

Nietzsche and Ecological Reason(s) in the Anthropocene

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Introduction

In ecological and eco-(philo)sophical discourses there is much talk about a “new ecological image of thought” (Hörl and Burton 2017, 7) that is emergent within the last decades and/or even centuries. Accordingly, the ecological condition that is sometimes termed “the Anthropocene”¹ (Crutzen 2002) calls for new ways of thinking that are yet to be understood and “that remain to be elaborated and completed in a collective effort” (Hörl and Burton 2017, 21).

This new image of thought certainly bears consequences on the occidental concept of reason that have to be examined. By “occidental” culture I mean – in this paper – a philosophical and cultural tradition that developed from the philosophy of Ancient Greece and whose monothematical obsession with one singular form of reason forms a central element of European – and then globalized – modernity that brought us into the time of ecological crisis called the Anthropocene. Since what can also be called “classical” or “Socratic” reason² has undergone various pervasive ecological critiques (Merchant 2007) and therefore cannot serve as a role model for an ecological thinking, it seems necessary to look elsewhere. By pluralizing reason, one can break with the Platonist tendency of “monopolizing” reason and subsequently look for modes of “ecological reasons” among several reasons. For this purpose, Friedrich Nietzsche – probably the fiercest critic of the occidental philosophical tradition who managed to stay “inside” the canon – is best suited. Being one of the most distinguished critics of this reason – who can be called the “common denominator” of most traditions of critiques of

¹The concept of the Anthropocene originates from geology and designates that our current planetary era can be described as one in which humans and their ecological imprints have become a geological force that actively shape the entire planet. It has been widely and critically discussed in philosophical and other discourses. For example, it has been highlighted that the name-giving “anthropos” (Ancient Greek for “human”) can be misleading for it was not humanity in its entirety that equally brought forth the Anthropocene, but predominantly occidental, patriarchal, and capitalist society. The Anthropocene might not be a new geological era, but rather a transitional epoch of ecological catastrophe which should be kept as short as possible. Compare: Parenti and Moore 2016; Theriault 2015; Demos 2017; Haraway 2016.

²This form of reason the occidental discourse was mono-thematically obsessed with shall be highlighted by the capital R as opposed to just one reason among many reasons.

reason that followed – he nevertheless succeeds in overcoming its looming nihilism by (critically) affirming reason as much as plural reasons. With a constructive reading of Nietzsche, we can both detect rudiments of a pluralization of reasons as well as frail signs of inherently occidental ecological reasons that are underway – in all their ambivalence and with all the problems they render perceivable.

This paper will first constructively reexamine Nietzsche’s critique of reason to highlight that there is a strong and recurrent ecological motivation in it. It will then go on to show that this critique is far from being rejective or even nihilist. Rather, it brings a perhaps before unfathomed strength and vital necessity of reason to light while at the same time allowing us to focus on its huge problems. This affirmative critique enables us to attain a more nuanced position concerning reasons, in that we can at once acknowledge (occidental) reason while maintaining that in a time called the Anthropocene, another reason (or other reasons) becomes more prevalent. An example of such an ecological reason (among possibly several) can be traced down in Nietzsche’s oeuvre and can serve as an early example of other reasons in the emergence that are not yet completely conceptualized. We will gain a first insight into the strength, but also the dangers and problems of this new paradigm of reasons.

Methodological Remarks

Nietzsche’s entire oeuvre can be characterized as a “Passion of Reason” (Türcke 2017) and his wild attacks on reason were not an expression of Irrationalism, but of a deep love of reason, “namely a deeply wounded and disappointed one that cannot help but uncover the whole inadequacy of reason” (ibid., 20). In consequence – and as is usually the case when one struggles with something one loves – he did not develop one unitary stance towards reason, but several – at least seemingly – contradictory evaluations of his passion can be traced across his entire oeuvre. Nietzsche praises reason as much as he batters it; he, at the same time, affirms the cunning of Socratic Reason as he rejects it in favor of another, greater reason. It is impossible to draw a unitary concept of reason out of Nietzsche’s oeuvre and an attempt to do so would contradict Nietzsche’s entire philosophical approach, which affirms that “the wisest human would be the richest in contradictions” (eKGWB NF-1884, 26 [119]).³ However, what is possible in Nietzsche’s body of work – which consists of scattered and frequently contradictory aphorisms and rarely pursues one thought or problem for longer than a page – is to draw various types of reason out of this multitude. We can attempt to order them by different family likenesses and develop several kinds of reasons following their different characterizations and

