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## TIMES OF THE MULTITUDE AND THE ANTICHRIST

Gary Shapiro

**I -*World and earth.*** Is the question of Europe to be posed within the discourse of *Weltgeschichte* or in the context of the *Menschen/Erde*? These are opposed perspectives. Responses to Nietzsche's political thinking have been strangely silent or vague about what he consistently describes as the *site* of the political, the earth. Fidelity to the earth, being true to the earth, willingness to sacrifice oneself for the earth, vigilantly dedicating oneself to the earth's direction or meaning (*Sinn*) -- these are the repeated refrains of *Zarathustra*. Above and beyond its phenomenological sense as our immanent lifeworld (the limit of most scholarly readings), earth in Nietzsche's writings has a political sense as the counter-concept to what Hegel and Hegelianizing philosophers call the world. Hegel's concept of world is a unitary notion. It cannot be decoupled from the state, world history, and God. Hegel says in the *Encyclopedia* that those who do not live in a true state do not have a world (Hegel, 1971 section 549). "World" is ultimately a concept of political theology; it finally provoked Nietzsche to articulate a philosophy of the Antichrist. When Nietzsche speaks of the earth (sometimes more specifically of the *Menschen-Erde*), he implicitly formulates a political a-theology. In *Human All too Human* Nietzsche recognizes that the state must now maintain itself by propagandistic fears (HAH 472). With Carl Schmitt he agrees that the state of exception is essential to the modern state's sovereignty, but God's death undermines Schmitt's theological analogy.

"Only after me will there be *great politics* on earth," Nietzsche writes in *Ecce Homo*, as he explains "Why I am a Destiny (1)." It is great politics of or on the earth that is at stake, not the great politics of *Weltgeschichte*. The earth is the ground and site of mobile human beings, as the

action of Zarathustra makes clear; Nietzsche was finding support for this orientation in his reading of works like Friedrich Ratzel's *Anthropo-Geographie*. The *Menschen-Erde* could be translated somewhat tendentiously but not altogether misleadingly as the anthropocene, the earth as humanly inhabited, transformed, and in process of transformation: as Marx called it, our exteriorized body. What shall be the *Sinn der Erde*? The possible *directions* of the *Menschen-Erde* are multiple. Nietzsche has Zarathustra describe humans as a skin disease on the earth, but he also imagines the earth transformed into a gigantic health resort and tree of life (Z II.19; WS 188-89).

Being true to the earth involves abandoning the concept of time that subordinates earthly life to a metanarrative concluding with eventual manifestation of the Idea or the Christian end of days. If the name for the world's time is world-history, what is the time of the earth? I'll approach this question by first considering political temporality in the *Untimely* or *Unmodern Observations*.

The objects of those scathing, satiric, and parodic polemics can be usefully compared to more recent "end of history" theorists, who, like David Friedrich Strauss and Eduard von Hartmann, targets of Nietzsche's first two essays, share a Hegelian inspiration. Both pamphlets identify Hegelian philosophy as a crucial component of this thought, thus anticipating Alexander Kojève, Francis Fukuyama and others. Strauss's and Hartmann's versions of the theory arise from both interpreting a teleological conception of history in terms of their varying accounts of human desire, with Strauss adapting Hegel's notion of historically cumulative recognition, while Hartmann sees history as a sequenced series of projects that progressively reveal the necessary failure of the desire for happiness, thus historicizing Schopenhauer. Strauss's comic version

celebrates an attained unity arising out of conflict; Hartmann's tragic, story depicts humans as repeatedly attempting the impossible until overtaken by necessity.

Strauss implicitly takes the "we" with whom he identifies as the self-satisfied German imperial *Bürger*, with culture drawn from the newspapers, religion an ethical ghost of Christianity, and a faith in progress envisioning nothing beyond further sophistications of communication and technology. Strauss could be the last human's philosopher, declaring "Yes, history has a meaning and it is us." Strauss claims to be ultimately timely, to have understood the fulfilled meaning of time, indeed, as part of his "we," to help constitute that meaning.

