

The Struggle Between Ideals: Nietzsche, Schmitt and Lefort on the Politics of the Future

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Introduction

In past ages political parties had explicit ideologies that were the leading principles of their policies and the justification of their practices. The collapse of the so-called great narratives, e.g. Christian morals, common fundamental values, metaphysical worldviews, has made it ever more difficult to ground policy heavily on ideology. There is an on-going development in which politics and ideology are being detached from each other. The rise of supposed pragmatic political parties that made not having an ideology to be their 'ideology' (for example the D66 party in the Netherlands) is perhaps the clearest sign that this development has reached its highest level in our current era. Today politics is defined primarily as serving citizens in the best possible way by clear-cut, practical policies that solve their problems or relieve them from dissatisfactions. Modern politics has become a branch of technics, a form of administration. Although solving problems is very important and politicians are responsible for developing practicable policies, politics is or should be something more and something different.

I want to argue that Nietzsche's notion of the will to power can offer us a framework that defines the necessary conditions for the possibility of a genuine politics that cannot be reduced to mere technics. Moreover, this notion can give us some basic guidelines for how a modern, Western society like ours can preserve and develop itself in a fruitful way without having to fall back into political point of views that presuppose some kind of absolute, pre-given social order.

In the following sections I will, first, argue that organization and struggle – two fundamental concepts that I derive from Nietzsche's notion of the will to power – are necessary conditions for the possibility of a genuine and healthy political arena. Then, I will elaborate and nuance this perspective by contrasting Nietzsche's view with, first, Carl

Schmitt's distinction between the friend and enemy, and second, Claude Lefort's view on the indeterminate character of democracy. The central idea that I propose in this paper is that a healthy society is a society in which individuals and groups are continuously challenging the ideologies that constitute their social, political, and personal identity in an endless strife for perfection. This view also implies, as we shall see, that social and economic problems and solutions should be understood and evaluated in the light of the goals and ideals that we want to pursue in our culture.

1. Nietzsche on will to power, organization and struggle

Nietzsche's claim that '[t]he world viewed from inside, [...] would be simply "will to power" and nothing else —' (BGE 36) implies that reality is constituted by two primordial 'principles', namely organization and struggle¹. That organization and struggle are the basic 'constituents' of reality can be illustrated by a short analysis of the concept of power in 'will to power'. The first point to make in this regard is that power is only power in relation to another power². The concept 'power' would be meaningless if such power would be detached from an opposite power. Additionally, this structure implies that power is only power insofar as it can maintain itself against other powers and strives to prevail over them. From this it follows that there is in Nietzsche's worldview nothing that has existence and meaning outside the play of power relations. There are no pre-given forms or ideas: reality is essentially characterized by multiplicity, variability, and relationality.

How does this result in any kind of organization? If multiplicity, variability, and relationality are 'essential' constitutive aspects of reality, then every perceivable form of reality, every unity, can only exist as a variable and relational multiplicity that is held together in some way. A variable and relational multiplicity that is kept together is an organization³. Moreover, any instance of will to power as such is always a variable and relational multiplicity of wills to power that are held together, and those wills

1 For an extensive exploration of this idea, see Aydin 2007 29–52.

2 Nietzsche says: 'A power quantum is characterized by its effect and its resistance' (14[79] 13.257; cf. 9[151] 12.424 and 2[159] 12.143).

3 In Nietzsche's words: '[a]ll unity is only as organization and interplay a unity' (2[87] 12.104).

to power exist only as a multiplicity of wills to power; and so on *ad infinitum*.

That the notion of the will to power also entails the concept of struggle can be easily shown. A will to power is, as we have seen, essentially directed at subduing as many other wills to power as possible. All other wills to power, however, are also directed at that (cf. 14[186] 13.373; 36[22] 11.560; 40[55] 11.655; 26[276] 11.222). A consequence of this is that the interaction between wills to power is characterized by struggle⁴. That is not to say that all reality is *based on* struggle, or that all reality is *determined by* struggle. Such interpretations already assume that struggle is an additional quality of something that distinguishes itself from it. Struggle, however, is a constitutive relation, not an additional and distinct element.