³All fragments are cited according to the *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe* (eKGWB) and are translated by the author or taken from the *Writings from the Early & Late Notebooks*. See Bibliography.

evaluations.⁴ This paper will focus on two reasons without implying that this is the only way of perceiving them. It will make use of a strategic dualism to discern a classical, Socratic reason from a frail ecological reason that shimmers through on various occasions in Nietzsche's oeuvre and his wide reception thereafter. This can be easily done by discerning the two by their different evaluations: often Nietzsche writes in a tone that is highly dismissive of reason, while in other passages reason is praised with surprising verve. We will first examine the highly critical passages about reason and then proceed to why one finds rudiments of a pluralization of reason in Nietzsche's oeuvre that enables us to witness an ecological reason (among possibly several) in the becoming in the Anthropocene. Furthermore, this will enable us to draw first glimpses on why it is equally problematic to one-sidedly affirm this new, great reason as one.

Saying that we will use Nietzsche's oeuvre constructively means that we are using Nietzsche's texts in order to show how his insights can be used productively in discourses around the Anthropocene. This implies that this paper is not so much an exegesis that will try to stay 100% true to Nietzsche's intentions (which are, of course, marked by their time), rather it tries to make Nietzschean thought productive for our contemporary problems and will thus quite seamlessly merge his work with some of later authors that were hugely inspired by him to create a greater picture of ecological reasonings in the Anthropocene.

Nietzsche's Ecological Critique of Reason

Sometimes, especially in his earlier phase – that is characterized by occasional resurges of a belief in an almost Kantian form of reason (HH 265)⁵ – he cries out in disappointment: “to adhere to reason would be nice, if there was any reason” (eKGWB NF-1881, 11 [109])! The painful impact of the realization that reason came to existence “poorly, in an unreasonable manner, by chance [wie billig, auf eine unvernünftige Weise, durch einen Zufall]” (D 123) is clearly perceivable in his writings of that time. “Reason! Without knowing it is something utterly foolish, even in the greatest philosophers” (eKGWB NF-1881, 11 [132]). To not lose

⁴Of course, text – which in its linearity and logic has its own problems – is not the only and perhaps not the best way of undergoing such a pluralization of reason in Nietzsche's oeuvre. In fact, this paper is an offspring of a 10-meter-long artistic map of Nietzsche's concepts of “Vernunft” titled NIETZSCHE VERNUNFT KARTE. In it, all 690 mentions of “Vernunft” in his entire body of work (including the *Nachgelassene Fragmente* and his letters) are mapped according to a similar scheme: vertically according to a “good – bad” scheme, horizontally following chronology. <http://www.stffwchsl.net/materialien/nietzsche-vernunft-karte-online-dokumentation/>.

⁵If not mentioned otherwise, all English translations of Nietzsche are taken from the “Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy,” all of which can be found in the bibliography. Since Nietzsche is the main reference, he is cited after the official abbreviations to be found in the Bibliography and on: http://www.psupress.org/journals/jnls_Nietzsche.html.

reason, one has to forget or even suppress that reason emerged out of unreason and coincidence (D 149), that one needs to escape from reality and its events (D 448) to maintain it – a procedure that all the “great philosophers” (of what I call the occidental tradition) have done so far, according to Nietzsche. He maintains that there is much less reason in humans than they assume (eKGBWB NF-1882, 4 [90]) and that clinging to this very small capacity as an ideal that all of reality should correspond to is in fact dangerous. There is a clear trait of an ecological awareness in this critique of reason: according to Nietzsche, this contingently built up reason has corrupted philosophers in turning them against sensuality, the body, and the permanently becoming earth in which it is located (TI 1-2). Since Socrates, reason in classical occidental philosophy has been a tyrant, a “deranged” and “crooked” reason (TI 10; A 41, 52), that was seduced by language (eKGBWB NF-1886, 5 [22] & GM I-13) to create a transcendent “true world”, a “soul” and “spirit” that lead us to despise our bodies and life (EH Destiny 8 & GM III-28) and was used as a vehicle of power and Christian world appropriation, thereby morally devaluing reality (eKGBWB NF-1888, 14). Nietzsche’s alter-ego Zarathustra is preaching a clearly ecologically motivated turn away from these “mixers of poison” in following lines of his *Prologue*:

