

Power and Purity

The Unholy Marriage That Spawned
America's Social Justice Warriors

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INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche's Puritan Warriors

During the immigration debate in the summer of 2018, Congresswoman Maxine Waters of California told a crowd:

For these members of [President Trump's] Cabinet who remain and try to defend him, they're not going to be able to go to a restaurant, they're not going to be able to stop at a gas station, they're not going to be able to shop at a department store. The people are going to turn on them, they're going to protest, they're going to absolutely harass them.... If you see anybody from that Cabinet in a restaurant, in a department store, at a gasoline station, you get out and you create a crowd and you push back on them! And you tell them that they are not welcome, anymore, anywhere.¹

In other words, a member of the U.S. Congress openly advocated the harassment of political opponents. While some tried to distance themselves from this rhetoric, others took up the cudgel. Both elected officials and high-profile staffers who dared to oppose the left were harassed in public places by hostile and threatening activists, who were absolutely convinced of the righteousness of their cause.

The contentious debate over Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation as a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court provoked similar expressions of fury on the left. Annie Shields of *The Nation* tweeted, "I'm starting a National @DemSocialists working group to follow [Senator] Jeff Flake around to every restaurant, Café, store, etc. he goes to for the rest of his life and yell at him." She followed up with, "If they knew they would get yelled at for the rest of their lives maybe they would act right."

Professor Christine Fair of Georgetown University's security studies program contributed her own incisive analysis with this tweet:

Look at this chorus of entitled white men justifying a serial rapist's arrogated entitlement. All of them deserve miserable deaths while feminists laugh as they take their last gasps. Bonus: we castrate their corpses and feed them to swine? Yes.

Not to be outdone, the activist Alexis Grenell began a *New York Times* column titled "White Women, Come Get Your People"² with this sanguinary sentence:

After a confirmation process where women all but slit their wrists, letting their stories of sexual trauma run like rivers of blood through the Capitol, the Senate still voted to confirm Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court.

She continued with a racially-charged condemnation of Judge Kavanaugh's supporters:

These women are gender traitors. . . . We're talking about white women. The same 53 percent who put their racial privilege ahead of their second-class gender status in 2016 by voting to uphold a system that values only their whiteness, just as they have for decades.

Grenell's main target was white women who refused to jump on the "destroy Brett Kavanaugh" train. Aghast at the irrational evil of women who demanded corroborating evidence of sexual assault, she wrote:

The people who scare me the most are the mothers, sisters and wives of those young men, because my stupid uterus still holds out some insane hope of solidarity.

In case you missed it, Ms. Grenell and her hopeful uterus are angry. Very angry. Her ire was focused on Senator Susan Collins, who happens to be a woman (but is, alas, also white) and cast a crucial vote in favor of Kavanaugh's confirmation. Here's Grenell:

Meanwhile, Senator Collins subjected us to a slow funeral dirge about due process and some other nonsense I couldn't even hear through my rage headache as she announced on Friday she would vote to confirm Judge Kavanaugh. Her mostly male colleagues applauded her.

It should be noted that Ms. Grenell is herself a white woman, but she is clearly woke to the unfortunate realities of her identity.

What's going on? While no faction has a monopoly on extremism, a certain kind of behavior and rhetoric has become a hallmark of the left, especially among the so-called "elites," who fancy themselves the vanguard of the revolution against the straight, white patriarchy. Not convinced? Imagine

a male professor's fantasizing aloud about the slow deaths of his female opponents, complete with the mutilation of their bodies. Does he keep his job? (He shouldn't.) Or imagine the *New York Times*' publishing an op-ed piece in favor of white nationalism or the subjugation of women or any other atrocious notion commonly attributed to everyone on the right. It is inconceivable. Although some on the right hold deplorable ideas, they are consigned to the fringes, while the radicals on the left enjoy positions of cultural and political influence.

The ascendancy of radicalism on the left is a threat to American society. All who believe that rational debate is the best means of identifying and achieving the common good—and this includes old-school liberals—must take this new radicalism seriously. These activists are willing to take extreme measures to achieve the paradise of justice and equality of which they dream.



Something is clearly wrong. Americans are on edge. Political differences have hardened. Discourse has become crasser, positions more extreme. Political opponents are seen as enemies to be destroyed rather than fellow citizens and neighbors. Has it always been this way? To be sure, politics has always been a contact sport. Political differences have frequently provoked sharp words, occasionally accompanied by

the wielding of sharp objects. But today our political differences have spilled over into daily life, spreading rancor and crowding out the common decencies that keep civil society civil. The American Dream, an image that has loomed large in the past, seems to be fading. The very definition of citizenship is being questioned. What does it mean to be an American? What binds us together? A common creed? A common history? A common religion or culture? None of these seems adequate today. And it goes without saying that mutual disdain is an inadequate binding agent.

Various thinkers have attempted to make sense of our condition. Some blame it on the 1960s—everything was fine until the Beatles showed up, Vietnam went down, and Woodstock got crazy. But that explanation is superficial. After all, if the 1960s brought about the decline of society, what brought about the 1960s? Ideas have antecedents as well as consequences. Perhaps the New Deal is the root of the problem. Or the despair and alienation precipitated by World War I. Or maybe we need to blame progressivism. Or the Industrial Revolution. Or slavery and the oppression of women. Perhaps the West was built on the systematic oppression of minorities by a white patriarchy that will release its hold on power only if compelled to do so.

Power may in fact lie at the heart of the story or at least be an indispensable feature of the tale. It was Friedrich Nietzsche—the great prophet of our age—who asserted that all of life is

merely the will to power. If so, perhaps we should not be surprised that the patriarchy, if there is such a thing, asserts itself. Nor should we be surprised that the oppressed assert their own power by attempting to overthrow the oppressor and establish new ideals and a new power structure.

There is, of course, another way to reckon with the facts. Perhaps the West in general, and America in particular, has lost the courage of its convictions. No society can long survive if it no longer believes it deserves to survive. Could it be that the greatness of the West is rooted in a commitment to truths now deemed untenable by many? I use the term “greatness” realizing that many will scoff, but their scoffing only demonstrates what I am asserting: We have lost faith in the very ideals that made us who we were. We are attacking our roots. But if the branches attack the roots, the tree will be devastated. Branches, despite their noble intentions and self-righteousness, do not fare well in such an enterprise.

What ideals formed America? What notions have shaped the way Americans think about the world and themselves? Alexis de Tocqueville noted that if you want to understand a nation, you need to consider its infancy, its formative moment: “Peoples always feel [the effects] of their origins. The circumstances that accompanied their birth and served to develop them influence the entire course of the rest of their lives.”³ And America, according to Tocqueville, is at its heart a Puritan nation. Even though most of us have long ago abandoned

any conscious affiliation with Puritanism—and perhaps vehemently deny any sympathy with it—we have inherited habits, ideas, and institutions deeply influenced by our Puritan past.

To put it more broadly, America continues to be profoundly shaped by its Christian heritage. Even those who most emphatically reject any allegiance to Christianity remain deeply implicated. The language of rights and the ideals of equality and democracy that pervade our political discourse are unimaginable apart from Christianity. Nietzsche understood this, and he was deeply dismayed by the nearly indelible fingerprints of Christianity on the Western consciousness.

There is a dramatic difference between a pre-Christian society and a post-Christian one. Pre-Christian pagan societies look radically different from societies formed by a prolonged encounter with Christianity. It is not easy to shake off the lingering effects of a Christian past. The residue is nearly impossible to eradicate. Although citizens may deny the faith, ignore the churches, and make every effort to ignore the social and moral teachings of the church, the fact remains that we live in a Christ-haunted culture. Our institutions, our language, our habits, the very shape of our consciousness, are Christian. Even in denying the faith, Americans in many respects see the world through Christian eyes.

Puritanism, of course, has become a term of disparagement, in part because of an increasing suspicion of Christianity and in part because of a distorted view of Puritanism going

back at least to the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Puritans had a keen sense of human sinfulness and were deeply concerned with fostering social and political institutions that encouraged virtue and discouraged vice. They sought personal holiness made possible by God's unmerited grace and a life of spiritual discipline. As fidelity to orthodox Christianity has waned, however, concepts such as sin and holiness have become distorted. Our culture retains a profound sense of sin, but secular progressivism limits it to a strong awareness of the sins of *others*—especially the perceived sins of institutions and social structures—losing the sense of original sin that infects every human being. Purity, therefore, can be attained or restored if compromised institutions and the persons complicit in those institutions are cleansed or, if necessary, eradicated. Holiness becomes a purely human endeavor. There is no need for divine grace, so there is no need for Christ. Divine redemption is replaced by human effort, forgiveness of sins by a purely human demand for punishment that the righteous can mete out on those who sin against the new secular but thoroughly moralistic order.

In this book I will argue that the unrest and sense of impending crisis we all feel are the result of a strange fusion of two seemingly incompatible ideas. Today's social justice warriors of the radical left embody a toxic combination of the Nietzschean will to power and Puritan moralism, secularized but no less rigorous than its earlier religious

instantiation. Some will be inclined to dismiss this account as a typically academic effort to blame social and political problems on the musings (and often mutterings) of obscure thinkers few have read and even fewer have understood. Fair enough. But bear with me. *Ideas* matter. *Ideals* matter. We are all moved by our deepest beliefs, even if we haven't taken the time to articulate them—indeed, even if we don't recognize them. Consider, for example, the ideal of diversity. Most people today take it for granted that diversity is good, more diversity is better, and anything that thwarts the expansion of diversity is evil. This is an axiom of our age. But is it true? Even asking the question smacks of heresy, and indeed it is a heresy against the reigning orthodoxy.