To explain how the relation between struggle and organization should be conceived, I have to introduce a third element, which Nietzsche borrows from the physiologist Robert Mayer, namely 'discharge' [*Auslösung*]. A 'will to power'-organization overpowers another 'will to power'-organization by the force that is released through the discharge of its internal tension. Internal tension is generated by the build-up of internal struggle in an organization. That tension, however, can only be built up if the opposing parties are related to each other in a certain way; if, in other words, the struggle is organized. Although the element of discharge is important in this respect, it does not have the same primordial status as the elements of 'organization' and 'struggle' because it is a result of these elements. It is, in other words, derivative.

This perspective also sheds light on the important distinction that Nietzsche makes between 'strong/healthy' and 'weak/sick'. Only the combination of strong organization and intense struggle is a trait of strength and health. If a high degree of organization is achieved by excluding all struggle, it would be a sign of weakness. Similarly, intense struggle without great organizational force would also be a sign of weakness. A strong or healthy 'will to power'-organization is characterized by considerable divergence and struggle that are forced into a unity in a structured manner.

If, from a Nietzschean point of view, the notions of organization and struggle are the basic constituents of reality, and supposing they offer us a criterion for what a strong or healthy organization would look like, then they could also point to the necessary conditions for a healthy political

4 And since everything that happens is will to power, Nietzsche can say: 'All happening [*Geschehen*] is struggle...' (1[92] 12.33; cf. 9[91] 12.383).

society. In the following sections I will elaborate on (the relation between) these notions within a social-political context by confronting Nietzsche with two influential political thinkers, namely Carl Schmitt and Claude Lefort.

2. Schmitt on friend and enemy

In his groundbreaking essay *The Concept of the Political*⁵ (henceforth: TCP) Carl Schmitt claims that the meaning of the political can only be obtained by discovering and defining the specifically political categories. The fundamental conceptual distinction for ontology is that of 'real' and 'apparent', for ethics that of 'good' and 'evil', for aesthetics that of 'beautiful' and 'ugly'. But what is it for politics, he asks? According to Schmitt, 'The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy' (TCP 26). Schmitt does not give us an explicit definition of what he means by 'friend', but defines it implicitly by defining the opposite: the enemy, he says, is whoever is 'in a specially intense way, *existentially* something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible, which can neither be decided by a previously determined norm nor by the judgement of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party' (TCP 27, my italics).

By using the term 'existentially', Schmitt underlines that 'enemy' is not a moral category. The enemy need not to be a vicious person or a criminal. The category of the 'enemy' applies to any person or entity that represents a serious *potential* threat that can lead to a situation in which people have to fight for their existence.

The friend-enemy distinction is, according to Schmitt, a fact of life because it is a necessary condition for order and, consequently, for law. No law can be applied in chaos because chaos is defined as a situation outside of any law. If a law is to apply, a difference between order and disorder must be already marked in a pre- and infra-legal fashion. Schmitt is interested in exploring this pre-legal sphere because for him the instance of order that makes possible any legal system ultimately has an inevitable transcendental component: prior to any rule of law there is a politics of obedience to divine commands, which are the ultimate ground of authentic, non-relativistic morality. The sovereign, who

5 Schmitt 1996.

is the representative of this divine authority, decides on what Schmitt calls the 'exception' [*Ausnahme*]. By 'exception' Schmitt means the appropriate moment for stepping outside the rule of law in the public interest. The sovereign, who decides on 'the state of emergency' [*Ausnahmezustand*], has the task to establish, restore, and maintain the order, which is permanently threatened by chaos and anarchy.

Armed with these political categories, Schmitt formulates a radical critique of liberal democracy. According to him, liberal democracy is hostile to all political projects. With its free market network and vast technological infrastructure, it makes all contending political beliefs and opposing ideologies insignificant, or at least inoffensive and not worth fighting for, unless they appeal to economic interests. Its strength, Schmitt stresses, lies not in its assertive posturing of its liberal ideal, but rather in its abandonment of all political ideals, including its own. Liberal democracy presents itself not as an ideology, but as a neutral framework that can satisfy diverse and even contrasting opinions. Moreover, the political friend-enemy distinction is weakened and transformed into the notion of economic competition. From the liberal point of view, there are no friends and enemies but only business partners. Democracy, the liberals want us to believe, exists by virtue of the absence of strong politics: democracy functions best when the political arena, with its thinking in terms of friends and enemies, is reduced to its minimum and the economic and juridical spheres are expanded to their maximum.