I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes! They are mixers of poisons whether they know it or not. They are despisers of life, dying off and self-poisoned, of whom the earth is weary: so let them fade away! Once the sacrilege against God was the greatest sacrilege, but God died, and then all these desecrators died. Now to desecrate the earth is the most terrible thing, and to esteem the bowels of the unfathomable higher than the meaning of the earth! (Z I-3)

Nietzsche reveals the transcendent grounds on which reason founds itself to be an illusion and seeks to disperse these foundations as much as the notions of strong truth, the strong subject, human exceptionalism, and its wrong morals “into the winds” (Foucault 2010, 76–100). He does this because he perceives an inherent ecological danger in ignoring earthly reality in favor of transcendent foundations. However, Nietzsche never thinks in absolutes, but only in relation to larger contexts that can be called ecological or, in this case, historical. We will see in the next sections that these foundational illusions were in fact necessary for human survival so far but become dangerous in the future world that Nietzsche is addressing.

Affirmative Critique

In essence, Nietzsche’s critique of reason turns against “adjusting reality to transcendent truth [Zurechtmachen der Wirklichkeit unter transzendenter Wahrheit]” (Kouba 1994, 168). He is

opposed to the “absolute rule and omnipotence of truth [*Alleinherrschaft und Allmacht der Wahrheit*]” (D 507) and sees a necessary tension between truth and reality, neither of which can be subsumed under the other.

However, despite of his occasional, earlier outcries that there is no reason at all, Nietzsche is far from rejecting reason in general. In fact, the last five years of his intellectually and socially active life are characterized by the development of something that can be called an *affirmative critique* of reason. After finishing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in 1884, there is – for Nietzsche’s standards – a long, almost two-year pause until his next publication, in which he reexamined the much despised “great philosophers” (like Descartes, Socrates, Kant, Hume, etc.) in detail.

This long research phase does not end with a more positive appraisal (eKGWB NF-1886, 6[13]) but it enabled him to develop a more nuanced understanding of reason as a “necessary illusion” (Kouba 1994, 169): he now affirms that reason’s suppression of reality, the body, and the becoming earth might have enabled human survival – at least in the form of occidental civilization (which Nietzsche does not differentiate with enough scrutiny). “[A]ll this violence, arbitrariness, harshness, terror, and anti-reason has shown itself to be the means through which strength, reckless curiosity, and subtle agility have been bred into the European spirit” (BGE 188). In his last phase of activity, Nietzsche proves to develop an ecological understanding of the emergence of reason: he still affirms that it is a product of coincidence, however, he traces it back genealogically to a certain environment in which the development of reason might have been the best option:

If it is necessary to make a tyrant out of reason, as Socrates did, then there must be no little danger that something else might play the tyrant. At that time people sensed in rationality a deliverance', neither Socrates nor his 'invalids' were free to be rational – it was *de rigueur* – it was their last available means. The fanaticism with which the whole of Greek thought throws itself on rationality betrays a crisis: they were in danger, they had just one choice: either perish or – be absurdly rational.... The moralism of Greek philosophers from Plato onwards is pathologically conditioned: likewise their appreciation of dialectics. Reason = virtue = happiness means simply: we must imitate Socrates and establish permanent daylight to combat the dark desires—the daylight of reason. We must be clever, clear, bright at all costs: any yielding to the instincts, to the unconscious, leads downwards.... (TI 10)

Although Nietzsche affirms its civilizational benefits for human survival (without explaining the threats further at this point), he still remains highly dismissive of reason: he classifies this centerpiece of occidental culture as “deranged” and “crooked” (TI 10; A 41, 52) because it necessarily needs to be unaware of its “human origin” (A 57) and how it builds on lies and

deceit. “Reality was made into ‘mere appearance’; a complete lie called ‘the world of being’ was made into reality” (A 10). The main point of Nietzsche’s affirmative critique of reason is that it does not understand or perceive its own productivity: it is claiming to be an eternal truth and moral ideal, whereas it is in fact only a product of certain contingent cultural and ecological factors that started in Ancient Greece. This critique under the angle of productivity is twofold: it affirms that reason is not able to regard itself as a product of certain (socio-cultural) environments and that reason cannot understand what it produces itself: moral categories and social order, truth, a transcendent, stable category of “being”, as well as – as some critics of reason would have it – bodily discipline, discrimination, and an unprecedented human power over the planet.

