early decades of the twentieth century. Instead, an experimental approach will attend to Zarathustra's own experimentalism, noting as he does that one must find one's own way, "for *the* way—that does not exist!" (Z III "On the Spirit of Gravity" 2). This approach will emphasize not a way of Being but the affirmation of self-

overcoming and transvaluation that makes possible the infinite processes of becoming that I am here suggesting we call becoming-*Übermensch*.

What results from this approach is a reformulation of the notion of the subject itself, not as a fixed and full substance or completed project, but always as a work in progress. I do not want to make too much of this aesthetic analogy however, for the important idea here is not to create one's life as a work of art, a view advanced by those who see in Nietzsche some kind of aestheticism. Rather, the central idea is that as a work in progress, one's life is never complete. One is always *unterwegs*, on the way, and the emphasis is always on the process of going rather than the destination reached. This, I would suggest, is the central issue in Nietzsche's discussion, at the opening of the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, of the active forgetting of the "*sovereign individual* [*souveraine Individuum*]" who has earned the right to make promises: promising becomes a praiseworthy act of a responsible agent only when that agent is capable of willfully choosing *not* to keep the promise. That is to say, having bred the powers of memory in humanity, it is only in the case of the "emancipated individual [*Freigewordne*]" and "master of a *free* will" (GM II 2) who is capable of becoming *other* than he was by *forgetting* what he was that promising becomes praiseworthy.

This idea animates as well the "great health" that Nietzsche alludes to at the conclusion of the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, that health that knows that growth requires destruction, that knows that to become requires that we in some sense destroy what we presently are (GM II 24). The goal of this process of becoming is not to be understood in terms of some fully formed and completed subject or self. Instead, the central insight in Nietzsche's account is that the process of becoming never comes to an end. Life, as Zarathustra learns, is that which must *always* overcome itself (see Z II "On Self-Overcoming"), and the greatest obstacle to self-overcoming is thus not to be found in others; instead, it is the self that one *already* is that stands as the greatest obstacle to future over-comings (cf. Z I "On the Way of the Creator"). Which is to say that the lesson that Zarathustra teaches in the teaching of the *Übermensch* is that to become what one *will* become means becoming-*other* than what one *is*.

The Politics of Becoming

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*[7] have argued for a radical democratic politics that is dependent in part upon reconfiguring subjectivity in terms of a multiplicity of subject positions. What can this account of the *Übermensch*, framed as it is by Deleuze's concept of becoming, contribute to our thinking the subject of radical democracy? At the very least, if we set radical democracy in opposition to a politics of identity, we see immediately that Nietzsche's account of becoming other than what one is actively resists any move toward a fixed notion of identity. It thus runs counter to the foundational assumptions behind many contemporary forms of identity politics that, in the end, must depend on an attitude like Sartrean bad faith or what may be the modern guise of bad faith, namely, some sort of essentialism. This essentialism is deeply problematic when anything other than a momentary strategy to which one makes no ontological commitments. More importantly, however, the Nietzschean-Deleuzian account of becoming shows that *any* fixed notion of identity, whether national, racial, ethnic, or gender identity, is as problematic when it is apparently "freely" adopted and self-imposed by those who participate in the identification as when imposed by those whose gaze views the recipient of the identification as other. From this Nietzschean perspective, in other words, the prison of identity is no less oppressive when it is self-imposed than when it

is imposed from without by the majority on the minority, a point Nietzsche first suggested when he highlighted free will and the invention of the soul as a central moment of the "hangman's metaphysics" of Christianity (see GD "Four Great Errors" 7).[8] We see the dangers of this self-imposition of identity wherever we see the emergence of nationalism, ethnic violence, or religious fundamentalism.[9]

