# The Holocene is Dead and We Killed It: The Revaluation of Values and the Challenge of Community in the Anthropocene

Michael Christopher Sardo, Occidental College

Prepared for WPSA Annual Meeting, April 2021

Abstract:

For many political and critical theorists, the Anthropocene - the new epoch of geologic time reflecting humanity’s transformation of the Earth system - cannot be adequately responded to within the dominant paradigms of humanism and neoliberalism, but requires a fundamental transformation in social and political values, including responsibility, justice, freedom, and even the human itself. Writing a century before the emergence of the climate crisis, Friedrich Nietzsche described a similar ontological catastrophe demanding a radical “revaluation of all values:” the death of God. Reading Nietzche’s diagnosis of the nihilism of modernity and attempt to establish new values in the context of the Anthropocene, this paper explores the possibilities and challenges of founding political communities in a period of ontological insecurity. With a particular focus on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I argue that Nietzsche’s thinking offers both generative resources and cautionary tales for negotiating such political dilemmas. Specifically, the inability of Zarathustra to found, or Nietzsche to theorize, a community based on life-affirming values illustrates the danger that the project of value-transformation can generate resentment of and antipathy towards political life.

## I: Introduction – The Death of the Holocene God

Since its introduction into popular discourse in 2000 by Crutzen and Stoermer,[[1]](#footnote-1) the idea of “the Anthropocene” – that human activities have come to “rival the great forces of nature and are pushing the Earth into a planetary *terra incognito*”[[2]](#footnote-2) – has dominated much of environmental discourse and imagination. It captures not only the scale and complexity of the climate crisis, but also the sense of existential anxiety that it creates. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) itself noted that its 2018 SR15 should be interpreted in this context: “human influence has become a principal agent of change on the planet, shifting the world out of the relatively stable Holocene period into a new geological era, often termed the Anthropocene.”[[3]](#footnote-3) While debate over both its stratigraphical accuracy and theoretical implications continues,[[4]](#footnote-4) the idea that humanity is fundamentally transforming the geological conditions that have undergirded the human condition since the Neolithic Revolution demands political-theoretical interrogation.

Clive Hamilton captures the eschatological import of the Anthropocene, writing that it represents the “material possibility of our own extinction” as humanity moves from the “pleasant and predictable climate of the Holocene epoch” to “a new, unstable, and unpredictable geological era,” concluding that “in short, the relationship of human beings to the natural world we inhabit has been upended” and “we must face up to the fact that this situation, an irreversible and dangerous shift in the Earth’s trajectory is our future and the ideals that we have inherited from the era before the break must all be open to question.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Such thinking is reflected in a slew of recently published popular works on the climate crisis. Climate change “changes everything.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The human condition has begun to “falter” and “play itself out.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Earth itself has been “lost,”[[8]](#footnote-8) and will become “uninhabitable.”[[9]](#footnote-9) While the apocalyptic invocations of these books give way to hopeful calls for action,[[10]](#footnote-10) for some such hope irresponsibly distracts us from the threat of near-term societal collapse.[[11]](#footnote-11) It is necessary to question “the foundations of civilization, the myth of human centrality, our imagined isolation;”[[12]](#footnote-12) it is necessary to “learn to die not as individuals, but as a civilization.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Similar language permeates recent work in social and political theory. William E. Connolly describes ﻿the Anthropocene as “the Whirlwind of today, with its implacable flooding of low-lying zones, glacier melts, temperature increases, intense storms, expanding zones of drought, proliferating species extinctions, ocean acidification, threat to monsoons, refugee crises, and potential shifts in the planetary ocean conveyor belt.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Donna Haraway rejects the term Anthropocene for its “cynicism, defeatism, and self-certain and self-fulfilling predictions” of doom in favor of what she calls the “Chthulucene” to emphasize the interconnectedness of humans, non-human animals, other forms of life, and abiotic forces at play and at stake in the climate crisis.[[15]](#footnote-15) Yet for her this epoch is no less eschatological, as her call to “stay with the trouble” replaces the abstract futurism of apocalypticism with a call to remain present and attentive to the ongoing multi-species apocalypses. Similarly, for Bruno Latour, the Anthropocene serves both as the eschatological revelation that Nature, an authoritative objective ground to settle political conflict, never existed in the first place and as a call to situate oneself “*during* the end time, for then you know that you will not escape from the time that is passing.”[[16]](#footnote-16) The Anthropocene captures, albeit imperfectly and problematically, this collective sense that in the age of an escalating climate emergency, that “the present form of this world is passing away.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

Writing approximately a century before the emergence of the scientific consensus around climate change, Friedrich Nietzsche evokes a similar sense of existential dread at the self-undermining character of modernity with announcement of the death of God. “Where is God?” his parabolic madman of *The Gay Science* provokes, “I’ll tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I! We are all his murderers.” This death describes not merely the Enlightenment’s attack on traditional forms of religious authority, but an ontological catastrophe in which the metaphysical and moral foundations of European modernity destabilized themselves. As the madman continues,

“What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sidewards, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren’t we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn’t empty space breathing at us? Hasn’t it got colder? Isn’t night and more night coming again and again? Don’t lanterns have to be lit in the morning?”[[18]](#footnote-18)

Later in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche explicates these implications in less metaphorical language. Positivistic science borrows from Christianity the “the unconditional belief or condition on which it rests, that truth is more important than anything else.” However, this unconditional will to truth having undermined religious interpretations of nature and existence, turns back upon itself becoming a principle “hostile to life and destructive” as it challenges both the necessary errors and illusions that make life possible and the unconditional status of the truth itself (*GS*: 344). The enlightenment project of critique and unveiling cannot be limited to religious illusions; it soon unveils morality, political authority, and the self as all too human illusions.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Nietzsche’s account of modernity’s self-destructive tendencies – that the Enlightenment destabilizes the foundations of knowledge, morality, and politics in its attempt to settle them – anticipates Latour’s account of the Anthropocene as introducing an instability “in the very notion of ‘nature.’”[[20]](#footnote-20) True to his own self-description as untimely, Nietzsche can be read as a, or even the, thinker of the Anthropocene. In an early student essay of 1862, he writes “World history is, then, the history of matter” and that “all distinctions flow together in a great unity, in which all development is in stages: everything flowing into a monstrous ocean wherein once again all the levers of development of the world unite, consolidate, all-one.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Another early essay begins with the fable of “clever animals” who “invented cognition” before the Earth “froze an the clever animals had to die,” all within a minute of the “history of the world.”[[22]](#footnote-22) His prophet Zarathustra begins his public ministry with the invocation to “*remain faithful to the earth*” in the aftermath of the death of God.[[23]](#footnote-23) Later, he will call his disciples “back to the body and life: so that it may give the earth its meaning, a human meaning” (*Z*, “Bestowing Virtue,” §2)! In *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche almost anticipates the contemporary focus on more-than-human assemblages and inter-species collaboration, writing of the importance of nutrition, climate, and geography on his own philosophical practice.[[24]](#footnote-24) Finally, just the Anthropocene requires rethinking and reorienting practices of belonging, dwelling, and kinship, the contours of civilization and the human condition, or even our conception of the Earth, for Nietzsche, the death of God requires the revaluation of values to create “a goal for mankind” that “gives the earth its meaning and its future” (*Z*: “Tablets,” §2) lest its disorientation culminate in the nihilism of the “last human being” (*Z*: “Prologue,” 5).