Contemporary Eco-philosophical Analysis of Unreflected Productivity

Such analysis of unreflected productivity is a central motivation of ecological critique today. Accordingly, occidental modernity is understood as being based on the fundamental dichotomic opposition of nature and culture. This separation of powers allows an unprecedented productivity in techno-scientific application (Latour 2002) and produces what have been called “quasi-objects” (Serres 2013) – objects whose full extent cannot be conceptually grasped inside the modernist constitution. The most famous example for such phenomena is, of course, climate change, which is largely a product of techno-scientific industrialization, although its most problematic effects are appearing on the nature side of the dichotomy: ocean acidification, global warming, mass extinction, etc. This problematic productivity cannot be reflected inside the modernist constitution, which explains why ecological problems could be overlooked for so long (and continue to be overlooked).

As we have just demonstrated with Nietzsche, however, this unreflected productivity is not just a characteristic of occidental modernity, but of reason in general. Reason needs to suppress the material, historical, and social (short: ecological) grounds it was developed from in order to work, thus creating dualist separations such as culture as opposed to nature (a popular term for the material grounds) that occidental modernity needed to develop from.

With an examination of reasons, we can begin to uncover deeper underlying structures of our ecological problems that supersede modernity. This cannot be attained by a merely rejective stance towards reason. By simply negating and denouncing the problematic entity, one will not be able to change anything about it but will only reinforce the problematic structures (Stengers 2013). Rather, one will have to closely study the ecological determinedness of the problem in order to understand what and how it co-produces environments. This investigation into the productivity of reason – that reason, as an integral part of its inner working, was blind to – enables Nietzsche, as we shall see in the next section, to incipiently conceive another reason

that can reflect its own productive environment including its ecological determinedness.

Another Reason for the Anthropocene?

As should have become clear by now, Nietzsche is far from being an irrationalist: he acknowledges that reason has a huge power, maybe even more so than some of what he calls the “great philosophers” would. Still, he remains highly dismissive of this “deranged”, “crooked” reason, and this is in spite of the fact that he affirms that “the finality of reason is an effect, not a cause: with every other kind of reason, to which there are continuously rudiments, life fails, - it becomes too chaotic - too unequal” (eKGWB NF-1888, 14 [152]).

Why then, one might ask, is Nietzsche so dismissive of this reason? Why does he reject reason with such great verve, if he admits it to be necessary for human survival?

“Crooked” Reason and the Death of God

First, we need to address a remarkable element of the above quote: *en passant*, as if it would be the most normal thing there is, Nietzsche affirms that there are other kinds of reason(s), of which there exist “continuous rudiments”. Although the plural form of *Vernunft* [reason] – “*Vernünfte*” – does not appear in Nietzsche’s oeuvre (which is also due to the fact that the word does not even exist in German dictionaries), quotes like the above show that Nietzsche can be used as an early thinker of a pluralization of reason: he does, in principle, concede that there are various kinds of reason and at the same time offers an explanation why occidental culture has suppressed this so far in its tendency to always speak of reason as a single, unitary entity: because it was necessary for the survival of occidental civilization.

Such an insight into the vital nature of reason would probably turn most people conservative: in the light of the understanding of the vast importance of reason for human survival, most would turn to the project of conserving reason. One might partly concede to the various critiques of reason – which were already virulent in Nietzsche’s life time – but only to save the core of precious reason.

Nietzsche however, who seeks to teach his afterworld “how to philosophize with a hammer” (TI), is not a thinker who supports the maintenance of the status quo. Quite frequently, Nietzsche affirms its destruction with sometimes uncanny idealizations of violence. “Break, break me these old tablets of the pious, my brothers” (Z III-15) is Zarathustra’s demand to those who have reached the nihilist “hour in which even your happiness turns to nausea and likewise your reason and your virtue” (Z I-3). He is preaching to the “last human” whose God has already died, whose morals, virtues, and truths have already acquired a foul taste and at a time when

“the earth has become small” and in which the last human “makes everything small (Z I-5). Nietzsche’s famous proclamation of the death of God is not a demanding postulation, but rather a sober assessment of his *Zeitgeist*’s status quo: the traditional metaphysics do not work any longer – God *has* died – and reason, although we see its historically vital necessity, no longer convinces us.

“Going Under...” — Nietzsche’s Dark Side

There is this somber, dark side of Nietzsche’s thought: he affirms this downfall of occidental humanity, he perceives the decadence of occidental culture as lucidly as few others of his time and cannot help but acknowledge it approvingly: “The appearance of decadence is as necessary as any rise and advance of life: it is not in our hands to abolish it” (eKGWB NF-1888, 14 [75]). He sees that there is no neutral, transcendent reason: “There is no reason of that kind, and without struggle and passion everything becomes weak” (eKGWB NF-1881, 11 [193]). Reason, although it played a vital part in occidental culture’s survival, is understood to be an illusion and we cannot reverse this process: we cannot make ourselves believe in reason once more.