Hartmann's ambitious story, moving through four great periods, was attractive to the nineteenth century's post-Hegelian periodizing obsessions. He follows a traditional analogy between history at large and life cycle stages: childhood, adolescence, maturity, old age. In their Greco-Roman childhood, human beings simply seek happiness in this life, and naively enjoy immediate life activities as imaginatively perfected by Olympian gods. Such a life eventually disappoints, giving way to boredom and melancholy. The alternative is found in medieval adolescence, which places its hopes for happiness in fictions of immortality, in another world. After skeptical disillusion about the reality of that world beyond comes mature manhood (unreflectively gendered), post-Reformation modernity. "We" no longer seek childhood's immediate enjoyment or fantastic adolescent ideals. Courageously shouldering its responsibilities, maturity surrenders easy hope, finding satisfaction rather in working toward a general progress of civilization that promises happiness to future generations. After several centuries of such effort, a general disillusion about the future earthly paradise sets in. Modernity, is accompanied by its own discontents (too familiar to recount). Now we enter the world's disillusioned old age, and understand the failure of earlier projects of satisfaction. We become

enlightened Schopenhauerians. Will is restless and insatiable; temporary satisfactions give way to melancholy or desire's return, relaunching the cycle: desire, striving, fleeting satisfaction, repeated frustration. In old age we submit to the *Weltprozess* that has brought us to this pass. We *should* welcome the process of human extinction. Hartmann, who invoked the Biblical end of days, would no doubt have found confirmation in the anticipation of catastrophic climate change.

Hartmann calls for "total surrender of the personality to the world-process." Nietzsche *responds* "If only one did not eternally have to hear the hyperbole of all hyperboles, the word world, world, world, since after all, if we remain honest, everyone ought to speak of human, human, human!" (UO II.9). To call for total surrender to the world-process is to give humans the personality of the earth-flea (*Erdfloh*), a metaphor that appears again when Zarathustra describes the last man.

Nietzsche's *Unmodern* series – which might have continued indefinitely in his budding career as public intellectual – halts abruptly after *Wagner in Bayreuth*, fourth of a planned thirteen. There he makes a first bungled attempt at describing a great event of the earth, a temporal caesura that would counter the illusory inevitabilities of the grand meta-narratives of *Weltgeschichte*. Anticipating Alain Badiou, he tells us that a great event is rare, difficult or impossible to predict or deliberately produce, and gives rise to a future. "For such an undertaking as that at Bayreuth there were no warning signs, no transitional events, nothing intermediate" (UO IV.1); it was not the result of (Hegelian) continuity and mediation. What makes this unexpected event *great* is its transformative power, its throwing past and future into a genuinely new perspective. Such events are so rare that Nietzsche offers only two examples. The "last great event" was Alexander's linking of East and West, of Asia and Europe. This involved cutting the Gordian knot that separated two cultural and geographical spheres and was a syncretistic act,

mixing together two previously separate domains (UO IV.4). Nietzsche describes Wagner as “the first of the counter-Alexanders” whose task is to unite and focus where Alexander had dispersed, in other words to tie together the threads of European culture in a novel, unified creation. Asia (and Christianity) will not be *aufgehoben* but cut loose or “subtracted.” Later we hear that this Wagner was Nietzsche. I conjecture that the series was broken off not only because of Nietzsche’s incipient estrangement from the maestro, but because the story that he had to tell there about Wagner’s becoming himself was Hegelian, all too Hegelian.

**II- Time: *kairos* and *chronos*.** Nietzsche’s work turns *eventually* (taking that word in several senses) to articulating the question of time on and of the earth, a time different from the world-models. The direction, future, and futurity of the earth become dominant concerns. Free spirits and good Europeans will take their distance from the shrunken earth of the last man with its foreclosure of the future. Among these modalities of time, thinking off the clock of world-history, is the venerable binary of *kairos* and *chronos*, of a passing opportunity to be seized or a continuous, extended duration to be endured.

I cite a section on temporality from “*What is Noble?*” which responds to that question by considering several possible relations to those rare opportune moments that are often recognized regretfully only when they have passed. BGE 274: “*The problem of those who wait*. Strokes of luck [*Glücksfälle*] and many incalculable factors are needed for a higher human, in whom the solution to a problem sleeps, to go into action at the right time – ‘into explosion,’ you might say.” Even higher humans need luck, and without it (the usual case) “people sit waiting, hardly knowing how much they are waiting, much less that they are waiting in vain.” Sometimes the alarm will ring and they must regretfully lament “‘It’s too late’”... having lost faith in themselves and being useless from that point on. – What if in the realm of genius, the ‘Raphael

without hands' (taking that phrase in the broadest sense) is not the exception but, perhaps, the rule? Perhaps genius is not rare at all: what is rare is the five hundred *hands* that it needs to tyrannize the *kairos*, 'the right time,' in order to seize hold of chance by the forelock!"