But hold on, you might say, words like “heresy” and “orthodoxy” are religious terms. We dispensed with that outdated mode of thinking long ago when we disavowed our embarrassing Puritan past. Did we? Perhaps the story is more complicated than that. Perhaps we have abjured fidelity to ancient religious beliefs only to commit ourselves with equal ardor to a new faith, a new set of ideals, a new orthodoxy. Like those religious enthusiasts of old, our cultural leaders know that heretics are dangerous and that orthodoxy must be guarded by the faithful.

At the same time, how are we influenced by Nietzsche? Most Americans have not read him and might not even know how to pronounce his name, let alone spell it. Is this an

indication of the failure of his ideas? Not necessarily. I want to suggest that Nietzsche's ideas have so permeated our world that we generally don't even notice them. A victorious ideology is as invisible as it is ubiquitous. It loses its aura of novelty and becomes the furniture of our minds. Some of Nietzsche's basic ideas have become just that. And they have been combined with certain Christian ingredients with one notable omission—Christ.

Of course, I have admittedly overstated the case in an important way. Not everyone has bought in to the reigning orthodoxy. There are still some on the outside who resist what many think is inevitable, who pit themselves against “the logic of history,” as the enthusiasts like to put it. But even these holdouts have at times adopted the strategy and rhetoric of their opponents, not out of calculation (“If you can't beat 'em, join 'em”) but because Nietzsche's thought has permeated virtually every quarter of our culture. Even those who think they oppose the radical ideology of the left too often find themselves embracing at least some of its tactics, terminology, and assumptions. This should comfort the partisans of this brave new ideology, for when your opponents have adopted your underlying assumptions, victory is all but guaranteed.

This book attempts to make sense of our current malaise, especially the impulses driving identity politics and the social justice warriors of the radical left. For Nietzsche, life is

nothing but the will to power: the attempt to assert oneself against others who are motivated by the same headlong drive. The Puritan is motivated by a quest for moral and political purity. By analyzing this odd combination, we can understand what is at stake and how to respond.



First, however, it might be helpful to take a brief look at Nietzsche's life. It is tempting to say that, above all else, he was a lonely man. Friedrich Nietzsche was born in 1844 in Röcken, Germany. He described his father, a Lutheran pastor, as "the perfect picture of a country parson! Endowed with a good spirit and heart, adorned with all the virtues of a Christian, he led a quiet and simple but happy life."⁴ Years later, Nietzsche wrote, "I consider it a great privilege to have had a father like this: it even seems to me that this explains any other privileges I might have—even apart from life."⁵ Nietzsche was five years old when his father died. Six months later, his two-year-old brother died. The family, reduced to Friedrich, his mother, his younger sister, and two unmarried aunts, left Röcken and settled in Naumburg, living on savings and a modest pension.

Nietzsche was a sensitive and studious child. His fellow students called him "the little pastor" because, as his sister later wrote, he could recite "biblical verses and spiritual songs" with

such emotion that "you almost had to cry." At the age of twelve he wrote his first philosophical essay, "On the Origin of Evil." He loved music, became proficient at the piano, and filled notebooks with his poetry. Nevertheless, he was aware of a profound absence. "By and large, I am in charge of my own upbringing. . . . I have had to do without the strict and senior guidance of a male intellect."⁶

A brilliant student, Nietzsche was awarded a place in an elite boarding school, where he received a superb education in the classics. He enrolled at the University of Bonn, intending to study theology, but his interests soon turned decisively toward philology—the study of language.

In 1865, while visiting Cologne, he asked a porter to take him to a restaurant. As a joke, the porter instead took him to a brothel. Nietzsche later recalled, "I found myself suddenly surrounded by half a dozen apparitions in tinsel and gauze, looking at me expectantly. For a short space of time I was speechless." Nietzsche touched nothing but the piano, an indication of the powerful pull music had on him. "I made instinctively for the piano as being the only soulful thing present. I struck a few chords, which freed me from my paralysis, and I escaped."⁷ Some, including the novelist Thomas Mann, speculate that he later returned and touched more than the piano, in the process contracting syphilis. The evidence that he returned is inconclusive, however, and scholars debate whether he suffered from syphilis.

When he returned home for the Easter holidays in 1865, Nietzsche caused his mother much grief by expressing an unwillingness to attend church, and he refused to take communion on Easter Sunday. Nietzsche's younger sister, Elisabeth, who admired her brother almost to the point of worship, was powerfully influenced by his wavering faith. She sought out pastoral counsel but found it unsatisfying.⁸

Nietzsche spent a year in military service, during which he was injured in a riding accident. Continuing his studies, he so impressed his professors that he was recommended for a professorial position at the University of Basel even before he completed his dissertation. A tireless worker, energetic teacher, and prolific writer, he was nevertheless physically weak. Declining health forced him to resign from the university in 1879. He was granted a small pension that afforded some independence but few luxuries. A biographer provides a vivid description of Nietzsche's life after the university:

He is shy, about five-foot-eight, but a little stooped, almost blind, reserved, unaffected, and especially polite; he lives in modest boarding houses in Sils Maria, Nizza, Mentone, Rome, Turin. This is how Stefan Zweig brings him to life for us: "Carefully the myopic man sits down to a table; carefully, the man with the sensitive stomach considers every item on the menu: whether the tea is not too strong, the food

not spiced too much, for every mistake in his diet upsets his sensitive digestion, and every transgression in his nourishment wreaks havoc with his quivering nerves for days. No glass of wine, no glass of beer, no alcohol, no coffee at his place, no cigar and no cigarette after his meal, nothing that stimulates, refreshes, or rests him: only the short meager meal and a little urbane, unprofound conversation in a soft voice with an occasional neighbor (as a man speaks who for years has been unused to talking and is afraid of being asked too much).

"And up again into the small, narrow, modest, coldly furnished *chambre garnie*, where innumerable notes, pages, writings, and proofs are piled up on the table, but no flower, no decoration, scarcely a book and rarely a letter. Back in a corner, a heavy and graceless wooden trunk, his only possession, with the two shirts and the other worn suit. Otherwise only books and manuscripts, and on a tray innumerable bottles and jars and potions: against the migraines, which often render him all but senseless for hours, against his stomach cramps, against spasmodic vomiting, against the slothful intestines, and above all the dreadful sedatives against his insomnia, chloral hydrate and Veronal. A frightful arsenal of poisons and drugs, yet the

only helpers in the empty silence of this strange room in which he never rests except in brief and artificially conquered sleep. Wrapped in his overcoat and a woolen scarf (for the wretched stove smokes only and does not give warmth), his fingers freezing, his double glasses pressed close to the paper, his hurried hand writes for hours—words the dim eyes can hardly decipher. For hours he sits like this and writes until his eyes burn.”⁹

For ten years after his resignation, Nietzsche wandered Europe, ill and ill at ease, yet producing a steady stream of books, notable for their provocative arguments and an energetic and idiosyncratic style. Titles include *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Genealogy of Morals*, *The Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Anti-Christ*.

Perhaps it is little wonder that a man who declared that all of life is the will to power found his greatest satisfaction and delight in improvising on the piano. The freedom, creativity, and power of the artist is a theme running throughout Nietzsche’s work. This is not limited to the creation of art, as such, for the artistic impulse governs all who are powerful, including those who command: “Their work is an instinctive creation and imposition of forms; they are the most involuntary, unconscious artists there are—wherever they appear something new soon arises.... [T]hey appear as lightning

appears, too terrible, too sudden, too convincing, too ‘different’ even to be hated” (GM, II, 17). Lightning, creativity, power, freedom—these go together. Once after hiking near Leipzig, he described a storm: “How different the lightning, the storm, the hail, free powers, without ethics! How happy, how powerful they are, pure will, untarnished by intellect!”¹⁰ When he describes the Overman, Nietzsche employs the image of lightning: “Behold, I teach you the overman: he is this lightning, he is this frenzy” (Z, prologue, 3).

At times, Nietzsche’s work seemed to produce adverse effects in his own psyche: “My doctrine that the world of good and evil is only an apparent and perspectivist world is such an innovation that sometimes I lose my ability to hear or see.”¹¹ He proposed to two women, both of whom declined. He repeatedly wrote of his solitude, noting in 1888 that “I have gradually broken off almost all contact with other people, out of disgust that they take me to be something other than I am.”¹² In the same year, he wrote, “The fact is ‘that I am so sad’; the problem ‘I don’t know what that means.’”¹³

In 1889, Nietzsche collapsed in the streets of Turin. He never recovered. He spent the next decade in the care of others, physically ill and mentally insane. He died in 1900 unaware of his growing fame and the spreading influence of his writing.

What follows is an exploration of a curious union of Nietzschean thought and Puritan moralism in our central

cultural institutions and practices. As we go, it will become increasingly evident that the ideas of Nietzsche have touched, and in some instances completely transformed, certain aspects of our society. Furthermore, we shall see how those ideas have been incoherently combined with Puritan moralism to produce in their adherents a self-righteous conviction of their own moral purity. This unholy marriage of power and purity has given birth to the social justice movement led by a peculiar breed that we might call Nietzsche's Puritan Warriors.

CHAPTER 1

My Truth, Your Truth, God and Values

Today people often refer to truth as if it were a personal possession. "That's my truth," someone might say. Or, "That's your truth, but it's just not true for me." This is a curious way of speaking if truth is, well, *true*.

It was once believed that the world existed in a certain way, that men could know something about that world, and that to know correctly was to know what was true. Gravity, for instance, is real. If you jump from a high building, you will learn some hard truths about the world. Or at least one. The world was once thought to contain moral truths as well, which were ignored only at our peril. To murder is wrong, and such an act merits moral guilt and deserves punishment. Likewise lying, stealing, and sassing your parents. Truth, in this older sense, was understood as a feature of reality, and our minds were capable of grasping, albeit imperfectly, various aspects of that reality.