But this, however, does not necessarily mean that Nietzsche sees complete downfall and chaos as the only option. In fact, he – in the name of Zarathustra – loves those “who do not know how to live unless by going under, for they are the ones who cross over” and “the great despisers, because they are the great venerators and arrows of longing for the other shore” (Z I-4). The downfall and contempt of occidental culture becomes a necessary step on the way to overcome occidental culture. The human – understood here in a post-humanist tradition as “occidental white man” (Braidotti 2012) – does need to be overcome. Reason – as in the monorationalistic, Socratic means to subjugate the body, reality, and the earth – needs to be superseded.

“...To Cross Over” — Nietzsche’s Visions of the Anthropocene

This analysis and Zoroastrian call for what is very problematically called the *Übermensch* does not stem from a naive and merely rejective critique of occidental culture. Rather, in this affirmative critique, Nietzsche acknowledges the irreducible strength of Reason and its culture while at the same time seeing that it has come to an end. In a longer, coherent fragment – the *Lenzer Haide Fragment* of 1887, regarded by some as one as the most concise summary of his body of work – he brings this very well to the point. Reason and its moral disciplination as “means of discipline [Zuchtmittel]” served humanity for a long time to survive: “it was a means of preservation [Erhaltungsmittel]” (eKGWB NF-1886, 5 [71]).

However, in the time that Nietzsche sees coming, “the *power* man has achieved now allows a

reduction of those means of discipline [Zuchtmittel]” (ibid., emphasis in original). One can interpret this quote as an early observation of what is today called the Anthropocene: a time that is popularly defined as the geological era in which humanity has acquired so much strength that it has become a geological force. In this time, the monopolization of Reason is no longer necessary: since humanity has reached such a power over the planet, other forms of reason become applicable without posing a threat for survival as such. In fact, one is able to go even further and find in Nietzsche’s oeuvre a call for another, qualitatively different form of reason that he sometimes calls the ‘great reason’” (Z I) and which seems to be a more important reason for the ecological task that this humanity as geological force is facing.

Ecological Reason, a First Draft

Having set the way in showing how we can detect the emergence of ecological reasons through Friedrich Nietzsche’s oeuvre, we can now investigate what this particular ecological reason might be. We will first examine some of its basic parameters and will then go on to examine how this ecological reason also bears very problematic traits. This, in turn, will set the way for a more nuanced and, unlike Nietzsche’s, less naively enthusiastic understanding of ecological reasoning.

Setting Free New Potential of Thought

As we have seen, Nietzsche affirms the history of reason with its tendency of monopolizing one reason in conceding that it was necessary for the survival and favorable development of occidental culture (problematically called – and in line with the spirit of his time – “humanity”). However, in the future time he sees coming, and that we can identify as the Anthropocene, this strength of reason turns into a weakness. Its disciplinary mechanisms that helped to conquer and despise the body and the earth turn into a fatal threat. The good news is that this disciplining is no longer necessary. The quote above illustrating that “all this violence, arbitrariness, harshness, terror, and anti-reason has shown itself to be the means through which strength, reckless curiosity, and subtle agility have been bred into the European spirit” continues: “[a]dmittedly, this also entailed an irreplaceable loss of force and spirit, which have had to be crushed, stifled, and ruined” (BGE 188). Nietzsche sees that “[n]othing has been purchased more dearly than that little bit of human reason” (D 18) – that all the suppression it needed to work has left so much potential of thought untouched. This potential, Zarathustra ensures us, can now be set free without having to risk that life will go wrong.

Such potential can be mainly found in the body, which he refers to as the “great reason” of which “our small reason, what you call ‘spirit’ [*Geist*] is also a tool of your body, my brother, a

small work- and plaything of your great reason” (Z I). The classical hierarchy is turned upside down (“Reversal of Platonism”): it is no longer the *Geist*, the spirit or mind, who has a privileged access to the stable truth of the world of being. The latter has been exposed as a wrong and ecologically catastrophic idol. The *Geist*, in turn, is now seen as a tool of immanent bodily interaction with the world. “All our categories of reason are of sensualistic origin: read [abgelesen] from the empirical world” (eKGWB NF-1887,9[63]).