Nietzsche invokes an ancient image. The Greeks and Romans knew what *kairos* looked like. Sculpture and early modern emblem books show him with locks of hair above his face, but bald in back. *Kairos*' large upper wings are matched by a smaller pair on his ankles, suggesting the swiftness of his passage. In a moment he's flown by. He bears a scale that is out of balance; the moment tilts toward possibilities that can be realized by the alert agent seizing the time – what Machiavelli called *occasione* or opportunity as distinguished from *fortuna* or chance. Seize *kairos* by the forelock as soon as he appears; if you hesitate the chance is lost. In Nietzsche's writings *kairos* appears only once, although the hunchback in Zarathustra's "On Redemption" alludes to the topos. It is the right time, significant moment, turning point, unexpected, unique hinge of opportunity. *Chronos* in contrast drags on and on – "creeps in this petty pace to the last syllable of recorded time." This mode of temporality lends itself to the spatialization of time that Bergson and others subject to critique. The serendipitous moment of incalculable, unpredictable opportunity partakes somewhat of the character of the event in Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida, and Badiou.

In this reference to *kairos* (cf. also Z II.20) Nietzsche encourages us to think together the questions of futurity and nobility. Does nobility then involve a certain relation to futurity? In this case 'the problem of those who wait' would be central to its intent. Nobility, it must be remembered, is not only an individual character trait, but a form of social and political distinction, even when decoupled from ideas of hereditary aristocracy.

What is the right time, the *kairos*? How can we recognize it and be prepared for it? To paraphrase Meno's challenge to Socrates, how will we know it when we see it? And how can we search for it when we don't know what it is? To these we must add a temporal dimension that Plato neglected when he turned the issue into one of *anamnesis*: how can we recognize, catch it, and respond to it *at the right time*? How can we be worthy of the event?

**III- Time of the multitude.** In this context, consider the concluding aphorism of "Peoples and Fatherlands" for it contains two important ideas about political temporality that deserve more attention than they've received so far. *BGE* 256 begins with the declaration: "*Europe wants to become one*". Nietzsche accuses nationalist "insanity" of a mendacious diversion and misinterpretation of Europe's desire. (I simply note now that there is a question of what this "one" can mean for an anti-essentialist and radical pluralist like Nietzsche.) The first thought about temporality is the striking statement set off by dashes "this is the century of *the multitude!* [*Menge*]," with the word *Menge* emphasized. The second is more indirect: after introducing a number of exemplars of Europe's desire (Byron, Napoleon, Wagner and others), Nietzsche says that "none of them would have been capable of a philosophy of the Antichrist." Whatever else the Antichrist topos suggests, it clearly has to do with end times, acceleration, and radical rupture. I will return to this second moment, after exploring the idea of the "century of the multitude."

A century is not only one hundred years but also (see Grimm) the time of living memory, the longest continuous stretch possible for human experience, one exemplar of *chronos*. What is the *Menge*? It is a diverse, heterogeneous multitude, more specifically a fickle and mixed audience. Unfortunately the term has been mistranslated as "masses" in many English translations, including even recent editions. Elsewhere Nietzsche makes explicit his distinction between homogeneous masses and plural multitude. In *Gay Science* he says that in Greece "there



must have been a multitude of diverse individuals [*eine Menge verschiedenartige Individuen*],” contrasting this, later in the aphorism, with the homogeneity of the *Masse*. The topic is “*The failure of reformations*”; Nietzsche asks why Luther, whom he frequently dismisses as a vulgar peasant, was able to accomplish a reformation in northern Europe when much more gifted spirits like Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Plato failed. He concludes that

Every time the reformation of an entire people fails and only sects raise their heads, one may conclude that the people is already very heterogeneous [*vielartig*] and is starting to break away from crude herd instincts and the morality of custom [*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*] (GS 149).

Compare the problematic English translation with the method proposed in GM I where Nietzsche undertakes a discriminating, differentiating look at the terms used to name human groups or types. There Nietzsche asks us to pay attention to distinctions, even subtle nuances, in the oldest Greek and Latin terms that masters and slaves use to describe one another. He notes the nuances of tenderness or compassion in some of the nobles’ names for the slaves, urging us to hear “the almost kindly nuances which the Greek nobility, for example, places in all words that it uses to distinguish itself from the more lowly people [*das niedere Volk*]” (GM I.10). Nietzsche reinforces the methodological point, proposing that some learned academy invite the submission of essays on the question of how linguistics illuminates moral concepts (GM I.17). Surely we should read the old philologist in this perspective with respect to his own usage of *Masse* and *Menge*.

