

Nietzsche's "Great Politics" and *Zarathustra's* New Peoples

BIRTE LOSCHENKOHL | UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

Abstract: Scholars have long debated how best to understand Nietzsche's "great politics." But they have hitherto neglected Nietzsche's own suggestion that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (*Z*) provides a "formula" for it. This article thus provides a fresh interpretation of "great politics" based on a reading of *Z*. It argues that "great politics" is concerned above all with the question of how to *overcome* humankind in its present form. Such overcoming does not have a specific goal. Rather, *Z* suggests that a continuous overcoming of the present is required in order to remain attuned to the nature of life itself and allow for human flourishing. In the "new peoples" Nietzsche anticipates, politics would take on a form that radically revalues many foundational assumptions of political philosophy. In offering a new understanding of "great politics," this article therefore also suggests an answer to the question whether and in what sense Nietzsche is a political philosopher.

Keywords: great politics, Zarathustra, self-overcoming, political philosophy

1.
[. . .] *Revaluation of all values:* that is my formula for the highest act of humanity's self-reflection, an act that has become flesh and genius in me. [. . .] I am a bearer of *glad tidings* as no one ever was before; I am acquainted with incredibly elevated tasks, where even the concept of these tasks has been lacking so far; only from me onwards are there new hopes. With all this I am at the same time necessarily a man of calamity. Because when truth begins to fight with the lies of millennia there will be tremors, a convulsion of earthquakes, a moving of mountains and valleys such as no one has ever imagined. The concept of politics will then have merged

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entirely into a war of spirits, all power structures of the old society will have exploded—they are all based on lies: there will be wars such as have never existed on earth. It is only beginning with me that there is on earth *great politics*.—

2.

Do you want a formula for a destiny like this, one *that becomes a human being*?—You will find it in my Zarathustra.

—EH “Destiny” 1–2 (translation altered)¹

This article sets out to take seriously and develop in detail what Nietzsche might have meant when referring to Zarathustra as a “formula” for his “great politics.” Despite the quote given as an epigraph above, and despite the fact that Nietzsche thought of *Z* as his most important work, indeed as the “greatest gift” humanity has ever received (*EH* Preface), the book has so far received little attention by those trying to understand and articulate Nietzsche’s “great politics.” Presumably this has to do with the fact that *Z* is very unlike other works of political philosophy.² Nietzsche’s status as a political philosopher, *Z*’s status as a work of political philosophy, and the question of “great politics” are in fact best approached together, as aspects of the same problem. Nietzsche is and is not a political philosopher: He is *not*, insofar as he does not comply with the criteria typically taken to be essential for qualifying as one. But more importantly, he *is* a political philosopher insofar as he *employs the categories* of political philosophy to revalue them and to create new ones that are appropriate to the task of a future politics. Several such conceptual innovations lay the foundation to Nietzsche’s “great politics.” But the most central revaluation Nietzsche introduces in his *Z* is a shift from self-preservation to self-overcoming. *Z*’s contribution to political philosophy is less obvious, but all the more crucial for a proper understanding of Nietzsche’s political thought: “Great politics” as it emerges in *Z* is at its core about the possibility of collective self-overcoming. As such, it does not have a concrete, unified goal. This does not mean that there is no political program implied in *Z*; rather, the political program of great politics is precisely *continuous self-overcoming*.

If and when we take seriously that *Z* is to be a formula for “great politics,” then, it becomes clear that Nietzsche’s vision for a future politics is very different from the one often ascribed to him. Rather than looking forward to “the emergence of a master race that will rule the earth” or advocating the

"unification of Europe,"³ *Z* suggests the local development of "new peoples" beyond the modern state (*Z* III: "Old and New Tablets"). Such peoples' orienting thought shifts from the securing of collective human survival to the continuous *overcoming* of humankind (*Z* IV: "Higher Man"). The founding of "new peoples" in *Z* is based on a process of self-overcoming and the cultivation of creative capacities in individuals. Insofar as it develops first individually *via* exodus from the modern state, then locally and from the bottom up, *Z*'s "great" politics turns out to be rather small in scale. And in these new political communities, as I will show, ruling, commanding, and lawgiving take on forms that are radically different from how they are typically understood in political philosophy.

This article is organized around the notion of self-overcoming for two reasons. First, and most importantly, in the quotation that provides the epigraph to this article Nietzsche himself connects the notion of "great politics" directly to his *Z*; and immediately following the quotation, he cites from the very section of the book entitled "On Self-Overcoming." This suggests an intimate connection between the idea of a new "great politics," *Z* as a whole, and the notion of "self-overcoming" in particular. Second, any reader of Nietzsche must respond to the challenge that his writing poses: Nietzsche's writing often contains (seemingly) contradictory statements that are difficult to make sense of, and he expresses his thought in unusual formats such as aphorisms, riddles, stories, images, songs—this is especially relevant to a reading of *Z*.⁴ One way of responding to this methodological challenge is "to make manifest the (coherent) thrust" of Nietzsche's project and use that "thrust" to guide one's reading.⁵ I adopt a similar approach in presenting a reading of Nietzsche's politics in *Z* that is centered on the notion of self-overcoming as the general "thrust" of that book.⁶ For both of these reasons, I approach the various remarks with obvious political relevance that appear scattered throughout *Z* from the perspective of self-overcoming.

I begin by outlining Nietzsche's understanding of self-overcoming, transformation, and creativity in the first section, where I highlight that the point of self-overcoming is not to get stuck in any particular state, rather than to arrive somewhere specific. The next section explores the tension between self-overcoming, most often associated with transformation on the level of the individual, and collective life. I argue that while Nietzsche understands the modern state as incompatible with self-overcoming, his description of ancient peoples should alert us to the fact that this incompatibility is not one between overcoming and collective life in general, but

specifically concerns the modern state. In the third section I take as my starting point Nietzsche's hope that "new peoples" might emerge from those who have left the modern state behind in favor of self-overcoming. I excavate how such a "new people" emerges from a bottom-up process, and what lawgiving might look like in this context. In the fourth section, I respond to a possible objection against my characterization of Nietzsche's new peoples as emerging in a bottom-up process by explicating his peculiar understanding of ruling and commanding. I argue that we should understand Nietzsche's "bestowing virtue" as a novel form of political rule. Finally, in the fifth section, I refute the idea that *Z* contains a world-encompassing (or even world-dominating) notion of "great politics" by showing that such a reading is incompatible with and fails to make sense of the book's central notion of self-overcoming. I conclude by suggesting a reorientation of our overall approach to figuring out Nietzsche's "great politics": rather than reading into *Z* a notion of "great politics" derived from *BGE*, we should proceed the other way around.