In what follows, I draw on this anachronistic, but provocative, interpretation of Nietzsche as a thinker of the planetary crisis of the Anthropocene to explore the politics of the ontological demands it generates. What possibilities, or necessities, for founding and creating political values, practices, and communities does the rupture of the Anthropocene create – just as Nietzsche believed the death of God did? But, and perhaps more importantly, what challenges and dangers attend the attempt to engage in political theory and political practice after the end of the world? I argue that Nietzsche’s thinking offers both generative resources and cautionary tales for theorizing such political dilemmas. In particular, the inability of Zarathustra to found, or Nietzsche to theorize, a political community around the project of revaluation illustrates the danger that must be negotiated in any attempt to radical refigure political life: when the fate of humanity is at stake in the project of revaluation, resentment of and antipathy towards the contingency, imperfection, and tedium of politics can create the very nihilism it seeks to challenge in the temptations of perfectionism and a withdrawal from political life.

## II- Climate Nihilism and the Last Humans

The climate crisis constitutes if not the end of *the* world, the end of *a* world. While claims about near term societal collapse have been criticized as alarmist and hyperbolic, the Anthropocene names a fundamental shift in the geophysical and geopolitical conditions that have governed the human project for all of its recorded history. Whereas the Holocene was marked by a relative stability in the Earth system, which made possible the emergence and dominance of human civilization, the Anthropocene describes “an emerging epoch in which human influences become decisive in affecting the parameters of the Earth system, accompanied by the potential to generate instability or even catastrophic shifts in the character of the whole system (“state shifts”) of the sort that are common in the planet’s deeper history, but unknown in recorded human history.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Even in a world where catastrophic warming greater than 2ºC is avoided, the human transformation of the planet, from greenhouse gas emissions to land transformation, is so extensive that it has created uncertainty in the functioning of the Earth system. Comparing current anthropogenic forcings with those associated with previous “state-shifts” in the Earth system, Barnosky et al. suggest that “another global-scale state shift is highly plausible within decades to centuries, if it has not already been initiated. As a result, the biological resources we take for granted at present may be subject to rapid and unpredictable transformations within a few human generations.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Because existing political, social, and economic institutions developed in the context of the climatic stability of the Holocene, Dryzek and Pickering argue, the potential for rapid and unpredictable fluctuations in the Earth system calls into question the survivability of institutions – the sovereign state, the market, liberal individualism – that many have taken for granted.

The Anthropocene represents the end of a world in another sense: no matter how political societies respond to the climate crisis in the coming years and decades, their response, or lack thereof, will create radically new conditions of political life. As Timothy Mitchell has argued, the very materiality of fossil-fuel extraction and production and the possibility of seemingly limitless low-cost energy expenditure made possible the development of both modern democracy and a global economy predicated on perpetual growth.[[27]](#footnote-27) Decarbonizing the global economy will require large-scale economic, social, and political transformations, whether by substantially reducing the demand for energy or reconfiguring the energy infrastructure to provide it in carbon-neutral ways. Similarly, Jason Moore contends that the climate crisis signals the end of the “cheap nature” that sustained capitalism’s development and therefore “therefore signals the exhaustion of a civilizational model;” the rise of “new ontological politics – of food sovereignty, climate justice, de-growth, and cognate movements” point to contestation over what models of political and economic organization will replace the present.[[28]](#footnote-28) Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright contend that even the failure to effectively mitigate climate change will give rise to new forms of political organization, what they call “climate leviathan:” a global sovereign created to manage the adaptation to the perpetual emergencies of an altered climate.

Whether the worst effects of climate change are successfully mitigated or not, the Anthropocene represents an inflection point in the human condition. As Matthew Paterson summarizes:

Either the world economy will be totally transformed by the abandonment of fossil fuels and the emergence of a renewable economy, the shift from ruminant agriculture, the shift to electric transport systems, the elimination of almost all aviation, and the financial and other infrastructure that underpins these transformations. Or it will collapse as a cascade of climate impacts overwhelm our social institutions and daily practices. More likely, we will experience some combination of these two processes, both of which are likely to dwarf anything human societies have experienced, at least on a global basis.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

The Anthropocene evokes existential and eschatological language not merely because of the magnitude of the changes and challenges it represents, but because it is an existential threat to the social, economic, and political structure that constitutes the world. It threatens the categories and values through which political communities are organized and oriented. As Dale Jamieson notes, “climate change is world-constituting.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Because climate change alters the conditions under which we make moral and political judgments, traditional and commonsense moral and political values demand revaluation and revision. “Commonsense morality operates within a horizon of possibility. It is not well-equipped to make judgments about the conditions that fix these possibilities.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

That this prospect invites denial, resentment, meliorism, and despair would not be surprising to Nietzsche. Instead of the necessary revaluation of values, the crisis of modernity had produced only nihilism, the condition under which “the highest values devaluate themselves.”[[32]](#footnote-32) For Nietzsche, nihilism is an ambiguous state. The state of meaninglessness and disorientation that the loss of traditional worldviews and sources of authority creates can be liberatory as it encourages the creation of new, life-affirming values – what Nietzsche calls “active nihilism” – or it can create a sense of despair and world-weariness in what he calls “passive nihilism” (*WP*: 10, 23). While Nietzsche celebrates the active nihilist as the free spirit, his concern is that modernity produces passive nihilism.