For Nietzsche, one of the "most calamitous" prejudices of the philosopher, one "taught best and longest" by Christianity, is the belief in "*soul atomism*," that is, "the belief which regards the soul as something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an *atomon*" (JGB 12). But far from completely eliminating belief in the soul, escaping from the prejudice of belief in the atomistic soul makes room for other, newer, more refined soul-hypotheses. In *Beyond Good and Evil* 12, Nietzsche names three—"mortal soul," "soul as subjective multiplicity," and "soul as social structure of the drives and affects"—the latter two of which speak directly to a subject amenable to the radical democratic project. Theorists like Laclau and Mouffe have advocated a dispersion of a fixed and unified subjectivity, arguing instead that democracy requires a fluid, transformative, and historically contingent notion of identity. Nietzsche articulated just such a notion when, *pace* the will-metaphysics of Schopenhauer and others, he wrote of the will as "something *complicated*, something that is a unit only as a word" and of the body as "but a social structure composed of many souls" (JGB 19). When the will commands, it also obeys, and "freedom of the will" is for Nietzsche just a simplified name for the delight of the individual who is able to obey its own command and who thereby experiences itself as, these are Nietzsche's words, a "well-constructed and happy commonwealth" (JGB 19). Such an individual—whether "soul," "will," "body," or "commonwealth"—will be characterized essentially by tension and openness; their "identity" will always be *in process*, just as Laclau and Mouffe have argued that the "identity" of the democratic subject must be viewed as a work in progress and never finished, producing itself in response to and being produced by the contingent antagonisms and alliances that constitute the social.[10]

It is at this point that a radical democratic theory might again return to Nietzsche and recall his appeal to the political and cultural value of the *agon*. In one of his earliest pieces, the unpublished "Homers Wettkampf," Nietzsche recognized the normative and productive value of these agonistic tensions when he suggested that the Greeks knew that competition is vital to the continued well-being of the state (HW, p. 191; KSA 1, p. 788). At the entryway to Hellenic ethics, he writes, should be situated one of the "most remarkable Hellenic ideas," an idea which he cites from Hesiod's *Works and Days* (lines 11–26), namely, the recognition that there are two goddesses of *Eris* or strife: to the bad *eris* who encourages war and cruelty, the Greeks proposed a good *eris* who encourages human beings to act productively and who motivates human beings to excellence. While the Greeks, following Hesiod, portrayed one *eris* as wicked, leading men into a hostile struggle-to-the-death, the other *eris* is praised as good insofar as it, "as jealousy, grudge and envy, goads men to action, not however, the action of a struggle-to-the-death but the action of *competition*" (HW 190; KSA 1, p. 787; see also MA 170; WS 29). In the philosophical domain, this good *eris* was, according to Nietzsche, transformed by Heraclitus into the foundational cosmological principle that gives birth to all becoming (KSA 1, p. 825) and, at the level of culture, it animated the agonistic opposition between the Apollonian and Dionysian that continually incited their respective arts to new and more powerful creative productions (see GT 1). In contrast to what Nietzsche regards as the modern desire that seeks the ex-

clusive position of absolute dominance, the Greek educational system was designed to cultivate respect for the *agon* insofar as the Greeks saw that an ongoing contest of powers was requisite for cultural advancement. The kernel of the Hellenic idea of competition, he writes, is their fear of "a monopoly of predominance" and to counter this, they sought "as *protective measure* against genius—a second genius" (HW, p. 192; KSA 1, p. 789). The Greeks' hostility to the "'exclusivity' of genius in the modern sense" was born of their recognition that not only will several geniuses incite each other to meritorious action, but they will also "keep each other within certain limits" (HW, pp. 191–92; KSA 1, p. 789). Nietzsche thus recognized that an absolute victory within the *agon* would mark the death of the *agon*, and he acknowledged that in order to preserve freedom from dominance, one must be committed to maintaining the institution of the *agon* as a shared public space for open competition.

While Nietzsche restricts his thinking, in "Homers Wettkampf," to the *agon* as it appears in the cultural sphere, his reading of the Greek *agon* can be joined to his critique of the metaphysical assumptions of a fixed subjectivity that underlie a rigid identity politics. In other words, there is both an external *agon* and an internal *agon*,[11] and to that *pathos of distance* which works toward the establishment of an order of rank in the social sphere, Nietzsche adds what in the opening section of the ninth and final part of *Beyond Good and Evil* he calls a "more mysterious pathos": "the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states" (JGB 257). This internal *agon*, manifested in the contest between competing drives and interests (see, e.g., FW 333),[12] is what makes possible "the continual 'self-overcoming of man,'" a process that, for Nietzsche is one and the same with "the enhancement of the type 'man'" (JGB 257).