The Life of Self-Overcoming

In this section I argue that we should not understand the kind of self-overcoming and value-creating that Zarathustra has in mind as simply a matter of swapping one (old) set of (bad) values for another (new and better) set of values. In *GM*, Nietzsche suggests that we should evaluate our current values by asking whether they have "up to now obstructed or promoted human flourishing" (*GM* P:3). Flourishing, in turn, is identified with "the fullness, strength and will of life" (*GM* P:3). It is Nietzsche's understanding of life itself, then, that is key to understanding why he suggests a reevaluation of all values. In its essence, we read in *Z*, life can be understood as "that *which must always overcome itself*" (*Z* II: "Self-Overcoming"). Thus if it is necessary that our values be attuned to the character of life itself, and if life is becoming and self-overcoming, then values that are in the service of human flourishing must allow for overcoming. If to flourish means to overcome oneself, then no newly created values could possibly be conceived as absolute; they themselves, in order to remain attuned to life and thus to allow for human flourishing, will have to be overcome again eventually. There can be no everlasting, "platonic" good or bad, as Zarathustra insists; all values "must overcome themselves out of themselves again and

again" (Z II: "Self-Overcoming"). What is good in the sense of enabling our flourishing today will eventually prevent us from doing so in the future, under changed parameters—unless it is itself subject to transformation. As will become clear later on, this has important consequences for the political implications of self-overcoming.

Zarathustra first suggests that it is in the nature of life to command and obey at the same time. Such obeying can take two different forms: either the living obeys its own "commands," or it receives its commands from outside. But even in this latter case, it will seek to command elsewhere. The tendency in the living always to command and obey at the same time is what Zarathustra calls its "will to power." Life is expansive; it wants to grow and overcome in order to express its strength. I will return to the discussion of commanding later; for now, I shall merely highlight that when Nietzsche speaks of commanding here, he is not discussing people commanding and dominating other people. He is, rather, speaking of "*the living*" in general. This does not *exclude* the possibility of strength being embodied in a person, but it certainly shouldn't be *equated* with relations of power between people. Most importantly, it is the "will" that seeks dominance. But for a *will* to dominate, *human beings* don't have to dominate each other.⁷ For my present purpose, there is yet another aspect of commanding that is important: sooner or later, the commanding is itself bound to be confined by its own commands and its own creations. Nietzsche has a personified "life" appear in this section to give an account of itself; and it reveals that beyond obeying its own commands, "life" is also bound to revise and overcome whatever form it might take and whatever it might create. There is thus no final purpose or goal inherent in the process of self-overcoming, and in the process of self-overcoming life necessarily proceeds on "*crooked paths*," characterized by struggle and (self-)contradictions (Z II: "Self-Overcoming").

Zarathustra sketches what we might understand as a "model" for self-overcoming in his first speech. In the tripartite metamorphosis presented there, spirit transforms itself from "camel" to "lion" to "child." The first stage is one of willing submission to received values and norms: the camel-spirit is thus weighed down by its acceptance of given values. The lion-spirit turns against the values carried and perpetuated by the camel. In doing so, it opens up space to make room for creation. But in order for new values actually to be created, the lion-spirit must yet transform into a child-spirit. The creation of the child-stage, while *building on* this forceful critique of the given, is *not in itself* hard, determined, or domineering. The child-spirit is playful

and affirmative: “The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying” (Z I: “Three Metamorphoses”). Creating new values, bringing about change, is a “game” that moves us on from the lion’s mode of critique and “nay-saying” toward affirmation. It is “innocent” and “forgetful” insofar as it departs from the current nexus of guilt—it goes beyond the good and evil of given values, leaving them behind to create new ones. That it is playful, a “wheel rolling out of itself,” implies that creating is not first and foremost interested in bringing about a particular end: it proceeds with lightheartedness and joyfulness.

In keeping with life’s very own impulse to contradict, contest, and overcome whatever it creates, we should resist the temptation to understand this process as teleological: the “child” is not a final “goal” of self-overcoming. It does not make much sense to assume that we simply remain in this mode of playful creating. On the contrary, the very fact that the child creates values suggests that, in accordance with Nietzsche’s understanding of life, this entire process of metamorphoses is bound to recur over and over. The child plays with chance elements that come its way. But in this play it is a creative spirit: it creates new values, thus also new duties and a new “thou shalt.” And while these new values might be in the service of a flourishing life, eventually they will come to weigh down their creator again, who is thus bound to return to the camel-stage. This means that eventually all those who create new values for themselves will be compelled to reject these new values, too, and the process of self-overcoming and creating will begin again. The child-stage is the most crucial stage in the process of self-overcoming insofar as it is the point at which a “new beginning” becomes possible. But the three parts of the metamorphosis of spirit all are different *instances* of the same process. I therefore suggest that we understand the progression from camel to lion to child as a perpetual metamorphosis, one that is less concerned with the attempt to *be* in the child-stage than it is with *not getting stuck in any one of the stages* that together constitute this metamorphosis.

The contrast between stagnation and conformity on the one hand, and overcoming and creativity on the other, runs through all of Z. The most fundamental problem Zarathustra confronts over the course of the book is that of a multitude of people who have lost not just the capacity, but also the desire to overcome their present state. And his most fundamental project is to reinvigorate this desire and capacity in those who are still capable of it, and to create new values that are attuned to the nature of life itself. In the

beginning of the book, Zarathustra introduces himself to the people in the marketplace as the teacher of the "Übermensch" with the following words: "Human being is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?" (Z I: Prologue). The *Übermensch* is conceived as a remedy to the ills of a society that, even though it does not *believe* in God anymore, remains bound to values that *originate* in Christianity and that stand in the way of a flourishing life.⁸ It is important to note, here, that instead of picturing a concrete "ideal type" of the overman, Nietzsche invites us to turn toward a critique of humans in their current form, discerning those aspects that inhibit their flourishing and developing contempt for them so as to be motivated to overcome them. It is the critical analysis of present conditions that Zarathustra hopes might compel the people on the marketplace to become creators. Implied in the notion of the overman is not an *ideal* we should strive for, but a *call for continuous transformation*. Just as it would go against the nature of life to think that any values we create would be everlasting, so the overman cannot be understood as a new form of life that, once created, remains static. In the remainder of this article, I excavate from *Z* suggestions about how the process of continuous self-overcoming might translate into a new politics of *collective* self-overcoming and creating.