Nietzsche locates the root cause of passive nihilism not in Enlightenment skepticism of absolutes, but in the belief in moral and metaphysical absolutes themselves. For Nietzsche, such doctrines constitute judgments on and against the physical world from the perspective of an unattainable metaphysical ideal (*WP*: 6, 11).[[33]](#footnote-33) Such thinking is rooted in a desire to make sense of the world of constant change and becoming and to impose categories upon it amenable to moral judgement. Conceptions of independence substances, causality, and the free will stem from the “instinct for punishing and judging” (*TI*: “Errors,” 7). By identifying guilty agents who can be judged and punished, the reality of human suffering can be incorporated within a “moral-world order” in which the world was governed by divine providence or secular progress. However, this same faith in truth and causal explanation undermined the possibility of the moral-world order, as the search for causes culminated in a mechanistic worldview with no space for religious illusions such as God, the soul, or the afterlife.

Yet even as Enlightenment skepticism and positivism undermined their religious foundations, Christian moral values lingered in secular forms. While the critique and dissolution of Christian values has created a “magnificent tension of spirit” and “with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals,” the death of God is experienced “as a crisis or state of need” generating attempts to “unbend the bow” through religious reform and democratic politics (*BGE*: “Preface”). Divine providence became the progress of history. The soul was replaced with the autonomous self. The salvation of the afterlife was translated into socialist and democratic demands for justice. Thus, despite the death of God, these values linger as the “shadow” of God” (*GS*: §108).

However, for Nietzsche, the continued belief in these values, once robbed of their metaphysical foundations, no longer animated and oriented life and action. As he notes in a notebook entry from 1887-1888:

The supreme values in whose service man *should* live, especially when they were very hard on him and exacted a high price – those *social values* were erected over man to strengthen their voice, as if they were commands of God, as “reality,” as the “true” world, as a hope and *future* world. Now that the shabby origin of these values is becoming clear, the universe seems to have lost value, seems “meaningless” – but that is only a *transitional stage* (*WP*: §7).

Crucially, the problem is not simply that religious values are false. Nietzsche acknowledge that errors and illusions are necessary for life (*TL*: pp. 150-151; *BGE*: §289). These values become nihilistic when they no longer provide the action-orienting function they once had. Nihilism describes the result of these values losing the ability to give life meaning and purpose. Robert Pippin describes nihilism as “a *failure of desire*” rather than “a failure of knowledge.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Nihilism is a psychological problem and not just a metaphysical problem.

The response to nihilism is not the articulation of a more accurate scientific worldview, but the creation of and commitment to values that can orient and motivate action. As he writes in *The Gay Science,* “the greatest recent event – that ‘God is dead’; that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable – is already starting to cast its first shadow over Europe.” The proper comportment to this event should not be “sad and gloomy, but much more like a new and barely describable light, happiness, relief, amusement, encouragement, dawn” as the “horizon seems clear again” and the “sea, *our* sea, lies open again” (*GS*: §343). Read in the context of the Anthropocene, and the reality of human suffering that the climate crisis creates, Nietzsche’s enthusiasm about the possibilities the death of God creates is irresponsible; yet his argument for hope, optimism and creativity, rather than despair is valuable. The challenge of founding new values and forms of life after the end of a world requires an affective disposition of joy, generosity, and creativity rather than despair, resentment, and melancholy.

This is Zarathustra’s task as he descends from his mountain solitude to give humanity a “gift” (*Z*: “Prologue,” §2). He announces, in the first town he enters, his teaching of the “overman” the possibility that the current state of things can be overcome (*Z*: “Prologue,” §3). “It is time that mankind set themselves a goal,” he admonishes the crowd, “it is time that mankind plant the seed of their highest hope;” however the time is short, as “the time approaches when human beings will no longer give birth to a dancing star [...] Behold! I show you *the last human being*” (*Z*: “Prologue, §5). The “last humans” lack the animating values to live, act, or create in the aftermath of the death of God. For them, the “earth has become small” and both religion and politics are eschewed as “too burdensome” and replaced with simple pleasures and entertainment. “‘What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?’ – thus asks the last human being, blinking” (*Z*: “Prologue,” §5). Business as usual dominates the life of the last human being who takes no risks and for whom nothing changes.

While these last human beings, weary of the word and of themselves, epitomize the passive nihilism that Nietzsche detests, Zarathustra combats this nihilistic attachment to self-devaluing values in a variety of forms, including the religious “preachers of death” who offer the promise of “eternal life” as a balm to a life of perpetual suffering (*Z*: “Preachers of Death”), the “soothsayer’s” pessimism that insists that “Everything is empty, everything is the same, everything was” (*Z*: “Soothsayer”), and the “spirit of gravity” that transforms life into “heavy burden” by imposing the weight of “good and evil” on every aspect of life” (*Z*: “Spirit of Gravity,” §2). In all these forms, the tension of the death of God is alleviated and the necessity of transformation is dismissed. The status quo, and the meaningless existence of the last human beings, is maintained, even as the conditions of that existence become impossible to maintain.

The Anthropocene exhibits similar trends. Despite the emergence of the scientific consensus concerning the climate crisis in the 1980s and the signing of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate change in 1992, more than half of greenhouse gas emissions since the industrial revolution have been emitted since 1989.[[35]](#footnote-35) On the one hand, much of this failure can be attributed to organized climate denialism and evasion funded by fossil fuel interests and propelled by conservative politics, which constitute an anti-reflexive counter-movement that mobilizes to “defend the industrial capitalist social order” during “times of fundamental social change.”[[36]](#footnote-36) On the other hand, even attempts to mitigate and adapt to climate change are resisted by what Dryzek and Pickering call the “pathological path dependency” of social, economic, and political institutions, which institutions not only inhibit “the creation of alternative institutions that would work better” but are also themselves “complicit in generating the unstable Earth system that now characterizes the Anthropocene,” by locking-in carbon intensive practices.[[37]](#footnote-37)

From a Nietzschean perspective, both conservative resistance to decarbonization and attempts to decarbonize within the dominant framework of market capitalism and sovereign states can be interpreted as signs of the nihilism of the existing social and political order. This is not to discount the imaginative and creative work of activists around the world, including Extinction Rebellion, the Sunrise Movement, indigenous communities, and activists from the global south and island nations most threatened by climate change. However, just as Zarathustra’s pronouncement of the death of God invited either dismissal, resentment, and fatalism, the shock of the Anthropocene has produced both resentful dismissal and dangerous incrementalism from the existing systems of power. The very value systems of modernity – liberal individualism, market rationalism, disenchanted nature, the sovereign state – have nihilistically devalued themselves, as they simultaneously undermine the planetary conditions that made their existence possible while precluding the types of imaginative and creative political responses the Anthropocene demands. The attachment to these values, even for those committed to sustainability and decarbonization, limits the range of responses to the Anthropocene to fatalist resignation to near term societal collapse or faith in technocratic and technological solutions to the crisis, from finding the correct carbon price to unproven carbon removal technology. Lacking the animating and orienting values to inspire radical transformation in the face of uncertainty, the dominant approaches to the climate crisis recall *Zarathustra*’s last human beings, silently blinking as their world becomes unrecognizable.