Something, however, has changed. How did we get to a point where “truth” is spoken of as nothing more than a personal preference—akin, say, to liking chocolate ice cream more than vanilla? That’s my truth. Vanilla might be your truth, and if so, that’s fine. We’re cool. We’re just different. Of course, it’s much easier to play this game with “abstract” moral categories than with physical reality. If you don’t subscribe to “my truth” about the perils of stepping in front of a moving bus, the disadvantages of “your truth” may eventually make themselves tragically felt.

We must admit up front, though, that plenty of life choices are, in fact, rooted in personal preferences. I may order steak, while you order kale. I may become a teacher, and you go to medical school. In both cases, our differing preferences are obvious, but it is not readily apparent that either choice is morally better. Many choices we make are like this, for in a world of alternatives, we are often confronted with more than one good option.

But there are limits. While I can choose to be a teacher or a doctor, I cannot choose to be a squirrel. I cannot choose to be an Eskimo or a woman. “But wait,” someone might object, “there are people who identify as creatures other than human—they call themselves ‘otherkin.’” And some men declare themselves women (and vice versa), and any number of physicians will obligingly prescribe hormones and snip away the “inconvenient truth” in an effort to deny what in an

earlier age was regarded as obvious. Still, our power to choose extends only so far. At the genetic level, there is no such thing as transgender.¹ And the NAACP of Spokane refused to pretend that its one-time president Rachel Dolezal, a white woman, was black, however intensely she “identified” as such.



What has all this to do with Nietzsche? Plenty. And it is necessary to grasp the scope and audacity of Nietzsche’s project to understand how pertinent he is today—both as a prophet of our time and as a critic of our society.

Nietzsche famously, or perhaps infamously, declared the death of God. Of course, he did not mean that literally. He was not suggesting that God ate a bad date, got sick, and keeled over. Nor was he saying that God died of old age, although that is closer to what he meant. Nietzsche meant that the *idea* of God was no longer plausible. But he was not content simply to drop his bombshell and walk away. Nietzsche was concerned with the aftermath. He understood better than most that the “death” of God would reverberate throughout Western culture. Philosophy, morality, politics, history, language, religious practice, psychology—nothing was immune, and everything would have to be rebuilt from the ground up.

What Nietzsche grasped, as many of his more timid contemporaries did not, was that men could not cease to believe

in God and continue living as if nothing had changed. For instance, you cannot declare the death of God and continue to assert traditional moral categories, insisting that people observe the Golden Rule or some similar principle of benevolence or fellow feeling. As Nietzsche so provocatively put it, the value of values must be reconsidered. He sought to get “beyond good and evil” (the title of one of his books), for good and evil are rooted in assumptions about the nature of reality. Concepts like guilt, shame, and resentment are merely the hoary remnants of an obsolete system.

Before Nietzsche, moral philosophers had hotly debated the rational justification for moral duties. Some based their claims on divine commands, some on natural law, others more recently on rationality itself or the so-called “greatest happiness” principle. Nietzsche wanted to get at something more fundamental. Rather than bicker about how to rationally justify basic moral principles that everyone agrees on—don’t murder, don’t steal, tell the truth, and so forth—Nietzsche asked a more disquieting question: Why affirm these age-old values at all? Perhaps they have been fabricated over time by those seeking to assert their own wills over others. Perhaps the language of the “common good” and “love thy neighbor” are merely ways to neuter the powerful by getting them to voluntarily suppress their desires so they don’t break out against the weak and timid. Perhaps the categories of good and evil represent the greatest fraud in history, a fraud made

possible by the now defunct belief in an all-powerful deity who could coerce us to do his will with the threat of eternal punishment in the next life and a persistent sense of guilt in this one.

Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, along with Christian thinkers who came later, held that the cosmos was a morally configured reality and that human beings could flourish only if their lives conformed to reality. To act justly meant to act in a way that corresponded to a reality that was “outside” of the self, a reality that existed prior to human will. The will, therefore, was subordinate to (or obliged by) a reality it did not create. Nature or God preceded human will, and to act contrary to nature or God was to condemn oneself to frustration and unhappiness. Flourishing, happiness, and health were inextricably tied to a willing submission to knowable standards not devised by human will. Without God, however, the cosmos has no intrinsic moral structure. There are no moral conditions for happiness or flourishing, only a chaotic array of individuals and natural systems that “happened.” Submission to a “higher” power or to an “outside” moral standard, then, is an unreasonable concession to an imaginary “reality,” something akin to submitting to the purple unicorn in the sky—a charming game for children, perhaps, but something of an embarrassment for adults.

What about the notion of truth itself? To answer that question, we need to go back to the fourth century B.C. Plato,

according to Nietzsche, is responsible for establishing "truth" as the West's highest ideal. He argued that there exists a realm of "pure spirit," a reality beyond the merely physical and of which the physical is at best a dim reflection. A feature of this realm of pure spirit, taught Plato, is "the good," a reality "beyond being" that gives life and meaning to all that exists. For Plato, the *most real* is also the *most good*. When a man dies, his soul, freed from its physical prison, becomes fully what it is capable of becoming. Nietzsche declared that "Christianity is Platonism for 'the people'" (BGE, Preface). His criticisms of Platonism, therefore, apply equally to Christianity. Both, he charged, despise the body and this world. Both posit a perfect Good to which men ought to submit. And both find solace in a world of spirit that transcends bodily existence and even temporality itself.

Nietzsche believed that the illusory Platonic and Christian construct was breaking down, allowing people to begin "breathing freely again." In his view, God and truth go hand in hand, and on this point he agreed with Plato and the Christians. The Greeks and later the Christians thought of truth as somehow participating in the divine. Heraclitus of Ephesus (d. 475 B.C.) posited that all things come to be in accordance with the "logos," which for him was a general principle by which the world is governed. He identified it with fire. When Saint John called Christ the *logos*, he was appropriating this image and explicitly identifying Christ with the divine. *Logos*

means "word," but it also can mean "rational principle," suggesting that Christ represents a sort of divine order that can be articulated through language.

If truth exists, and if it is inextricably tied to theism, then a commitment to the notion of truth must entail a commitment to theism. We will be "under the thumb" of a divine will, obliged to submit to a cosmos ordered and superintended by God. To be committed to the idea of truth, then, is to be bound, limited, and constrained. To be "free spirits"—a term Nietzsche used regularly—we must extricate ourselves from that increasingly far-fetched notion of God. It is here, Nietzsche believed, that twenty centuries of "training in truthfulness" will actually turn the tables on theism, for belief in God has become a problem, and those committed to the idea of truth will be forced to face the problem head on. They will have to recognize that God is, in fact, dead. At this point, however, their commitment to truth will turn on itself with a vengeance, for once God is jettisoned, the very notion of truth must be called into question. No longer will we speak of truth, dragging along with it the musty implication of theism. Now we can see more clearly that life is not the will to truth but the will to power. Faith in God is replaced with faith in man, and the will to truth is replaced by the will to power.

It is important to recognize that Christianity was Nietzsche's central target. All of his work can be understood as an attempt to destroy the faith of his father. The psychology

of his vendetta would be an interesting study,² but for now we need to focus on his arguments. In perhaps the most famous of all his declarations of God's death—his parable *The Madman*—Nietzsche presents a Diogenes-like character who lights a lantern, runs to the marketplace, and declares to the astonished onlookers that God is dead. He goes further. God is dead, and “we have killed him.”

Like Nietzsche, this madman realizes that one cannot kill God and continue on as if nothing had changed. Acknowledging the enormous consequences of this news and the stunning hubris necessary to bring it to light, Nietzsche asks, “Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?” Both images suggest a loss of orientation. Wiping away the horizon makes traditional navigation—using a sextant fixed on a star and the horizon—impossible. When the earth is unchained from the sun, the days and seasons cannot be marked. Where will we go? How can we navigate? Are there no fixed stars? No fixed morality? No heaven? No hell? No justice? No good? No evil? How can we bear this new world free from the shackles of God? How can we reorient ourselves to this new reality? “What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?” (GS, 125).

Yet hope remains. Perhaps not for the weak, who find comfort and security in the cocoon of theistic belief. But for the strong and free spirits, this turn of events represents “a new dawn” with new possibilities. Nevertheless, Nietzsche understood that the full implications of the death of God would take time to reveal themselves and to make their way down to the very marrow of Western society, steeped so long in Christianity.

Nietzsche especially despised nineteenth-century moral philosophers, both Kantians and utilitarians, who sought to preserve the basic outlines of traditional morality—don't murder, don't lie, don't steal, seek justice, and so forth—but at the same time eliminated the concept of God or divine law from their respective ethical frameworks. Nietzsche recognized more clearly than most that if we rid the world of God we also dispense with Christian morality—that is to say, European morality. The two stand or fall together.

If Nietzsche was right about that, what becomes of traditional morality? If there are “no moral facts,” (TI, p. 38) then how do we account for the ubiquity and power of moral claims and demands? To answer this obvious question, Nietzsche embarked on his “genealogical” project, presenting a purely naturalistic account of the development of morality. As we saw, Nietzsche thought the will to truth must ultimately be subsumed into the will to power. Likewise, the will to morality must be understood in light of this more fundamental urge.

