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The Problem of Nihilism in Modern Political Philosophy: A Nietzschean Discussion

Abstract

This study defends the thesis that nihilism is a central problem of contemporary political philosophy and that in order to overcome this problem, Nietzschean thought can provide significant leverage. We address our study in a Nietzschean manner because Nietzsche considers the problem of modernism as a problem of nihilism, and accordingly, he regards "the modern era" as an era in which nihilism appears. On the other hand, Nietzsche's philosophical thoughts, which suggest a chance to overcome nihilism, are significant for understanding problems of contemporary political philosophy.

Key Words

Nietzsche, Nihilism, Political Nihilism, Life, Contemporary Political Philosophy, Nietzsche's Ethic.

Modern Siyaset Felsefesinde Nihilizm Problemi: Nietzscheci Bir Tartışma

Özet

Bu çalışma, nihilizmin, çağdaş politik felsefenin merkezi bir sorunu olduğu ve bu sorunun üstesinden gelmede Nietzscheci düşüncenin önemli açılımlar sağlayabileceği tezini savunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Nietzsche'nin modernizm sorununu bir nihilizm sorunu olarak görmesi ve buna bağlı olarak da "modern dönemi" nihilizmin tezahür ettiği (açık hale geldiği) bir dönem olarak telakki etmesi, çalışmamızın Nietzscheci bir tartışma bağlamında yürütülmesinin sebebidir. Öte yandan Nietzsche'nin felsefî düşünceleri de, nihilizmin üstesinden gelmeye yönelik içerimleri nedeniyle, çağdaş politik felsefenin sorunlarını anlamak açısından son derece önemlidir.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Nietzsche, Nihilizm, Politik Nihilizm, Yaşam, Çağdaş Politik Flsefe, Nietzsche'nin Etiği.

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Introduction

Although Nietzsche did not himself regard the problem of nihilism as a specific problem of political philosophy, by considering nihilism as a central problem of modern political thought and life, Nietzsche's thought can be seen to provide highly important tools both for understanding the problem in question and for a thinking attempt at overcoming it.

According to Nietzsche, nihilism is predestined for Western thought and culture. This destiny became visible and sensible in the modern era. As it had reflections throughout the full range of life, the problem of nihilism had reflections in political life and thought. Therefore, even if Nietzsche is not a political philosopher, in the context of the problem of nihilism, he made some assessments of political subjects like state, democracy, freedom, equality, justice, nationalism, socialism etc. These assessments are important to an understanding of several problems in modern political philosophy.

This study, firstly, will deal with Nietzsche's assessments of the problem of nihilism, considering specifically the terms in which he sees nihilism as a problem and as an opportunity. Subsequently, Nietzsche's ethical theory will be mentioned in an attempt to address the problem of nihilism. His ethical theory is important for this study because Nietzsche considers nihilism intrinsically an ethical problem. The foundations of his political philosophy depend on his ethical interests, and accordingly, he sees the problems of modern political thought as extensions of the problems of Western ethical thought. Lastly, political nihilism will be discussed. In this subject matter, Nietzsche's criticisms of modern political thought will be mentioned in terms of his considerations of political nihilism. After pointing out the importance of these criticisms, it will be stated that Nietzsche proposed a political society in response to the problem of nihilism. Building, finally, from the idea that the relationship of Nietzsche's thought to the political has a meaning beyond his proposal for politics, the question of what sort of suggestions Nietzsche's philosophy can provide for overcoming the problems of contemporary political philosophy will be answered.

Nihilism

In a broad sense, nihilism indicates a historical situation wherein existing values are devaluated and the question "why" stays unanswered (Nietzsche 1967: 9). Devaluation of values entails a loss of persuasive meaning in relations with oneself, with other people and with the world. Leaving the question of "why?" unanswered means a loss of purpose for man. For instance, one can be subjected to a great deal of pain by the nature of his or her worldly existence. One can willingly endure this pain, if he or she has an appreciable purpose that can justify these sufferings. In the case of nihilism, the thing more desperate than suffering for man is to not know why he is suffering (Nehamas 1999: 171).

