Introduction

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It may be something of a truism these days to note that contemporary political struggles often find their origins in conflicts that are based on social group identities, including race, ethnicity, religion, geographic region, gender, sexuality, disability, and nationality, as well as class. However obvious a point this may be, questions about how inequities, injustices, and social problems are connected with politicized identities remain pressing.[1] Research in a range of disciplines has shown that our social group identities directly affect the material conditions of our lives.[2] Conflicts and inequities that are grounded in the particularities of social group identities have been shown to affect democracy itself, as well as participation in democracy.[3] These material issues are not confined to one nation, or to any single world region, and neither are they are purely twenty-first-century problems, since they are grounded in our histories and deeply embedded in our understanding of and critical engagement with those histories. We propose that we would do well to continue to ask questions about why politicized identities bear so much political weight in determining who counts as a member of a social group, and in whether and how it is possible to respond to the specific political challenges that affect social groups cogently, collectively, and justly.

This volume aims to make better sense of the extent to which the work of Friedrich Nietzsche incorporates conceptual resources that are necessary to address current and pressing political and social issues grounded in engagements amongst, and about, politicized identities. We take our inspiration for the volume from Nietzsche's remarks in aphorism 6 of *Beyond Good*

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and Evil, where Nietzsche describes every great philosophy as the confession of its originator and as a form of autobiography, "a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir; in short, that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constitute the true living seed from which the whole plant has always grown" (*BGE* 6). Nietzsche's concern in this aphorism is of course to point out the lack of awareness and involuntariness involved in current philosophers' incorporating of the personal into their—our—practice of philosophy. As part of Nietzsche's continuing engagement with free spiritedness in this text, this aphorism prompts us to interrogate the prejudices and assumptions that we all bring to the practice of philosophy, including and especially our moral prejudices and assumptions. And, at the same time, Nietzsche's aphorism also opens up space in which we may consider how to respond to the personal as already forming a constituent part of our philosophical engagements, not least since, as Carol Hanisch has pointed out, the personal is political.[4]

In this volume, we encouraged authors to incorporate autobiographical components into their chapters, including insights from their lived experiences in academic philosophy as well as in their personal lives. However, we determined that it was important for authors to be supported in choosing how much, and in what ways, to speak from, or about, lived standpoints.[5] We think it is important to note that philosophers and political theorists, including volume authors, live with the issues of politicized identities addressed by the chapters collected here every day: lived experiences are a valuable component of scholarly engagement with politicized identities. In addition, it bears mention that since we asked authors to ground their work in engagements with lived standpoints, not all politicized identities are or could be represented directly in this volume. Even so, we think the scholarly analysis here is relevant and timely to the question of how to engage critically and constructively with politicized identities, which continues to be taken up in a variety of contexts internationally.

Also underlying our approach to this volume is a return to genealogy, by which we mean two things: first, a return to engagement with Nietzsche's text *On the Genealogy of Morality* as a political philosophical text; second, a return to emphasis on critical engagement with Nietzsche's concept of genealogy as a tool for engagement with social and political issues affecting diverse social groups in particular ways. These two, of course, often come bundled together. That is, by attending to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* and to the origins, the histories, and the psychological needs that

shape forms of life and their moral worth, one also opens up the methodological issue of whether this distinctive mode of investigating is up to the task of clarifying how our vexed concepts function or of addressing, and perhaps redressing, any number of urgent social issues.[6]