Generalizing this agonism is one of the themes explored by several political theorists who have sought to ground the democratic polity on a politics of difference. Chantal Mouffe, for example, has made the "permanence of conflict and antagonism" a central feature in her articulation of a "radical and plural democracy." Contrary to *liberal* democratic theorists, for whom conflict and antagonism are "seen as disturbances that unfortunately cannot be completely eliminated, or as empirical impediments that render impossible the full realization of a good" that total social harmony would constitute, Mouffe argues that pluralism is necessary for democracy, and dissensus—conflict and contestation, diversity and disagreement—is a necessary condition of pluralism.[13] Rather than erasing differences through the postulation of some imagined consensus yet to be achieved, Mouffe calls instead for the development of a positive attitude toward agonal differences that sees in a pluralism "whose objective is to reach harmony . . . ultimately a negation of the positive value of diversity and difference," not the life but the death of a democratic polity.[14]

Can we link Nietzsche's agonism to the radical democratic agonism of Laclau and Mouffe? To be sure, Nietzsche was not a democrat insofar as he saw democracy integrally tied to an egalitarian ideal that leveled society to the rank of its lowest and least worthy members. But it is important to note, here, that this concern with democracy's tendency to draw individuals and cultures down toward mediocrity is something that Nietzsche shared not only with critics of democracy like Plato but also with many of the strongest advocates of democracy, including James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill. Both David Owen and James Conant[15] have recently noted that Nietzsche's criticisms of democracy fall very much in line with the concerns articulated by perfectionist thinkers like Mill or Emerson that the democratic movement's will to equality both levels

down and fosters conformity. Conant puts the point this way:

> Many a theorist of democracy has discerned within "the democratic movement" a tendency to suppress democracy's capacity for criticism from within—a pressure to collapse into (what de Tocqueville called) "a tyranny of the majority." John Adams, Matthew Arnold, William James, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, John Stuart Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville (not to mention Emerson and Thoreau) all dread that debasement of democracy that both Mill and Emerson refer to as "the despotism of conformity."

Conant goes on to note that "there is a perfectionist strain within the tradition of democratic thought that takes it as a matter of urgent concern that the antiperfectionist tendencies latent within the democratic movement be kept from eroding democracy's resources for criticism from within." This openness to internal self-criticism is viewed by these thinkers "to be essential to democracy's capacity to remain faithful to its own aspirations," and each of them emphasizes that democracy can flourish only if its citizens cultivate precisely those virtues—independence of mind, disregard for fashion, eccentricity of conduct—that were "formerly the sole prerogative of aristocracy."[16]

When put in the context of other nineteenth-century thinkers who are themselves part of the democratic tradition, Nietzsche's criticisms of democracy do not seem as patently anti-democratic as they are often taken to be. Consider the following passage (cited by both Conant and Owen) from *Human, All-Too-Human*:

> *Two kinds of equality.* — The thirst for equality can express itself either as a desire to draw everyone down to oneself (though diminishing them, spying on them, tripping them up) or to raise oneself and everyone else up (through recognizing their virtues, helping them, rejoicing in their success). (MA 300)

Contrary to the conventional view, Nietzsche does explicitly acknowledge that democracy offered conditions that made possible genuine excellence. In *Beyond Good and Evil* 200, he notes that the age that has mixed types of human beings to the point where each individual is a war of competing and opposing drives and value standards—that is, this democratic age—has produced *two* types. For the one type, whether Christian or Socialist democrat, "their most profound desire is that the war that they *are* should come to an end." But there is another type, for whom the internalized *agon* is "one more charm and incentive of life," who displays "a real mastery and subtlety in waging war against oneself." These latter Nietzsche calls the "magical, incomprehensible, and unfathomable ones," the "enigmatic men predestined for victory and seduction," and he includes among their ranks Alcibiades, Caesar, Frederick II, and Leonardo da Vinci. But what is important for our purposes here is the way *Beyond Good and Evil* 200 ends, for Nietzsche closes this section by noting that these latter "appear in precisely the same ages when the weaker type with its desire for rest comes to the fore: both types belong together and owe their origin to the same causes"— and that cause is none other than democracy![17]