## III- Towards the Revaluation of All Values

Writing in 1992, Dale Jamieson summarizes the ethical-political challenge of the Anthropocene in almost Nietzschean language:

Science has alerted us to the impact of humankind on the planet, each other, and all life. This dramatically confronts us with questions about who we are, our relations to nature, and what we are willing to sacrifice for various possible futures. We should confront this as a fundamental challenge to our values and not treat it as if it were simply another technical problem to managed.[[38]](#footnote-38)

More recently, Frank Biermann has questioned the adequacy of the “environmental policy” and “environmentalism” paradigm for addressing the complex challenges of the Anthropocene, arguing for more expansive conceptions of environmental policy and governance that can conceptualize the Earth system as a whole, integrating ecological, geological, social, economic, and political dynamics.[[39]](#footnote-39) Dryzek and Pickering similarly contend that such a paradigm shift requires cultivating ecological reflexivity, “the capacity of structures, systems, and sets of ideas to question their own core commitments, and if necessary change themselves in response,” as the climatic instability of the Anthropocene makes it impossible to design effective or equitable institutions *ex-ante*.

This demand for value transformation, paradigm shifts, and radical reflexivity point to the value of Nietzsche as an interlocutor for political theory in the Anthropocene. Nietzsche names “the revaluation of all values” as his “formula for an act of supreme self-examination on the part of humanity” (*EH*: “Destiny,” §1). Though Nietzsche never produced his planned work *The Revaluation of All Values*,[[40]](#footnote-40) its project is immanent throughout his corpus. It consists in both “no-saying” and “yes-saying” aspects (*EH*: “Beyond Good an Evil,” §1). The former constitutes Nietzsche’s deconstructive project, his “*critique of modernity*, not excluding the modern sciences, modern arts, and even modern politics, along with pointers to a contrary type that is as little modern as possible – a noble Yes-saying type” (*EH*: “Beyond Good and Evil,” §2). It is a “a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values should itself, for once*, *be examined*” (*GM*: “Preface,” §6). Crucially, this deconstructive revaluation seeks not merely to show that the values that have organized human life up until this point are false or illusory, but to give a naturalistic and historical account of the development of these values, how they came to dominate, and what forms of life they both make possible and preclude. Hence his turn to genealogy to uncover “the conditions and circumstances under which the values grew up, developed and changed (morality as result, as symptom as mask, as tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, remedy, simulant, inhibition, poison)” (*GM*: “Preface,” §6).[[41]](#footnote-41)

While the project of revaluation requires a critical interrogation of dominant moral values to understand how they came to be dominant and what psychological and political factors contribute to their dominance, it requires a complementary affirmative and creative project. As he writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, such investigation, “are only preconditions for his [the philosopher’s] task: the task itself has another will, — it calls for him to *create values*” (*BGE*: 211). Without this “yes-saying” project, little differentiates his project from the skeptical project that results in the nihilism and world-weariness of the last human being.[[42]](#footnote-42) Hence, Nietzsche’s project in *Zarathustra* is to explore the possibility of value-creation, even as he, Nietzsche, “is no longer confident that the promise of radical cultural change is imminent in received historical circumstances.”[[43]](#footnote-43) As Robert Gooding-Williams continues, "For Nietzsche, part of showing how it is possible to create new values is showing how it is possible for someone and, in particular, for Zarathustra, to maintain his commitment to becoming a creator of new values despite the truth of the claim that assertions of skepticism tend repeatedly to undermine and could even obliterate that commitment.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Thus, *Zarathustra* offers a productive vehicle for exploring the conditions of possible value-creation after the end of the world, as well as the dangers and risks of that project.

Zarathustra seeks to replace the deadening weight of Christian value systems, and its secular after-lives, with an immanent Earthly one, grounded in experience, physicality, and becoming. Rather than viewing earthly existence as “the eternally imperfect, the mirror image and imperfect image of an eternal contradiction” to be escaped into some Hinterworldly perfection, Zarathustra teaches: “no longer bury your head in the sand of heavenly things, but bear it freely instead, an earthly head that creates a meaning for the earth! I teach mankind a new will; to *want* the path that human beings have traveled blindly, to pronounce it good and no longer sneak to the side of it like the sick and the dying-out” (*Z*: “Hinterworldly”). Rather than based on renunciation, Zarathustra seeks to guide “the virtue that has flown away back to the earth – yes, back to the body and life: so that it may give the earth its meaning, a human meaning” (*Z*: “Bestowing Virtue,” §2). His morality is based on abundance and generosity rather than “revenge, punishment, reward, retribution” (*Z*: “Virtuous”). Zarathustra critiques the “preachers of equality” as harboring a hidden spirit of resentment and vengeance (*Z*: “Tarantulas”), and praises a “new nobility” that both contests the mediocritizing forces of modernity – “all rabble and all despotic rule” – and promotes plurality and difference, for “many noble ones are needed, to be sure, and many kinds of noble ones” (*Z*: “Tablets,” 11).

The precise contours of this value system remain undetermined, as critical to Zarathustra’s revaluation is to understand moral values as contingent, alterable, and perspectival rather than fixed in advance. Recognizing that all moral valuations express a will to power, Zarathustra characterizes the desire for absolute and universal moral laws as a nihilistic project to “create the world before which you could kneel.” “Truly, I say to you,” he continues, “good and evil that would be everlasting – there is no such thing” (*Z*: “Self-Overcoming”). Zarathustra does not seek to proselytize a particular moral system – Nietzsche writes in *Ecce Homo* that he is not a “moralistic monster” and that “no new idols are erected by me” (*EH*: “Preface,” §2) – but to promote a culture and value system where individuals are free to “give yourself your own evil and good and hang your will above yourself like a law” (*Z*: “Way of the Creator”). He admonishes his followers that his own morality is nothing but his own taste: “not good, not bad, but *my* taste [...] ‘This – it turns out – is *my* way – where is yours?’ That is how I answered those who asked me ‘the way.’ *The* way after all – it does not exist” (*Z*: “Gravity,” §2). For Zarathustra, the only truly affirmative and animating value system is one that is legislated by one’s self, not imposed externally. Only self-legislating values for oneself can avoid the nihilism of the last human being.