Truth vs. “New Possibilities of Life”

In the opening paragraphs of *Beyond Good and Evil* from 1886, Nietzsche denounces and deconstructs what he perceives as a dogmatic obsession with truth and asks what it is that makes us will the truth as the single goal of thought. Provocatively, he asks: “Granted, we will truth: why not untruth instead? And uncertainty? Even ignorance” (BGE 1)?

As Deleuze puts it, with Nietzsche, a new “image of thought” is attained that no longer incorporates truth as the central element (Deleuze 2006, 104), but rather sees it in the larger picture of relationality to “necessary lies” and as a product of the specific milieu in which thought is taking place. In his last, autobiographical piece, *Ecce Homo* from 1889, Nietzsche, now a physically frail and hyper-sensitive persona, expresses gratitude that his condition was forcing him “to think hard about reason in reality” (EH 2). He realized how much “the effects of climatic and meteorological factors” (ibid.) and that of the right nutrition affect his entire reasoning and how reason is dependent on the milieus in which it takes place (EH 8). Thus, he could overcome reason’s monothematic obsession with truth and speculate on a more ecological image of thought.

An ecological reason, as the one we can find rudiments of in Nietzsche’s work, does not refer to a transcendent sphere of eternal truths, but interacts with the immanence of its environment and draws its concepts from its permanent becoming processual, making concepts themselves fluid and prone to their historical, social, environmental, etc. milieus. With this kind of reason, thought no longer tries to attain a permanent, unchangeable order of concepts, but rather actively invents concepts to make life easier in a particular context: “*Thinking would then mean discovering, inventing, new possibilities of life*”, as Gilles Deleuze (2006, 109, emphasis in original) summarizes the consequences of this Nietzschean image of thought.

In the Anthropocene, which is marked by gigantic ecological devastations such as the Sixth Mass Extinction and which confronts us with various new and frequently toxic environments, such capacities of inventing new life forms will become central, as they enable to open up new fields of possibilities to explore new forms of co-inhabiting and making kin on an already damaged planet. Eternal truths and rigid conceptual outlets, on the other hand, should be

critically re-evaluated under their ecological productivity, not by standards of truth, but by effectivity.

Consequently, what is today called a “new ecological image of thought” (Hörl and Burton 2017, 7) no longer refers to big schemes, “grand claims concerning solutions or the precise conditions for-long term ‘ecological sustainability’”. Indeed, terms such as these should be subjected to rigorous interrogation and perhaps ultimately effaced from the lexicon of environmental struggle” (Halsey 2005, 34). Rather, such grand schemes that try “to constitute various portions of earth as a unity in spite of its being a multiplicity” (ibid., 51) are being recognized as ecologically problematic in themselves.

Another Modernity

Nietzsche’s work can light the way out of modernity and its ecological dead ends. With him, what some people call “another modernity” (Schmid 1998, 459) becomes thinkable – not one, that is blindly obsessed by human dominion over the planet – but with an emphasis on coexistence and taking delight in life (ibid., 460). One can make out a “new planetary consciousness” (ibid.), which transcends the old schemes of abstraction and their suppressive dualisms, and by help of which “our old earth would be more comfortable to inhabit than before” (ibid., 463). Such a Zarathustrian new reason will now longer have a one-sided emphasis on action – as reason did, especially in its modern version – but will be a reason of “reasonable letting-it-happen [vernünftiges Geschehenlassen]” (Sloterdijk 1986, 184). One that can reflect on how and when to act and not act, no longer being forced by an exterior, abstract scheme seeking application, but rather taking active pleasure in making sense *in* reality and enjoying its manipulation as much as its free-flowing untouchedness. “Knowing something of ecological problems, therefore, means to become cognizant of the flows, speeds and intensities of matter (organic and inorganic) and energy (kinetic and potential) which pass through and across particular kinds of bodies (atmospheric, aquatic, terrestrial)” (Halsey 2005, 51). An ecological reason of “reasonable letting-it-happen” plays with these flows, speeds, and intensities while regarding itself as part of them and understanding that observation already alters the processes. Ecological reasoning can be understood as a never-ending balancing and adequate mixing of various intensities, truths, concepts, matters, worldviews, etc., rather than a sorting out, once and for all, of which philosophy is the right one for all situations.