This is the idea that I want to explore in my final comments, but before I do, I want to highlight an important distinction between Nietzsche and the perfectionist strain within democratic theory to which Conant and Owen draw our attention. What has been a persistent problem for modern democratic theory is that it has been put forward in terms of the Kantian assumption that the individual autonomy of the isolated subject is the *sum-*

mum bonum. Thinkers like Mill, Jefferson, and Madison share this assumption, which leads them to the modern idea that politics begins with the problem of balancing the rights of the individual against the needs of society. For Deleuze as well as French Marxists like Althusser, Macherey, or Balibar, the political attractiveness of Spinoza is in part because his metaphysics of the subject can avoid the problem of situating the individual in fundamental opposition to the group by allowing the subject to see him or herself as *one* with the public rather than a *part* of the public. As Antonio Negri has argued, contrary to the rigid individualism that characterizes seventeenth-century thinkers like Hobbes,[18] Spinoza understands human individuality constructing itself as a collective entity.[19] "By singular things," Spinoza writes in the *Ethics*, "I understand things that are finite and have a determinate existence. And if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing."[20] This understanding of individual and collective, which Spinoza elaborates in his political works in terms of his concept of the multitude,[21] departs from both the Kantian and contract-theory traditions. Nietzsche, I want to argue, follows this Spinozist line, and if we take Nietzsche's critique of the atomistic subject seriously, there is no reason why the individual cannot at times identify him- or herself with his or her body, at other times with his or her family, and at still other times with his or her clan, community, nation, or planet.

This changes the foundation of modern political thinking and it is part of what leads a political theorist like William E. Connolly to Nietzsche when he appeals to Nietzsche's account of the *agon* while arguing for a reinvigorated democracy that is understood not in terms of the drive for consensus but as a dynamic social space in which agonistic respect is folded into "the ambiguities, conflicts and interdependencies that constitute social relations."[22] Connolly makes agonism central to democratic practice as he takes the impossibility of arriving at a final and fixed identity—whether social or individual—as the basis for cultivating the "agonistic respect" necessary for democracy. For Connolly, Nietzsche's agonal dynamism operates both interpersonally and intrapersonally as Nietzsche's account of the multiple self—of the self as a struggle between competing drives and impulses—can likewise serve as a model for a dynamic and pluralistic polity. By attuning oneself to the "differences that continue to circulate through my or our identity [one] can engender a certain *empathy* for what we or I am not. Empathy, then, emerges from the ambiguous, relational character of identity itself, when this ambiguity is affirmed rather than denied or regretted."[23] While Nietzsche felt that his contemporaries were no longer capable of exhibiting this empathy insofar as they were operating within modernity and the slavish morality of oppositional identity politics that it fosters, such empathy for what we are not remains for Nietzsche a possibility for those sovereign individuals and philosophers of the future who will be able to overcome modernity. In fact, this is precisely what Connolly takes Nietzsche to mean by the "pathos of distance": "an attachment to that which differs from you growing out of glimmers of difference in you, an attachment that takes the form of forbearance in strife and generosity in interdependence rather than a quest to close up the distance between you through formation of a higher unity. . . . This ethos of agonistic respect amidst a world of dissonant interdependencies is crucial to the fabric of democratic politics: . . . it folds a pathos of distance into democratic relations of contestation, collaboration and hegemony."[24]

To those for whom the model executors of Nietzsche's "grand politics"[25] were Hitler or Mussolini, Connolly's or Mouffe's democratic agonism will sound very un-Nietzschean. But is it really so un-Nietzschean? As I have already suggested, while Nietzsche was a critic of democracy,

we should also recall that his criticisms here, as elsewhere, were *timely*, which is to say that his criticisms were directed toward "that which *now* calls itself democracy" (WS 293. Emphasis added.). This timeliness, we must remember, is precisely what Nietzsche labeled his *untimeliness*, "that is to say, acting counter to [his] time and thereby acting on [his] time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come" (HL Foreword). Consider, in this context, Nietzsche's critique of liberal institutions in several of his "untimely" skirmishes in *Twilight of the Idols*. He opens "Skirmish" 39, entitled "Critique of Modernity," by noting that everyone is now agreed that our institutions are no longer fit for anything, but he quickly adds that the problem lies not in our institutions but in us. We moderns no longer have the instincts necessary for such institutions, instincts including "the will to tradition, to authority, to centuries-long responsibility, to *solidarity* between succeeding generations backwards and forwards *in infinitum*." Nietzsche then proceeds to develop the forward-looking dimension of this description: "The entire West," he writes, "has lost those instincts out of which institutions grow, out of which the *future* grows: perhaps nothing goes so much against the grain of its 'modern spirit' as this. One lives for today, one lives very fast—one lives very irresponsibly: it is precisely this which one calls 'freedom.'"