Nietzsche regards nihilism as a destiny of Western thought that has its roots in Plato (Pearson 1998: 58). The nihilistic content of the tradition is closely related with its metaphysical content.

According to Nietzsche, the tradition of metaphysical thought has a nihilistic character because metaphysical thought renders life worthless through dichotomies like being-existence, subject-object, agent-action, finite-infinite, soul-body, rational-emotional (Bergoffen 1990: 63). In every distinction, the first element preserves its value and the second becomes worthless. The ideas of truth in itself and the isolated subject, which are—in fact—only fictional and linguistic realities, hide the dynamic structure of becoming. In one sense, becoming is negated. Negation of becoming is, in fact, negation of life in favor of the idea of another world (Deleuze 1989: 147).

Even if the values that are immanent to the tradition of metaphysical thought are against life, they are, at the same time, necessary to this life. The aforementioned ways of evaluation are highly important for a particular lifestyle, namely, "the herd" life. It is also possible, however, to see the reflection of the "will to power" in nihilistic values. (Nietzsche 1998: 59). These values make life endurable by compensating for people's feeling of impotency against life (Nietzsche 1998: 67). At this point, it is important to distinguish a culture's or a philosophic tradition's nihilistic character from occurance of nihilism itself. Nihilism, specifically European nihilism, refers to a historical condition wherein values, even if they are nihilistic today, were once functional but have lost their viability.

The Nietzschean interpretation of the tradition of metaphysical thought has never been founded on "negation" or "denial". On the contrary, the Nietzschean notion of affirmation is paramount. History is affirmed because today is inseparable from the past. Likewise, it can be said that this idea undergirds Nietzsche's approach to the problem of nihilism that is the destiny of Western thought. In modern times, the most basic instinct of metaphysical thought, "the will to truth", is transformed into a scientific, intellectual consciousness. Thus, it brought about the end of metaphysical thought and devaluated the Western tradition's values by revealing the artificiality of the notion of metaphysical truth (Nietzsche 1998: 149 – 150).

Considering nihilism as a problem stems from a lack of foundation both in the degree of individual being and in social values (Nihistani 1990: 3). In this sense, nihilism takes the form of a passive nihilism. Passive nihilism, for Nietzsche, is marked by a decreased sense of power and a general pessimism (Nietzsche 1967: 11, 17).

Considering nihilism strictly as a problem prevents us from making an effort to overcome it precisely because overcoming nihilism primarily depends on the affirmation of the same. This requires an attitude that considers nihilism not just as a problem but, at the same time, an opportunity. Nihilism is an opportunity because it is the prerequisite for both the devaluation of existing values and the creation of new values (Küng 1980: 391 – 392). Nietzsche considers the affirmation of nihilism to be an opportunity and the approval of it to be the mark of an active nihilism (Nietzsche 1967: 18). Pessimism and the related withdrawal from life that characterize passive nihilism give way to approving life in active nihilism.

According to Nietzsche, overcoming nihilism requires a reevaluation (Deleuze 1989: 175). Nietzsche's ethic distinguishes itself by attempting to fulfill the need for this reevaluation.

Nietzsche's Ethic

Initially, one might think it problematic to discuss the ethics of a philosopher who positions himself as beyond good and evil (Nietzsche 1991: 39), against morality (Nietzsche 1991: 27) and amoral (Nietzsche 1997a: 130). The problem here, however, stems not from the philosopher's thoughts but from the dominant ethical understanding that claims moral truths to be universal. This ethical understanding is exactly what Nietzsche rejects and takes a stand against. Accordingly, it does not follow from Nietzsche's rejection of an ethic that is characteristically monist that he lacks a moral theory (Conway 1997: 30).