In contrast to what liberals believe and what they want us to believe, Schmitt claims, politics was, is and always will be our ineluctable fate. Liberalism did not eliminate the political distinction between friend and enemy, but merely obscured it by its pacifistic vocabulary: liberals do not fight enemies, they say, but impose sanctions; they do not damage their antagonists, but protect conventions; they do not destroy their opponents, but take measures to preserve the peace. Schmitt argues, however, that we should recognize that liberal tolerance towards opposing political views is deceiving. Liberalism, which claims to be open to all kinds of different opinions, will destroy, albeit in a soft, humanitarian style, anything that would question its apolitical *status quo*, its ideology without ideology.

Schmitt's analysis raises an important question in this respect: if the friend-enemy distinction is indestructible, and life and death struggles are, at least potentially, inevitable, why then is liberalism worse than other possible political systems? Liberalism, Schmitt argues, weakens the citizens' social identity. By not acknowledging the political distinction

between friend and enemy, neutralizing its own position, and focusing on the private rights of individuals, liberal democracy merely provides for the equality of atomized individuals whose ethnic, cultural, or racial bonds are so weakened or diluted that they can no longer be viewed as equal inheritors of a common cultural memory and a common vision of the future. The decisive point that Schmitt wants to make here is that the friend-enemy distinction is a necessary condition for uniting and separating people, for forming and preserving a communal identity. Although the friend-enemy distinction is the basic characteristic of social life from which one cannot escape, one can deny and conceal it, as the liberals do. In the end, however, Schmitt believes, denying the political distinction will lead to the disintegration of society and give an unknown enemy the possibility to subordinate it.

3. 'Organization – struggle', 'friend – enemy'

If we compare Schmitt's friend-enemy doctrine to Nietzsche's principle of the will to power and the categories of organization and struggle that I have derived from it, we find some interesting similarities, but also important differences⁶. Let us concentrate on the similarities first. Nietzsche's principle of the will to power implies that a society can only preserve itself fruitfully by virtue of an organized struggle with contesting forces that threaten its existence. Moreover, Nietzsche stresses in several occasions the importance of having enemies. In *Twilight of the Idols* he writes with respect to his notion of *Great Politics*: 'A new creation in particular – the new *Reich*, for example – needs enemies more than friends: in opposition alone does it feel itself necessary, in opposition alone does it become necessary...' (TI Morality 3 6.84; cf. EH Wise 7 6.274).

One could say that for Nietzsche the enemy is also a necessary condition for establishing and maintaining a social organization. Moreover, for Nietzsche as for Schmitt, the enemy does not have to be something morally condemnable. Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes, for example in *Thus*

6 There are many indications that Schmitt was influenced by Nietzsche; the aim of this paper, however, is not to find (biographical) evidence of a possible influence of Nietzsche on Schmitt, but to conduct a systematic analysis and comparison of their views. Cf. McCormick 1995 and 1997 84 f. Although I agree with McCormick that it is possible to draw some similarities between Nietzsche and Schmitt, I believe that he disregards significant differences between the two.

Spoke Zarathustra, that we should not despise our enemies, but be proud of them (Z I War). Nietzsche's and Schmitt's references to the Greek attitude towards their enemies bring them even closer together. Schmitt often uses the Greek *polis* as a model for how political decisions are made when confronted with hostile forces, for example in the case of the *psephisma* of Demophantos. In *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche claims that for Homer both the Trojans and the Greek were good, emphasizing that an essential characteristic of the 'noble man' is not to characterize his enemy as evil (HH 45 2.67).

There is yet another similarity between Schmitt and Nietzsche. Schmitt insists that the friend-enemy distinction cannot be eliminated. The friend-enemy distinction is transcendental in the sense that it is a necessary condition for the establishment of an order of laws and social norms, and consequently for the existence of man as a social being. Earlier we saw that Nietzsche's notion of the will to power implies that an organization can only exist and preserve itself by virtue of the struggle with forces that threaten its existence. This indicates that for Nietzsche, very similar to Schmitt, struggle is in a certain sense transcendental: struggle is a necessary condition for the existence of every form of unity, including every type of social unity.