This section is preceded by an equally interesting, and pertinent, section, "Skirmish" 38, entitled "My Conception of Freedom," in which Nietzsche offers us an account of freedom in the context of a critique of liberalism. The value of a thing, he begins, lies not in what one attains with it but in what one must do in order to attain it. The example he gives is liberal institutions, which "cease to be liberal as soon as they are attained." As a result, there is in fact "nothing more thoroughly harmful to freedom than liberal institutions" because in their drive toward making everything equal, they undermine the will to power that is necessary for freedom to exert itself in the overcoming of resistances. The overcoming of resistances was central to the Hellenic idea of competition that the young Nietzsche believed was necessary for the production of genius and vital for the well-being of the state, and he recalls in *Twilight* the importance of maintaining the *agon* as a shared public space for open competition when he writes that nations, and individuals, which "*became* worth something, never became so under liberal institutions: it was *great danger* which made of them something deserving reverence, danger which first teaches us to know our resources, our virtues, our shield and spear, our *spirit*—which *compels* us to be strong." Freedom, he concludes, should be understood "as something one has and does *not* have, something one *wants*, something one *conquers*." And for this reason, and this is perhaps what is key here, it is not liberal institutions but the *struggle* for liberal institutions that is most likely to promote the freedom that will know itself as "the will to self-responsibility."

Nietzsche's thought here fits nicely with the idea of democracy as always "to come," always something that we are on the way toward, and toward which the agonal relations between us and the internalized *agon* that we are, are not something to be regrettably put up with but are, in fact, the only means by which we will be able to engage in democratic political practices. Nietzsche himself noted as much when he wrote that this democracy yet to come "wants to create and guarantee as much *independence* as possible: independence of opinion, of mode of life [*Lebensart*] and of employment" (WS 293). And he observed—an observation as pertinent in our day as it was in his—that the three great enemies of this threefold sense of independence "are the indigent, the rich and the parties" (WS 293).

While no egalitarian, we should remember that the same Nietzschean sensibility that admired the Greek *agon* also despaired over

the Christian-dogmatic tendency that seeks to eliminate difference because it has always and only understood difference as opposition. Following the famous opening section of *Twilight*'s "Morality as Anti-Nature," in which Nietzsche notes that the only way that the Church, and morality more generally, knows how to combat the passions is through their extermination, there comes this less famous statement of Nietzsche's alternative:

> The Church has at all times desired the destruction of its enemies: we, we immoralists and anti-Christians, see that it is to our advantage that the Church exists.... In politics, too, enmity has become much more spiritual—much more prudent, much more thoughtful, much more *forbearing*.... We adopt the same attitude toward the "enemy within"; there too we have spiritualized enmity, there too we have grasped its *value*. One is *fruitful* only at the cost of being rich in contradictions; one remains *young* only on condition the soul does not relax, does not long for peace. (GD "Morality as Anti-Nature" 3)

Thus, at the end of his productive life, as at the beginning, Nietzsche continued to appeal to the idea that competition and contestation—the *agon*—is necessary for the continued well-being of the individual and the community. While Nietzsche did not choose to link the *agon* with democracy, his oversight should not keep us from acknowledging that it is precisely totalitarianism that requires the elimination of competition and contestation in the political sphere.[26] Contrary to the Right's tendency to desire an identity or unanimity that presumes the elimination of their antagonists, Nietzsche never tires of invoking the desirability of the "worthy enemy, against whom one can test one's strength" (GT Preface 1; see also MA II, Preface 7), whose enduring presence is required for the *agon* to continue and for each of the agonal partners to proceed along the path of self-overcoming. This "worthy enemy," whether one's democratic contestatory others or whether the others within that one is in competition with or struggling to become, thus serves to insure against those forces that motivate us to rest, to remain what we are, to fix our identities in their present incarnation. Nietzsche was explicit in associating stasis with death, both at the level of the individual and the community, and he never stopped advocating the value of agonistic relationships of "reciprocal incitation" and "permanent provocation."[27] I would like then to close with the suggestion that Nietzsche himself may be our "worthy enemy," against whom we must test our commitment to a radically pluralistic democratic politics, as we explore the possibilities for politics within a differential and agonistic public space.[28]

1. Ernesto Laclau, "Power and Representation," in *Politics, Theory, and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Mark Poster (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 292.
2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 238-39.
3. Citations from Nietzsche's works are drawn from the following texts: EH: *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967); FW: *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974); GD: *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968); GM: *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967); GT: *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967); HL: *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale in *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 1983); HW: "Homer on Competition," trans. Carol Diethe in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); JGB: *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966); KSA: *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980); MA: *Human, All-Too-Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); WS: *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale in *Human, All-Too-Human* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Z: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Viking Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1967).