Contrary to the universalistic ethic, Nietzsche's ethic has a pluralistic character (Connoly 1995: 25). Nietzsche's ethical pluralism results from his understanding of the pluralistic self. According to Nietzsche, a self is a place of dynamic struggle between different instincts and desires; the notion of the self in the universalistic ethic can have only a fictional reality because it sees the self as static and isolated (Nietzsche 1997a: 13).

Nietzsche considers the notion of the self that is at the center of the universal ethic to be a side effect of the fallacy that stems from our linguistic habits (Vattimo 2001: 62). In that sense, the term "I" that has an existence in linguistic usage, e.g., "I am doing", is transferred out of its linguistic context and started to be thought of as the "thing in itself". Thus, a universal humanistic subject is invented by purifying him/her from his/her historical, emotional and relational qualities (Nietzsche 1998: 47). In this manner, it can be said that the monist characteristics of the universalistic ethic are founded upon the abovementioned notion of self.

An ahistorical notion of self, marked by the separation of an agent from his/her act, provides a basis for the notions of ethical freedom and ethical responsibility that are used by the universalistic ethic to build itself (Pearson 1998: 57). The self needs an existence distinct from its acts in order to be free (to be free to choose own acts) in the terms of the ethic. Freedom to choose one's own acts entails the responsibility for those acts (ethical responsibility).

Considered from a Nietzschean approach, the nihilistic character of the universalistic ethic could be said to result from this notion of responsibility. The reason for this is that the pointed address for the responsibility is in fact the same address of evil that should be denied. What is denied can be either the act of the other or one's own (according to Nietzsche, s/he is oneself). Actually, what is denied in both cases is the life with plurality and fertileness (Connoly 1995: 10). The claim of universality and of the universalistic ethic denies every approach apart from its own.

Contrary to the universalistic ethic that is based upon negating and denying the becoming, affirmation is the main part of Nietzsche's ethic. According to Nietzsche, becoming is as innocent as a child's play and is beyond the categories of good and evil that have been imposed upon it (Nietzsche 1992a: 43). If everything consists of becoming, then the self consists of human acts. In that case, agent and action cannot be separated from each other. In Nietzsche's thought, self is considered to be a process and the sum of all effects. Thus, our selves are open to change depending upon our acts.

This dynamic self understanding enables different self regimes, i.e., different ethic understandings.

The question of self in Nietzsche's ethics begins replacing the question of "how?" that is the center of genealogical approach, by the question of "what is?", which is, in fact, metaphysical in character (Schutte 1984: 39). When the genealogic approach explores the question "how have we become what we are?", it disables the universality claim by positing that forms of evaluation that claim universality are actually manifestations of a will to power (power relations) (Warren 1991: 102-103). Genealogy never pursues its questioning to find the authenticity or essence of a thing. On the contrary, genealogy questions the past in terms of its relation with today by pointing out that there is no essence in the past and that everything is contingent. Understanding the question of "how have we become what we are?" is a precondition for overcoming the situation in which our present beings are shaped (Owen 1995: 39-40). When it is thought in terms of the problem of nihilism, the genealogical questioning that is the main part of the Nietzschean ethic means an attempt to address the question of how we have come to nihilism.

With his work, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche makes an important point about genealogical questioning. Nietzsche emphasizes two different types of ethics that become different attitudes for life: the slave morality that has reactive character and negates life (and is thus nihilistic) and the master morality that has an active character and approves life.

Slave morality has a reactive character because it describes the understanding of "good" on the basis that the "other must be evil". Accordingly, the evil is master and his/her acts. Whereas the noble values such as self-love, self-respect, self-satisfaction are described as evil, the alternate values of humbleness, altruism and mercy are described as good. Thus, the values of the master are reversed (Nietzsche 1998: 32-33). In this sense, the reactive character of slave morality stems from its attitude that negates life (Deleuze 1989: 117). The reason for this is that the master, who is understood as bad and negated, symbolizes the sense of powerlessness against life. Where the slave abnegates for the sake of otherworldly aims, the master approves life. The active character of master morality stems from precisely this affirmation (Deleuze 1989: 119-120). The master does not need the "other" in order to ground his perception of good.