Immanence of Nature

Since ecological reasons can transcend reason’s dualisms (such as nature/culture, human/non-human, man/woman, active/passive) by being able to understand their becoming within a

particular culture and image of thought, matter can be conceived of differently. It no longer needs to be suppressed in a necessary lie as the unthinkable of reason but can be regarded as the matter that thoughts are made of. In such a shift of perspective, reasons are no longer regarded as the oppositional counterpart of matter it thinks about and acts upon (as did reason) but, rather, reasons think and act through matter. Reasons *are* matter – thinking, vibrant matter that act with, and as an exchange flow of, other matters, which necessarily include human as well as inhuman bodies (Bennett 2010). “Of equal importance are the bodies of experts, forest blocks, endangered species, logging coupes, heritage rivers, national parks and so forth. In all instances, the task would be to dislodge the image of thought currently investing those assemblages deemed responsible for ‘managing’ nature” (Halsey 2005, 51).

Ecological reason does not reflect on nature as an external element to it, but sees itself as an immanent part of this nature, making the term somewhat obsolete.⁶ Nietzsche provides a very effective toolset to dismantle reason and its modern constitution by showing how they are interlinked by an ignorance of their own productivity. He reveals human exceptionalism and its separation from nature to be a motor of modernity and its morals (Maurer 1998, 467). The problem is that these morals and their reason (which was formed in Socratic times) were often monopolized to be the only option in the course of modernity. Whereas this enabled a more comfortable and longer life for most individuals, on a planetary level, this had consequences which have brought forth the Anthropocene (ibid., 475). Blindly applied, these modern individuals following a singular reason will devastate the planet and transform its application in techno-science into a business of “world annihilation” (ibid., 470). But this, Nietzsche insists, is not the only option: another reason, another science, and another modernity are possible. If taken seriously, we can see that reason (in its monopolized form) worked on its own dissolution for a long time in history – and now, in this time of decadence and catastrophe, the time has come “to push humans from the heightening pedestal onto which their religious-metaphysical-moral self-interpretation has placed them” (ibid., 477). With such a form of “second enlightenment” humans can finally try to attain a “cosmic justice towards all things” (ibid.) by no longer seeing “man as the measure of all things” (as our Hellenic, Protagorean heritage does):

The wanting-to-know things as they are - that alone is the good hang: not the looking out for others and seeing with other’s eyes - that would merely be a change of place of selfish seeing! We want to heal ourselves of the great basic insanity, which requires us to measure everything after us: [...] Increasing the

⁶Which consequently lead to calls for an “End of Nature” and designs of an “Ecology without nature” – compare: Latour 2004; Cavazza 2014; Morton 2009; Nordquist 2006.

indifference! And exercising to see with other eyes: exercising to see without human relations, meaning: objectively! Cure the human megalomania! (eKGWB NF-1881, 11[10])

As we have seen, Nietzsche examined the inner workings of reason and sees how they have been necessary for a long time but can now be joined by another, more ecological form of reason. His oeuvre, as we have seen, provides effective tools to undo the problems of reason as much as opening up a view onto new forms of reasons that can help us deal with our ecological entanglement and help us become “what we not yet are: good neighbors of the nearest things” (eKGWB NF-1879, 41 [31]).

A More Nuanced, Sober Outlook on Ecological Reason(s)

Nietzsche, a philosopher that has found approval from Nazis and Marxists, feminists and misogynists, racists, internationalists and everybody in between, cannot be read purely positively. As we will see, there are highly problematic traits in his appraisal of an ecological reason that we cannot leave unaddressed. In fact, the final examinations of these more problematic traits will enable us to attain a more nuanced, less enthusiastic understanding of ecological reasons.

Problematic Traits in Nietzsche’s Oeuvre...

In an early aphorism called “Reason and the tree of humanity” (HH II/2 189) Nietzsche writes:

Mankind shall one day become a tree that overshadows the whole earth bearing many milliards of blossoms that shall all become fruit one beside the other, and the earth itself shall be prepared for the nourishment of this tree. That the still small beginnings of this shall increase in strength and sap, that the sap shall flow around for the nourishment of the whole and the individual parts through numberless canals - it is from this and similar tasks that the standard is to be derived as to whether a man of the present is useful or useless. The task is unspeakably great and bold: let us all see to it that the tree does not untimely rot away! [...] What we must do, rather, is to look in the face our great task of preparing the earth for the production of the greatest and most joyful fruitfulness - a task for reason on behalf of reason!

A few years later, Zarathustra is preaching about this great reason: “And what you called world, that should first be created by you: your reason, your image, your will, your love itself it should become!” (Z II).