BGE 256 develops this thought about the multitude by examining the careers of exemplary cultural figures whose hybridity and internal multiplicity reflects both the

heterogeneity of the *Menge* which idolizes them (cf. BGE 269) and its desire to be one; yet just as Greek reformations failed, so such unification is unlikely so long as the population remains diverse. In “*Peoples and Fatherlands*” Nietzsche discusses both factors which could encourage unification (such as the slow generation of adaptable supra-national and nomadic types [BGE 242]) and the actual diversity that leads not to homogeneity but to varied forms of hybridity.

These artists and political figures, whose achievements arise from mixing and synthesizing novel combinations of various cultural traditions, resemble one another in the form but not the content of their hybridity (so Heine’s German-Jewish persona is distinct from Stendhal’s Franco-Italian one). The *Menge*, it seems, is like these hybrid cases so far as its members too tend to be of mixed but not uniform heritage.

As the context of BGE 256 suggests, the *Menge* is, among other things, an audience. From the beginning of the aphorism we are in the world of theater, as Nietzsche explains that the nationalistic politics of the day is “a politics of dissolution” which must necessarily be a politics of the theatrical *interlude* (*Zwischenakts-Politik*). I cite two important texts that probably contributed to Nietzsche’s use of “*Menge*”: the “*Prelude in the Theater*” in Goethe’s *Faust*, which emphasizes the *Menge*’s diversity, and the gospel of Mark (in Luther’s version), where the *Menge* is extremely fickle in their taste, now enjoying the Jesus spectacle and now turning away from him.

Nietzsche goes on from “*Peoples and Fatherlands*” to ask “What is Noble?” *Beyond* characteristically ends with a question, or complex of questions. And I paraphrase one of these: What is *kairotic* vigilance in the age of the *Menge*? This is “the problem of those who wait.” How can the *vornehm* live with the challenge of a future that cannot be anticipated? This temporal openness must be further defended against the amortizing of the future in a system of

debt, as the *Genealogy* shows. Nobility requires not only understanding Europe's changing social structures but avoiding deception by the multitude's enthusiasms, in a culture where various forms of celebrity or news of the day are confusedly taken as great events in the society of the spectacle. How can we distinguish the spectacular flight of Zarathustra's shadow or simulacrum - or what's gone viral on the internet -- with the true "great events" which come softly unannounced on doves' feet (Z II.18)?

That the *Menge* is not a universal class of all human beings, or all those within a certain territory or political unit, is evident from a discussion of their reverence for "great men" (BGE 269). The multitude is understood as an audience, one that often admires unwisely, but is distinguished from a more universal class. This admiration is typically naïve; in contrast "the psychologist" of this section is aware of the pitiful shortcomings of the figures generally considered to be great. The psychologist – a role Nietzsche plays when he analyzes the "higher humans" (as in BGE 256) – suffers from observing their admiration: "Perhaps the paradox of his condition becomes so horrible that the multitude, the educated, the enthusiasts [*die Menge, die Gebildeten, die Schwärmer*] develop a profound admiration for the very things he has learned to regard with profound pity and contempt..." Nietzsche takes this contemporary phenomenon as a clue to "what has happened in all great cases so far: the multitude worshiped a god, -- and that 'god' was only a poor sacrificial animal!" The apposition of "multitude, educated, enthusiasts" indicates the relative selectivity in the concept of multitude, as opposed to herd and masses. They are those with sufficient interest and motivation, whatever their other differences, to care intensely about "great men." While such things may always have happened with the multitude

and the objects of their admiration, we now live in the very *longue durée* of the multitude, their century.

The psychologist must resist the temptation of pity – precisely the situation of Zarathustra with the higher humans. At this point he finds himself in opposition to the *Menge*:

The paradox of his situation may even reach the frightful point where those cases that have triggered in him great pity as well as great contempt, have triggered in the multitude, the educated, the enthusiasts, a feeling of great reverence; theirs is a reverence for ‘great humans’ and performing animals, for whose sake we bless and esteem the fatherland, the earth, the dignity of humanity, and ourselves; men whom we ask our children to look up to and to emulate (BGE 269).

