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A Philosophy of the Antichrist in the Time of the Anthropocenic Multitude: Preliminary Lexicon for the Conceptual Network

Gary Shapiro
University of Richmond, gshapiro@richmond.edu

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ANTICHRIST. Nietzsche's not just being scary and shocking. He speaks of a "philosophy of the Antichrist" in one of the more explicitly political sections of *Beyond Good and Evil*,[1] in fact in a long concluding aphorism in §8, "Peoples and Fatherlands." He reviews the mixed accomplishments of figures who helped to teach the nineteenth-century concept of "the higher human (*Mensch*)," including such diverse men as Napoleon, Wagner, Stendhal, and Heine. While all invented various forms of cultural hybridity (*cf.* **übernational**), escaping the limits of nationalism, still all reverted to religion, and none "would have been capable of a philosophy of the Antichrist." In the late preface to *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche ventures to reveal the **Antichrist**'s true name: Dionysus. The book *The Antichrist*, completed by Nietzsche and published later in distorted form by his sister Elisabeth, was first described as the initial one of four in *The Transvaluation of Values*, and later as the work's whole. In choosing the name and figure of **Antichrist** is Nietzsche sim-

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §256, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1992), 387.

ply aiming at ultimate blasphemy, a poke in the eye for Christianity? Some scholars take this view and would translate the book as *The Anti-christian* (Daniel Conway acknowledges his terminological change by writing *The Antichrist[ian]*). While either works as a translation of the German term, leaving aside Nietzsche's usage, the lexicon reads Nietzsche's invocation of the **Antichrist** in terms of his rejection and parody of a specific set of Christian theological-political concepts involving specific ideas of time and history which he saw as the source of his *bête noire,* the Hegelian idea of ***Weltgeschichte***. Thinkers like Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben, and Ernst Kantorowicz have shown that much Christian political thought, beginning with early church fathers like Tertullian, legitimated worldly power, as that which deferred the coming of **Antichrist**. The texts providing a (rather questionable) basis for this view were those letters attributed to Paul that attempt to discourage the view that the end of the world was imminent. Instead, "Paul" said there was a delaying, restraining power (a *katechon*) holding back the appearance of **Antichrist**. Eventually this was understood to be the Roman empire (even prior to its Christianization) and the idea was then applied to its successor states. Agamben has this complex of ideas in mind when he says that much Western political theology is *katechontic*. The **Antichrist**, then, is that which appears with the collapse or dissolution of the state. As early as *Human, All Too Human,*[2] Nietzsche suggested that the form of the European nation-state was fragile in a world of increasingly ***nomadisch*** peoples who were not as firmly attached to territory and tradition as their forebears. One sign of this fragility was the state's readiness to discover security threats which it countered by declaring a state of exception or ***Notzustand***. Like Schmitt, Nietzsche sees that such sovereignty operates on a theologic; its legitimacy requires thinking of the political state of exception as parallel to the miracle by which God asserts his sovereignty over the world and nature. Part of the long and difficult process of

2 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human,* trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), §472–75.

understanding God's death is seeing that the state with its claims to sovereignty is one of several "shadows of God" that persist after his disappearance.[3] Nietzsche announces a philosophy of the Antichrist which will not only split the world's history in two but also marks a break with the time of *Weltgeschichte,* the Christian–Hegelian construction of political time that owes so much to Christianity's accommodation to the *Welt,* more specifically to the state, said by Hegel to be "God's march through the world."

An important step in the development of katechontic thought was taken by Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 200 CE) in commentaries on apocalyptic texts from Old and New Testaments. He interpreted them to mean that the end times were at least several hundred years away. Without this extension of time, which was gradually increased, the meta-narratives of Christian history that eventually morphed into the stories of *Weltgeschichte* or *Weltprozess* would not have been possible. Nietzsche's critique of Hartmann's conception of the *Weltprozess* includes a sneer at the author for assimilating his own narrative mélange of Schopenhauer and Hegel to the Christian idea of the last days and the coming of Antichrist.[4] Nietzsche was conversant with this tradition. A former student of theology from a ministerial family, his closest adult friend and housemate for several years was Franz Overbeck, an anti-theological theologian. According to Agamben and Andreas Sommer, Overbeck anticipated Nietzsche's genealogy in his critique of Christian canon formation, and was engaged with him in a common project of deconstructing liberal Protestantism's evasion of its radical disconnection from messianic consciousness. A "philosophy of the Antichrist" then is one that sets aside the narratives of Christianity and *Weltgeschichte* concerning the *Welt* (first rejected and then conditionally accepted in Christianity) and instead celebrates the

3 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Josefine Nauckoff (New York: Cambridge University Press), §108.