Self-Overcoming and the Modern State

As I have shown above, self-overcoming has no concrete positive goal. But Nietzsche gives us clear indications of what would *stand in its way*: anything that disallows the reconfiguration of given values and forms of life. And those elements Nietzsche identifies as inhibiting our flourishing can ultimately be traced back to a demand for conformity, which leads to stagnation and the loss of creative energies. Of course, Christian morality and moral values derived therefrom are of central importance here. But rather than examining his critique of Christian morality, I briefly turn to Nietzsche's critique of the state and of the marketplace. This will elucidate the political impetus of *Z*, for Nietzsche sees church and state as similar institutions: the church, he explains, is "a kind of state" (Z II: "Great Events"). Both are understood to institute and enforce conformity and stifle our will to power, and are thus fundamentally opposed to creating. While it might seem, then, that Nietzsche finds self-overcoming to be incompatible with political life in general, I will show that this incompatibility is specifically geared to

the modern state by way of discussing Nietzsche's positive assessment of ancient peoples.

Both the church and the state strive to speak for everyone; both are institutions with a claim to universality. Both prescribe norms and duties, and determine our sense of justice. Nietzsche suggests that the state has replaced the "old God" as our "new idol" (Z I: "New Idol"). Where once God provided rules of conduct, a firm notion of good and bad, and a sense of appropriate punishment for transgressions, now the state does. Nietzsche's critique of the state and its political culture in *Z* is not particularly elaborate. He decries the conformity of thought stemming from measuring excellence in terms of money, office, or title. He mocks the "swift monkeys" who "scramble all over each other" in a desperate attempt to get to a position of power. As the "crowbar of power," wealth is a central concern within the state, and the effect of accumulating material wealth is people's impoverishment. The culmination and embodiment of the above life form are those Zarathustra describes as the "last human beings." They are interested only in their own comfort, security, and happiness—a state of being where everyone is content with what is, and there is no conflict, no desire, no hardship (Z I: Prologue). Such a collective resignation of any impulse toward difference and resistance, of course, is the absolute antipode to willing and creating the new: the last human beings do not desire to change anything about their mediocre existence.

Those who found states, according to Nietzsche, are not creators but "annihilators"; the state's order is based on "sword" and "a hundred cravings," that is, force and deprivation. There is nothing that actively connects people in the state, no community, we might say. As a way of responding to such estrangement, the state attempts to employ creators for its own benefit (Z I: "New Idol"). To the creators, Zarathustra suggests staying away from those influential within the state, from their fame and the way the people "revolve around" them (Z I: "Flies"). They should not seek influence within the state or waste their energy on improving it. Even less should they seek the material wealth around which the state is organized. Nietzsche recommends a "small poverty": to have fewer possessions means that one is also less possessed by the state, and thus less subjected to the present order (Z I: "New Idol"). Finally, creators should leave state and marketplace behind and seek solitude.

The overman, Zarathustra suggests, can begin only "where the state ends" (Z I: "New Idol"). The path of self-overcoming is not (yet) compatible

with collective life, and certainly not realizable by engaging in state politics. But while the process of self-overcoming is clearly based on solitude and on withdrawal from the state, it is not clear that this means that one must withdraw to one's cave and live as a hermit. Zarathustra himself never does: he repeatedly retreats from company, but he only ever does so temporarily. That he retreats into solitude when he encounters obstacles in the process of overcoming suggests that solitude is most importantly a space for thought and for taking critical distance from one's own self. But the "self" that creators engage in thought and seek to overcome is of course a *socialized* self. It is the same self whose emergence Nietzsche describes in the second essay of his *GM*, and elements of which now are rejected in much the same fashion in which the lion rejects the values that the camel carried into its desert. Given that solitude is part of the process of reevaluating our values, and that values in turn are understood by Nietzsche to be inherently social and historical (both in their genesis and in their effects), it seems to me plausible that Zarathustra's recommending solitude should be understood not as a final state but rather as an element in the process of self-overcoming.⁹ He advocates solitude not as an *alternative* to living with others, but as part of a process that overcomes the modern state and mass society and allows for new forms of collectivity to emerge.

Beyond his critique of the social, cultural, and moral shortcomings of the modern state and the life-forms it inspires, Nietzsche also addresses its *genesis*. In fact, the entire discussion of the modern state begins by contrasting "states" with "peoples and herds," that is, ancient forms of communal life. Nietzsche insists that in the past, "*peoples* were creators and only later *individuals*; indeed, the individual himself is still the youngest creation" (Z I: "Thousand and One Goals," my emphasis).¹⁰ According to Nietzsche, what fundamentally characterized the ancient "peoples" he so clearly preferred over the modern state's mass society, and what set them apart from the latter, is that they were *acting* collectively, rather than *behaving* in a conformist manner. Their values and their laws were the result of "their overcomings" and "their will to power," and thus of their own creative deeds. As Nietzsche emphasizes, humans are fundamentally creatures who value and esteem, and to esteem and value at the same time is to create. Humans did not "find" their values, they did not discover them by accident: they actively created them. The creative deeds of peoples in turn depend on their specific "need and land and sky and neighbor," that is, on their material and relational circumstances. Thus, Nietzsche argues, there was great variance

between peoples (Z I: “Thousand and One Goals”). Structured by their own “customs and rights,” notions of good and bad vary between different peoples (Z I: “New Idol”).

Insofar as Nietzsche believes that ancient peoples such as the Greeks and Persians had a more active sense of authorship regarding the laws and values that guided their collective life, by Nietzsche’s own standard they therefore led more flourishing lives in the sense spelled out above: their values were attuned to life and life’s specific demands at a given point in time, and they were ready to change with those demands. Thus, while creating is presently very much dependent on individuals and their episodes of chosen solitude, it seems that this is not necessarily true of overcoming and creating at all times. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a temporal or historical dimension to Nietzsche’s reflections regarding creating in Z: It is in the present state of affairs—in a modern world of nation-states and mass culture, to be precise—that Nietzsche finds it necessary to withdraw into solitude as part of the process of creating of new values. Here lies the key to understanding how Nietzsche conceives of the solitary self-overcoming that is at the center of the book as a basis for a politics of the future: Overcoming and creating *today* may depend on solitude, since it provides creators with critical distance from received values of modern societies. But that does not mean that overcoming won’t become a collective process once again, *if circumstances change*. Just as overcoming and creating once was a collective task for ancient peoples, so it might be once again in newly emerging peoples that constitute themselves beyond the modern state.