Note that Nietzsche has silently enlisted the pity of his reader for the psychologist, so that we find ourselves in (or resisting) a situation parallel to his. The misplaced reverence of the multitude prevents them from detecting genuinely great people or events. The melancholy of the psychologist threatens an equivalent oblivion regarding the future. These noisy and exaggerated enthusiasts fail to see that their celebrities are not so different from performing animals. They see the great humans as justifying the earth, the fatherland, and their own dignity. Perhaps, Nietzsche continues, it has always been so with the multitude, adoring an imagined “god” who was “only a poor sacrificial animal.” The great humans themselves are woefully unprepared for the *kairos* because they are “precipitous in their trust and distrust,” “people of the moment,” and likely to be swayed by “intoxicated flatterers.”

What is nobility now, for those who wait? Among other things, it is avoiding premature, precipitate action and knowing how to avoid such temptations. In BGE 277 Nietzsche reminds us

of the classic paradox that once you've built your ideal house you have already thought beyond it to what it should have been. We should learn not to be over-eager in anticipating the moment. . Nietzsche's project, articulated most explicitly in *Beyond*, is to think, not the content of the future, but futurity itself, and to provoke his readers to a certain vigilance in their time and place.

Here I will only allude briefly to Nietzsche's analysis of how debt and debt management shape political time. The process of the production, accumulation, and accounting of debt is a theory of how the debt machine constructs a future restricted to training and disciplining humans to make restitution. This is a theory of time, of theologico-political time. Nietzsche claims that it's infected the philosophical tradition from its beginnings. It also increasingly infects politics in and between nations as well as individual and domestic economies.

**IV- *The Antichrist*.** Recall now that in section 256 of *Beyond*, where Nietzsche critically analyzes – and does not merely celebrate or endorse – Europe's "desire to be one" he says of his hybrid, quasi-cosmopolitan exemplars, that "none of them would have been capable of a philosophy of the Antichrist" (there are a number of related statements from 1886-88). This is not simply an anti-Christian philosophy in the sense of opposition to Christian morality and metaphysics. It is a political statement with significant implications for political time. As Nietzsche, former theology student and housemate of Franz Overbeck knew well, the Antichrist is a figure of the coming political collapse of existing regimes, dominion over the earth, and the acceleration of time.

In a letter to Malwida von Meysenbug from the time of Zarathustra's composition, Nietzsche writes "Would you like a new name for me? The church language [*Kirchensprache*] has one --- the *Antichrist*. Let's not forget to laugh!" (April 4, 1883; KSB 6.357). And in *Ecce*

*Homo*: “I am in Greek, and not only in Greek, the *Antichrist*” (EH Books 2). What is involved in Nietzsche’s adoption of this *Kirchensprache* – even with various degrees of humor and irony?

There is a political dimension here that has often been obscured. Walter Kaufmann wanted to depoliticize a thinker who’d been associated with two world wars. Nietzsche was to be seen as an individualistic existentialist and a cultural critic. Kaufmann did this rather successfully for the American and Anglophone scene, his influence extending through philosophers like Robert Solomon, Richard Schacht, and Alexander Nehamas. Even though Kaufmann’s book is titled *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, he never addresses the Antichrist theme as such. This should seem odd, given the history of identifying the greatest perceived political threats as Antichrist – from Frederick II through Napoleon on up to Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump (then there is Ronald Wilson Reagan, whose three names have six letters each). The very book *The Antichrist*, even in its censored condition, is highly political and culminates in sweeping condemnations of Christianity as a historical, political system and movement – Crusades, Reformation, and praise of one of its classic opponents, Islam. And then we have the over-the-top “Decree Against Christianity.”

Giorgio Agamben concludes an essay on Hobbes by observing that the political philosophy of modernity must come to terms with its theological roots (Agamben, p. 60). Is the earthly kingdom just a secularized version of the heavenly one? Hegel seems to confirm the general lines of Schmitt’s and Agamben’s understanding of political theory when, in his *Philosophy of World History*, he robustly defends modern secularization and at the same time says that we are living in the last days, in the Christian sense of that idea. In introducing his analysis of the Germanic world, Hegel announces that “...the Christian world is the world of completion; the grand principle of being is realized, consequently the end of days is fully come”

(Hegel 1955, p. 342). Now, in the end of days, it turns out, “Secular life (*Weltlichkeit*) is the positive and definite embodiment of the spiritual kingdom – the kingdom of the will manifesting itself in outward existence.” In this absolute Protestantism, with its construction of the nation state and its complete *Aufhebung* of the earth (or human geography) in world-history, Hegel achieves a politico-theological synthesis whose only glimpses of futurity are incidental and tentative speculations about which states will rise and fall.