4. I have developed this experiment in much greater detail in "Rethinking the Subject, or How One Becomes-other than What One Is," in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Reassessments of Nietzsche's Philosophy,* ed. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 47-62.
5. See in this regard JGB 200, about which more below.
6. David B. Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 118.
7. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).
8. It is this insight, I would argue, that inspires the entire Foucaultian project of analyzing modernity in terms of a disciplinary society.
9. Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* is one of the great analyses of this phenomenon, as he exposes the evil that results both from the Anti-Semite's imposition of the identity "Jew" on the Jews and the Anti-Semite's imposition of the identity "Anti-Semite" on themselves.
10. See, e.g., Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 166-67.
11. This is one of the places where Nietzsche's late fascination and familiarity with the cutting edge of the science of his day may have borne fruit, for when developing this idea of the internal *agon*, Nietzsche may very well have been inspired by the work of biologist Wilhelm Roux, whose 1881 text *The Struggle of the Parts in the Organism* he knew well. Roux, like Nietzsche, was troubled by the Darwinistic grounding of evolution exclusively on natural selection insofar as this implied a teleological notion both Nietzsche and Roux found problematic. For Roux, as Müller-Lauter summarizes, "struggle [is] the constitutive principle of the formation processes on the levels of the cells, tissues, and organs" and by locating struggle (ultimately, for food and space) within the cell, Roux could appeal to struggle as a mechanical process of "organic self-regulation without pregiven purposefulness." Wolgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of Philosophy*, trans. David J. Parent (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 169. Roux's account of struggle should, I think, be kept in mind when thinking about Nietzsche's comments on "will to power" in the notebooks of 1885–88 and, although I cannot pursue this topic here, I think one should read these notebooks in a way that challenges the view, put forward most forcefully by Maudemarie Clark, that Nietzsche does not really advance any position called "will to power."
12. That Nietzsche was intrigued by the metaphysical possibilities of viewing the self/soul as a multiplicity of competing drives, interests, or instincts, and the psycho-social implications of this metaphysical view, is evidenced by his numerous comments in the notebooks of 1885-88; see, for example, KSA 11: 40[42]; 12: 7[60], 9[98], 10[19].
13. Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Politics and the Question of Identity," in *The Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 44.
14. Ibid.
15. See James Conant, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism," in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism,* and David Owen, "Equality, Democracy and Self-Respect: Reflections on Nietzsche's Agonal Perfectionism," unpublished manuscript.
16. Conant, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism," pp. 227–28.
17. Nietzsche makes a similar conjunction in JGB 242, where the same democratic tendencies can produce both a type prepared for the slavery that will be required of workers in an industrialized Europe and, in "exceptional cases, the strong human being [who] will have to turn out stronger than ever before."
18. C. B. Macpherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) is the locus classicus for this account of individualism in seventeenth-century thought.
19. Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael

Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 135.

20. Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Book II, Definition 7.
21. See Negri, pp. 194–210, and Étienne Balibar, "Spinoza, the Anti-Orwell," in *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, trans. James Swenson (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 3–37.
22. William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 195.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. For a particularly pointed statement of this version of "grand politics," see the final sentences of JGB 208.
26. It is at this point that one can see Hannah Arendt as what Mark Warren has called, in addition to Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche's most important successor in political theory." See his discussion in "Nietzsche and the Political," *New Nietzsche Studies* 2:1/2 (Fall/Winter 1997): 37-57, esp. 41–42.
27. These phrases are from Michel Foucault. I thank David Owen for recalling to my attention Foucault's reference to agonism in the essay "The Subject and Power," in Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 222.
28. Earlier versions of sections of this essay appear in "Nietzsche *for* Democracy?" *Nietzsche-Studien* 29 (2000): 220–33, and "Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze, and the Subject of Radical Democracy," *Angelaki: journal of the theoretical humanities*, Special Issue "Rhizomatics, Genealogy, Deconstruction," ed. by Constantin Boundas, 5:2 (Summer 2000): 151–61.

ENDNOTES

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