Nietzsche's New Peoples: “Founding” and “Lawgiving”

The most urgent question citizens of the modern state pose themselves is how to make their lives comfortable, pleasant, and secure for the greatest possible number; they have no interest in changing or even just questioning their current values and forms of life. Very fittingly, then, Nietzsche proposes that we move away from the question posed by the “rulers of today” within the modern state: “How are human beings to be preserved?” This is of course precisely the question that, since Hobbes, has become the first question of liberal political thought. Nietzsche suggests that instead we begin to ask, “How shall human being be *overcome*?” (Z IV: “Higher Man”). Thus he expands his notion of self-overcoming to the political sphere and

positions it against a politics of preservation.¹¹ How can we make sense of Zarathustra's revaluation as the orienting question for his "great politics"? In the context of two crucial sections—the very last part of the first book, "On the Bestowing Virtue," and again toward the end of the third book, "On Old and New Tablets"—Nietzsche suggests the emergence of future *new peoples*. Given that ancient peoples seemed to have been genuinely capable of self-overcoming, it makes sense that a transformed version of such ancient exemplars provides the basis for a positive model of future communities contained in *Z*, both to mark a departure from the modern state and for the active and creative characteristics of ancient peoples. In this section, I turn to the question of how Nietzsche envisions the founding of such new peoples and the creating of values—or, to speak in the idiom of political philosophy, lawgiving—as a *collective* process rather than a *solitary* one.

A new people would emerge from a process of overcoming analogous to that described in the "Three Metamorphoses": its starting point is the lion-spirited critique of the modern state and rejection of its values and forms of life. This rejection requires solitude; it requires that creators leave state and marketplace behind to make space for critical distance. But one day, Nietzsche suggests, those scattered points of critical resistance, the "lonely" and "withdrawing ones" of his day, might themselves come to constitute a people: "from you who have chosen yourselves a chosen people shall grow—and from them the overman" (*Z* I: "Bestowing Virtue"). There are three important things to note in this description. First, and fundamentally, Nietzsche's "new people" emerges from the bottom up rather than being the willed plan of some leader or lawgiver. It is those who have "chosen themselves," who have chosen the path of self-overcoming, from whom such a people would organically "grow." Thus Nietzsche envisions an ethical self-transformation that precedes the emergence of a new people. Second, this bottom-up movement does not stop with the founding of a new people. Rather, the newly founded collectivity is itself merely the initiation of a perpetual self-overcoming such as is embodied in the overman.

There is a third point, though, that I want to emphasize here: namely that this new people is self-selected. That is, no one is excluded from taking part, even though it is clear that Nietzsche thinks most people would be neither willing nor able to go through the prerequisite process.¹² But it is important to note that there is no formal or political exclusion whatsoever that is barring people from taking part if they select themselves for this task. In fact, it seems that Nietzsche maintains a faint hope that others might

eventually be able and willing to join: Those who are able to create today can act as “physicians” in the hope to help the “sick” who are living in the confines of the state (and therefore lack creative vitality). Their medicine, however, is not one that the physicians spoon-feed to the sick, but one that works through examples: it is by allowing the “sick” to observe how one may heal oneself that the physicians can help them (Z I: “Bestowing Virtue”). Rather than actively trying to assist them—which would only further their dependence on others, and hence their sickness—it is the role of physicians to inspire the sick to help themselves. While this implies a sense of avant-gardism, which might be taken to imply inequality, a new people such as Nietzsche envisions it certainly does not rest on any structural inequality.

Since they are constituted by fellow creators, any potential “rank-ordering” *within* these new peoples will have to be up for contestation. Zarathustra identifies creators as a “new nobility”: they “create new things and a new virtue” (Z I: “Tree on the Mountain”). He clearly positions this “new nobility” in opposition not just to the “rabble” of the marketplace, but to moneyed aristocracy, too; and importantly, he characterizes his new nobility as an adversary of “all despotic rule.” He further insists that there must be “many kinds of noble ones *for nobility to exist*”—nobility requires plurality and difference (Z III: “Old and New Tablets”). If we take this notion of a “new nobility” to ground Nietzsche’s politics, such politics will differ significantly from our common understanding of “aristocratic” politics.¹³ Nietzsche’s new nobility is about a mode of doing and a way of being in the world, and, again, it has precious little in common with how we are accustomed to use this term in political philosophy.

The kind of transformed community envisioned is constituted by the previous “withdrawing ones,” by creators. It might thus seem that in such a community each individual gives herself her own values and laws, and hangs her own tablets over herself, as creators are wont to do. But since Nietzsche suggests that creating once was a collective process (Z I: “Self-Overcoming”), it is more plausible to think that once a new people emerges, the process of creating new tablets would once more turn into a collective one, where all creators create together. How, then, might the process of lawgiving work in the context of a “new people” of creators? “A Thousand and One Goals” does not mention a lawgiver but rather seems to suggest equality among the creators, such that a new people “grows” out of their deeds rather than originating in an act of lawgiving. In his discussion of *ancient* peoples, by contrast, Nietzsche had suggested that creators “created peoples” by hanging “a faith and a love over them,” which sounds more

like a traditional act of lawgiving (Z I: "New Idol"). I will now turn to "On Old and New Tablets" to examine whether and in what sense Zarathustra himself can be understood as a lawgiver in the sense in which this figure is often alluded to in political philosophy, and what a process of collective creating and lawgiving might look like in his vision for a future politics.

In the beginning of this section, Zarathustra is presented as removed from the people themselves, a familiar setting for lawgivers in the imagery of political philosophy. Surrounded by shattered "old tablets," which represent values that have been overcome or at least have lost credibility, he undertakes to write new ones. But some aspects of the story complicate viewing him as a lawgiver in the conventional sense. First, the new tablets around him are only "partially written upon," and Zarathustra sits among them, waiting for his "hour" to come so that he may return to mankind (Z III: "Old and New Tablets"). That they are not fully written might suggest that for its completion, the process of lawgiving depends on Zarathustra having returned to mankind first. Perhaps most instructive regarding the process of lawgiving is a later section in the same chapter. It is worth quoting in full here:

Whoever has become wise about ancient origins will surely, in the end, seek new sources of the future and new origins. Yes my brothers, it will not be overly long and *new peoples* will originate and new sources will roar down into new depths. An earthquake, after all—it buries many wells, it causes much dying of thirst: it also brings to light inner powers and secrets. An earthquake reveals new sources. In an earthquake of ancient peoples new sources break out. And whoever cries out there: "Look, here is a fountain for many who thirst, a heart for many who long, a will for many tools"—around him gathers a people, that is: many who try. Who can command, who must obey—*here it is tried!* Indeed, with what long searching and guessing and lack of success and learning and trying again! Human society: it is an experiment, this I teach—a long search: but it searches for the commander!—an experiment, oh my brothers! And not a "contract!" Break, break me such words of the soft hearted and half-and-halves! (Z III: "Old and New Tablets," translation altered)

Zarathustra here describes the founding of new peoples as constituted by several elements: First of all, there are "earthquakes" that both bury old

wells, and lay bare new sources for new wells. Recall that “a convulsion of earthquakes” was one of the elements of “great politics” Nietzsche mentions in the quotation from *EH*, given as an epigraph to this article. The “wells” in the quotation from *Z* stand in for values and tablets such as are able to bestow vitality to a people and thus allow it to flourish. That these emerge as a result of *earthquakes* suggests the sudden eruption, the sudden becoming visible of an extremely slow process that was hitherto hidden from plain sight. These earthquakes must include both the increasingly widespread insight that current values stand in the way of flourishing and the preparatory work of a revaluation of values by creators in their solitude.

There are *two long-term movements*, which together constitute the requirement for new sources to become visible. First, the increasing obsolescence of current values for a flourishing life; and second, the search of some to rid themselves of these values. Together, these movements constitute the requirement for new sources to become visible. And based on this, then, there are those who actually *discover* these new sources, and *proclaim* them as sources suitable to sustain the lives of those around them. That is, they make these new sources visible to others as “a fountain for many who thirst, a heart for many who long, a will for many tools.” But a new people is constituted only when those others, too, find the new sources suitable. New tablets are thus not enacted *for* them, on behalf of them, but they themselves have to affirm and hang them over themselves. Thus it may well be just one or a few creators who discover a set of new values suited to a new people; but they would not then go on to *impose* them on others. Rather, such values would have to correspond to a preexisting “thirst,” an actual desire in others that emerges out of and changes with their own self-overcomings. It is affection toward a set of values that truly are their own, and that they can recognize as their own, that may bring creators together to form a people.

After having suggested a shift from “preserving” to “overcoming” humankind as the first political question, Nietzsche furthermore introduces his second revaluation of a fundamental conceptual resource in political philosophy in this paragraph: he insists that we should understand society not as a “contract,” that is, as something that rests on a (fictional) agreement of all to certain terms and conditions, but rather as an “experiment.” Peoples are constituted by “many who try” to be creators. This means that the “many” are active constituents of any such people, that they are active in the process of developing values and of governing. It further emphasizes that

the structure of rule in such new peoples is continually up for contestation and negotiation: "Who can command, who must obey—*here it is tried!*" The authority of any given tablet of values does not extend beyond the point where it ceases to be in the service of a flourishing life. With Daniel Conway, we might imagine a people of creators as constituted by a "political microsphere" that constitutes its "vital core," engendering their legislations, and a "macrosphere" that "extends outward as an involuntary, spontaneous outgrowth" of these legislations.¹⁴ It is not clear whether Nietzsche thinks such an experimental, agonistic community would give itself a government in the traditional sense and a constitution to ground a stable institutional framework at all. Given *Z's* critique of the state and its emphasis on continuous overcoming, we might well think that it would not. But if it did, such a constitution would first and foremost have to safeguard the ability of creators actively to contest their current values and radically to change them. They would have to be able at any time to change and overcome their current form of government, as well as replace those that are currently in charge of it. A collective process of creating cannot be understood as "consensus-finding" or as any kind of (lasting) agreement—Nietzsche's political vision is radically agonistic.¹⁵

Teaching, Commanding, and Political Rule

A possible objection against understanding the founding of new peoples as a bottom-up process is that for Nietzsche to endorse such a view would seem to be in tension with his positive references to ruling and commanding throughout the book. Having elaborated on the question of founding and lawgiving of *Z's* new peoples, I therefore turn to these concepts next to argue that once we properly understand what they mean to Nietzsche, we can see that there is no contradiction between an endorsement of commanding on the one hand, and a bottom-up conception of politics on the other. Once more, Nietzsche revalues our common understanding of commanding and ruling.

As discussed in the first section of this article, the first transformation of the notion of commanding comes as part of the discussion of self-overcoming and life as will to power: there, Nietzsche had suggested that commanding and obeying are both intrinsically intertwined. Throughout *Z* as a whole, the things and people that are described as "commanding" are

extremely diverse. Of course, Zarathustra himself occasionally commands. But beyond this, Nietzsche mentions the body, the will, faith, great love, the stillest hour, thoughts that come on the feet of doves, chance, the sky above—all of which “command” in one way or the other, and *some* of which, such as the “stillest hour,” are described as commanding Zarathustra. I cannot address all of the different instances of commanding here; instead I will focus on Zarathustra’s general comportment as a commander, a teacher, an authority figure—and his rejection of all of these positions—as well as on the “stillest hour’s” elaborations on the kind of commanding appropriate to someone like Zarathustra.

Zarathustra explicitly and repeatedly refuses authority over others. The indeterminateness of his “ideal”—self-overcoming and creating—corresponds directly to his comportment as a “teacher”: he is unwilling to become the leader of a movement, much less a political party. And indeed, it would be difficult to imagine anyone formulating a manual or program for how to achieve a goal as radically indeterminate as “self-overcoming” or the “Übermensch.” Neither of them are teachable goals that refer to a concrete and knowable content. Accordingly, rather than instructing others in what to do, Zarathustra first and foremost seeks to *inspire* others in their *own* journeys. He asks of his students to be his companions, “fellow creators,” rather than his disciples. As his students, they can only follow him in the attempt at self-overcoming insofar as they follow themselves. Everyone must “write new values on new tablets” on their own (Z I: Prologue). Zarathustra himself finds his path by “trying and questioning,” and those seeking to overcome themselves likewise must find their own paths, because “*the way*,” that is, a universally applicable path toward self-overcoming, simply “does not exist!” (Z III: “Old and New Tablets”). Zarathustra even advises his fellow creators not to follow his lead, to walk away and guard themselves against him (Z I: “Bestowing Virtue”). So he is not much of a leader to begin with, and he repeatedly abandons his friends. Toward the end of the second book, right before he leaves them once more, he suggests that it was his “stillest hour” who commanded him to leave his friends behind—and precisely because he refuses to “command and lead the way commanding” (Z II: “Stillest Hour”).