A philologist, Nietzsche began by uncovering what might be called the primordial significance of basic moral terms. Initially, “good” referred not to a moral category but to a state of health, strength, and vitality, associated with what he called the “knightly-aristocratic” class. “Bad,” not surprisingly, was merely the opposite, associated with a plebian or common social class. The category of “evil” did not exist. It had to be invented. But who would come up with such a notion? What could be their motive? The answer is obvious if we are willing to follow Nietzsche. The weak invented “evil,” and their motive was the will to power, which is at the heart of all motives. Not content to wallow in their weakness, they sought to reverse their fortunes and by an act of philosophical jujitsu gain power over the powerful. This they achieved by what Nietzsche called “the transvaluation of values,” an account we can admire at least for its creativity.

The knightly-aristocratic class was confronted by the “priestly” class, which, lacking physical vitality, sought subversive ways to assert its power. The priests invented the notion of guilt and insisted that qualities that had hitherto been seen as good—power, strength, nobility, wealth—were “evil.” Good became identified with the very qualities that were once seen as bad: weakness, poverty, suffering, and so forth. This transvaluation of values is clearly seen in the teachings of Jesus: blessed are the meek, the poor, the suffering, the persecuted. The very qualities Nietzsche called bad and which

are clearly undesirable from a particular vantage point, Christ associated with blessing.

Of course, Jesus was a Jew, a member of the “priestly people” that had for centuries been oppressed by the strong and had in those years built up a profound resentment against its oppressors. This priestly people did the unthinkable: it discovered a way to triumph over its adversaries, not by force but by audacious cleverness, devising a means by which its masters would willingly submit to its dark and unnatural desires. How? By rejecting Jesus and crucifying him, the Jews set the stage for the Roman conversion to Christianity. The triumph of this religion of the priestly class and of the weak, born of resentment, gave the West its moral categories and demands along with a profound sense of guilt that could be alleviated only by the ministrations of the church, the institution of priests that promises forgiveness through the body and blood of a crucified God.

The victory of Christianity produced the victory of the slaves and priests—both painfully impotent—who through malevolent treachery convinced the powerful to submit to the ideals of Christianity. Perhaps they weren’t as impotent as they appeared.

Nietzsche saw Christianity and Christian morality as the mortal enemies of life itself. The weak have invented such concepts as God, the soul, truth, salvation, and free will, each of which undermines health and strength (EH, 789–90). As he

put it, “Dionysus versus the ‘Crucified’: there you have the antithesis” (WP, 1052). The former represents life, vitality, destruction, and creation. The latter represents an innocent suffering to achieve salvation in another world. One is of this world. The other is not. One is healthy and strong and can tolerate suffering for the sake of greatness. The other is sick and weak and suffers at the hands of the strong.

For centuries, the priestly class—the Jews and therefore the Christians—found a way to exercise its will to power and thereby subjugate the powerful under the guise of guilt and the promise of redemption. Guilty men could be restored to a right relationship with God through the intercession of the church. With the ascendancy of Christianity, the transvaluation of values was complete. By the nineteenth century, however, belief in God had begun to falter. The facade of Christian morality began to crumble. When Nietzsche made so bold as to declare the death of God, he was giving voice to a belief that had become increasingly common. Nietzsche, however, did something that his contemporaries were unwilling to do: He argued that the death of God forces a reconsideration of virtually all categories of life, including, as we have seen, morality and even truth itself. If there is no God, everything must change.

Protest Trumps Debate

Intimidation works. We see this in the corporate world when employees are pressed to conform to standards of “progress” and “tolerance” and when political agendas are imposed on a city or state with the threat that a corporation will withdraw its business from that community if a certain law is not passed or rescinded. The same pressures abound in the academy, where the vast majority of professors call themselves liberal, but serious engagement with people holding substantially different viewpoints is increasingly rare. If a speaker’s views do not line up with the current orthodoxy, he or she is shunned, shouted down, or driven away. The same tactics are common in the political arena. Consider the following examples.

In the spring of 2017, Charles Murray, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, attempted to give a lecture at Middlebury College in Vermont. The event was shut down

by a mob—mostly students of that august liberal arts institution—whose disorderly protest sent a professor to the hospital.¹ Similar mob censorship is taking place at elite and not so elite universities around the country.

In July 2017, James Damore, a Google engineer, used his company's internal discussion board to argue that Google's culture had become an "echo chamber," that dissent from what Damore considered a liberal bias was not allowed, and that the disparity in the numbers of male and female programmers might reflect a difference of interests. Damore was accused of fomenting a hostile work environment and was fired.²

In June 2018, a group of protesters accosted the attorney general of Florida, Pam Bondi, outside a Tampa cinema, questioning her about health care policy and immigration. A video of the confrontation showed several people shouting at her as she left the theater, escorted by law enforcement officers. Fittingly enough, she had just watched a documentary called *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* about public television's Fred Rogers. Mr. Rogers would not be pleased.

Again in 2018, during a contentious "debate" about immigration policies, the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Kirstjen Nielsen, eating dinner in a D.C. restaurant, was surrounded by protestors shouting their disagreement about the administration's policies. She was forced to leave. Protestors also positioned themselves in front of her house, pacing with placards and angrily shouting their demands.

During the same immigration "debate," the White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, went to a restaurant in Lexington, Virginia. After her party was seated and had placed their orders, the owner asked them to leave, citing her strong disagreement with President Trump's policies.

A few days later, Congresswoman Maxine Waters delivered her infamous exhortation to harass members of the Trump administration at restaurants, department stores, and filling stations. To their credit, the Democratic congressional leaders—Senator Charles Schumer and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi—condemned Waters's remarks, but activists on the left have followed her advice, driving their political opponents from public places as punishment for their heresies.

Maxine Waters did not invent this tactic. President Obama, on the stump in 2008, urged his supporters to confront their "friends and neighbors." Standing behind a sign promising "Change," he instructed his supporters: "I want you to argue with them, and get in their face"—the sort of advice you'd expect from someone who cut his teeth organizing communities based on the principles in Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*. However such tactics are framed, they amount to the intentional and systematic harassment of one's opponents.

The far right, of course, has its share of persons who are willing to resort to violence or the threat thereof, including the white nationalists who marched in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017. One of them drove his car into a crowd

of counter-protesters, killing a woman. The difference is that left-wing radicals have the sympathy of many cultural elites, while white nationalists are despised, finding no sympathy in the press or academia. This asymmetry can provoke a radicalized and embittered reaction. Right-minded Americans should reject radicals on both the left and the right, but until that happens, the impulse to violence will grow as political differences become more acute.

As politics gives way to protest, protest can escalate from the merely verbal to the physical. Rhetoric matters, and when groups persistently refer to their political opponents as enemies, a few will take such rhetoric literally. Once the shootings, the beatings, and the bombings begin, they are difficult to stop. In fact, in June 2018, a Rasmussen Report indicated that 31 percent of Americans believed a civil war was likely in the next five years.³

Our country is increasingly beset by protests and the threat of violence. The language of a common good—of moral ends that are proper to human beings, of a transcendent source of morality, or even of the existence of God—is threatened by the feverish demands for autonomy, liberation, rights, benefits, or whatever happens to be the demand of the moment.

We are at a crossroads. As tensions grow and animosity intensifies along with the rhetoric of warfare and destruction, it is not hard to imagine an incident—perhaps some confrontation between white nationalists and Antifa—that will spark general

violence. On the other hand, it may be possible for responsible citizens to dial back the rhetoric, to speak respectfully to and about each other, and thus regain some sense of what joins us together as citizens. The stakes couldn't be higher.



Not long ago, social conservatives were wringing their hands over the “moral relativism” of the young. Today, moral relativism is not the problem. Maybe it never was. If you listen to the rhetoric of the social justice warriors, you hear not the easygoing platitudes of the relativist but the hard-edged assertions of the absolutist. When people march in the streets, picket their opponent's house, and threaten their political enemies with violence, they are expressing not moral relativism but supreme moral confidence. The humility required to listen patiently and respond charitably has nearly vanished. We see in all of this the strange combination of moral absolutism, inherited from our Puritan past, and the Nietzschean will to power.

If power lies at the heart of all human affairs, then any appeal to reason to justify one's position is merely a means of leveraging power. For Nietzsche, right and wrong, and even true and false, are rooted in a theistic order that has died. Rationality is not a means by which men can determine truth or pursue a common good derived from human nature but

merely a means by which the will of the powerful can dominate the weak or the weak can seize power from the strong.

This turn has conspicuous implications for politics. The classical ideal of politics—which the American founders shared—is predicated on a moral order that is knowable, however imperfectly. Politics, according to this ideal, entails rational debate about the best means to secure ends proper to human beings individually and corporately. It is an ongoing discussion about the common good, and while that discussion may veer from rational debate into hostility and force, the ideal remains a clear indictment of the violent alternative.

In a world infused with Nietzschean assumptions, the understanding of politics as a rational discussion about the best means to secure ends rooted in the natural order has to be abandoned. If there is no “good” independent of human will; if there is no human nature that implies norms of behavior; if there is no God who created the cosmos and infused human nature with meaning, purpose, and direction; if the category of truth must be discarded, then “rational” discussion about those things is nothing more than the babbling of men either deceived into imagining a world infused with moral meaning or slyly employing the language of morality to assert their will to power.

In a Nietzschean world, politics, at least in the classical sense, is exchanged for alternative modes of discourse and persuasion. Political protest marked by aggression, noise, and intimidation

replaces rational debate, for protest is the concentration of power in pursuit of the desires of individuals and groups. People are not persuaded by protests. They are drowned out.

Residual Puritanism is also apparent in the politics of protest. The salient feature of the activists and protestors in America today—especially among the social justice warriors of the radical left—is the moral absolutism behind their rhetoric and their actions. They use terms such as “rights,” “equality,” “democracy,” and “tolerance” with confidence, absolutely certain that those who stand in the way of these noble ideals are racists, homophobes, fascists, or just plain evil. Following Nietzsche in their will to power, they are beholden to their Puritan ancestors (whom they despise for their religious bigotry) for their unshakeable sense of rectitude.