According to Nietzsche, either type of ethics appears as different kinds of will to power. Just as the sense of satisfaction (an affirming attitude) in life stems from the sense of power in the master, the attitude that negates life stems from the sense of impotency in the slave (Nietzsche 1998: 40). The slave has to universalize his form of evaluation in order to compensate for the sense of impotency. For that purpose, he separates agent from action. With this separation, the slave will equalize him/herself with master by separating him/her from his/her power. At this point, one can identify the notions such as universality, equality and liberation as distinctive forms of slave morality (particularly in Christian morality). This identification is important for us because the aforesaid notions persist as secularized forms of Christian morality in modern political and ethical thought.

Despite the fact that Nietzsche attributed a positive value to the master morality, he does not offer master morality as an alternative in the age of nihilism (Danto 2002:

76) The reason is that master morality is historical and in this sense, only has meaning in the terms of its historical context. On the other hand, Nietzsche thinks that the ethics that dominate in his age also do not offer an alternative. Nietzsche considers both Kantian ethics—grounded in the sense of transcendent self and thus containing the faults of universalistic ethic—and utilitarian ethics, which addressed a human type who has neither purpose nor motivation directed towards overcoming nihilism, to be nihilistic ethical systems (Nietzsche 1992b: 28, Nietzsche 1991: 23, Nietzsche 1997a: 132-133).

Whereas interpreters of Nietzsche debate whether or not he proposed an alternative positive ethical theory, in our opinion a positive ethic can be deduced from Nietzsche's thoughts. David Owen's argument that the basic elements for forming an ethical theory can be found in Nietzsche's philosophy supports this idea.

After stating that an ethical theory should have four basic elements (ontological principle, asceticism, ethical order and *telos*), Owen points out that these four elements can be founded in Nietzsche's philosophy, suggesting the conclusion that Nietzsche has an ethical theory. According to Owen, within Nietzsche's philosophy, these elements respectively are the will to power, erotic asceticism, the idea of eternal recurrence and the overman (Owen 1995: 112). In the Nietzschean ethic, "Will to Power" appears as an ontological principle (Lampert 1986: 255) and as such, functions as a mean for integration and conversion of an existence that has a plural, dynamic character. Herewith, Nietzschean will to power, as in Hobbes' conceptualization of power, not only has a mean bounded by power that directed another one (Patton 1993: 153).

Directing power to ourselves, the effort to overcome the situation we are in brings with it a certain asceticism. This asceticism differs from the Christian asceticism that means withdrawing from the world and life for the sake of the hereafter. Asceticism means purifying man of all his senses and instincts in Christianity (generally, in metaphysics) because the soul and body (mind and material in modern thought) are considered distinct from each other, and whereas the soul is consecrated (accredited with superiority), the body is denied (May 1999: 81-82). Because the Nietzschean self is considered to be the area in which the different senses and instincts struggle with each other, erotic asceticism suggests not oppressing man's senses and instincts, but regulating them for a worldly aim (Nehamas 1999: 165).

This worldly aim (*telos*) is the overman ideal in the Nietzschean ethic, and the overman is the man who approves his life and is pleased to be what he/she is in the current situation. According to Nietzsche, amor fati (love of fate) is the most distinguishing characteristic of the overman (Nietzsche 1997b: 74-75). Loving fate means that one wants to continue the current situation in perpetuity.

At this point, the term eternal recurrence appears as a significant (supplementary) element of the Nietzschean ethic. In our opinion (and contrary to that of some Nietzsche interpreters), eternal recurrence does not refer to a cosmological principle that everything recurs itself. Rather, it refers to the ethical order wherein the current situation continues forever, and if we are not self-satisfied, we should transform ourselves into a situation that we would want to continue forever—which is the overman (Thiele 1990: 204).