As his personified “stillest hour” insists, what is “needed most by everyone” is the one “who commands great things.” The stillest hour therefore critiques Zarathustra for having the necessary *power* to rule while lacking the *desire* to do so. Zarathustra replies to this that he “lack[s] the lion’s voice for all commanding,” suggesting that he finds himself incapable

of commanding others by employing the same forceful determination involved in the lion's rejection of given values. The stillest hour, however, brushes this objection away by insisting, "The stillest words are those that bring the storm. Thoughts that come on the feet of doves steer the world. Oh Zarathustra, you shall go as a shadow of that which must come; thus you will command and lead the way commanding" (Z II: "Stillest Hour"). It seems, then, that Zarathustra misunderstood what was asked of him. The kind of commanding that the stillest hour suggests is far from prescribing rules and norms to others, and further even from forcefully dominating them. It is not a "lion's voice" that is needed to command, not a vigorous assertion of power over others, but *stillness*. Thoughts such as are capable of bringing a "storm" to the world and "steer" it in a new direction arrive quietly, perhaps without people noticing at first. Thus it seems that it is precisely in Zarathustra's refusal to rule, in his stillness and in proceeding on the path of creation, that his stillest hour anticipates he might institute a larger, structural change—as a "shadow" of future possibilities.

Nietzsche discusses the difference between the "commanding" appropriate to Zarathustra's project of overcoming humankind and the kind of rule typically associated with state politics explicitly in his critique of the marketplace. There, the opposition is expressed through the distinction between creators on the one side, and "actors" and "performers" on the other. Whereas it is the latter around whom the *people of the marketplace* "revolve," creators, the "inventors of new values," instead have the entire *world* "invisibly" revolving around them (Z I: "Flies"). It is the "pressing" types that inhabit the state who desire to have others follow them. Zarathustra himself had attempted and then rejected a somewhat similar approach when trying to motivate the people on the marketplace to self-overcoming at the very beginning of the book.¹⁶ Later, he explicitly advises creators not to collaborate with the actors of the marketplace, even though we might think that this would give creators a certain influence over the people. But the kind of commanding that Z envisions is not one that decides for others how the world is to be evaluated, and what is to be done. As Zarathustra experienced on the marketplace, you cannot "command" people to live a flourishing and creative life unless they themselves are already disposed to such a life, unless they feel a longing for such a life. Likewise, as seen in the founding of new peoples, you can well point out a source for new tablets, but you cannot decide for others to adopt a new tablet. As Vanessa Lemm aptly puts it, "what makes a deed great is its reception by a people."¹⁷ To

“command,” then, does *not* mean to *assert domination* over others by force; it means to *find the world revolving around oneself*—or, more precisely, revolving around a thought (Z II: “Stillest Hour”) or a value (Z I: “Flies”) created—even though, or perhaps because, one does not *intend* for this to happen, and even though one does not have any desire to rule.¹⁸

That many lust after power out of a desire for fame and public admiration is part of Zarathustra’s critique of the modern state and its political culture. But he further proceeds to revalue our understanding of the “lust to rule,” rather than becoming weary of rulers altogether.¹⁹ In “On the Three Evils” he describes lust to rule as cruel; it “breaks and breaks open everything rotten and hollow” and teaches “cities and empires” to develop contempt for themselves and to wish for their own end. Most importantly, if and when it is “the high” that “longs downward for power,” we should not think of this kind of ruling as “lusting after” power and rule. Rather, it is perfectly appropriate to the nature of “the high” (Z III: “Three Evils”). Here I should like to emphasize that “the” high is a translation of “*das Hohe*,” indicating not a *person* as ruler but a *something*—presumably a thought, a value, a virtue. The proper name for such kind of rule, as Nietzsche insists, is that of “the bestowing virtue” rather than “lust to rule.” The chapter “On the Bestowing Virtue,” to which Zarathustra refers with this revaluation, adds to its new understanding. A bestowing virtue is mild, not predatory; it is indifferent to utility; it takes away (old values) because it seeks to give; it originates in love; it “serves the meaning of the earth.” Such a “new virtue” is *itself* “power” and “a ruling thought.” As Nietzsche further suggests, it is a “river” that can be both “a blessing and a danger to adjacent dwellers”—it can quench their thirst, but it can also wash them away with it. Since all of this is discussed in the chapter in which Zarathustra first suggests the future emergence of a new people, it seems to me obvious that “the bestowing virtue” is what replaces conventional forms of political rule in those new peoples (Z I: “Bestowing Virtue”). Thus Nietzsche’s critique of rule in the modern state does not mean that his position is incompatible with political rule *per se*.

While much more could be said, I do hope that Nietzsche’s central insight about commanding has become clear: What commands or rules is not a human being seeking influence in the world, but rather a thought or a virtue. It is in the nature of such a virtue, insofar as it is powerful, that it finds itself shaping the world. This reading thus supports Maudemarie Clark’s judgment that “the vision of philosophers dominating people by

imposing their values on them, either directly or by means of a political elite" is "too silly for words."²⁰ Of course, in *BGE* Nietzsche famously does insist that "true philosophers" are always "commanders and legislators" (*BGE* 211). But by attending to the reevaluation of the ideas of "commanding" and "legislating" introduced in *Z*, we can see in what precise sense the imposition of values by a political philosopher elite is indeed silly: For Nietzsche, true commanding does not require or even allow for a forceful imposition on others. Commanding implies a giving, obeying, and loving relationship, even though for some it can be overpowering.

Whither "Great" Politics?

In this last section, I turn directly to the question of "great politics." While the term itself does not appear in *Z*, some commentators have taken the last lines from "On a Thousand and One Goals" to express the ambitions of Nietzsche's "great politics":

A thousand goals there have been until now, for there have been a thousand peoples. Only the fetters for the thousand necks are still missing, the one goal is missing. Humanity still has no goal. But tell me, my brothers: if humanity still lacks a goal, does it not also still lack—humanity itself?— (*Z* I: "Thousand and One Goals")

Laurence Lampert, for instance, suggests that we have here the "welding" of mankind into "a single people" by a "supreme act" of the overman that promises to deliver a "universal system of harmony or historic necessity" which they hitherto lacked. I agree with Lampert that it is unlikely that Nietzsche had a "return to ancestral ways" in mind when speaking of the possibility for a new people of creators. But it is even less likely that Nietzsche would conceive of such a new people as a forceful "welding" into one uniform mass of humanity, which is now bound to follow the prescriptions of "the superman."²¹ This is entirely incompatible with Nietzsche's emphasis on creating, self-overcoming, and self-legislating throughout the book, and with his reevaluation of what it means to command. It also goes against the notion of the self-selection of those who instantiate new peoples. As Nietzsche very clearly states, they are not welded together—they

constitute themselves. In a more subtle interpretation, Gooding-Williams suggests that “On a Thousand and One Goals” constitutes “what Nietzsche later calls great politics,” that is, “the advent of a new caste of a new-values-creating philosophers” for a “global politics,” but hastens to add that “nothing in [Nietzsche’s] *concept* of new-values creation rules out the possibility of a new-values creator who declined to dedicate himself to the aims of ‘great politics.’”²² Thus Gooding-Williams finds it necessary to separate what he takes Nietzsche to suggest here (a global great politics) from an alternative that might also follow from and presumably redeem Nietzsche’s own concepts.