This new moral absolutism is irrational and indicates that the will to truth has been replaced by the will to power. The death of God necessarily entailed the death of truth. The new absolutism of our cultural moment is grounded in will rather than reason, and laments over the decline of rational debate are, in reality, an expression of longing for a theistic metaphysics that has been abandoned implicitly if not explicitly.

This new form of irrational moral absolutism is accompanied by a form of political absolutism that can be traced to a decline in the historical Christian distinction between politics and heavenly things. In the fifth century, Augustine argued that the City of God must be distinguished from the Earthly City

and that while all men find themselves, for a time, part of the Earthly City, it is not of ultimate consequence. Politics is not to be neglected, for it is a means of attaining peace and justice, however imperfectly and impermanently. But it is secondary to the soul's eternal destiny. This view of politics avoids political fanaticism while providing space in which a chastened politics can operate. Since true happiness and perfect justice are achievable only in heaven, well beyond human influence, human beings must be content with incremental and reversible achievements in the Earthly City. Hope is deferred to heaven, and the imperfections and limitations of the earthly realm are patiently endured.

If God is dead, or at least no longer a central figure in political reflections, the "two-city" solution collapses. Dreams of political perfection, once deferred to the heavenly kingdom, are reintroduced in the temporal realm. The longing for perfection—born of a Christian notion of heaven—is difficult to forget. The chastened politics of the Christian era has been replaced by a revolutionary politics that seeks perfect justice and moral purity by political means. The French Revolution was the first of the revolutions springing from political perfectionism (the residue of a Christian heritage) and impatience with the slow pace of traditional political processes.

Revolution represents an alternative to politics and a complement to protest, for revolution seeks to accomplish immediately what the political process can achieve only

gradually. Revolutionaries are always in a hurry. They lack the patience rooted in humility and a recognition that the human condition will never be radically altered by political means. Revolutionaries chant, "What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!" But now is never soon enough, and justice or equality or whatever ideal the revolutionary is fixated on is never fully realized. So the revolutionary is never satisfied, and his methods become increasingly radical as his goal proves illusive.

Although many people—especially the social justice warriors—relish the idea of revolution, we would do well to consider the consequences, for revolutions rarely turn out well.⁴ The rhetoric of revolution and war fosters the centralization of political power. War itself is perhaps the most efficient means of centralizing political power. Resistance to a threat, external or internal, requires the consolidation of authority and resources. The rhetoric of war tends to the same ends, and it is interesting to consider the extent to which the language of war has infected our political discourse. We have in recent decades declared war on poverty, drugs, illiteracy, and crime. Politicians wage "campaigns" and establish "war rooms" where they formulate strategies to defeat the "enemy."

When citizens come to think of politics in terms of war, they are drawn to violence rather than debate, absolutism rather than compromise, and they become willing to cede power to those who position themselves as best equipped to

defeat the enemy. It is not hard to see how the pervasive use of war rhetoric—and therefore the rhetoric of power—eventually leads to violence and the breakdown of social cohesion. Social instability as a consequence of war rhetoric and revolutionary actions leads, if history is any indication, to an authoritarian backlash. Napoleon and Stalin were the unintended, though not surprising, consequences of revolutions.

What can we learn? Once a society has had a deep and sustained encounter with Christianity, it is not easy to remove the Christian residue even if the dogmas of the faith are rejected. Dogmatism outlasts dogma. The idea of heavenly perfection is far more seductive for a post-Christian people than for a people that has always been pagan. A post-Christian society may be especially prone to revolution and therefore susceptible to an authoritarian regime—tricked up, perhaps, in the garb of democracy, which makes the regime more palatable to the citizens and power easier for the leader to wield.

Democracy as Decadence

Democracy, a movement that was sweeping Europe during his lifetime, provoked Nietzsche's ire. "The democratic movement is the heir of the Christian movement," he wrote, (BGE, 202) and he was convinced that the rise of democracy signaled the decline of humanity.¹

Nietzsche argued that changes in the conception of God from the Old Testament to the New paved the way for modern democratic movements. The God of the Old Testament was a God of a particular people, a warlike God who took pleasure in smiting the enemies of his people, who demanded blood sacrifices, who was local and particular in his concerns if not his agency. By contrast, the God of the New Testament, like the Jewish people, went wandering and in the process became a cosmopolitan God, a God who loved everyone, a God who viewed all people as equals (AC, 17). Theology, in other words, became democratic as the noble, tribal, and violent

God of the Old Testament became the tame, cowering God of “love your neighbor as yourself” and “turn the other cheek” and “resist not evil.”

This shift in the conception of God made possible a change in the conception of man. If God is the God of *all* men, then all men are equal. If all men are equal, then the only legitimate political system is one in which all are treated equally. When all persons are understood to possess equal value before God, the way is paved for the doctrine of equal rights. But if, as Nietzsche asserted, the will to power is the driving force of all life, then the doctrine of equal rights flies in the face of a basic fact of existence. It is, in this light, opposed to life itself. It countenances the equal treatment of the weak and the strong. Women are treated with as much respect as men and given rights equal to men's. Class distinctions and the natural divisions between the strong and weak and between the healthy and sick collapse into a heap of sameness. The strong are hamstrung, and the weak are invited to pretend they are something they are not. This is a recipe, Nietzsche believed, for social decay.

The decadence of democracy manifests itself in several ways that we might summarize as the emergence of weak nomads running in herds. First, people in general become weak. Compelled to defer to the wishes of the majority, they lose their ability to think independently, considering every question in terms of what the majority will think or do. No longer creative, free,

and healthy individuals, they are reduced to thinking about their “neighbor.” They will voluntarily submit to their own emasculation, even wielding the knife themselves, as they seek solace in the company and approval of others.

These “others” represent what Nietzsche called the “herd.” Healthy individuals, men who have not succumbed to the sickness of equality, democracy, Christianity (they are all of a piece), are not afraid of solitude. They are not afraid of pain or of striving for the kind of greatness that sets them apart from, or even at odds with, the crowd. Nietzsche called the gregarious animal of late-stage democratic society “the last man.” He seeks a pleasant and peaceful life. He is content with his petty and vulgar entertainments, does not strive to improve himself, and seeks above all to live a long life. He aspires to little more than peace and prosperity. He calls himself happy, but this happiness costs little and requires no sacrifice. The last man avoids risk, pain, and chaos. He is perfectly happy to find happiness in a bottle or a pill (or presumably Facebook), as long as he does not have to think seriously about happiness or about the degraded beast he has become.

Nietzsche believed that all of Europe was, by virtue of this democratic leveling, becoming more homogeneous—not just in culture, but physiologically as well. The nations of Europe were, in a word, ceasing to be marked by their particular racial histories and cultural characteristics. They were becoming a bland mass of last men, a European herd in which greatness

was only an embarrassing memory (because great men are dangerous) and happiness was promised to all. European peoples were becoming “supra-national and nomadic.” Today we’d say such men are the perfect denizens of a European Union that celebrates the cosmopolitan sameness of a continent without borders, where last men in search of diversion can wander unmolested across frontiers once jealously guarded by proud and distinctive tribes. Keeping watch over them is a single benevolent authority that promises happiness, or at least the possibility of happiness, and equality to all.

Yet equality is hostile to life, and the aspiration to equality and equal rights therefore finds itself beset by a countervailing force. On the one hand, democracy undermines the strong by fostering values such as equality and neighborliness—or in today’s parlance, “niceness.” Democratic citizens are expected to be nice to each other. Children are admonished to play nicely with their peers. Follow the Golden Rule, we are told. Share with those in need. All of these dispositions, Nietzsche believed, deprive the strong of the very qualities that in a healthy society they would assert.

Nevertheless, the pathological softness that democracy produces cloaks a hidden aspiration that breaks out in unexpected ways. Even in the so-called love of neighbor, Nietzsche found a surreptitious will to power, for in helping my neighbor when he can’t help himself, in giving a person something she needs but cannot secure for herself, I am putting my

neighbor in my debt. He owes me something, even if only his gratitude. But in Nietzsche’s view, the dynamic of debt is really nothing other than the will to power masquerading as goodness, which is to say, asserting my superiority over the beneficiary of my kindness.

The weak of society will naturally tend to seek each other out just as sheep find comfort and security in the herd. Indeed, for Nietzsche, the weak are naturally disposed to congregate, while the powerful naturally stand alone, inclined to separate from the herd lest the pathologies of the herd infect them. For this reason, great men are rare in a democratic age, and at the same time great men are feared, for greatness and power are inseparable. The herd fears nothing as much as a lion who naturally preys on the members of the herd.

Out of this equality social-contract thinkers emerged. Although Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau differ in important ways, they are united by the conviction that all men are naturally equal and that the legitimacy of a regime depends on the consent of the governed. The authority of such consent depends on the equality men enjoy in a mythical state of nature. Rather than see political power as emerging from a contest between competing powers, the social-contract thinkers derive legitimate authority from the agreement of all participants to cede part or all of their power to a superintending authority that represents everyone and, by virtue of the agreement, amplifies the power

of the individuals in a political body rooted in consent. Power is thus both ceded and claimed, the members of the new state voluntarily submitting to this power that they tell themselves is nothing more than a reflection of their own wills.