Finally, Nietzsche would lend Schmitt a sympathetic ear with respect to his critique of liberal democracy. The neutralizing tendency of our modern, democratic society is for Nietzsche one of the most hideous atrocities in the evolution of humankind⁷. He does not get tired of blaming modern, liberal democrats for reducing man to a herd animal that has lost its divine capacity to create new forms of life⁸. By destroying the struggle between different life forms, modern democracy destroys not only the conditions for the development of a social identity, but it destroys life itself⁹.

7 See also David Owen (1995 167–169) on the tendency of liberalism to depoliticize politics.

8 See, for example: 'Liberalism, in plain words, reduction to the herd animal...' (TI Expeditions 38).

9 In GM II 11 he formulates it in the following way: 'A legal system conceived of as sovereign and universal, not as a means in the struggle of power complexes, but as a means against all struggles in general, something along the lines of Dühring's communist cliché in which each will must consider every other will as equal, that would be a principle hostile to life, a destroyer and dissolver of human beings, an assassination attempt on the future of human beings, a sign of exhaustion, a secret path to nothingness.'

Nevertheless, the similarities between Nietzsche and Schmitt should not disguise significant differences. First of all, there is an important difference in the demarcation of the sphere of the political. Schmitt's unshakeable belief in the autonomy of the political categories of friend and enemy forbids any cross-fertilization between categorically different fields. The friend and enemy concepts are to be understood, Schmitt says, 'least of all in a private-individualistic sense' (TCP 27 f.). For Schmitt, the friend and enemy distinction establishes communities who share a uniform way of life (a *Lebensform*). The enemy is what threatens a community and its way of life. The friend, then, is no more than an individual who obeys, with other community members, the command of the sovereign to partake in armed combat when their way of life is threatened. The state preserves a certain socio-political order and identity by suspending internal tensions, antagonisms, and conflicting interests.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, could be said to extend the political distinction of friend and enemy to all regions of life, including the moral, economic, and aesthetic, as well as to the private domain. The will to power is not only the constitutive principle of a social-political order, but of life itself. This way everything becomes political; Nietzsche politicizes life as such. Consequently, and this is a crucial difference, a community for Nietzsche is not only organized by virtue of its struggle with external 'will to power' organizations, but also and at the same time by virtue of an internal struggle¹⁰. And Nietzsche radicalizes the reach of the political even more: the individual himself is what he is by virtue of an internal struggle. He writes in *Twilight of the Idols*: 'Our attitude to the "internal enemy" is no different: here too we have spiritualized hostility [*die Feindschaft*]; here too we have come to appreciate its value' (TI Morality 3 6.84; cf. 3[1].290 10.88). One could say that the individual as such becomes a political unity.

Second, Nietzsche and Schmitt have different views on the position of the state. For Schmitt, people are ultimately united and separated by the sovereign power of the state. This has far-reaching consequences. The establishment of order by the political is for Schmitt not a sheer formal, technical procedure; establishing order means establishing convictions. The question 'Who are your friends and who are your enemies?' can be translated as 'For what convictions are you willing to die?'. The possibility of death forces individuals to be sure of what it is about their way

10 Nietzsche writes in a *Nachlass* note: 'let us also be enemies, my friends!' (13[13] 10.462; cf. Z I Friend; 4[211] 10.170).

of life that they will be willing to die for. Frank Vander Valk explains this in the following way: 'In Schmitt's depiction of the centrality of the friend/enemy distinction, the ultimate capacity for instilling meaning in life, for generating and instilling certain values over others, rests with the political', i.e., in the end with the state¹¹.

For Nietzsche, the state cannot be the transcendental agency that ultimately has the exclusive right to establish and define a community's way of life. A consequence of maximally expanding the realm of the political is that even the sovereign, even in a 'state of emergency', cannot withdraw from the game of power relations. In Schmitt's view, the sovereign can ultimately withdraw from the game of power relations because he is the representative of a divine authority. From a Nietzschean perspective, one could say that just as individuals live with an intuitive recognition of the possibility of war, they also live with the knowledge that a *different* way of life, with a *different* set of friends, is *always* a possibility. Although Schmitt concedes that peace, and with that, a certain way of life, cannot be eternal, he fails to admit that sovereignty is equally subject to challenges. Schmitt sometimes acknowledges the fact that conflicts from other spheres of life often spill over into the political realm (see, for example, TCP 36), but he is less keen about admitting that it is through these interruptions that challenges to sovereignty are introduced.