Political Nihilism

According to Nietzsche, nihilism—an inevitable consequence of nihilistic culture—reveals itself as a problem in which man cannot provide his/her completeness and has lost the connection with his/her acts (Warren 1991: 13-14). In the context of political philosophy, this problem reveals itself as the nihilistic character of political culture, systems of political thought, political ideologies, governmental systems and political ideals. These are nihilistic in character because they consolidate the disconnection between a human being and his/her acts and conceal this disconnection by referring to notions of artificial integrity (Warren 1991: 152-153). Nietzsche's assessments of modern political thought are stem from this idea. For Nietzsche, although forms of modern political thought present themselves as new, they are actually the continued and secularized forms of the traditional metaphysical thought that has a nihilistic character.

In this line of thought, Nietzsche directs serious criticism towards the modern state and democracy, modern political ideologies like liberalism, socialism and nationalism and also modern political ideals like freedom, equality and justice.

Nietzsche considers the modern state to be an obstacle for individuation, which is to say, an ethical attempt to overcome nihilism. The modern state compensates speciously the individuals' feeling of impotency and, in this way, bars individuals from overcoming themselves. (Warren 1991: 220-221). For Nietzsche, the state thus fills the void left by the death of God and maintains the nihilistic character of Christian thought and culture in a secular character (Nietzsche 1999: 67).

The most systematic expression of a modern state conception can be found in Hobbes' political philosophy. According to Hobbes, the most distinctive feature of the modern state is sovereignty. Modern states achieve this sovereignty by undertaking the mission of being a guarantor of social order. In this sense, the state is the only sovereign that unites the power of individuals who otherwise behave according to their self-protection instinct. Here is the origin of the problematic character of the modern state from the perspective of Nietzsche's ethics. The reason for the problematic character is the following: the Hobbesian state, by appealing to its sovereignty, unites the whole power that individuals need in order to transform themselves, whereas in another sense, the state is based on the impotency of individuals (Patton 1993: 159). Contrary to Hobbes, Nietzsche attributes this sovereignty to individuals. The subject of the Nietzschean ethic, "sovereign individual" refers to the individual who is the owner of his own actions and his own power and takes responsibility for his actions.

The Nietzschean criticism of the conception of the modern state can be levied on one of the dominant ideologies of modern times, namely, nationalism. Nietzsche thinks that a nation, as a state, has only a fictional reality and functions as a mechanism that compensates for individuals' sense of impotency. (Nietzsche 1997a: 157). Because nation is a fictional identity in which every kind of individual difference is compressed, nationalism, in this sense, appears as a totalitarian ideology.

Nietzschean criticism against nationalism can be considered as a specific example of his criticism of ideologies in general. In this manner, one can cite parallels between Nietzsche and Marx, who defines ideology as an illusion. Like Nietzsche,

Marx gave importance to historicity of subject and the relationship between the individual and practice, and he directed significant criticisms at every kind of fictional conception of individual and thought system that disconnected the link between individual and practice. Despite these parallels between Marx and Nietzsche, in our opinion, Marx's thoughts can be subjected to Nietzschean criticisms because of two basic characteristics. First, Marx's teleological philosophy of history is problematic in terms of Nietzsche's philosophy of becoming. Second, Marx falls into essentialism because he attributes a deterministic position to economic factors in the final analysis, and in this manner, he contradicts the Nietzschean conception of self that has a dynamic and plural character.

Nietzsche's criticisms of democracy and socialism, which were significant for their age, stem from his conviction that both political thought systems are secular forms of (Christian) herd morality (Apell 1999: 124). The ideal of equality that is glorified by the masses in order to compensate for their impotency against nobles is the dominant value for both democracy and socialism. In the same way, nobles' understanding of justice, which depends on the principle that treats equals equally, is displaced by mass morality, which treats everyone equally. The masses' understanding of justice is the other dominant principle of socialism and democracy. For Nietzsche, however, the socialists' prediction that humanity will reach a society wherein everybody will be free and equal is a secular form of Christian salvation belief (Nietzsche 1991; 68).