One particularly notable place in which the two have shown up together is Wendy Brown's essay "Wounded Attachments," which is notable for its sustained critical engagement with identity politics and examines the *ressentiment* of identities that she treats as grounded in their formative, historical, socio-political injuries.[7] Therein Brown develops a genealogical account of politicized identity as a product of what Nietzsche calls "willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal" (*GM* III:28).[8] On this basis, she contends that all liberal subjects, not just markedly disenfranchised ones, are vulnerable to *ressentiment* by virtue of their situatedness within, and production by, power, as well as by liberal discourse's denial of this situatedness and production: as she suggests, in attempting to displace their suffering, identities structured by *ressentiment* become problematically invested in their own subjection.[9] In her assessment of Patricia Williams's defense of rights, which forms part of her account, Brown points out that rights may ultimately abet the damages of privatization, which include the fragmentation of a political culture of responsibility and the disguise of the workings of class—workings that mean the promise of rights may ultimately be kept only for the few and not for the many.[10] Yet as C. Heike Schotten has pointed out, while Brown's account constitutes a definitive statement of left Nietzscheanism, it contrasts a Nietzschean freedom that is not clearly liberatory with what ultimately amounts to a straw version of identity politics.[11] Hence, it is Schotten's claim that a more robust account of politicized identity is available, one that incorporates insights from Nietzsche but calls upon us to grapple with questions of liberation anew.

Brown and Schotten, however, are not alone. Indeed, a significant body of scholarship has deployed Nietzsche's thought in response to ongoing social and political concerns that are bound up with politicized identities, of which a number also focus on, or point to the critical importance and continuing relevance of, Nietzsche's genealogy as an analytic tool. For example, Ofelia Schutte has used Nietzschean resources to develop an account of political identity in which she points out the significance of genealogical accounts of liberation struggles, which provide unifying collective memory for oppressed social groups.[12] Further still, as Robert Bernasconi has shown, in Foucault's critical engagement with his own genealogical perspective,

Foucault connects his methodology to that of Nietzsche, which according to Bernasconi, raises questions about Nietzsche's role in the history of race and racism as well as about Foucault's own role. Otherwise put, a clear-eyed engagement with the methods of genealogy ought to, or so Bernasconi argues, raise a fundamental critical issue: the question, that is, "of how easy it is to pass from tracing a history to praising it."[13] The worry, as Bernasconi has it, is that Nietzsche's thinking on heredity and breeding is tied up with concerns of race. Hence, even while evidence of Nietzsche's agreement with biopolitical anti-Semitism of some of his peers is clear, the evidence of Nietzsche's anti-Black racism cannot be, as Bernasconi maintains, explained away.[14] Accordingly, in assiduously attending to the history, the origins, and the very tracings of complex histories one may inadvertently usher in a host of normative commitments that, in Bernasconi's view, one would do well to be alert to and bear in mind.

Further still many scholars have drawn on Nietzsche's philosophy to strengthen interconnections between diverse and intersectional accounts of and engagements with politicized identities. For instance, in the first of her three books that interrogate the concept of the feminine in post-Hegelian philosophy, Luce Irigaray critically examines Nietzsche's relationship to the feminine.[15] A wide range of scholars have followed Irigaray in critical assessment of Nietzsche, women, and feminist theory.[16] More recently, Maudemarie Clark has written on questions of Nietzsche's receptivity to feminism, to the project of gay liberation, and to democracy.[17] Further still, Nietzschean conceptual tools for addressing and critically engaging with racialized identities have been explicitly developed in a collection of essays on the critical affinities between Nietzsche and African American thought edited by Jacqueline Scott and Todd Franklin.[18] Work by Robert Gooding-Williams has critically examined interconnections between Nietzsche and Black studies.[19] Lewis Gordon has deployed Nietzsche's thought in his critical engagements with racialized and colonized identities, noting where Nietzschean tools are useful to the advancement of justice, including in cases where Nietzsche himself may have been unsympathetic to an observation that may be appropriately grounded in his philosophy.[20]

The chapters in this volume pick up on some of the threads developed in earlier scholarship and seek to connect these with contemporary concerns. As such, the volume is divided into three main thematic areas, with chapters grouped according to these themes. The first section examines questions pertaining to the origins of identities and modes of subjection of identities. In section two, a more specific focus on elitism and political

hierarchies is maintained. In the third and final section, a range of emancipatory possibilities of Nietzsche's political and philosophical thinking are considered and assessed.