Zarathustra’s value system echoes many calls for revised ethical-political imaginations in the Anthropocene.[[45]](#footnote-45) As Adrian Del Caro notes, if there is a political project that Nietzsche’s thought can be put to use for, despite Nietzsche’s own antipathy towards politics (*EH*: “Wise,” §3), it “is the reclamation and preservation of the earth he made this his task, he set the standard at the threshold of the ecological age for humanity's first attempt to dwell affirmatively, intelligently, and in partnership with the earth.”[[46]](#footnote-46) However, my concern is less in evaluating the value of Nietzsche’s particular value-commitments for the orienting politics in the Anthropocene, but on reflecting how his model of value-transformation provides resources for thinking about such possibilities in our own context. It is less the content of Nietzsche’s revaluation than the challenges Zarathustra faces and how he responds to such challenges that I find generative.

## IV: Self-Artistry, Perfectionism, and the Limits of Revaluation

Zarathustra’s model of value-transformation is essentially an artistic one, as he embraces, in Gooding-Williams’ language, "an avant-garde consciousness that the future can differ radically from the present and the past.”[[47]](#footnote-47) He sees the project of value-transformation as radically breaking from existing systems and creating new values through a project of artistic self-transformation in which one’s own life becomes an expression of these newly created values. Thus, he describes the freedom of the creator as self-realization not liberation: “You call yourself free? Your dominating thought I want to hear, and not that you escaped from a yoke [...] Free from what? What does Zarathustra care! But brightly your eyes should signal to me: free *for what*” (*Z*: “Creator”). Later in the narrative Zarathustra describes himself as “a seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future” (*Z*: “Redemption”), underscoring that he sees his life itself as creating the possibility for a radically new system of value.

Such artistic transformation requires a commanding will to, as Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, “give style to one’s character” by “survey[ing] all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until each appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye” such that “when the work is complete, it becomes clear how it was the force of a single taste that ruled and shaped everything great and small” (*GS*: §290). Zarathustra takes up this challenge in the pivotal chapter of Book III, “On Old and New Tablets.” Surrounded by “old broken tablets” and “new tablets only partially written upon” symbolizing the established systems of value, Zarathustra sits in solitude and describes his system of value transformation as he “tell[s] myself to myself” (*Z*: “Tablets,” §1). Against the “old conceit” that good and evil are universal and well-known, Zarathustra insists that “what is good and evil *no one knows yet* – except for the creator! He, however, is the one who creates a goal for mankind and gives the earth its meaning and its future” (*Z*: “Tablets,” §2). Against the complacency and levelling down of modernity, he calls for a “new nobility” who “shall be my begetters and growers and sowers of the future” (*Z*: “Tablets,” 12).

Those, like Zarathustra, who undertake this project of self-artistry, do so to make possible humanity’s self-overcoming in the overman (*Z*: “Tablets,” §3). He addresses these “nobles:” “You should love your *children’s land*; let this love be your new nobility – the undiscovered land in the furthest sea! For that land I command your sails to seek and seek! You should *make it up* in your children that you are the children of your fathers; *thus* you should redeem all that is past! This new tablet I place above you” (*Z*: “Tablets,” §12). The goal of value transformation is not merely to allow humanity to continue living under the new conditions created by the death of God, but to create a new form of human life: “not merely to produce, but instead to *sur*produce” (*Z*: “Tablets,” 24). As Daniel Conway notes, Nietzsche’s project “aims at nothing less than the (eventual) production of human beings who require no external, metaphysical justification for their meaningless existence.”[[48]](#footnote-48) Zarathustra’s self-artistry aims to transform himself into the father of humans able to live, flourish in, and affirm an existence without transcendental guarantors of meaning.

Zarathustra offers a poetic variation of what Nietzsche calls in *Beyond Good and Evil* the philosopher’s “most comprehensive responsibility, whose conscience bears the weight of the overall development of humanity” (*BGE*: 61).[[49]](#footnote-49) Therefore, only those who are hard, who possess the firmness of character to “write upon the will of millennia as if upon bronze” (*Z*: “Tablets,” §29), are capable of engaging in this practice of self-constitution. Only those who he elsewhere calls “artist-tyrants” possess the strength of will to bear the burden of the future of humanity’s development (*WP*: §960). Zarathustra makes the political implications clear: those who cannot bear this burden should submit to those who can: “For the best should rule, my brothers, and the best also *want* to rule” (*Z*: “Tablets,” §21).[[50]](#footnote-50)

This perfectionism, however, leads Zarathustra to failure. Despite announcing early in the narrative that he “needs companions, and living ones [...] companions the creative one seeks and not corpses, nor herds and believers. Fellow creators the creative one seeks, who will write new values on new tablets” (*Z*: “Prologue,” §9) and noting that “first people were creators and only later individuals: indeed, the individual himself is still the youngest creation” (*Z*: “Thousand and One Goals”), Zarathustra is unable to truly affirm the intersubjective nature of value creation and the importance of community for this project. He frequently retreats from the world and his disciples into his own solitude, unable to be a part of the community he is cultivating (*Z*: “Child with the Mirror”; “Stillest Hour”; “The Homecoming”; “Convalescent,” §1). He only leaves his solitude because his “enemies” have “distorted the image of my teaching” (*Z*: “Child with the Mirror”) and the satyr play that constitutes the “Fourth and Final Part” consists primarily of Zarathustra resenting the “higher men” who transform his teaching into a new form of nihilistic religion (*Z*: (“The Awakening;” “The Ass Festival”).

His resentment that he cannot remake the world in his own image and is dependent upon others is most striking in his convalescence and failure to affirm his teaching of the eternal return. After his seven-day convalescence, Zarathustra admits to his animals that the thought of recurrence initially encouraged his own resentment, telling them, “My great surfeit of human beings - that choked me and crawled into my throat; and what the soothsayer said: ‘All is the same, nothing is worth it, knowledge chokes.’” Zarathustra’s initial response to ERS was to see “the human earth transformed into a cave, its chest caved in” and feel “nausea” at “eternal recurrence of even the smallest” that perpetuates the last human (*Z*: “Convalescent,” §2). Unable to overcome his own resentment, Zarathustra fails at transforming the world into the breeding ground of a higher and flourishing humanity, as he announces at the beginning of the narrative, but withdraws from the world prioritizing his own ethical purity and perfectionism.[[51]](#footnote-51)

The specter of such perfectionism – that the existential burden of humanity’s future creates a self-defeating megalomania that culminates in a withdrawal from politics and the world – haunts responses to the Anthropocene as well. Its moderate form can be seen in Dale Jamieson’s conclusion that “Climate change is occurring and is effectively irreversible on timescales that are meaningful to us. Our failure to prevent or even to respond significantly reflects the impoverishment of our systems of practical reason, the paralysis of our politics, and the limits of our cognitive and affective capacities. None of this is likely to change soon.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Politics – in the sense of contesting visions of how the world should be organized realized through the use of power – is entirely absent in this assessment. Much like Zarathustra’s diagnosis of the last human beings, Jamieson relies on seemingly unchangeable brute facts about the human condition. Rather than arguing for political mobilization and contestation to challenge and reform these psychological and institutional features, Jamieson’s response to the Anthropocene is an ethical one that relies on “nourishing and cultivating particular character traits, dispositions, and emotions” that can encourage individuals to “reduce GHG emissions” and “give us the resiliency to live meaningful lives when our actions are not reciprocated.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Such an ethic mirrors Zarathustra’s own disavowal of politics in favor of an ethical self-fashioning.