Contemporary regimes are largely liberal democracies, and the subject of debates on contemporary political philosophy is in general liberal democracy. In this manner, it can be said that Nietzsche's criticisms against liberal democracy have significant value. These criticisms can be collected in several points.

As liberalism is founded on the notion of an abstract and ahistorical individual, the first criticism against liberalism appears as a criticism of the subject. In the genealogy, Nietzsche displays the historical and contingent characteristic of the subject and shows that the subject does not have a transcendental self. Thus, he disables the abstract sense of the individual on which liberalism is based. Nietzsche, as a logical consequence of his criticism of the subject, denies some social contract theories that consider political society as a product of a social contract between individuals.

Nietzsche's second criticism of liberalism targets the liberal notion of rights. According to Nietzsche, liberalism's rights doctrine that every human being, as a human being, has some universal rights, differentiates the right from the individual's struggle and performance and abolishes the "pathos of distance" that is an indicator of a healthy society. This "pathos of distance" refers to qualitative differences between individuals, and Nietzsche considers liberal tolerance, which means every sense of good should be valid at the same degree, as a symptom of "decadence" (Nietzsche 1991: 72)

Nietzsche's third criticism concerned the understanding of liberal freedom. As is known, liberalism is based on negative freedom, which means limiting interferences and protecting natural rights. Nietzsche's understanding of freedom has a positive implication in terms of displaying power and transforming self (Detwiller 1990: 95). As Nietzsche considers struggling against every kind of obstacle and overcoming every kind of difficulty as a part of understanding of freedom (Nietzsche 1991: 73), he sees the understanding of liberal freedom that aims to create a sheltered place that is

independent from external enforcement as a threat from the perspective of his ethical project.

Nietzsche's last criticism indicted liberalism's dualistic character. The dualistic character of liberalism stems from the fact that liberalism, like other modern political philosophies, is a continuation of metaphysical thought tradition. This dualistic characteristic finds its expression in the dichotomies like individual-society, civil society-state and public sphere-private sphere in liberalist political philosophy.

According to some interpreters (Kaufmann 1974: 412, Rorty 1995: 14-20, Thiele 1990: 224), Nietzsche has no political philosophy because he positions himself outside of the modern political understanding. For these interpreters, Nietzsche's thoughts should be discussed in terms of the self overcoming the individual and the self creating himself. Unlike these interpreters, we think that although Nietzsche does not offer a systematic political philosophy, he does have a political philosophy.

Nietzsche's political philosophy functions as an external (social) condition in order to actualize his ethic (his attempt to overcome nihilism) (Pearson 1995: 201). In this sense, the aim of political community is to enable the overman, who takes responsibility for advancing and enriching humanity. However, because Nietzsche thinks that being an overman is not possible for all, he proposes a dual social structure; one side consists of overmen who are lawmaker philosophers and leaders of the community. On the other side, there are the people who pave the way for raising overmen (Nietzsche 1997a: 166). In this model of political society, lawmaker philosophers produce both new values for enriching humanity and the values that build others' intellectual world and let them engage with the community (Apell 1999: 133). In this context, the model of political society that Nietzsche proposes can be considered as "aristocratic radicalism". The aristocratic element in this characterization refers to idea that politics is an activity peculiar to elite people; the radical element is the idea that the elite would unite their identities of saint, artist and philosopher, unlike the noble types in the past (Detwiller 1990: 159-190).

The political philosophy of Nietzsche comprises two different inclinations that struggle each other. These inclinations are expressed as Stoic autarchy and Aristotelian cooperation (the notion of community) (Apell 1999: 13-14). As Stoic autarchy emphasizes individuals struggling against themselves for self-unity, so the Aristotelian notion emphasizes the cooperation that enables healthy culture and is required for a healthy society.