Neither Lampert nor Gooding-Williams reflects on the ambiguity of Z’s formulation “if humanity still lacks a goal, does it not also still lack—humanity itself?” This formulation could have two implications: It could express Zarathustra’s longing for a “goal for humanity” so that, finally, humanity might come to exist. But it could also mean that, because there are thousands of peoples and thousands of different conceptions of good and evil and thus thousands of different goals, it simply does not make much sense to speak of “humanity” as one singular entity at all. It is not clear whether Nietzsche truly entertains the possibility that we might in the future come to exist as humanity for the first time, or whether his point is to critique the notion of humanity as implying a uniting, universal goal for diverse peoples. That humanity apparently “still lacks humanity” might simply mean that there is no humanity, that this notion as such is absurd and that that is acceptable, or good, or just something to which we have to be resigned. Goals, values, striving, creating—these could then exist only in locally specific forms.

But suppose Lampert and Gooding-Williams are right, and these lines indicate Zarathustra’s wish to give humanity a single goal: What could such a goal look like if it is to make sense of Z’s project of overcoming? A plausible answer might be that the thought of overcoming itself could be this “single goal.” After all, Zarathustra “commands” this “highest” thought to his friends, and he also suggests that it replace our traditional focus on collective self-preservation (Z I: “New Idol”; IV: “Higher Man”). But if this thought itself were the “unifying goal” for humanity, such a goal would again lack *concrete content*—it would not tell us what to do or what not to do, it would merely tell us to overcome what *is*. If our goal is to overcome ourselves continuously, then any concrete purpose, value, or goal whatsoever to emerge at a given historical moment will itself subsequently have

to be overcome. Thus to orient collective life toward this thought does not mean to establish, pace Lampert, a "universal system of harmony or historic necessity" among humankind.²³ On the contrary, overcoming depends on "contradictions" between the living; that is, it depends on disharmony and struggle (Z II: "Tarantulas").

As I have sought to show in this article, the politics that *Z* suggests is far from "great" in the sense of containing a program of "world domination" or "pan-European politics." The book concerns itself mostly with the transformation of individuals, with their self-overcoming and the creating of new values. The motivation for such transformation originates on the one hand in an insight into the nature of life itself as continuous overcoming; on the other hand, it responds to a felt social, political, and cultural crisis. *Z* does not propose a political program as a remedy to the problems it diagnoses: the kind of transformation Nietzsche advocates there is fundamentally incompatible with understanding politics as the implementation of a program for the future. As a precondition for developing new forms of community, it first of all focuses on the necessary *resistance* to the homogenizing effect of modern political culture, mass society, the modern state, and their calls for unquestioned obedience. It is "small" insofar as the book suggests that we *leave the state behind* us and that only then, based on a decentralized process of *individual* and *local* attempts at creating, new forms of collective life may emerge. Since such "new peoples" would be made up of creators, that is, of individuals who are capable of self-overcoming, their mode of lawgiving will be different from familiar models in political thought. The first goal of these new forms of collective life is not to preserve but rather to *overcome* humankind in whatever its present state might be. Accordingly, this is a society based on *experiments*, on the continuous contestation of existing values, and not on a "social contract." That is, it is agonist in character, it requires struggle and disagreement, and any values, norms, and laws within it are continuously up for transformation. It is a society of creators, who for Nietzsche form a *new nobility*—not a nobility by birth or wealth, but based on whether or not someone is willing and capable to overcome themselves and create values; finally, the character of *commanding* and *ruling* here is far from the familiar liberal models of political rule, and without coercion of others.

I conclude by raising a question regarding Nietzsche's *Z*, (great) politics, and Nietzsche's oeuvre as a whole. Those interested in Nietzsche's politics tend to read back into *Z* a notion of "great politics" derived from *BGE*

(e.g., Lampert, Gooding-Williams, and Detwiler). But if my understanding of *Z* as a reevaluation of the foundational categories of political philosophy is at all correct, then this approach is problematic. It would mean to read a book that seeks to revalue traditional categories of political thought—to create new concepts for new tasks and a transformed notion of politics itself—through the lens of a book that (mostly) comments on the political developments of its day and age. When Nietzsche himself reflects on the relation between the two texts, he insists that while *Z* constitutes the “yea-saying” part of his project, *BGE* should be understood as its “no-saying, no-doing” counterpart (*EH* “Books: *BGE*” 1). After the “squandering of goodness” of *Z*, with its “need to see into the distance,” Nietzsche in *BGE* is “forced to focus on things that are closest to it, the age, our surroundings” (*EH* “Books: *BGE*” 2). This suggests that both books relate to each other like lion and child in the process of overcoming: one of them critiques and rejects the present, while the other is concerned with creating; one remains bound by its present, while the other is capable of going beyond it. It is thus somewhat surprising that so many commentators seek to construe Nietzsche’s own, affirmative vision of politics by drawing on *BGE* more than his *Z*.²⁴ This might simply be because the former clearly operates within the idiom of political philosophy and international politics, while *Z*’s politics is both tentative and fragmentary. But if anything, would it not make more sense to draw on Nietzsche’s revaluations of political concepts in his *Z* to guide our reading of *BGE*, rather than proceeding the other way around?

NOTES

This article is the product of innumerable metamorphoses over several years. I have presented previous iterations to audiences at the Nietzsche-Society Annual Conference in Naumburg, at the University of Chicago’s Contemporary European Philosophy Workshop, and at the EU’s Legal and Political Theory and History of Ideas Workgroup in Florence. I am grateful for feedback received on these occasions, in particular from Richard Bellamy and Chiara Destri. Fabian Freyenhagen, Raymond Geuss, Jared Holley, and Martin Ruehl have read and commented on entire drafts, and each has helped improve this article immensely. Finally, I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers at *JNS* for their constructive feedback, as well as the editorial board.