4 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations,* trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), II §9.

Erde, the site of human energy, activity, productivity, and movement.

Erde. Earth, the sphere of actual, living, human habitation, as distinguished from the "world beyond," and somewhat more subtly from the *Welt.* When Zarathustra begins his discourses by calling for loyalty (*Treue*) to the earth and later seeks disciples (*Jünger*) in this enterprise, the political aspect of the term becomes evident. This is even more explicit in *Zarathustra*'s chapter "On Great Events" (*cf. grosse Ereignis*), in which the noisy, exaggerated howlings of politicians and what we would call "public intellectuals" are juxtaposed with true great events that approach quietly "on dove's feet" and somehow mesh with the self-renewing earth. The usage seems implicit in later writings. *Beyond Good and Evil* speaks, for instance, of the battle for hegemony (*Herrschaft*) over the earth in the next century.[5]

Garten. Garden. If humans are loyal to the *Erde* it could become a garden.[6] From the standpoint of active and exuberant power, the garden is a site of growth, cultivation, and artful perspective. When conditions are not yet ripe for this, the garden can be a more enclosed and relatively private site of thought, rest, and friendship, on the model of Epicurus's garden. The symbol can be expanded to embrace contemporary ecological concerns.

Grosse Ereignis. Great event. According to Alain Badiou, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*'s chapter containing this term is the most important in the book. He assimilates Nietzsche's thought to his own concept of a holistic change that elicits fidelity to a new form of universality. Indeed, Nietzsche begins his 1876 *Untimely Meditations* §4 with an account of such a great event that he thinks is happening then; he explicitly states that such

5 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* §208.

6 Cf. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* trans. Graham Parkes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), III §13.2

events are rare, transformative in unanticipatable ways, evoking and inspiring fidelity to their principle. Badiou downplays or ignores the emphasis that Nietzsche gives to *Erde* in naming the site of such great events in this and related texts. The last such great event, Nietzsche says, was Alexander's linking of East and West. The nascent great event is Wagner's decoupling of West from East. However absurd the thesis and comparison, it shows Nietzsche thinking geophilosophically and sketching, however abstractly, an alternative to Hegel's *Weltgeschichte* whose transitions involve inclusions and transformative absorptions (*Aufhebungen*). At the same time it suggests questions about the Christian pattern of Hegelian teleology, whose Trinitarian structure is its signature. Unspoken here is that the first event enabled the Christianization of Europe, and that Wagner makes its de-Christianization possible. Wagner could then be thought of as a "positive" *Antichrist*. It's well known that Nietzsche soon saw Wagner as more of an actor than a cultural hero (perhaps he'd already entertained such doubts). *Beyond Good and Evil* §256, frequently remembered for its closing ironic rhymes on Wagner's path toward Rome, also declares that none of the great nineteenth-century figures who enacted various versions of cultural hybridity was capable of a philosophy of the Antichrist. Although Nietzsche's later speculations and often bizarre notebook entries can seem as strange as the comparison of Alexander and Wagner, he consistently says or implies on a "formal" level that the great event is one of the earth, as in the summation in *Ecce Homo*: "[T]here will be wars unlike any yet on the *Erde*. Only from myself on will there be great politics on the *Erde*."[7]

Menge. Probably most accurately translated as "multitude"; while "crowd" or "throng" are not necessarily misleading, they do not capture as well Nietzsche's distinction between relatively homogeneous masses (*Massen*) and the diversity of the *Menge*. This is especially important in reading *Beyond Good and Evil*, the book that begins to speak of "a philosophy of the Antichrist."

7 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Destiny," §1, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 387.