The possibility of disobeying the way of life that is defined and maintained by the state is for Nietzsche of utmost importance because the potential to establish *radical* new ways of living can only come from **individuals** that are not completely absorbed by the *Sittlichkeit der Sitte*. We all know Nietzsche's famous saying in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: 'There, where the state ceases, there only begins the man who is not superfluous' (Z I New Idol 4.63). The human being that is not superfluous is the great individual who is able to establish a radical new way of living. And this would only be possible if there is no agency or authority that can withdraw itself from the game of power relations.

In addition, by banishing the friend-enemy distinction from the interpersonal domain, Schmitt contributes, I believe, to the very same development that he detests so much in liberal democracy, namely the **production** of atomized individuals and groups within the state. If the friend-enemy distinction is a necessary condition for the formation of national identity, why is it not also a necessary condition for the constitution of identities within a state? At this point, the importance of

11 Vander Valk 2002 39.

Nietzsche's radicalization of the Schmittian friend-enemy distinction can be clarified further. For Schmitt, *external struggle* is a necessary condition for the constitution of a community with uniform convictions. From a Nietzschean perspective, a community can only constitute, preserve, and develop itself in a healthy manner by both *external and internal struggle*. A society can preserve itself fruitfully only if it has enough 'plastic power' [*plastische Kraft*] (HL 1 1.251) to form and reform itself by virtue of an organized struggle with contesting internal and external forces. 'Preserving itself fruitfully' means in this respect permanent self-overcoming (and, therefore, not-preserving itself), i. e., an everlasting process of acknowledging the possibility of other views, participating in a struggle of interpretations, and incorporating 'foreign' elements without disintegrating in a disorganized chaos.

Although Schmitt's critique of liberal democracy can help us to analyze and uncover some serious dangers that our modern society faces, his limiting of the friend-enemy distinction to the public field and giving the state the exclusive authority to make this distinction can lead to the same problems of atomization and neutralization that he wants to attack. Moreover, by granting the state the exclusive authority to decide on the 'exception', Schmitt re-establishes the conservative view in which a certain ideology – in Schmitt's case the Christian, or more specific, the Catholic – is given a privileged and external status. By expanding and radicalizing the friend-enemy distinction Nietzsche seems to offer us a more promising perspective to understand and possibly deal with problems like neutralization and atomization.

4. Lefort on the indeterminate character of democracy

A political thinker who has intensely questioned and criticized the conservative political position represented by Schmitt is Claude Lefort. A short discussion of some of his view could shed some light on the dangers that come with giving certain ideologies a privileged status and can further help to clarify and nuance the Nietzschean position that I have put forward.

In *The Question of Democracy* (1988) Lefort states that in the pre-modern, *ancien regime* the king's body represented the point of intersection between the visible and the invisible; it played the role of mediator between the earthly sphere and the divine sphere. This allowed the king to 'incarnate society's identity'. Against this background, modernity en-

tails the ‘disincarnation of society’, i.e. the emergence of a condition where no figure can embody society’s unity and thereby link it with a heavenly sphere. Important for Lefort in this respect is that ‘disincarnation’ leaves a trace: although the figure of the king may have vanished, the ‘place’ that he occupied remains; it remains as an ‘empty place’. Where the sovereign figure of authority was able to embody absolute power, in a democratic society power becomes delocalized. According to Lefort, the empty place in modern democracy symbolizes society’s non-closure on itself, i.e. its non-identity with itself; or to put it in yet another way, this empty place blocks society’s immanence¹².