Part I: On the Origins of Identities and Modes of Subjection

One of the grounding questions of this volume is that of identity formation and development. How, for Nietzsche, do varying modes of identity form and acquire legitimacy? These questions are tied to conceptual and textual interpretation questions concerning Nietzsche's thinking on subjectivity and drive psychology. If it is the case that Nietzsche contests a unitary subject, offering an account of the sense of self as a composite of competing, often conflicting, drives, then what sense can we make of identity and of its role as the locus of agency or action? Any cogent answer to these questions requires provision of an account for the disjunction between Nietzsche's attempts to dissolve the self into a fluid, fluctuating set of drives and the stability of a unified and autonomous sense of ourselves as agents. To elaborate further on this point, we might also consider in what ways our philosophical accounts of ourselves serve to constrain us or to limit our conceptions of what is possible. We might even imagine how our understanding of ourselves might be reshaped.

Lawrence Hatab takes up these thematic issues in his contribution in chapter 1, arguing that Nietzsche's ostensibly inconsistent views on agency can be reconciled if one brings together Nietzsche's account of agonistic psychology with a mode of narrative identity structure. The narrative form, claims Hatab, offers a sense of self over time, yet that very *sense* of identity is itself constituted by an agonistic psychology: our drives and affects, both conscious and unconscious, often conflict and compete to gain a place of prominence in that story. Once we recognize this—that "selfhood" is a matter of conscious and unconscious agonistically contended perspectives— we can also appreciate how identity claims to nationality or ethnicity, for instance, follow a similar structure. By way of conclusion, Hatab draws on his own biography and evolving identities to further demonstrate the feasibility of the Nietzschean account he proposes.

In chapter 2, Paul Kirkland points out that what Nietzsche offers us is a new way of thinking about identity as a site of politicized contest. As Kirkland shows, Nietzsche develops a conception of identity that focuses on multiplicity and on agonal contestation, which roots identity in the

thoroughly tragic. By emphasizing these dynamic elements—the sense of self as the product of a mix of competing drives, for instance—Kirkland shows how Nietzsche offers us a more nuanced conception of identity that seeks to hold unease as a component of identity itself, rather than seeking to reconcile or otherwise do away with internal conflict. According to Kirkland, the tragic view of identity is precisely the one Nietzsche offers us through his self-portrait in *Ecce Homo*.

Robert Guay's chapter 3 explores the themes of identity formation and of their legitimacy. Nietzsche, Guay holds, sees all identity formation as aspirational, as inevitably striving to meet an ideal. As Guay puts it: "Identity itself is idealizing." The problem, however, is that these ideals after which we strive are often unreflectively or unconsciously internalized, making our identities self-estranging. Expanding on Nietzsche's concerns that identity formation, so understood, leads to homogenous normalizing, Guay demonstrates that social institutions can also produce conformity through abnormal and marginalized identities. If our identity is formed and shaped by both individual and social norms, which are at once available to conscious reflection and to the unconscious, how might we respond, how might identities be reshaped? One answer, Guay suggests, is to be found in a recognition of the idealizing structure of identity formation, which may show us a meaningful way of being who we are.

Allison Merrick agrees that identity formation, for Nietzsche, is thoroughly politicized. In exploring why a psychologist would undertake the genealogical study of morality, Merrick's chapter 4 demonstrates that historical, socio-political conflicts and contexts organize self-experience (*EH* "Genealogy"). If Nietzsche's account of those conflicts and contexts are persuasive then we can notice that genealogical investigations extend much further than excavating our taken-for-granted notions, reclaiming subjugated histories, and examining how forms of life have been contingently constructed. What Merrick's analysis shows is that Nietzsche's genealogical accounts also help us to understand how our affective, which is to say psychic, lives have come to be ordered and shaped. Attending to the genealogist as psychologist then carries some renewed significance for projects of political action: it reminds us that even as we must attend to subjugated histories we must also keep in view the psychic structures they produce.