Beyond Good and Evil §256 maintains that "this is the century of the *Menge*," with Nietzsche emphasizing the term. For a clear sense of the masses/multitude distinction, see *The Gay Science* §149 ("The failure of reformations"), where Nietzsche says that a religious reformation cannot succeed, no matter how brilliant and charismatic its leaders (as in ancient Greece), if the population is composed of "a *Menge* of diverse individuals," but stands a chance where there are *Massen*. Luther's Reformation is a sign of the backward status of Germany and the European north. In the context of *Beyond Good and Evil* (§213, §256, §269) the *Menge* are not a cross-section of the population but "the educated, the enthusiasts" (§269), those who flock to the theater or to admire those they take to be "great men." Two sources of Nietzsche's usage are especially notable: 1) Luther's Bible typically uses *Menge* to describe those non-disciples who listen to Jesus, at least occasionally, with interest and enthusiasm; 2) Goethe's *Faust* opens with a "Prelude in the Theater" in which director, writer, and a clown discuss the attributes of the *Menge* before whom the play will be performed. The Biblical emphasis looms in the background of Nietzsche's warning to philosophers of the future to avoid the fickle, thoughtless taste of the *Menge*; the second underlines his diagnosis of the century as one of theater or spectacle. Failure to see the masses/multitude distinction is ironic, given that the *Genealogy of Morals,* explicitly labeled by Nietzsche as a guide to understanding *Beyond Good and Evil,* stresses the importance of noting nuances in the various Greek and Roman terms for diverse social groupings.[8] Unfortunately, both the recent Cambridge and Stanford translations of *Beyond Good and Evil* render *Menge* as "masses."

Mensch. Human; often translated tendentiously as "man." The *Mensch* is in danger of becoming totally tamed and regularized, losing all sense of adventure and novelty, the *letzte Mensch.* Nietzsche thought this tendency was driven by increasing bureaucratization and organization of life around fetishistic no-

8 Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals,* I §10, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche,* 387.

tions of individual and group security and by systems of thought (e.g., Hegel, D.F. Strauss, Hartmann) which anticipated what we now call "end of history" theories. The possibilities of the *Mensch* and its relation to animal and earth are still to be discovered. The most promising future is one where the *Mensch* is loyal to the earth and creates a glorious *Menschen-Erde*. Yet until now, the production of "an animal with the prerogative to promise"[9] has been focused on training humans to accept and live within an economy of *Schuld*; accordingly, Nietzsche suggests that *Mensch* derives from the Sanskrit *manas*, suggesting something like "the measurer," meaning the one able to measure what is due to and from itself.

Menschen-Erde. The human earth. While there is obvious emphasis on the experiential or phenomenological aspect of the human earth, the term can also be taken as a literal equivalent of the recent geological category of the anthropocene, the era when human habitation begins to change the earth and its atmosphere, especially since the end of the last Ice Age, ca. 10,000 BCE. (This date coincides roughly with the first proto-urban settlements and with the "moral" phase of *Hauptgeschichte* Nietzsche outlines in *Beyond Good and Evil* §32 and fills in further in *Genealogy of Morals* II §16–17). The experiential and the geological/archaeological senses can be seen as relatively passive and active sides of the same thing, human embodiment in the environment. On the one hand, Zarathustra declares in "On Great Events" that *Menschen* are a skin-disease on the *Erde*; they have desecrated and overlaid its beauty. On the other, he tells us elsewhere that the *Mensch* and the *Menschen-Erde* are unexhausted and undiscovered. The human earth, having come to seem like a dismal cave, could be transformed into a *Garten*, as he and his animals agree in his convalescence. "What direction will humans give to the earth?" is Nietzsche's overriding question. So far as the Antichrist figures as a symbol of hegemony over the earth, this question is central to a philosophy of the Antichrist.

9 Ibid., II §1.

NOMADISCH. Nomadic. When Nietzsche speaks of the increasing nomadic character of the modern European,[10] we must guard against reading this anachronistically as referring to the lifestyle of more or less solitary individual travelers, emigrants, and the like. As Deleuze reminds us, nomads are first of all peoples, although they typically lack a state organization; second, nomads do *not* travel—they roam within a certain territory (even if it has vague or porous boundaries), sometimes in response to seasonal changes. In Emerson's essay "History," Nietzsche read an account of human group formations that includes both state and nomad types on an equal basis. Nomads may lack a *Welt* in Hegel's view, but they inhabit the *Erde.* A similar perspective, argued in more scholarly fashion, is found in Friedrich Ratzel's *Anthropo-Geographie,* which Nietzsche was reading and marking in the 1880s.