1. This article refers to the following translations of Nietzsche’s work: *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

2002); *Ecce Homo*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

2. There is a general tendency in Nietzsche scholarship concerned with his politics either to read him as proposing some sort of "aristocratic" or elitist power politics (Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999]; Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990]; Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016]), or to approach him from the perspective of (generally, agonist or radical) democratic theory (William Connolly, *Political Theory & Modernity* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1989]; Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993]; Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988]). But if Nietzsche's point is precisely to revalue our political values and categories, such framings might not be very helpful. Another strand of commentators take Nietzsche's uneasy fit within the recognized traditions of political thought, and his refusal to comply with the methodological presuppositions taken as foundational to political philosophy, as grounds to argue that he simply cannot be described as a political philosopher at all. Bernard Williams, for instance, maintains that to have a "coherent politics" would require Nietzsche to develop "a coherent set of opinions about the ways in which power should be exercised in modern societies, with what limitations and to what ends" (*Shame and Necessity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008], 10). Williams is right: Nietzsche does not have a political philosophy or a coherent politics in either of these senses. But this does not mean that his *Z*, for instance, is *merely* a book on culture, values, ethics, or the like. Generally speaking, here I agree with Gary Shapiro, who insists that to place Nietzsche "within a spectrum of possible positions" that we assume to have been already mapped out, and to assimilate his political thought to "patterns and concepts" with which we are already familiar is likely to distort our understanding of Nietzsche's political philosophy (*Nietzsche's Earth: Great Events, Great Politics* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016], 2). *Z* contributes to political philosophy precisely insofar as the book undertakes revaluations of categories typically employed and positions standardly adopted by those writing within this discipline. We might compare the way in which the book as a whole "teaches" us about overcoming current categories of political philosophy to the way in which the main protagonist of the book, who goes by the name Zarathustra, "teaches" his disciples about self-overcoming. He refuses to give any clear instructions and insists that those who want to follow him must first learn to follow themselves; he seeks to inspire creativity rather than advance doctrine. Similarly, *Z* as a whole prepares the ground for and seeks to inspire us to change the way we think about and do politics, rather than outlining a theory of the "ideal state" or of legitimate power relations.

3. Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, 4.

4. See Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), ix–xv.

5. Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, expanded ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 7.

6. See Robert Pippin, “Nietzsche: Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” in *Introductions to Nietzsche*, ed. Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 168.

7. Stylistically, Nietzsche leaves open the question whether he has in mind people as bearers of the will to power. When speaking of relations of commanding and obeying, he contrasts “the smaller” and “the greater,” “the weaker” and “the more powerful” (*Z* II: “Self-Overcoming”). In German, the “the” Nietzsche uses here is decidedly *indeterminate*: while he could have referred to “*der Stärkere*,” “*der Schwächere*” (a strong or a weak *person*), he instead uses “*das*” in all cases, suggesting that the relation between strength and weakness might in fact be a relation between aspects and elements of the living, either *within* one particular living creature or *between* different living things (*KSA* 4, p. 148).

8. Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 65–70.

9. See Horst Hutter, *Shaping the Future: Nietzsche's New Regime of the Soul and its Ascetic Practices* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2006), 75–108.

10. Nietzsche traces the creation of the individual in his *GM*. There, it culminates in the vision of a “sovereign individual” as the “ripest fruit” to grow out of this creative process (*GM* II:2).

11. Daniel Conway suggests that Nietzsche's first political question may be summarized as one of “political legislation: *what ought humankind to become?*” (*Nietzsche and the Political* [London: Routledge, 1997], 3). He does not cite the formulation of this thought in *Z*, and thus misses an important detail: rather than asking *what* humankind ought to become, Nietzsche asks *how* it might be overcome in its present state. Taking the notion of self-overcoming seriously means that it becomes impossible to determine *what* humankind should become, because the “what” is bound to change with the circumstances.

12. This is reflected in the subtitle of *Z*: it is “A Book for All and None.”

13. As Vanessa Lemm convincingly argues, Nietzsche's understanding of nobility contributes not to a rehabilitation or renewal of traditional notions of aristocracy, but to answering the question of “how not to be governed” (“Nietzsche, Aristocracy, and Nondomination,” in *How Not to Be Governed: Readings and Interpretations from a Critical Anarchist Left*, ed. J. Casas and J. Martel [Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011], 83–102).

14. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, 48.

15. See Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

16. Of course, Zarathustra did not seek to convince them to do any particular thing; he merely tried to convince them to examine themselves and their own

lives, and see whether they might not live a more flourishing life if they changed themselves—thus to inspire an agonist and creative spirit in them.

17. Vanessa Lemm, "Nietzsche's Great Politics of the Event," in *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, ed. K. Ansell-Pearson (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 179.

18. Nietzsche summarizes the kind of ruling or dominating he envisions (and the kind he rejects) in an unpublished note, written about a year before he began taking notes for *Z*. That note aligns well with the different approaches to ruling or commanding in "The stillest Hour" as well as with Nietzsche's critique of the lust for political power in his depiction of the modern state: "I have found strength where one does not look for it: in simple, mild, and pleasant people, without the least desire to rule—and, conversely, the desire to rule has often appeared to me a sign of inward weakness: they fear their own slave soul and shroud it in a royal cloak (in the end, they still become the slaves of their followers, their fame, etc.). The powerful natures *dominate*, it is a necessity, they do not lift one finger. Even if, during their lifetime, they bury themselves in a garden house!" (*KSA* 9, 6 [206], p. 252; trans. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013], 252).

19. This is the reaction of the people on the marketplace whom Zarathustra encounters in the beginning of the book. They rejoice at his characterization of the last human being, meant by him as a warning: "Who wants to rule anymore? Who wants to obey anymore? Both are too burdensome" (*Z I: Prologue*).

20. Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 168.

21. Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching. An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 63–64.

22. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, 143.

23. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, 63.

24. See for instance Drochon, who maintains that it is only in *BGE* that Nietzsche "transformed *grosse Politik* into his own notion of what great politics should truly amount to" (*Nietzsche's Great Politics*, 155). He goes so far as to actively ignore Nietzsche's explicit suggestion, quoted in the epigraph to this article, that Zarathustra serves as a *model* for great politics. Drochon claims that we find in the second aphorism from *EH* "Destiny" "simply a quote from Zarathustra" (*Nietzsche's Great Politics*, 165).