Nietzsche argued that the democratization of Europe, exemplified in the language of social contract, has produced last men—essentially nomadic pleasure-seekers—who will pave the way for a tyrant. Last men do not concern themselves with politics or with anything other than their own immediate, hedonistic desires. They are herd animals—industrious workers who do as they are told as long as they receive a regular paycheck. The leveling of society has produced a flattening of aspirations as well. Few are driven by the need to excel, to break out of the herd and assert themselves against the herd or even without reference to the herd. But again, if life is constituted by the will to power, then this great lethargy, this ennui of late-stage democracy, will produce the ideal conditions for the emergence of a tyrant—something that thinkers as diverse as Plato and Tocqueville predicted.

Nietzsche also perceived a subtler inner dynamic that undoes democracy. Life is a struggle. The attempt to bring something to life consists of a struggle against all the forces that seek to deny the creation of something new. Nothing is free. Liberal institutions themselves are bought at a price. Their success means the cessation of the striving that brought them into existence. They “stop being liberal as soon as they

have been established,” and once they exist, they harm freedom rather than sustain it.

For Nietzsche, freedom is “having the will to responsibility for oneself.” It requires a willingness to endure pain and hardship for the sake of independence. Freedom is neither easy nor free. It requires “manly instincts.” “The free human being is a warrior.” As a practical matter, then, freedom is achievable only by a few (TI, p. 75; BGE, 29). Universal freedom is a charade, a false ideal that can never be realized. And though warlike instincts may have been required for the founding of liberal institutions, once those institutions are in place, they cultivate traits antithetical to those that gave them birth. Liberalism is, for Nietzsche, inseparable from the cultivation of the herd animal.

Liberal institutions, paradoxically, require illiberal ingredients: tradition, authority, a sense of responsibility to future generations. But the success of liberalism has altered the notion of freedom as well as the concept of authority, both of which hasten the decadence that eventually paves the way for a tyrant. The instincts that enabled the building of liberal institutions—a sort of hardness capable of enduring trials and a willingness to sacrifice for a future goal—have been rendered inert by the success of liberal institutions.

Modern liberal democratic citizens desire peace and plenty. They think of freedom as the immediate satiation of their desires rather than “the will to responsibility” and the

accompanying spirit of the warrior. Likewise, authority has been transformed. Whereas citizens once willingly submitted to the authority of an ideal or a goal that required sacrifice and perhaps even death, today any authority is seen as a new form of slavery that must be overthrown. The very instincts that make liberal institutions possible are rejected. Liberal institutions suffer the same fate as liberal democratic citizens. They become decadent. They eventually open the door for a new and striking assertion of power that exposes the hollow aspirations of late-stage democratic liberalism (TI, 74-77).

CHAPTER 4

Identity Politics: There Will Be Blood

What binds us together as Americans? In recent years the answer to this question has become elusive. While once there might have been a generally accepted answer, today we are increasingly disposed to give our primary allegiance to a racial or ethnic group with which we identify. In other words, we are coming to believe that what unites us is really our differences, which provide no bond at all. Identity politics unites to divide, and it goes without saying that no nation torn by division, acrimony, grievance, and scapegoating will long survive. But those are precisely the features of identity politics. Nietzsche grasped with stunning clarity the psychology of victimhood and punishment that animates this growing movement in America.

It is important to acknowledge that historical grievances are real. The most obvious stain on American history is slavery, which was introduced to the colonies in 1619—only

twelve years after the founding of Jamestown and one year prior to the founding of the Plymouth colony. Slavery was not unique to the United States, of course, nor were other abuses of power, including the subjugation of women and the unjust treatment of native peoples. These injustices are not to be minimized or forgotten. The *way* they are remembered makes all the difference, however, and it is with the subject of memory that we can begin.

Nietzsche argued that memory and unhappiness are inseparable (GM, II, 1). If you want to be happy, you must forget. Of course, forgetting is not easy, especially when the source of your unhappiness constantly intrudes upon your memory. For Nietzsche, pain and memory went hand in hand. Pain is the best mnemonic device—the most effective way to create a memory is to impress it with pain. Obviously, Nietzsche wouldn't have lasted long as a kindergarten teacher.

Constantly recalling past pain keeps it continually present as a persistently festering wound. Unhappiness is the unavoidable result. Human beings remember, and the past is painful. The memory of slavery is painful. Genocide, oppression, and abuse produce painful memories. Memories are burned into the soul and shape it in ways that constantly recall the pain. The soul limps.

While we cannot avoid pain, we can avoid unhappiness by forgetting, which seems to be the prerogative of creatures without a sense of time or a sense of the self. Man's rationality

allows him to be unhappy. Nietzsche suggested "active forgetfulness" as a remedy to the unhappiness of memory, but purging oneself of memory is easier said than done, for rationality seems unavoidably tied to memory. Nevertheless, Nietzsche suggested that rationality might provide a solution. Reason developed, he insisted, as an instrument for avoiding pain. If pain and memory are linked, and if reason is a means of avoiding pain, then perhaps reason can provide a means of avoiding memory itself. This, of course, turns on a conception of reason that is quite different from how we generally understand it, for it is difficult to conceive of reason apart from memory. But perhaps reason can provide a means of dealing with pain.

Pain is a fact of existence, and great actions, great achievements, great movements of the soul are impossible apart from sacrifice, which entails pain. According to Nietzsche, great things are begun only with blood, (GM, II, 6) and the human species endures only through human sacrifice (WP, 246). But Christianity, preaching the equality of all, excludes the possibility of human sacrifice. If the species is sustained, energized, and advanced only by means of human sacrifice, then Christianity must bring about the decline of the species. The doctrine of equality runs counter to the facts of existence. It offers an enervating alternative to the will to power.

In paganism, human beings sacrificed other human beings. They might even sacrifice what was most precious—a son or

a daughter. During what Nietzsche called “the moral epoch,” men sacrificed themselves—that is, their desires—to their gods. The Platonic aspiration to control the appetites and cultivate self-control, declaring war on passion and instinct, is an example of this self-sacrifice, which Nietzsche saw as an obvious decline from human sacrifice. Christianity takes matters a step further. God sacrificed himself for the sins of a guilty people. Sacrifice was not abandoned, but in Nietzsche’s view it became absurd. What was once a source of health and vitality now, in this new formulation, produces decadence and the decay of the human species (BGE, 55).

The Christian God does something unnatural: he sacrifices himself for others. In so doing, he declares that he loves all human beings equally and therefore forbids human sacrifice, robbing the strong of the “voluptuous pleasure” of inflicting pain on the weak. When Nietzsche declared the death of God, he reclaimed the possibility of human sacrifice, a necessary condition for the health of the species. The self-sacrifice of God is replaced by a restored pagan will to power. The elimination of God both reclaimed human power and sought to retrieve the human species from the decadence brought about by Christianity.

But what of this pleasure of inflicting pain on others? Are human beings really like that? Nietzsche argued that the presence in every society of strong and weak members produces a dynamic of creditor and debtor. Consider primitive societies.

Ancestors were worshipped as a means of repaying—through some form of sacrifice—a debt owed to them. The sacrifice could take the form of food or honors, but above all the sacrifice was manifested in obedience to customs, laws, and traditions passed down from the ancestors. Obedience was given as a payment due to a creditor. Nietzsche argued that the perceived debt will diminish as the tribe declines and will increase as the tribe becomes more powerful. Ultimately, the ancestors of this expanding and vital tribe will be elevated as gods, and the intensity of devotion rooted in a perceived debt increases dramatically (GM, II, 19).

No one enjoys being a debtor, but most of us are. In fact, most people find themselves in the positions of creditor and debtor at the same time. Consider the following: A man goes to his office, and his boss berates him. In so doing, the boss is exercising his will to power over someone who is weaker. The man goes home and insults his wife. She, in turn, takes out her frustration on their child. The child, not understanding why he has been on the receiving end of his mother’s wrath, kicks the family dog. Each person is lashing out at someone or something he perceives to be weaker than himself, and he is doing so as a response to his own perceived weakness. At the same time, each is exercising what Nietzsche called the “right of the masters,” which gives him the exhilaration of mistreating someone as “beneath him” (GM, II, 5). In the process, each person gains a kind of relief from the pain he has suffered at the hands of

someone more powerful. And the dog is left wondering, "Why did Jimmy kick me?"

Being the victim of abuse, that is to say a debtor, is an indication of weakness. Yet life is the will to power, and Nietzsche showed how even the weak assert themselves by underhanded means, for they cannot face the strong on the open field of combat. In the so-called "slave revolt of morality," the weak subverted the strong by a cunning plot, tricking them into accepting the teachings of Christianity and voluntarily emasculating themselves. Whether or not that is an accurate description of the rise of Christianity, the same psychological dynamic is at work in the attempt by the weak to assert themselves through identity politics and thus extricate themselves from the pain and misery of being subject to another.

Writing in 1888 but sounding as if he were describing twenty-first-century America, Nietzsche identified the etiology of identity politics: resentment, weakness, blame, and scapegoating. It begins with the recognition by the weak that they suffer the "inescapable consequences of a long suppression of the weak by the strong." The next step is to assign the responsibility for their weakness to the strong. Blame has to be shifted. Once the strong are blamed, the weak experience liberation from any sense of responsibility for their own misery: "they threaten, they rage, they curse; they become virtuous from indignation" (WP, 765).

The purity of grievance without personal responsibility unlocks a secret and previously untapped fount of virtue, for what could be more virtuous than a blameless victim? In a society still deeply influenced by Christianity, the role of blameless victim carries special significance, for the blameless victim par excellence is Christ. A Christ-like luster is therefore imparted to the victims, who, blameless and virtuous, are empowered to curse and rage against their oppressors.