In her contribution in chapter 5, Rebecca Longtin examines the enduring significance of Nietzsche's perspectivism to contemporary engagement with politicized identities. As Longtin points out, perspectivism situates knowledge within concrete embodied standpoints and their

socio-political-cultural contexts, shifts between different perspectives to challenge universal frameworks and dogmatic hegemonies and resists essentialist identity categories. Longtin compares Nietzsche's perspectivism with the work of Latin American decolonial feminist philosophers María Lugones, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Mariana Ortega in order to illuminate the contemporary political significance of perspectivism, which as she argues is of enduring significance if we want to theorize in intersectional ways that do real justice to multiple standpoints and worldviews.

Part II: Elitism and Political Hierarchies

In chapter 6, Daniel Conway also takes his cue from *On the Genealogy of Morality*. In focusing on the psychological profile of ascetic priest, Conway demonstrates the ways that the character type marshals shame to shape identity. As a means of illuminating and assessing Nietzsche's attempts to politicize the figure and role of the ascetic priest, Conway draws on the 2014 Damian Chazelle film *Whiplash*, which tells the story of a sadistic music teacher, Terence Fletcher (played by J. K. Simmons) and his talented protégé, Andrew Neiman (played by Miles Teller). What emerges from their interactions is a view of shame as a tool of subjection. Open, then, is the question of whether Andrew's overcoming of Fletcher is possible for the "new philosophers" Nietzsche envisages. Can we use Chazelle's film, the very template he lays down, to complete the Nietzsche's genealogical account? Might the priests too take pride in and feel himself awakened and invigorated by the whiplashing he has received from his erstwhile ward and protégé, the philosopher?

Conway's chapter, of course, opens up a number of pointed but often neglected questions: Why does Nietzsche need the character of the priest to be so terribly inflexible in their allegiance to the ascetic ideal? Is that a flaw in Nietzsche's account, an internal weakness? Or is there a more promising explanation? Might the priests come to recognize a problem in the way that they have maintained their power and forgo their ways? This raises, in a rather acute way, the questions of what values, and of whose values, should be prioritized and why. This is, of course, to grapple and contend with Nietzsche's aristocratic politics.

Rebecca Aili Ploof takes up this task in chapter 7. In focusing on a mode of ontological freedom as historically discovered and deployed by an aristocratic class, Ploof contends that, according to Nietzsche, so too with

us: the rewards of such freedoms, far from being democratically distributed, will be the purview of the elite. Ploof's explanation for Nietzsche's aristocratic elitism focuses on the value of freedom. According to her, Nietzsche identifies how the political drive toward ever greater equality jeopardizes the freedom for humans to become otherwise. As Ploof shows, projects focused on equality entrench a form of human being that is unhealthy and harmful to itself through the universalization of ascetic ideals, scientism, and democracy. Ploof therefore suggests that Nietzsche proposes we should seek to reinvigorate freedom as the most valuable value, because freedom is the value that enables the transformation of human being itself, even while this transformation is limited to the few.

In a similar vein, C. Heike Schotten suggests in chapter 8 that we must recognize that Nietzsche's critique of slave morality is written from the vantage point of those in power. Instead of reprimanding Nietzsche for situating his critique "from above," as a mode of elitism, Schotten uses that perspective to draw out the misplaced *ressentiment* of the Right. In so doing, Schotten demonstrates through her analysis of the US "terrorism" discourse that Nietzsche's critique can be usefully directed toward the "reactionary rightwing powerholders ascendant in our current moment"—and as she also points out, this is also, in some sense, "every moment hitherto in the existence of these United States."

Part III: Emancipatory Possibilities

The final group of chapters in this volume examine the question of whether Nietzsche's engagement with questions of politicized identities and his wider political thought are best viewed as descriptive or whether his philosophy offers us a therapeutic or even normative political agenda. That is, these contributions explore whether Nietzsche simply helps us to better diagnose the ills of modernity or whether he also offers us a means of redress for the conditions in which we find ourselves. Can we deploy Nietzsche usefully in support of political action, and if so, in what way and to what extent is such action limited by Nietzsche's own prejudices and presumptions? Moreover, these contributors consider what it is that we get from Nietzsche that we cannot get from other political philosophers and theorists concerned with issues of politicized identity, especially with regard to contemporary political projects that drive at egalitarian or democratic ends.