More troubling are the extreme versions of perfectionism and withdrawal as responses to the Anthropocene. For example, the ecologist Guy McPherson, convinced that “it is too late for societal-level solutions” to avert near term human extinction, has literally withdrawn from the world, including his professional position, to live closer to the land. “My response to a transient and immoral set of living arrangements,” he writes, “is focused on self-reliance and introspection.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Where Jamieson’s green virtue ethics still contained other-regarding principles, McPherson’s withdrawal is much more reminiscent of Zarathustra’s own misanthropy and disregard for others. Despite dressing up his argument in the language of “resisting imperialism” by “dropping out of American empire,” he admits that “because I am increasingly self-sufficient, I can extend my life for a few years beyond completion of the ongoing, human-induced economic and environmental collapse.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

Similarly, Paul Kingsnorth – co-author of “Uncivilisation: the Dark Mountain Manifesto,” which argues that the climate crisis is both caused by and signals the end of the “myth of civilization” – bemoans that environmental activism no longer prioritized protecting a pure, inhuman nature. “Now it seemed that environmentalism was not about wildness or ecocentrism or the other-than human world and our relationship to it. Instead it was about (human) social justice and (human) equality and (human) progress and ensuring that all these things could be realized without degrading the (human) resource base that were used to call nature.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Kingsnorth’s perfectionism dismisses any environmentalism concerned with justice, the built environment, politics or policy as shallow and a betrayal of the “true” environmentalism that rejects all instrumentalization of nature. While his argument that mainstream environmentalism has been co-opted by neoliberal thinking with its emphasis on market based solutions and sustainability may have traction, his solution is not to argue for a more radical environmental politics or to contest neoliberal hegemony. Instead, like Zarathustra, he writes:

“I withdraw you see. I withdraw from the campaigning and the marching, I withdraw from the arguing and the talked-up necessity and all of the false assumptions. I withdraw from the words. I am leaving. I am going to go out walking. I am leaving on a pilgrimage to find wat I left behind in the jungles and by the cold campfires and in the parts of my head and my heart that I have been skirting around because I have been busy fragmenting he world in order to save it; busy believing it is mine to save. I am going to listen to the wind and see what it tells me, or whether it tells me anything at al. You see, it turns out that I have more time than I thought.”[[57]](#footnote-57)

McPherson and Kingsnorth are not emblematic of the climate change activism, which has prioritized both questions of justice and the priority of policy responses over personal consumption habits. However, they serve as examples that Zarathustra’s temptation to treat the existential demands of human flourishing after the death of God into a solitary project that is doomed to failure. The challenge of the Anthropocene is no different – its eschatological and existential valences risk subordinating politics and communal deliberation and contestation to culture, the market, technology, or authoritarian managerialism.[[58]](#footnote-58) Whether by intensifying the stakes to that of human survival or inculcating apathy and despair that nothing can be done but withdrawal from the world and save yourself, Zarathustra’s own struggles with the project of revaluation and community building illustrate the dangers of Anthropocene anti-politics.

## V- “The Great Noon:” Wither Politics in the Anthropocene

In the conclusion of the First Part, Zarathustra addresses his followers before leaving into his isolation: “And that is the great noon, where human beings stand at the midpoint of their course between animal and overman and celebrate their way to evening as their highest hope: for it is the way to a new morning” (*Z*: “Bestowing Virtue,” 3). One could frame the Anthropocene in similar light, with political communities facing a choice on how to respond. On the one hand lies the temptation of various forms of climate nihilism, whether as explicit denial or a faith that the right market intervention, pricing system, or carbon removal technology can solve the climate crisis without calling into question the foundational values, institutions, and practices that shifted the Earth from the Holocene to the Anthropocene. On the other hand, Zarathustra offers a cautionary tale that the existential demand of creating new values can lead to anti-political isolationism or authoritarianism. To face up to the existential challenge of the Anthropocene and cultivate new value systems, political institutions, social practices, and economic structures that can make possible human flourishing on a radically altered Earth, it is necessary to remember Zarathustra’s initial belief that this project “needs companions, and living ones” (*Z*: “Prologue,” §9). Nietzsche’s own resentment of the rabble and antipathy for the compromise, slowness, and contingency of democratic deliberation and politics meant that he was unable to follow this insight towards a political, and potentially even democratic, conception of value-legislation and “great politics.” Yet this is the path that must be tread. And, as Zarathustra himself insists: “I counsel you to go away from me and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And even better: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he deceived you. The person of knowledge must not only be able to love his enemies, but to hate his friends too. One repays a teacher badly if one always remains a pupil only” (*Z*: “Bestowing Virtue,” §3).

Bibliography

Barnosky, Anthony D., Elizabeth A. Hadly, Jordi Bascompte, Eric L. Berlow, James H. Brown, Mikael Fortelius, Wayne M. Getz, et al. “Approaching a State Shift in Earth’s Biosphere.” *Nature* 486, no. 7401 (June 2012): 52–58. https://doi.org/10.1038/nature11018.

Bendell, Jem. “Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy.” *IFLAS Occasional Paper*, no. 2 (2020).

Biermann, Frank. “The Future of ‘Environmental’ Policy in the Anthropocene: Time for a Paradigm Shift.” *Environmental Politics* 30, no. 1–2 (February 23, 2021): 61–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1846958.

Bonneuil, Christophe. “The Geological Turn: Narratives of the Anthropocene.” In *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*, edited by Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil, and François Gemenne, 17–31. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Connolly, William E. *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.

Conway, Daniel W. *Nietzsche and the Political*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Crutzen, Paul J., and Eugene F. Stoermer. “The ‘Anthropocene.’” *Global Change Newsletter*, no. 41 (May 2000): 17–18.

Del Caro, Adrian. *Grounding the Nietzsche Rhetoric of Earth*. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004.