Having assumed the mantle of victimhood, they "need the appearance of justice, i.e., a theory through which they can shift responsibility for their existence... on to some sort of scapegoat" (WP, 765). This group of self-righteous and deeply aggrieved persons must identify an individual or a group, "a guilty agent who is susceptible to suffering," on whom it can inflict pain and thus gain some relief from the pain of its own weakness (GM, III, 15). Who is the scapegoat? Nietzsche said it could take different forms, depending on the context. It could be God, the social order, education, the nobility—or, somewhat ominously, the Jews. The key, however, is to find an individual or class against which the aggrieved group can vent its aggression, rendered virtuous by blame-shifting. It will express its self-righteous resentment in moral terms: "It is a crime to be born in favorable circumstances; for thus one has disinherited the others, pushed them aside, condemned them to vice, even to *work*."

White privilege is a currently fashionable scapegoat. Some women—and even some men—direct their rage against the so-called patriarchy. In our increasingly Nietzschean age, Christianity itself is fast becoming a scapegoat, for Christianity teaches reconciliation, humility, and above all forgiveness—the very things that would dissipate the energy of identity politics. The virtuous aggrieved must insist that someone else is to blame. Nietzsche channeled their rage: “How can I help it that I am wretched! But somebody must be responsible, otherwise, it would be unbearable” (WP, 765).

None of this is to say that real grievances do not exist. They do. Yet identity politics is precisely the wrong way to resolve historical injustices. It neither forgets as Nietzsche suggested nor forgives as Christianity requires. Identity politics only makes matters worse, for it depends on shifting blame rather than assuming responsibility. It exchanges the real complexities of history for an artificial narrative of the “guilty” against the “pure,” the innocent weak against the vile abusers of power. The impulse to alleviate pain by lashing out at another is at the heart of identity politics. Those in pain must locate someone they can deem guilty, even if the “guilty” happens to be merely the descendant of the actual transgressor. Nuance is not a virtue in an age of grievance and revenge.

What is missing is forgiveness, the lack of which prevents the possibility of any resolution, much less reconciliation.

Forgiveness doesn't eliminate guilt, but it does bring an end to the aspiration to inflict pain. Christianity is the enemy of identity politics precisely because one of its central features is forgiveness, which identity politics cannot tolerate. Christianity seeks to reverse the will to power—expressed in identity politics as the will to inflict pain—and replace it with the will to forgive rooted in love for one's neighbor.

Nietzsche thought that forgetting is the only means of alleviating pain. But we must consider whether forgiveness is a more plausible means to the same end. Forgiveness is a means of reconciliation between estranged parties. The estrangement may be the result of deep pain, perhaps pain that goes back for generations. Forgiveness undermines the natural impulse to lash out at the source of one's pain (real or imagined). Forgiveness can end the reciprocal dynamic of blood feuds, of the resentment rooted in violations of rights, of the suffering of innocent victims. To be sure, when we speak of forgiveness in this way, it is difficult not to think of it as a sort of divine power, for forgiveness is nothing short of miraculous when considered in terms of the will to power.

Can forgiveness accomplish the same thing as forgetting? Can forgiveness transcend the pain of memory, the pain of living? Perhaps. But offering forgiveness is not easy, nor is accepting it. Consider Christ's parable of the unforgiving debtor from the Gospel of Matthew:

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt (18:23–30 [King James Version]).

Nietzschean psychology helps us to understand why the servant acts the way he does. At first glance, we easily see why the servant who was forgiven acts unjustly when he refuses to grant the same kindness to his debtor. But let us consider this story more closely. When the king demands payment of

the debt, the servant falls to his knees and begs the king's forbearance. The king agrees and goes further: he forgives the debt completely. The servant, however, does not become debt-free. Instead, a monetary debt is replaced by a debt of gratitude. But this debt is infinitely more pressing than the former, for while the monetary debt was heavy, it required only a finite and external satisfaction: come up with the money, discharge the debt, and the relationship will again be equal. Once the king forgives the debt, how can the servant—short of completely and intentionally forgetting—ever be anything other than a debtor? How much gratitude is necessary? If he ceases being grateful after, say, a year, has he acted justly? No. And because the debt is open-ended and non-material, he finds himself in greater debt after he has been forgiven than before.

If all of life is the will to power, it is easy to see how this act of forgiveness accentuates the power of the king and the corresponding weakness of the servant. The servant, receiving forgiveness after groveling at the feet of the king, must find a means to assert his own will to power. He must kick a dog. In this light, it is unsurprising that he would find his own debtor, insist on full payment, and even physically assault him. He *must* act in this way if he is to relieve himself of the sense of impotence caused by the graciousness of the king. This is the reason that receiving an unmerited gift is so difficult. It is why grace is foreign to human nature. Forgiveness, idealized in the gospel, shows a way out, for the dynamic of forgiveness—both

given and received—provides an alternative to the economy of pure power, which cannot get beyond the creditor-debtor relationship.

Nietzsche is right: blood must be shed. The debtor-creditor relationship is real and unavoidable. In Christianity, the demand for blood is satisfied, and forgiveness, if received with gratitude and humility, can end the cycle of violence. The alternative is a continual demand for an outlet for the pressure to sacrifice human life. Nietzsche showed why identity politics is both attractive and a vicious cycle. If God is dead, the gospel is nonsense, and the self-righteous and insatiable rage of identity politics is the obvious—and catastrophic—alternative.

Memory, Monuments, and Manipulation

Although Nietzsche seemed to long for active forgetfulness that overcomes the pain of the past and bestows a sort of bestial happiness on the miserable human species, the fact remains that we remember. Complete forgetting is not a practical option. The haunted past animates identity politics, whose partisans manipulate the past to dominate the present. In this chapter, I want to explore Nietzsche's view of history and consider how history is wielded today as a weapon rather than studied as a source of wisdom or cared for as a precious inheritance.

Nietzsche offered various critiques of history. He was especially hostile to the teleological view of history—the idea that it is moving toward a God-ordained end or climax. If God is dead, there is obviously no God-ordained historical process. There is only life and death, health and sickness. If

“Higher” Education and the War on Reason

Something strange is happening on our college and university campuses. The institutions that used to introduce students to the best books and ideas of our culture have become swamps of ideologically radical (not to mention nonsensical) courses, politically correct jargon, irrational protests, and safe spaces protecting fragile students from any idea that might make them uncomfortable. At the same time, the cost of this “higher” education has skyrocketed even as young people are told that a college degree is essential for any kind of professional success. So more and more people are wasting four years in the intellectual playpens of higher education and assuming massive debt for the privilege.

Is there a Nietzschean angle to the hijacking of higher education by ideologues who are more concerned with their social and political agendas than with the pursuit and transmission of truth? When we state the problem in those terms,

the Nietzschean themes become obvious. Nietzsche's only sustained engagement with the topic of education was a series of lectures he delivered in the spring of 1872, when he was twenty-eight, titled *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*. They suggest that he had not yet fully embraced the most radical implications of his thought, and he never consented to their publication. Nevertheless, they give us some sense of his early understanding of the purpose of education and his disdain for modern educational institutions.

In brief, Nietzsche was concerned that the trend toward universal education would lead not to universal enlightenment but to barbarism (EI, p. 17). A growing focus on utility and specialization signaled the demise of truly liberal education (EI, p. 16, 18). These shifts represented the "curse of modernity" (EI, p. 54), a new barbarism marked by concern for "individual personality" rather than the development of the genius of a few great souls (EI, p. 27, 51). True education is necessarily aristocratic, and its focus is on "the only true homeland of culture: Greek antiquity" (EI, p. 31). With the democratization of education came an increasing interest in the practical application of knowledge rather than the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Well before Nietzsche's time, this turn toward the practical was expressed in terms of power. Francis Bacon, as we have seen, argued that knowledge should be understood as power over nature. Nietzsche's eventual view of life in terms of power suggests that he came to the same

conclusion as Bacon, though by another route and in a far more systematic and far-reaching way.

After those lectures, Nietzsche left us only scattered references to education in his writings. Near the end of his career, he offered the conventional observation that the purpose of education is to see, to think, to speak, and to write. He expressed the same pessimism that marked his youthful lectures when he complained, "There is no concept of [thinking] in our schools anymore" (TI, p. 48). Nietzsche prided himself on his thinking and writing, so this lament is perhaps not surprising. But since the will to power had become a central theme in his work, we should expect power to lie at the heart of the mature Nietzsche's account of education.

We see hints of this in a comment he made about parents and children: "Invariably, parents turn children into something similar to themselves—they call that 'education.'" (BGE, 194). Why would parents do this? To Nietzsche, the answer is obvious: "Deep in her heart, no mother doubts that the child she has borne is her property; no father contests his own right to subject it to *his* concepts and valuations" (BGE, 194). Here the will to power is at the heart of the parent-child relationship. The parents seek to impose their values upon the child, and this imposition they call "education."

The same motive, Nietzsche said, is found in teachers. They are not driven by a love of truth or a "drive to knowledge," but like all human beings, and indeed all living creatures, they are

moved by the will to master. Knowledge for its own sake is a false ideal. Knowledge, learning, and education are a means to assert oneself, to dominate. The teacher seeks to promote his family, make money, or acquire political power (BGE, 6). In other words, scholars employ knowledge of their particular subjects to gain power over others.

It might be helpful at this point to consider two very different conceptions of education, for only when we see the options can we understand what is at stake and what a distinctly Nietzschean turn higher education has taken. For the sake of convenience, I will call the older approach classical, as opposed to the radically different approach that I will call modern.