In chapter 9, Elif Yavnik takes up these questions in relation to the issue of feminine subjectivity in Nietzsche. Yavnik argues that the Nietzschean performative *summoning* of the feminine can be viewed as a call to the possibility of being and living differently. As Yavnik explains, this is to open oneself up to living in a world shaped by diverse experiences, bodies, and sensibilities as well as to encountering hitherto less apparent facets of oneself and of understanding oneself differently. In line with the diagnostic dimension of Nietzsche's relevance to contemporary issues of politicized identities, Yavnik proposes that what Nietzsche offers to us today is a signpost to the possibility of overcoming the understanding of identity through male perspectives and masculine discourses and orders.

Kaitlyn Creasy also assesses Nietzsche's agenda as being descriptive rather than normative. In chapter 10, offering an account of the transpersonal nature of the affects, Creasy shows that Nietzsche illuminates the affective dynamics of oppression and internalizing of harmful social norms resulting in harms that range from extreme to subtle and insidious. According to Creasy, a Nietzschean analysis of the affective dynamics of oppression, especially gender-based oppression, can help to explain the affective productions of patriarchal culture that subject women to particular cultural or social norms that potentially result in exhaustion, self-estrangement, or even self-loathing. In so doing, Creasy shows how her Nietzschean account fleshes out a critical affective mechanism of what Sandra Bartky has termed psychological oppression.

Jacqueline Scott proposes a therapeutic account in chapter 11, focusing on issues of race in her assessment of Nietzsche's relevance to politicized identities. Scott makes plainer how one of Nietzsche's goals in his later works was to experiment with the aims and methods of philosophy, in order that—in the face of a tragic view of life—the healthiest psychological types may affirm their lives. With this specific form of philosophical experimentation in mind, Scott argues that we need to adopt a tragic view of our racialized lives in the contemporary world in order to affirm our lives as racialized subjects in a racialized society. According to Scott, doing so will enable us to accept the endemic and chronic nature of racism in society, acceptance that is necessary to enable action to revalue racialized identities in ways that make real differences to the material conditions of people's lives and to their capacity to affirm their racialized lives. For example, she applies Nietzschean tragic affirmation to explain the transformative potential in a case examined by Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, in which prisoners might experiment

with their racialized identities in order to create the solidarity across racial identities necessary to improve their incarcerated working conditions and their lives after prison. As Scott also points out, the problem of racialized division and the need for tragic affirmation to combat it is not solely an American problem: it is also a problem for philosophy as a discipline.

Jeremy Fortier also adopts a therapeutic approach to the issue of emancipatory possibility from a different angle: How might we affirm the past, Fortier wonders in chapter 12, particularly a past that we may like to resist, in whole or in part? Can one affirm the past while also at the same time resisting it, or at least certain of its political implications? Fortier shows how both Nietzsche and Ralph Ellison wrestled productively and insightfully with these questions. As Fortier demonstrates, both Nietzsche and Ellison concluded that finding something to *affirm* in one's history is a precondition for effectively resisting, and transcending, that history. As Fortier makes clear, what both Nietzsche and Ellison demonstrate is the interconnection of self-knowledge and historical knowledge, which enables our critical questioning of contemporary values while also supporting a space in which to create values. As such, Fortier's comparison of Ellison and Nietzsche shows us how each man's work can illuminate the other's, as well as illustrating the continuing relevance of their thinking to political thought.