NOTZUSTAND. or *Ausnahmezustand.* Usually translated as "state of emergency" or "state of exception." Philosophers and political theorists should be familiar with the discussions of the concept in Schmitt and Agamben. In the state of exception the sovereign suspends some portion of "normal" law for the sake of the existence of the state (*Staat*) itself. Nietzsche was familiar with and alluded to Bismarck's use of the state of exception in the 1870s as part of his cultural war (*Kulturkampf*) in which, on this analysis, he attempted to solidify state power by raising fears of Catholic subversion. Other well-known deployments of the state of exception include Lincoln's suspension of *habeas corpus* in the US Civil War and Nazi Germany's use of the state of exception clause of the Weimar Constitution to suspend (rather than nullify) that constitution itself. The Weimar provision itself was based on law from the Bismarckian *Reich.* In *Human, All Too Human* §475, Nietzsche says that the transnational (übernational) tendencies of trade, migration, and other movements and interactions of peoples are eroding the national identity

10 E.g., Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* §472–75; *Beyond Good and Evil,* §242.

desired by the state. In response, the state attempts to evoke nationalism through imaginary security threats. But, he says, "this artificial nationalism is as dangerous as artificial Catholicism once was, for it is in essence a *Notzustand* and beleaguerment forcibly inflicted by the few upon the many, requiring artifice, deceit, and force to maintain its authority." Translations tend to miss the specific *legal* network of concepts at stake, with phrases like "state of siege" or "state of distress." Schmitt defines the sovereign as the one who decides upon the exception (cf. George W. Bush on the US president as "decider"), emphasizing the parallel between the sovereign's suspension of state law and God's of natural law through miracle. For Nietzsche the state is one of the "shadows of God,"[11] and in *Untimely Meditations* §3.4 he compares the absolute claims of the contemporary state to those of the medieval church. The katechontic tradition would legitimize protecting state sovereignty by deploying the state of exception.

ROME. In the Biblical Revelation, as originally understood, Rome is demonized. Taking the side of ancient Rome and the possibilities of its renewal in the Renaissance, Nietzsche identifies with the **Antichrist.**[12]

SCHULD. Writing in the late nineteenth century, a time conscious of newly accelerated global financial crisis, Nietzsche sketched a political economy based on debt rather than exchange, in the classical liberal model. The civilized ***Mensch*** is born in debt, accumulates more, and passes this on to the future. In the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche articulates a genealogical analysis of how the archaïc sense of ***Schuld*** as debt of goods, services, or money also acquired the psychic and religious meaning of guilt. The earliest human social forms, Nietzsche argues, consist of networks of debtors and creditors. These are not only the first economic relations — so that debt, for example, is prior to

11 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §108.

12 Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §58, in *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 179–80.

barter or to money—but are coeval with the emergence of the human (*Mensch*) as the animal capable of making promises and of measuring everything. The *Genealogy of Morals* traces the development of the debt regime, from tribal and familial contexts to the state's emergence; he shows how *Schuld* first acquires a religious coloring with debts to national gods and leads finally to the madness of monotheism in which the debt/guilt becomes overwhelming and unpayable (except through God's own sacrifice, for which believers now assume another unrepayable debt).

Philosophy itself is complicit in this madness, Nietzsche's Zarathustra argues, in a chapter fittingly entitled "On Redemption (*Erlösung*)," Zarathustra compresses the history of the Western philosophical tradition, from its first surviving sentence credited to Anaximander to its latest manifestation in Schopenhauer's pessimism, when he declares what madness preached:

> Everything passes away, therefore everything deserves to pass away! And this is itself justice, that law of time that time must devour its children [...]. This, this is what is eternal in the punishment "existence": that existence itself must eternally be deed and guilt again. Unless the will should at last redeem itself and willing should become not-willing."[13]

Nietzsche had several allies in his project of redemption, a redemption that would affirm the innocence of becoming (its freedom from debt and guilt, *das Unschuld des Werdens*); perhaps we should call this unmortgaged becoming. One was the North American sage who inspired him in his youth, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson began his deceptively brief and simple "Gifts," his meta-economic theory, with another apparent allusion to Anaximander and his tradition, which could stand as an emblem of world economic crisis: "It is said that the world is in a state of bankruptcy; that the world owes the world more

13 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 122.

than the world can pay, and ought to go into chancery and be sold."[14]

So whether in the philosophical tradition that extends from Anaximander to Schopenhauer, in global economic relations, or in the theological complex of *Schuld* and *Erlösung*, the future is either completely and irretrievably mortgaged, an open-ended, indefinite amortization like the debt to the company store, or ought to be rejected as providing the illusion of satisfied desire.