Classical education was characterized by a pursuit of the good, the true, and the beautiful based on a particular conception of reality we have seen in previous chapters. The cosmos is an intelligible whole that is infused with moral categories. The good is not something we make up, not a product of individual or corporate will, but a fundamental characteristic of reality—a reality that human beings can discover and to which they can (and should) submit. Goodness is a constitutive element of reality itself. To know the good is to know that which is true, for truth is merely a mark of reality. Our minds are equipped to know reality, and though we cannot know it fully, we can know truly. And knowing itself is good. Furthermore, reality is infused with a beauty that, again, human minds are capable of perceiving. As we open ourselves to the beauty of

reality, we see the coherence of all things; we see connections between particulars, and we see how everything ultimately points toward the divine, who is the source of all things. To pursue the good, the true, and the beautiful is to pursue God. We move upward from the particulars, discerning their order and relationships, ultimately converging in God. From there we move back down from the universal to the particulars, coming to see with clearer eyes the meaning—which is to say the goodness, truth, and beauty—of the particulars now illuminated by the light of God. Classical education is the pursuit of the highest things, predicated on the existence of a hierarchy that we can grasp and ascend. In the process, we come to see how all things are related and infused with divine meaning.

Classical education is often associated with what used to be called a "liberal" education (from the Latin *liber*, "free"), an education suited to free citizens, in contrast to a "servile" education, the narrowly technical training intended, in the ancient world, for slaves. A liberal education was thought to be a necessary condition for self-government, which begins with governing one's own appetites. A beast is subject to its appetites, whereas a well-functioning human being subordinates his appetites to higher things, making self-government possible. A society of self-governing persons can govern its corporate affairs wisely.

A liberally educated person considers fundamental ideas such as the nature of justice, the best kind of human life, and

the best kind of society. It is dangerous for slaves to think about such things. Slaves were trained to focus exclusively on a specific job, which would keep them absorbed in their mundane tasks. When they were not at work, they were distracted by entertainments that, like their work, prevented them from thinking seriously about serious matters. They were deprived of the tools and the time for serious reflection, for the last thing a society needs is discontented slaves.

In a democratic society, however, all citizens need to be capable of self-government. That means that all citizens must, at least to some degree, be willing and equipped to think clearly about justice, the good life, and the good society. All citizens must have some access, either formally or informally, to an education suited to free citizens. All must have at least the basics of a liberal education and not be merely trained for a narrow occupation. A nation of servilely educated citizens will be ill-equipped for democratic self-rule.

Modern education is not liberal and often not even servile. Many college professors use words like "truth" only ironically, and they scoff at notions of objective morality and beauty. The entire landscape of higher education appears to be the scene of a sweeping victory for Nietzsche. We have gotten beyond good and evil; we have rejected the notion of objective truth, and we have come to believe that beauty is nothing more than individual preference.

But things are not that simple. Deeply influenced by their Christian past, Americans find it virtually impossible to rid

themselves of the residue of Christianity. On many college campuses, Nietzsche's Puritan warriors have taken over, and we see the devastating effects of the will to power married to a moral absolutism lacking any justification other than individual will subconsciously energized by a rejected Christian past.

Consider the frequent protests and violence intended to silence those whose views deviate from the reigning orthodoxy. Consider the unwillingness to engage opponents in rational debate. Rationality, we are told, is merely a contrivance of the white patriarchy to assert and maintain control, which is clearly illegitimate and must be deconstructed. The protesters rely on force, power, and volume rather than arguments. Truth is not the issue. What really matters is justice, equality, and tolerance. And they will destroy you if you disagree or get in the way.

But it is precisely where the moral claims are most strongly asserted and where the will to power is most emphatically embraced that we can begin to see cracks in the logic of the whole noisy enterprise of modern higher education. Although power is asserted with the self-righteousness of a crusader and with an air of supreme confidence, it is a fragile power masking a surprising weakness. Consider the popularity of so-called "safe spaces" and the insistence on "trigger warnings." Safe spaces are designated areas where a person can be assured that he or she (or "they," if you prefer) will not encounter any ideas that make them feel uncomfortable. However,

as any sane person living in a free society knows, the world is full of diverse ideas and people espousing them, and some of those ideas will challenge one's own. Higher education was once seen as an opportunity to encounter new ideas, to understand them, and perhaps be changed by them. At the very least, encounters with strange ideas would bring a student to a better understanding of his own ideas. The demand for safe spaces and "trigger warnings"—by which certain ideas and books are quarantined—is a sign of mental and emotional fragility, an unwillingness or even inability to deal maturely and thoughtfully with differences, making tolerance impossible, for people tolerate only what they disagree with. Rather than assume that students are adults (or nearly so) and therefore mature enough to handle challenging ideas, teachers coddle students, insulating them from ideas that might contradict their prejudices.

Nietzsche, who regarded complaining as a sign of weakness, would have despised such delicacy (TI, p. 69). But wait—if the will to truth doesn't matter, if the will to power is the central feature of life, then perhaps these "delicate" students are on to something. Why listen respectfully to someone with whom you disagree? Listening requires seriously engaging with arguments, sifting through them to determine which are compelling and which are not. In other words, respectful and engaged listening is predicated on the idea that truth is a good worth pursuing even if people ultimately differ in the conclusions they draw or

the practical implications of those conclusions. But if Nietzsche is right and the will to truth must be replaced by the will to power, then shouting down your opponents—even your professors—makes sense. So does insisting that uncongenial views be silenced and driven from the field. The tactics merely represent the logic of the will to power. Maybe Nietzsche would approve after all.

There are, however, two reasons that these campus protests and movements, while exhibiting some of the characteristics of the will to power, are un-Nietzschean. First, protests and mass movements in the name of equality and tolerance express nothing more than the debased desires of the herd. These students are terrified of greatness, of excellence, of anything other than superficial differences. They demand equality and tolerance while they stifle those who are different, who threaten their comfortable little worlds built on self-righteous platitudes and assertions of solidarity with others who pride themselves in their "radical" thinking even as they cower in conformity. Is there any space for conservatives in this brave new world of tolerance? Please. How about for the old-fashioned liberal who believes in the power of ideas and that vigorous debate is the best means of ascertaining the strongest argument? Increasingly unlikely.

The second reason these movements are un-Nietzschean is that they are charged with a hyper-moralism. Equality must be pursued because it is a self-evident good. So too tolerance, diversity, individual rights, and democracy. How could anyone

question the unimpeachable goodness of these ideals? There is no suggestion here that anyone has gone beyond good and evil. Instead, we see a rigorous moralism that would make Cotton Mather blush. These students are so sure of the righteousness of their causes that they are willing to silence any who challenge them. The will to power has been combined with unyielding moral claims. Christianity having been rejected, however, those moral claims rely on mere assertions of will.

Students are not the only ones deeply implicated in this pseudo-Nietzschean charade. Members of the faculty—who should be the mature adults pointing students toward truth—all too often promote and even lead the protests. But this raises another puzzling question: If all of life is the will to power, why would professors seek to empower students in self-righteous rage? Isn't my power what matters? Isn't it ill-advised to empower others who might at any moment turn on me? Why would Nietzsche himself write books that seek to alert his readers to the creeping malady of Western society? Isn't that an act of altruism and generosity rather than an assertion of power?

I don't want to speculate about Nietzsche's motives, but today's radical faculty members are easier to read, for their rhetoric and their deepest commitments give them away. However emphatic their atheism, they cannot cleanse themselves of their residual Christianity. Many are openly hostile to orthodox Christianity, which they blame for injustice,

intolerance, and small-minded bigotry. They have, so they say, progressed beyond childish religious belief. They are interested in overturning systemic injustices, in deconstructing power, and in overturning the patriarchy or white hegemony or whatever. They think of themselves as radically and unapologetically democratic, lovers of freedom, committed to ferreting out and purging any person, institution, or idea that contradicts those ideals. They seek to empower the dispossessed, which from a Nietzschean perspective is empowering the herd.

"Woke" faculty members imagine they are powerful agents of liberation, justice, and equality. But again, why empower the herd? Why promote democracy? By what means can equality be meaningfully asserted? These ideals emerged from Christianity, and they make sense only if the human person has an inherent dignity. Democracy, rights, equality, and even the notion of a scapegoat—a concept necessary for identity politics—all find solid grounding in a Christian view of the world. Divorced from that view, those notions are merely blind assertions, claims rooted in the will to power, lacking the moral force that their modern adherents assume they possess.

From a Nietzschean perspective, it makes no sense to empower others unless you believe that in so doing you are empowering yourself. Faculty members who encourage student radicals might be doing so for purely selfish motives. If

so, they are seeking to distract impressionable students into thinking herd power means something when in reality it is the pathetic clamoring of the impotent. Few faculty members go this far. Instead they imagine themselves the missionaries of a new age of equality and tolerance, ushered in by the power of protest, revealing themselves to be willing disciples of Nietzsche and unwitting disciples of a desiccated Christianity. Nietzsche would call them craven fools who are unwilling to take the final leap and discard the Christian ideals whose foundations they have sought so assiduously to destroy.

Going Full Nietzsche: Do You Have the Guts?

It is impossible to understand the radical left in America without recognizing that it is the product of a grotesque combination of the Nietzschean will to power and the moralizing absolutism of a Puritan heritage explicitly rejected but tacitly (though only partially) embraced.

An obvious question is whether this union is stable, let alone coherent. Let us first, though, briefly review the salient attributes of what we have called Nietzsche's Puritan Warriors. They have inherited from Nietzsche a hostility to historical Christianity. God, if not explicitly denied, is at least safely sequestered behind the rhetoric of "my God," a creature of my imagination who never does or commands anything unpleasant, rather than the omnipotent Creator of the universe. There is no Trinity, for if Jesus Christ were divine, then the entire gospel story of his death and resurrection to save sinners(!) would be uncomfortably relevant.