*It's later than you think. The Antichrist* (and the “philosophy of the Antichrist”) clearly signals its concern with questions of time and temporality from beginning to end. This text not only observes and analyzes a plurality of temporal modes, but aims at actively intervening in its readers’ sense of time. It demolishes core Western narratives by portraying an atemporal Jesus, an “idiot” living in a pure present, explaining Christianity as Paul’s political invention, and offering heterodox stories of Christianity’s relation to Rome, Islam, the Crusades, and Germany. From a distance suggesting a parallel universe with its own time, “we Hyperboreans” become temporal guerillas, disrupting and interrupting world-history, splitting it in two. As Agamben says, it is the political philosophy of modernity that’s at stake. Modernity is a self-named, self-described time that places itself as successor to classical antiquity, middle ages, and renaissance. To be modern is to be up to date, and Nietzsche wants to disrupt all dates, emblematically by starting a new calendar with *The Antichrist*. He was squaring off against such modern thinkers as Hegel, Comte, Spencer, and Darwin. What makes them modern is their fundamental commitment to the idea of “progress,” the notion that history, society, or biological life are developing, evolving, or unfolding in a movement toward greater complexity.

What is the “true name of the Antichrist” (BT PII.5)? In Christian political theology, as contrasted with the potpourri of passionate anathematizations and passing hysterias about

supposed great events or cataclysms, it is not so much a question of naming the Antichrist as of understanding his, her, or their relation to political power. In that long tradition, the Antichrist is understood as the evil one(s), both enemies of Christ and figures capable of imitating his attributes, whose appearance is restrained or held off by the state. In the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul (or whoever) warns his addressees against expecting an imminent arrival of the last days, the end of the world. He says without much explanation that there is a restraining force or *katechon* (*Aufhalter*) that delays the appearance of Antichrist(s):

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth [*katechon*] that he might be revealed in his time [*kairo*]. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way (II Thessalonians 2: 3-7).

This is the enigmatic text that Tertullian applied to the Roman Empire around 200 CE, roughly a century before Constantine's official Christianization. The theme of waiting, containing, warding off, and other apotropaic strategies has more general implications, and can be understood in such contexts as the Cold War doctrine of containment, slowing global warming, resistance to economic change by entrenched institutional interests, or the struggles of those with aging bodies to mitigate processes of decay and degeneration. Paul is the first critic of accelerationism.



For Schmitt, the state legitimated in terms of this teaching is the emblem and central institution of the temporal regime that began with the coming of Christ and will end in the world's last days as foretold in Apocalypse/Revelation:

The Christian empire was not eternal. It always had its own end in view.

Nevertheless, it was capable of being a historical power. The decisive historical concept of this continuity was that of the restrainer: *katechon*. "Empire" in this sense meant the historical power to restrain the appearance of the Antichrist and the end of the present eon; it was a power that withholds (*qui tenet*), as the Apostle Paul said in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians (Schmitt 2003, p. 59-60).

Katechontic political theology involves a very specific sense of temporality, one that helps to constitute the Christian core of *Weltgeschichte*, which Nietzsche saw as the dominant form of his age's temporal thought. Katechontic (and world-historical) political time contrast with the temporal consciousness of earliest Christianity, the community of Jesus' followers who believed that he had ushered in a new, messianic time.

In the struggle with Gnosticism the church developed a theory of time (as real and continuous rather than punctuated by absolutely abrupt revelations), a political structure (to combat heresy and order lives in the world), and an accommodation with the state (rather than dismissing it as merely an illusion of the fallen world). The logic of theology as well as the strategy for suppressing Gnosticism pointed the Church in the direction of organization, doctrine, and practice that acknowledged history as it made its peace with the state.

Christ and Antichrist are names having to do with time, more specifically with calculated time. If Christians begin their calendar with Jesus' birth they have also frequently attempted calculations of the world's end, signaled by the Antichrist's coming. These calculations began in earnest with the church father Hippolytus around 210 CE, calculations Nietzsche would almost certainly have discussed with Overbeck, who wrote his doctoral thesis on Hippolytus' treatise *On Christ and Antichrist*.

