

Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016). 224 pp. ISBN 978-0-691-16634-6. Hardcover \$45.00.

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Friedrich Nietzsche remains one of the most influential thinkers of the nineteenth century. The large number of his works, the wide variety of themes and problems he treated, his changes of opinion, and the status of his unpublished and largely untranslated notes (*Nachlass*) have all contributed to divergent and opposing interpretations of his thought. Within these wide-ranging scholarly debates, Nietzsche's political ideas and his bearing on political thought are an especially divisive issue, as he does not fit easily into the genre of political thought and his *oeuvre* lacks recognizably political texts. Nietzsche's cult of the individual and his concern with morality has led the majority of scholars to consider him as a non-political thinker.¹ Despite this, some of Nietzsche's key philosophical concepts have an unmistakably political character, such as the will to power and master and slave morality. For this reason, a growing body of literature has begun to challenge the anti-political reading of Nietzsche and examines the political dimension of his thought.² Those scholars who agree that politics does have a significant place in Nietzsche's works emphasise different parts of his project. Thinkers such as William Connolly, Bonnie Honig, and Lawrence Hatab have

¹ See Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2003); Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

² See Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche's Machiavellian Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Herman W. Siemens and Vasti Roodt (eds.), *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2008).

focused on Nietzsche's impact on contemporary democracy and its revitalization.³ Others, such as Don Dombowsky, hold opposing views and perceive Nietzsche's political ideas to be profoundly antagonistic to democratic thinking and values.⁴

Emerging from the context of this scholarly debate, Hugo Drochon's *Nietzsche's Great Politics* offers a middle ground. Drochon not only takes a step away from the anti-political reading of Nietzsche, he also presents a distinct position within the literature examining Nietzschean politics. Adopting a Cambridge school approach, one of the book's central claims is that we can only understand Nietzsche's politics and begin to get a sense of its significance for the modern world by considering it in its original context: Bismarck's era of "blood and iron". Drochon argues that Nietzsche "does make a (highly interesting) contribution to political thought (2)," but also questions those who mine Nietzsche's relevance for modern politics by de-contextualizing his ideas. Without denying the centrality of culture to Nietzsche's project, Drochon shows that Nietzsche's thought had a political dimension, the germ of which was present from his early writings onwards. He sees Nietzsche's idea of great politics as the essence of this political project: great politics (*grosse Politik*) was Nietzsche's vision of what politics would look like after the petty politics of nationalism, democracy and equality were superseded.

Drochon frames his discussion with reference to Bernard Williams' work, particularly to *Shame and Necessity*.⁵ Quoting from Williams, Drochon identifies four necessary criteria in order to consider a thinker as possessing coherent politics: they need to have ethical and

³ See William Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Lawrence Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defence of Democracy: An Experiment in Postmodern Politics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995).

⁴ See Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche's Machiavellian Politics* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁵ Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

psychological insights, to provide an account of modern society, to relate these insights to the account of society, and to have a coherent vision of how power should be exercised (3). In his bid to disprove those claiming that Nietzsche had no politics, including Williams himself, Drochon demonstrates how Nietzsche's writings pertain to these four desiderata. Drochon emphasises the continuous political concern throughout Nietzsche's writings; the originality of *Nietzsche's Great Politics* lies in its claim that upon his descent to madness in 1889, Nietzsche was just moving from the philosophical to the political stage of his project. Drochon's discussion traces the political ideas of Nietzsche in an attempt to give an idea of what this unfinished political project would have entailed.

Drochon supports this large claim elegantly and convincingly. He begins by examining Nietzsche's engagement with the politics of antiquity, which provided many of the categories of thought he retained. Studying the society of ancient Greece, Nietzsche realized the significance of leisure for the creation of culture, on which he based his insistence that slavery was necessary for the existence of art and genius. This class consciousness remained an indispensable element of his thinking about politics henceforth and also underlay his views on the modern state, which Drochon discusses in Chapter 2. For Nietzsche, a society which sought equality was doomed to failure because only inequality could produce the spirit necessary to preserve and regenerate life. The state was the result of the original act of political violence perpetrated by the conquering blond beasts of prey and maintained with the help of priests. Nietzsche saw the modern democratic will and the degeneration of religion as signaling the overcoming of the state: men would be impelled to "do away with the concept of the state" and "private companies" would overtake formerly governmental functions.⁶

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 472.

Drochon then proceeds to discuss Nietzsche's views of contemporary politics through his discussion of democracy. He shows that after his original insights into the significance of slavery for social life, Nietzsche traced with alarm the way in which the democratization of Europe sought to create a social order in which the natural order of rank would be eradicated. Morality and politics had both been corrupted by modern man's weakness and inability to seek strength and dominance, leading to the enfeeblement of mankind. According to Nietzsche, democracy was life in decline. Drochon argues that this signals not the absence of a positive political program in Nietzsche, but rather exactly the opposite. Drochon outlines how the process of degeneration leading to the levelling of mankind would also result, according to Nietzsche, in the creation of a caste of good Europeans "who will arise through multinational unions and will become the new European nobility (86)." Drochon reconstructs Nietzsche's political vision, in which the enfeeblement of society through democracy preceded the strengthening that would be brought about by the overcoming of the state and the creation of good Europeans.

Despite its strong merits, Drochon's discussion of Nietzsche's philosophy and politics in Chapter 4 somewhat deflates the thrust of the argument towards its logical continuation: demonstrating how Nietzsche's project of revaluation built upon his views of the state and democracy and the ways in which it was politically significant. However, Chapter 5 returns to the characteristic strength of the book, as Drochon argues that while Nietzsche's philosophy had, at the time of his descent to madness, reached a stage of unity and completeness, the political dimension of his ideas following from his philosophical works was left unfinished. In his closing chapter, Drochon provides an idea of what this political project might have been, and he enlists the idea of great politics as a way of "addressing the question of whether he [Nietzsche] 'has a politics' (155)." Drochon emphasizes the connection Nietzsche

perceived between all things related to slave morality — nationalism, parliamentarianism, philistinism — and the power politics of his day. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche's theoretical views on politics shifted: he moved away from his critical stance towards great politics, the politics of Bismarck and nationalism, which he renamed petty politics. More importantly, Nietzsche began to articulate a positive vision of great politics, and Drochon aims to recover what this vision entailed. Drochon's account of Nietzschean politics includes these various elements which, taken together, amount to a comprehensive, if fragmented, view of politics: modern states were in decline because of their rejection of the necessity to preserve different castes in society and their fear of anything which seeks to dominate; democracy, which is symptomatic of life in decline, would lead to renewal through degeneration by giving rise to private companies that would supersede the state, as well as to a new caste of good Europeans that would rise above the masses. The party of life would embody all of these values by organizing strong men in such a manner so as to enable them to pursue great politics and renew humanity.

Whilst definitely not a primer in Nietzsche's philosophy, Drochon's book offers scholars of Nietzsche's thought an insightful analysis of his political ideas that makes judicious use of his published and unpublished writings. He gives primacy to the published texts and supplements his discussion with insights derived from the unpublished writings and Nietzsche's letters where these serve to illuminate contentious points. An example of special interest is the excellent contextualization of Nietzsche's revaluation project in chapter 5: cross-referencing Nietzsche's notebooks, letters, and published writings, Drochon demonstrates that *The Antichrist* was the conclusion of Nietzsche's intended revaluation project. A firmer justification for framing the discussion of Nietzschean politics around Williams' work would have been welcome. Nevertheless, the book achieves its stated goal

with aplomb as it follows the development of political ideas in Nietzsche's works, and it deserves to become a standard reference text for advanced students and Nietzsche scholars.