Consequences

Nietzsche's importance to political thought is not limited to his political philosophy. In general, the philosophy of Nietzsche has some applications in the disputes on contemporary political philosophy beyond his opinions about politics.

Many postmodern political theorists, who focus on Nietzsche's thought, infer a model of democratic society instead of the model of hierarchical society that Nietzsche set forth previously. These theorists consider Nietzschean critiques of liberalism and democracy to be functional in terms of their modern political theory and claim that their

respective senses of democracy can be supported with Nietzsche's thought. At this point, it is worth noting three points that make Nietzsche important in terms of postmodern political theory and the understanding of postmodern democracy.

The first point concerns Nietzsche's critiques of metaphysical thought. Metaphysical thought found its expression with dichotomies that create the different denotations in modern theory. These dichotomies appear in the form of dichotomies of state-civil society, private sphere-public sphere and power-freedom. According to postmodern political theorists, the aforementioned dichotomies functionally narrow the political public sphere and thus omit different identities from the political sphere. For example, the dichotomy of civil society-political society legalizes silencing all identities outside of the isolative and totalitarian identity of citizenship by designating a civil society. At this stage, the political entirety on which liberal democracies predicate citizenship is artificial, abstract and metaphysical precisely because it precludes so many identities and human practices.

For this reason, theorists of agonistic democracy whose political action is predicated on different identities consider Nietzsche's critiques of metaphysics as supportive in terms of their democracy projects.

The second point that makes Nietzsche functional for postmodern political theory is his skepticism. This skepticism depends on denying every kind of objective truth. Nietzsche has a perspectivist understanding of truth because he thinks that there are no absolute truths but merely created ones. Nietzschean perspectivism refutes the objective, universalized truth claims by insisting on the fact that our knowledge cannot be separated from our historicity, interests and will to power. Thinking in the context of modern political theory, the common good that is acceptable for the whole political society is legitimized by universal (abstract) reason. Because the common good is defined by referring to a universal human subject, the other different understandings of good are illegitimatized. According to postmodern political theorists who pay attention to relationship between the truth and power that is established by Nietzsche, common good that is supposedly valid for everyone by modern political theory is actually legitimates the authority established by certain identities over others. Postmodern political theorists, who attach importance to different perspectives and therefore, different senses of good, think that universalized truth threatens their sense of democracy, and they count Nietzsche as an ally particularly because of his skepticism.

The third point concerns the political applications of the Nietzschean philosophy of power. As the will to power is important for ethical thought in terms of how power can be used for self overcoming, it is important for political thought in terms of power's dominant effect on power. Conceptualizing power as above, Nietzsche presupposes an agonistic model of culture and society. According to Nietzsche, power relations, at the ontological level, are in the foundation of every kind of human behavior and relation. Contrary to the Nietzschean philosophy of power, modern political theory (with its dichotomy of freedom-power) alienates individuals from power relations by attributing a negative value to power. This alienation can be seen in the sense of freedom in two great modern political ideologies; liberalism and Marxism. Both ideologies attribute a negative value to power. Liberalism considers limiting power, whereas Marxism considers abolishing it entirely, as a precondition of freedom. Power, however, contains

a positive sense for Nietzsche, as it represents the means of improving conditions and overcoming obstacles that stem from oneself and others. Because postmodern political theorists consider political norms as results of power relations and think that political struggle is important in order to change these norms, they find Nietzsche's will to power (with its positive valuation of power) and his genealogical method of revealing power relations to be important for themselves.

Lastly, what makes Nietzsche's ethic important for postmodern political thought is the pluralistic characteristic of this ethic. As has been stated, Nietzsche does not offer a universal ethic that denies different senses of morality. While offering his ethic as an approval ethic, Nietzsche strictly criticizes any ethic that claims universality. On the other hand, the Nietzschean ethic, with its grounding in an understanding of the dynamic and plural self, is important for postmodern political thought that emphasizes identity as relational and contingent and, in this sense, objects to every confinement of identity.

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