Hippolytus' originality was in providing arguments that claimed to render intelligible the deferral and delay of the second coming and the end of time, an increasing worry in the second and third centuries. His greatest innovation was his redating of the final events to about five hundred years in the future. This opens up a time of waiting, expectation, and inevitable accommodation to the world in the time that remains. From his reading of Daniel Hippolytus deduced that there were still ten democracies and ten kingdoms yet to come, before the world's end. It is something like this time of waiting (*chronos*), which for Overbeck is both symptom and enabler of accommodation to worldly culture, and for Nietzsche a time that threatens to extinguish a vigilant watch for the opportunities (*kairoi*) offered by chance (BGE 274). Part IV of *Zarathustra* enacts a parody of the waiting which became basic to the Christian tradition. The theologian must be concerned to sublimate the various forms of what Walter Benjamin called *Jetztzeit* that characterized primitive Christianity, that amalgam of Gnostic salvation, Stoic *kairos*, and Jewish Messianic time. Eventually theology leads to the invention of world-history.

Katechontic time, the time of waiting and deferral has obvious political implications. With church and state established and coordinated, Christianity finds the basic lines of temporal life defined: the state, with the church's endorsement, resists the coming of Antichrist. History is now plotted in terms of a story of deferred redemption (*Erlösung*) with regular payments on the

debt in the form of confession and penance (a structure that can be secularized through the mechanisms of credit and finance). Yet the time of the *katechon* is only one mode of medieval Christian thought about time and history. Ernst Kantorowicz made the important observation that “the Middle Ages were perhaps more aware than we are of the various categories or measures of time,” and this might be extended to Nietzsche’s thought, especially when he adapts such a paradigmatic medieval *topos* as the Antichrist (Kantorowicz, p. 89). It is worth recalling that Zarathustra’s lament about the shrinking, measured world and his announcement of eternal recurrence coincide with the global standardization of time that took hold in the early 1880s.

Historians of philosophical and religious thought, like Karl Löwith and Jacob Taubes, see the emerging tendency toward condensing the many varieties of temporality as stemming from the apocalyptic and eschatological commentaries and speculations of Joachim of Fiore, who elaborated a three stage conception of human history consisting of the epochs of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For Joachim the age of the Holy Spirit was to begin in 1200. Such critical studies lead Agamben to sharply distinguish messianic time (the time of the end) from eschatological time (the end of time) – a distinction already made by Overbeck. Messianic time is experience free of obsessive hope, regret, and nostalgia; it lives in an expanded present, not in waiting or expectation of a future state. Eschatological thought expects, awaits, and frequently attempts to predict the ultimate end. Messianic time is apolitical. Eschatological time requires an interim politics adapted to the specific character of the destined end. For Nietzsche, it was Paul, the evangelist and community organizer, who laid the foundations for eschatological time and its politics.

The Stoics criticized time experienced as mere waiting and deferral, a critique that can be applied to the church’s conception of katechontic time as that during which governments ward

off the coming of the Antichrist. Stoics aimed at eradicating hope and fear, both of which blind us to the lived experience of the moment and the readiness for real opportunity or *kairos* when it arises. The calculation of time, the measuring out of *chronos*, I have been suggesting, is one of Nietzsche's persistent themes. It contributes to making the earth small, furthers the regime of the last humans, and produces a general blindness to the unpredictable future and the fleeting but genuine opportunities offered by chance. Yet we might ask whether merely substituting one calendar for another could be more than an ironic gesture if the primacy of calculation still goes unquestioned.

Perhaps it is not surprising then that apocalyptic thought tends to resurge in times that fearfully anticipate climate change, trans-national religious war, shortages of basic resources, new waves of migration and nomadism, as well as rapid and unpredictable technological transformations that penetrate deeply into all social relations. Unlike those who scour the Biblical texts for literal, all too literal, news of the last days, Nietzsche's donning of the Antichrist mask can be read most fruitfully as a way of asking now, at this date – is it early or late? – how we might begin to think earth's times in ways that do not foreclose being open to great events and great politics.

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This essay draws on the book *Nietzsche's Earth: Great Events, Great Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2016) where some arguments of this essay are developed more fully. I gratefully acknowledge permission from the University of Chicago Press to incorporate parts of the book here.

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