ÜBERNATIONAL. Transnational, no longer bound by the ideology and practices of the nation-state. *Beyond Good and Evil* §242 speaks of the "increasing similarity among Europeans," as they detach themselves from their original conditions of site and climate, and the "slow approach of an essentially **übernational** and ***nomadisch*** type of person." The term "transnational" has become current in the academic field of American Studies, although introduced in Randolph Bourne's 1916 essay "Transnational America." Bourne's brief reviews and essays on Nietzsche are probably the most perceptive US responses to his work before 1920.

VATERLAND. Fatherland. Those who cling to archaïc conceptions of sacred territory when the ***Menschen-Erde*** are said to be guilty of *Schollenkleberei*, being obsessed with and stuck in the mud or muck.[15]

VOLK. People or folk. Nietzsche is clear in his criticism of the fetishistic essentialism of the term as employed to legitimate the nation-state in the century of the ***Menge***.

WELT. World. While Nietzsche's usage is not consistent, he often speaks critically of the ***Welt***, especially in dealing with the term's appearance in contexts such as Hegelian ***Weltgeschichte***

14 Ralph W. Emerson, "Gifts," in *The Complete Works, Vol. III, Essays: Second Series* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1904), ch. 5.

15 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §241.

and Eduard von Hartmann's *Weltprozess*. As early as his critique of the latter he complains about being compelled in reading Hartmann to constantly hear "the hyperbole of hyperboles, the word world, world, world!"[16] Instead, he suggests, we should be hearing about the human (*Mensch*). In the case of both the more traditional Hegelians and Hartmann, the word designates a totality or unity that transcends not only individuals, but groups and associations. For Hegel, the *Welt* is essentially impossible and inconceivable except as a structure of the state. Hegel goes so far as to maintain that there is no world for peoples who do not have a state.[17] Nomadic or non-state peoples are for Hegel "mere nations (*Nationen*)," that is, groups affiliated only by reproductive or family lineages. In contrast, Nietzsche never despises the *Erde*, and the term becomes increasingly prominent from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on, sometimes qualified as the *Menschen-Erde*. What distinguishes *Erde* from *Welt* in this conceptual network is that *Erde* is a full site of human life, not requiring to be understood either in terms of an absolute teleology or as requiring the political form of the state.

Weltgeschichte. World history, a term especially identified with Hegel, although English translations typically omit the "world" in his *Philosophy of World History*, perhaps because they would rather not confront its restrictive sense of *Welt*. Nietzsche often speaks with contempt of *Weltgeschichte*. Beyond his rejection of Hegel's idealistic, absolutistic, teleological, and politico-theological history, Nietzsche suggests that geography, in a broad sense, cannot be subordinated to history in Hegelian fashion. The *Menschen-Erde* takes precedence over the state.

Weltprozess. World-process, a central concept of Eduard von Hartmann's philosophy of history in *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, one of the most widely read books of systematic phi-

16 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, II §9.

17 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. William Wallace (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 279, §549.

losophy of the late nineteenth century. The conclusion of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* §2 mischievously reads Hartmann as if the author of the "great book" had set out to write a parody of Hegelian thinking of the end of history, grotesquely mixing the spirit of that idea with Schopenhauer's conception that wisdom consists in willing nothingness. Hartmann thought it inevitable that after humanity's youth (Greco-Roman belief that this present world is sufficient for happiness), medieval adolescence (striving for salvation in the beyond), maturity or modern enlightenment (aiming at using knowledge of humans and nature to produce a better future world), and old age (where even the last of these is revealed as illusory), the only alternative is Schopenhauerian recognition of the futility of the search for happiness, and so acceptance or pursuit of the end of humanity. With respect to Nietzsche's later gestures toward a philosophy of the **Antichrist**, it is notable that he regards Hartmann's ***Weltprozess*** as a belated version of the Christian narrative with its end-of-the-world scenario, as in *Revelation*.