For Lefort, the always-present danger that lies in wait in our modern era is the temptation to fill up the open space that is created by democracy with a new type of ‘incarnation’ or definitive unity. In his view, **totalitarianism** is in its essence not the ideology of, for example, a master race, but rather a flight from the empty place that democracy entails. It is an attempt to fill it with what he calls ‘a materialization of the people’, i.e., a people no longer in conflict with itself but rather a ‘People-as-One’. Consequently, this self-identity will rule out internal struggle, creating a radical division between ‘the inside’ and ‘the outside’, between the ‘people’ and its ‘enemies’¹³.

Lefort argues that real democracy involves conflict or division among competing interests or claims – whether of individuals or groups or **political** parties – and therefore an ongoing contestation of prevailing **authority**, which requires periodic elections of representatives. Society is *always and everywhere* torn by inner conflict. The elimination of struggle within a democratic society is not only impossible but also undesirable. Democracy is a political regime that accepts openness and the indeterminacy of its own institution because it cannot appeal to a source of justification beyond itself. In a democracy power has no canonical location, which means that the legitimation of authority or the use of power is always in question. This gain, Bernard Flynn comments in his book on Lefort, ‘is what we call *freedom*’, which is ‘the very condition of the political and of politics’¹⁴.

In contrast to Schmitt, Lefort does not accept a simple identification of the political with the government or state. Schmitt’s attempt to rediscover the transcendental foundation of the German state by defining a

12 Lefort 1988, esp. 9–20; see also Flynn 2005 xxiv–xxvi.

13 Lefort 1986 297–304; see also Flynn 2005 213, 241.

14 Flynn 2005 150.

certain pre-legal sphere that decides on 'the state of emergency' would for Lefort be nothing else than an attempt to fill up the open space that constitutes democracy. In addition, one could say that Lefort radicalizes the reach of the political along similar lines as Nietzsche by expanding it to all the layers of society. Schmitt rejects liberalism because it blurs the clear boundary between the inside and outside, between the friend and the enemy, and destroys the homogeneity among citizens. For Lefort the dream of the People-as-One is an essential characteristic of totalitarianism.

Schmitt states that there has to be a transcendental authority that has the exclusive power to decide who is the friend and who is the enemy. For Nietzsche and Lefort, the friend-enemy distinction, which generates struggle continuously, is itself transcendental in the sense that there is no authority that can control it, because it is itself the highest 'authority'. It is, however, not an authority that can commend its servants to respect certain clearly defined values and norms, because it is itself responsible for fundamental indeterminateness. This makes it a very vulnerable authority; the more vulnerable because in contrast to totalitarian systems that are directed at preserving themselves, democracy has by its very essence to remain open for alternative political views, views that even may destroy it.

Conclusion: On goals and ideals

There are strong similarities between Lefort's defence of the indeterminate character of democracy and Nietzsche's view that retreating from the game of power relations is not only impossible, but in the long run also results in disintegration. For both Nietzsche and Lefort, struggle is a necessary condition for a healthy society, that is, a society that isn't only able to preserve itself, but also contains enough potential to continuously overcome its deficiencies and innovate itself.

Does this mean that I think that Nietzsche is a democrat à la Lefort? No, I do not! In the first place, I do not consider Nietzsche to be a democrat at all. I do not believe that somebody who repudiates the idea that all people are in principle equal and have potentially the same rights can still be considered a democrat¹⁵. In addition, Lefort's passionate defence

15 Cf. Ansell-Pearson (1994 11, 72 f.) on Nietzsche's claim that 'slavery is of the essence of culture'.

of human rights would be unacceptable to Nietzsche. Nietzsche would agree much more with the Schmittian credo that 'whoever invokes humanity, wants to deceive'. It must be pointed out, however, that the purpose of this has not been to establish whether or not Nietzsche is a democrat¹⁶.

In the context of this paper, there is another and more significant reason why Nietzsche's and Lefort's views do not coincide. Earlier I have argued that, for Nietzsche, only the *combination* of strong organization and intense struggle is a trait of health: a strong or healthy society is characterized by an intense struggle between strong 'will to power' organizations. Lefort's equation of modern democracy with radical disincarnation and his condemnation of every attempt to assemble people on the basis of an ideology as totalitarian make it very difficult to understand how organization is possible at all. If we also consider that from a Nietzschean point of view struggle without organization cannot be real struggle, then the differences between Nietzsche and Lefort become more apparent. Lefort does a great job in revealing the dangers of the 'People-as-One' doctrine, but his lack of interest in the importance of the element of organization, probably under the influence of Raymond Aron's strong, non-ideological liberalism, seem to result in a 'People-as-No One' doctrine.