Rebecca Bamford's account in chapter 13 shows how Nietzsche's philosophy has been used to provide support for disability justice projects in the past. Similar to Scott and Fortier, Bamford takes a therapeutic-normative approach. She argues that Nietzsche's critique of *Mitleid* (pity or compassion) and the free spirit works in which this critique is grounded, still count as a helpful resource for disability justice projects. As Bamford suggests, Nietzsche's critique of *Mitleid* can help to unpick the structural conditions that perpetuate ableism, promote disabled people's agency and independence, and provide a useful tool to help us understand how moral, social, and political philosophical assumptions and prejudices—particularly when these are predicated on the assumed universal moral and social correctness of *Mitleid*—hinder the elimination of ableism from philosophy as well as from wider society.

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As is clear, not all topics and issues pertinent to politicized identities and the social and political issues tied to them could be covered in any single

volume.[21] We therefore make no claim for the completeness of this volume's coverage of the plethora of complex issues concerning experiences of intersectional injustice to which politicized identities remain vulnerable. Rather, the chapters gathered in this volume constitute a current appraisal of Nietzsche's contemporary relevance to understanding, and responding effectively to, some of the important range of social and political issues that are inextricable from politicized identities in their diversity and intersectionality. As Kimberlé Crenshaw has pointed out in a key contribution on intersectionality, identity, and the political, the social power in delineating difference may be "the source of social empowerment and reconstruction" rather than a source of domination.[22] Nietzsche's philosophy is neither an unproblematic tool nor always the best tool for seeking social empowerment or for pursuing projects of social justice. Our contention here is the modest one that Nietzsche may be a useful tool toward such ends and that it is worthwhile to continue to ask when and why political philosophy and theory grounded in Nietzsche can do useful liberatory work that may make a meaningful difference in people's lives and experiences. Our hope, of course, is that this volume achieves just that.

Notes

1. We have opted for the term of art "politicized identity." The reason is that the papers collected in this volume argue that Nietzsche places identity itself on the scene of agonal socio-political and historical struggles.

2. Major, Dovidio, and Link 2018; Valentine 2022.

3. Brown-Dean 2019.

4. Hanisch 1970 (2006). As Hanisch notes in her 2006 introduction to the text, the title of her essay was suggested by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt.

5. Indeed, some of our contributors comment on their approaches in their biosketches for the volume.

6. Bernard Williams, as is well known, draws upon Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* to clarify how the concept of truthfulness may be said to function (2002). Others have marshaled the text and its methods to clarify and combat a number of urgent social issues, including racism, sexism, and ableism (e.g., McWhorter 2009; Scott 2006; Tremain 2017). Others still have made use of the mode of genealogical inquiry to illuminate our current historical contexts and the ways it shapes modes of life (e.g., Erlenbusch-Anderson 2018).

7. Brown 1993. See also Elisabeth Anker 2022. Indeed, it is worth pointing out that Brown's approach can be neatly contrasted with the complaints about

identity politics that focus on vague appeals to a focus on identity being somehow problematically "woke."

8. Brown 1993, 401–2.

9. Brown 1993, 401–2.

10. Brown 1993.

11. Schotten 2019.

12. Schutte 1993, 16.

13. Bernasconi 2017a, 174.

14. Bernasconi 2017b.

15. Irigaray 1991.

16. Oppel 2005; Patton 1993; Diethe 2013.

17. Clark 2015.

18. Scott and Franklin 2006.

19. Gooding-Williams 2006.

20. See for example Gordon 2022, 207; Gordon 1997.

21. Though to offer one example, Longtin's piece (chapter 5 of this volume) does indeed touch upon issues of colonialism, though we acknowledge that more work could have been included that would have also clarified the extent to which Nietzsche's work may be a resource for anti-colonial movements. Further still, and on another front, Allie Merrick has recently shown that Nietzsche's *Antichrist* draws upon and makes use of the genealogical mode of inquiry to make plain that, in Nietzsche's view at least, the origins of Christianity rest on a reinterpretation of the type of the redeemer. Hence, open here is another avenue of scholarship, one that illuminates Nietzsche's account of the origins, motivations, and histories of religious identities as well as a critical evaluation of those claims, but one that for reasons of shape could not be taken up by this volume (Merrick 2023).

22. Crenshaw 1991.

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