Di Chiro, Giovanna. “Environmental Justice and the Anthropocene Meme.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory*, edited by Teena Gabrielson, Cheryl Hall, John M. Meyer, and David Schlosberg, 362–81. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Drochon, Hugo. *Nietzsche’s Great Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Dryzek, John S., and Jonathan Pickering. *The Politics of the Anthropocene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Gooding-Williams, Robert. *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Hamilton, Clive. *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017.

Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

IPCC. “Global Warming of 1.5oC: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5oC above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strenghtening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty.” Geneva, Switzerland: World Meteorological Organization, 2018.

Jamieson, Dale. “Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming.” *Science , Technology, & Human Values* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 139–53.

———. *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle against Climate Change Failed - and What It Means for Our Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Kingsnorth, Paul. *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2017.

Kingsnorth, Paul, and Dougald Hine. “Uncivilization: The Dark Mountain Manifesto.” In *Convessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*, 257–82. Mineapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2017.

Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2014.

Latour, Bruno. *Facing Gaia: Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017.

Malm, Andreas. *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World*. New York: Verso, 2018.

Malm, Andreas, and Alf Hornborg. “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative.” *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 1 (April 2014): 62–69.

McCright, Aaron M. “Anti-Reflexivity and Climate Change Skepticism in the US General Public.” *Human Ecology Review* 22, no. 2 (2016): 77–108.

McCright, Aaron M., and Riley E. Dunlap. “Anti-Reflexivity.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2–3 (March 1, 2010): 100–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409356001.

McCright, Aaron M, Sandra T. Marquart-Pyatt, Rachael L. Shwom, Steven R. Brechin, and Summer Allen. “Ideology, Capitalism, and Climate: Explaining Public Views about Climate Change in the United States.” *Energy Research & Social Science* 21 (November 2016): 180–89.

McKibben, Bill. *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?* New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2019.

McPherson, Guy. “Going Back to the Land in the Age of Entitlement.” *Conservation Biology* 25, no. 5 (2011): 855–57.

Mitchell, Timothy. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*. 2nd ed. New York: Verso Books, 2013.

Moore, Jason W. *Capitalism and the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. New York: Verso, 2015.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann. Translated by Judith Norma. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1886] 2002.

———. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. Edited by Maudemarie Clark. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1881]1997.

———. “Ecce Homo.” In *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann, 201–338. New York: Vintage Books, [1908] 1968.

———. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson. Translated by Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1887] 1997.

———. “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense.” In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, translated by Ronald Speirs, 139–53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1872] 1999.

———. *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1882]2001.

———. *The Will to Power*. Edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, [1901] 1989.

———. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Edited and translated by Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1885] 2006.

———. “Twilight of the Idols.” In *Twilight of the Idols and the Antichrist*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin Books, [1889] 2003.

Owen, David. “Nietzsche, Re-Evaluation, and the Turn to Genealogy.” In *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals: Critical Essays*, edited by Christa Davis Acampora, 39–56. Lantham, MD: Rowman & Littlefied, 2006.

Paterson, Matthew. “Climate Change and International Political Economy: Between Collapse and Transformation.” *Review of International Political Economy*, The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, 2020. https://doi-org.oxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/09692290.2020.1830829.

Pippin, Robert B. *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Rich, Nathaniel. *Losing Earth: A Recent History*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.

Scranton, Roy. *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization*. San Francisco: City Light Books, 2015.

Stack, George J. “Nietzsche’s Earliest Essays: Translation of and Commentary on ‘Fate and History’ and ‘Freedom of the Will and Fate.’” *Philosophy Today* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 153–69.

Steffen, Will, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill. “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature.” *Ambio* 36, no. 8 (December 2007): 614–21.

Steffen, Will, Jacques Grinevald, Paul Crutzen, and John McNeill. “The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives.” *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 369, no. 1938 (2011): 842–67.

Swyngedouw, Erik. “Apocalypse Forever? Post-Political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2–3 (2010): 213–32.

Wallace-Wells, David. *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*. New York, NY: Tim Duggan Books, 2019.

Zalasiewicz, Jan, Colin Waters, and Martin J. Head. “Anthropocene: Its Stratigraphic Basis.” *Nature* 541, no. 7637 (January 2017): 289.

1. Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” *Global Change Newsletter*, no. 41 (May 2000): 17–18. Both Crutzen and Stoermer used the term informally in the 1970s and 1980s prior to its more formal introduction in 2000 and have noted its historical and conceptual antecedents. See: Will Steffen et al., “The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives,” *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences* 369, no. 1938 (2011): 842–67. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill, “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature,” *Ambio* 36, no. 8 (December 2007): 614. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. IPCC, “Global Warming of 1.5oC: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5oC above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strenghtening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty” (Geneva, Switzerland: World Meteorological Organization, 2018), 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On the ongoing stratigraphical debate, see; Jan Zalasiewicz, Colin Waters, and Martin J. Head, “Anthropocene: Its Stratigraphic Basis,” *Nature* 541, no. 7637 (January 2017): 289. On the multiplicity of discourses and invocations of the Anthropocene, see: Christophe Bonneuil, “The Geological Turn: Narratives of the Anthropocene,” in *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch*, ed. Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil, and François Gemenne (New York: Routledge, 2015), 17–31. Many have criticized the term from political theoretical grounds, contending that it treats the climate crisis as either an ontological inevitability or the effects of undifferentiated human behavior, obscuring ,in both cases, the social and historical forces that drive the climate crisis, the differential contribution to the crisis along lines of wealth and power, and the disproportionate vulnerability of the global poor to the effects of climate change. See: Giovanna Di Chiro, “Environmental Justice and the Anthropocene Meme,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory*, ed. Teena Gabrielson et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 362–81; Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative,” *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 1 (April 2014): 62–69; Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (New York: Verso, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017), 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bill McKibben, *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Nathaniel Rich, *Losing Earth: A Recent History* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* (New York, NY: Tim Duggan Books, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. McKibben, for example, argues that humanity has an “outside chance” of surviving the climate crisis, and that we should be “true optimists, and operate on the assumption that human beings are not grossly defective.” McKibben, *Falter*, 202. Wallace-Wells explicitly rejects claims that short term societal collapse brought about by climate change is inevitable, and contends that “we have all the tools we need, today, to stop it all.” Wallace-Wells, *Uninhabitable Earth*, 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jem Bendell, “Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy,” *IFLAS Occasional Paper*, no. 2 (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine, “Uncivilization: The Dark Mountain Manifesto,” in *Convessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays* (Mineapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2017), 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2015), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. William E. Connolly, *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 55–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 1 Corinthians 7:31. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1882] 2001), §125. Henceforth: *GS* in text. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. On morality see: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clark, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1881] 1997), §10; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, trans. Judith Norma (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1886] 2002), §186-192. Henceforth *D* and *BGE* respectively. On political authority, and the social contract in particular, see: Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1887] 1997), II.8-11, 17. Henceforth *GM* in text. On the self, see *BGE*: §12,17, 19, 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. George J. Stack, “Nietzsche’s Earliest Essays: Translation of and Commentary on ‘Fate and History’ and ‘Freedom of the Will and Fate,’” *Philosophy Today* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1872] 1999), 141. Henceforth *TL* in text. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, ed. and trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1885] 2006), Prologue, §3. Henceforth, *Z* in text. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Friedrich Nietzsche, “Ecce Homo,” in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, [1908] 1989), “Clever,” §1-3. Henceforth *EH* in text. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. John S. Dryzek and Jonathan Pickering, *The Politics of the Anthropocene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Anthony D. Barnosky et al., “Approaching a State Shift in Earth’s Biosphere,” *Nature* 486, no. 7401 (June 2012): 57, https://doi.org/10.1038/nature11018. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso Books, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism and the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015), 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Matthew Paterson, “Climate Change and International Political Economy: Between Collapse and Transformation,” *Review of International Political Economy*, 2020, 9, https://doi-org.oxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/09692290.2020.1830829. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Dale Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle against Climate Change Failed - and What It Means for Our Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, [1901] 1968), §2. Henceforth *WP* in text. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See also: Friedrich Nietzsche, “Twilight of the Idols,” in *Twilight of the Idols and the Antichrist*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, [1889] 2003), “Reason,” §1-4. Henceforth *TI* in the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Robert B. Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, “Anti-Reflexivity,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2–3 (March 1, 2010): 105, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409356001. See also: Aaron M McCright et al., “Ideology, Capitalism, and Climate: Explaining Public Views about Climate Change in the United States,” *Energy Research & Social Science* 21 (November 2016): 180–89; Aaron M. McCright, “Anti-Reflexivity and Climate Change Skepticism in the US General Public,” *Human Ecology Review* 22, no. 2 (2016): 77–108. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Dryzek and Pickering, *Politics of the Anthropocene*, 29-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Dale Jamieson, “Ethics, Public Policy, and Global Warming,” *Science , Technology, & Human Values* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Frank Biermann, “The Future of ‘Environmental’ Policy in the Anthropocene: Time for a Paradigm Shift,” *Environmental Politics* 30, no. 1–2 (February 23, 2021): 61–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1846958. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. This left only the first volume – *The Antichrist* – completed. In his preface to *Twilight*, Nietzsche, he closes: “Turin, on 30 September 1888, the day that the first book of the *Revaluation of All Values* was finished” (*TI*: “Preface”). In a note from that same fall, only months before his collapse, Nietzsche gives the following outline for the project: “**Revaluation of all Values**. *The Antichrist*. An attempt at a critique of Christianity. *The Free Spirit*. Critique of the most fateful form of ignorance, morality. *The Immoralist*. Critique of philosophy as a nihilistic movement. *Dionysus*. Philosophy of Eternal Recurrence” (*KSA*: 13:19[8]). Another outline from the Fall of 1888 has modifications to the titles of the four books – The Antichrist, The Immoralist, We Yes-Sayers, Dionysus – while retaining the order and content of the subtitles (*KSA*: 13:22[14]). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Following David Owen, Nietzsche’s turn to genealogy stems from the inadequacies of his purely naturalistic critique of morality in *Daybreak* and *Human, All too Human* to inspire the creation of alternative value systems. By providing a naturalistic account of how these values came to dominate, genealogy provides immanent criteria for identifying the types of values that can be animating and motivating for the types of creatures that human beings are. See: David Owen, “Nietzsche, Re-Evaluation, and the Turn to Genealogy,” in *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals: Critical Essays*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora (Lantham, MD: Rowman & Littlefied, 2006), 39–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. This is thematizes in Zarathustra’s first speech on the “three metamorphosese of the spirit” where he contends that to create values, the world-weary spirit, laden by morality like a camel, must first become a no-saying lion to “create freedom for itself for new creation.” However, the lion’s critical no-saying stance cannot create or affirm new values, for which the spirit must transform into a child, whose “innocence” and “sacred yes-saying” makes possible such value creation. See also, Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 31–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For example, Haraway writes, “The decisions and transformations so urgent in our times for learning again, or for the first time, how to become less deadly, more response-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise, more able to practice the arts of living and dying well in multispecies symbiosis sympoiesis, and symanimagenesis on a damaged planet, must be made without guarantees or the expectation of harmony with those who are not oneself.” Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 98. Latour similarly, contends that “There is no cure for the condition of belonging to the world But, y taking care, we can cure ourselves of believing that we do not belong to it, that the essential question lies elsewhere, that what happens to the world does not concern us.” Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 13. Connolly argues for an entangled humanist that cultivates a “﻿a deeper appreciation of the sources and functions of creativity can help to support multisited practices of attachment that are needed to replace notions of organic belonging today.” Connolly, *Facing the Planetary*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Adrian Del Caro, *Grounding the Nietzsche Rhetoric of Earth* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. On the convergence between the philosophers of *Beyond Good and Evil* and Zarathustra, see: Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra’s Dionysian Modernism*, 26-27. Conway, furthermore, interprets Nietzsche’s intervention in political theory as framing “the business of politics to legislate the conditions of the permanent enhancement of humankind.” Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This becomes even more explicit in later works. For example, Nietzsche entrusts his philosophers of the future to “will make use of religion for his breeding and education work, just as he will make use of the prevailing political and economic situation” (*BGE*: §61). Towards the end of his life, he describes his project of “great politics,” subordinating politics to the cultural project of cultivating this new humanity (*EH*: “Destiny,” §1). For a reconstruction of “great politics” throughout Nietzsche’s work, see: Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche’s Great Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Conway argues that following *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche abandons the political project of perfectionism focusing on a micro-political ethical perfectionism. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, 44-50. Cf. Drochon, *Nietzsche’s Great Politics*. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time*, 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Guy McPherson, “Going Back to the Land in the Age of Entitlement,” *Conservation Biology* 25, no. 5 (2011): 856. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. McPherson, “Going Back to the Land,” 855. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Paul Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2017), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Kingsnorth, *Confessions*, 81-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See especially: Mann and Wainwright, *Climate Leviathan* and Erik Swyngedouw, “Apocalypse Forever? Post-Political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2–3 (2010): 213–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)