In my view, Nietzsche's concern for the element of organization explains also his interest in (common) goals and ideals. In numerous places he emphasizes that a society is organized and regulated by virtue of the embodiment of certain common goals and ideals. In the context of his analysis of the disintegration of Christian morals he says, for example:

The dissolution of morality leads in its practical consequences to the atomistic individual, followed by the break-up [*Zerteilung*] of the individual in multiplicities [*Mehrheiten*] – absolute flow [*Fluß*]. Therefore now more than ever a goal is requisite, and love, a new love. (4[83] 10.138; cf. 17[27] 10.547)

Because for Nietzsche the individual is also an organized multiplicity, goals and ideals will also be the constitutive principles of personal identity. Both social and personal identities are constituted by virtue of the anticipation toward (shared) goals and ideals.

This view of the relation between goals and ideals, organization, and social and personal identity should not be confounded with fundamentalist doctrines that ground identity exclusively on a shared *past* origin that

¹⁶ For a discussion on this question, see Hatab 1995 and Appel 1999.

dictates which norms and rules must be obeyed. An essential characteristic of a goal or ideal is that it is something that has to be realized in the *future*; it is of the type of a would-be, not of a has-been. Although the content of an ideal will to a certain extent depend on past experiences, it will not be completely exhausted by them. Goals and ideals in a Nietzschean context constitute identity not by virtue of the sheer repetition of what one *was* but much more by virtue of efforts to realize what one *wants to become*, which often requires overcoming what one was. One pursues a goal, as Nietzsche formulates it, 'not for the end, not to maintain the species [*Art*], but to **sublate** it [*aufheben*]' (4[20] 10.114).

Since what one wants to become is a kind of directedness toward a possible *future*, the goals and ideals that one pursues are necessarily vague and general, and therefore susceptible to modification and improvement. Nietzsche's notion of struggle underlines this dynamic character of goals and ideals: because the establishment of (common) goals and ideals is not a process that takes place outside the game of power relations, but is itself the outcome of continuous interaction between groups and individuals, every goal or ideal will be provisional. This indicates that a healthy society in the Nietzschean meaning of the word is a society in which individuals and groups are continuously challenging the ideologies by virtue of which they constitute their identity in an endless striving for perfection.

Not only can this perspective shed light on present-day politics; it can also indicate the essential conditions for the possibility of a genuine and healthy future political arena. The lack of explicit long-term goals and ideals by virtue of which socio-political organizations establish a durable identity leads to a society in which what is considered as good and what as undesirable are determined by current convictions and trends. Politicians have become technicians who offer fast and practical solutions for the problems of the people that vote for them. Moreover, the contests between modern politicians are often not about radically different views, because the (latent) conditions for determining certain situations as problematic or unfavourable are not really at stake. Our modern politics of problem-solving with its concentration on the actual, present situation is a symptom of a culture that has lost interest in an elemental question, namely: 'which goals should be pursued to enhance and enrich our way of life?' It is a symptom of a culture that has lost its ambition to improve and overcome itself and only desires self-preservation.

While a discussion of how the provisional perspective I have developed here could be implemented in particular and concrete situations

falls outside the scope of this article, it is possible to draw three general conclusions from the preceding argument: first of all, politicians, being representatives of different views in society, should explicate which long-term goals and ideals they think should be pursued in our culture. Second, social and economic problems and solutions should be understood and evaluated in the light of those goals and ideals. Third, politicians should propose how the goals and ideals that should be pursued can be embodied in concrete, particular instances and offer solutions for encountered problems, i. e. for situations that obstruct the concrete realization of the goals and ideals that have been set up. That there are no a priori methods to establish which goals and ideals should be pursued does not imply that a politics of ideologies is obsolete. The pursuit of goals and ideals is not only an essential condition for the constitution of durable social and individual identities but also for a genuine struggle between different socio-political perspectives. Which goals and ideals will be actually embodied in our society should depend on the outcome of the struggle between different ideologies, an outcome that has to be established continuously.

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