As will be difficult to ignore for politically sensitized readers, elements of the two citations above are highly problematic. We read that humanity will acquire a level of dominion over the planet, which sounds startling and anthropocentric in its highest megalomania. On top of which we learn that in this world to come, humans will be selected by their usefulness [Nützlichkeit], which reminds us of eugenic practices of “social hygiene.”⁷

In the new century, mankind may already have gained more power by mastery of nature than it can consume, and then something luxurious will come to humanity.... Instead of creating works of art, one will greatly enhance nature...for example, elevating the Alps from their rudiments...of beauty to perfection...fire and surplus of power will result from the healthy way of living. (Nietzsche cited in Maurer 1998, 468)

One can find quotes in Nietzsche’s body of work that a progressive minded person of the 21st century cannot agree with. How is one supposed to deal with them? Should we solemnly ignore them and focus on the good things, hoping that the more negative things will go away? Or is there a deeper wisdom to be drawn from them?

...Resounding in Contemporary Interpretations of the Anthropocene

Nietzsche’s idea of a humanity that rebuilds the entire planet according to its needs and reason(s) reminds us of the predominant, neoliberal interpretations of the Anthropocene. In them, “the human” is naively (and analogously to reason) regarded as a universal unity and not as a specific cultural product with strong andro- and Eurocentric leanings. With such a lack of differentiation, “the human” is regarded as a super-powerful being whose only option it to use his power more wisely than he has so far done – thus completely overlooking the fact that other cultures and genders have historically developed very different forms of relating to and reasoning in their specific environments which might serve as an inspiration for more ecological reasoning. In their shortsightedness, these voices call for geo-engineering and other massive increases of human intervention, sometimes with undertones of a new kind of eugenics (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2017), just as we have found them in the above Nietzsche quotations.

This politically predominant wing of proponents of the Anthropocene fails to consider how such interpretations reproduce some commonplaces of reason that got us into the Anthropocene in the first place. They fail to see that the Anthropocene is not brought forth by all of humanity,

⁷Although it should never be ignored, I will not further elaborate on the fact that Nietzsche has been used to justify eugenic practices in the past among which can be named the biggest crime against humanity in history: The Holocaust. For such critical examinations see, among others, Hicks 2010; Stone 2002.

but by “the human” in its modern, occidental understanding – the name-giving *Anthropos*, who is, of course, predominantly a white, occidental man (Theriault 2015). Furthermore, they fail to consider the role of capitalism (Parenti and Moore 2016), technology (Hornborg 2016), and the predominance of occidental culture (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2017) in the emergence of this time of ecological catastrophe. These theoretical shortcomings make such interpretations prone to call for a further increase of the problematic structures that brought us there in the first place: more capitalism, more human exceptionalism, and the call for a protection of nature by culture, thereby becoming a part of the problem themselves.⁸

Against the “Will to System” to Sketch “the Ensemble of the Problem and its Condition”

We can see, then, how Nietzsche’s ecological reasoning can inspire us to new images of thought in all their ambivalence and contradictoriness. Nietzsche affirms that “the wisest human would be the richest in contradictions” (eKGWB NF-1884, 26[119]). This is not a random remark but a consequent stance central to his philosophy, which is opposed to any systematization that would allow purity and non-contradiction. “I mistrust all systematists and avoid them. The will to system is a lack of integrity” (TI 63). Since Nietzsche is, as we have seen, deeply concerned with an ecological reason that is no longer dependent on abstraction from nature but tries to think within the immanence of reality, the body and its sensual, affective realm, he consequently rejects systematization and affirms contradiction.

Such an ecological reasoning does not see consciousness as a higher, separate form of awareness, but as the tip of the iceberg of unconscious, instinctual behavior. “Traditionally, conscious thought is valued more highly than unconscious..., but Nietzsche associates it with error and treats it like the new kid on the block. Eventually, it will be incorporated” (Oliver and Pearsall 1998, 205). This understanding of immanent consciousness tries to stay true to reality by reproducing the errors, contradictions, and regions of vagueness it absorbs by its bodily partaking in the world. There is no higher order, no stable, eternal truth-sphere of being one can relate to. Rather, wisdom is to incorporate the contradictions of one’s ecology and express them as distinctly and clearly as possible. Ecological reason is not a method or capacity of creating unity and order in the world, but rather a mode of understanding “the ensemble of the problem and its conditions” (Hörl and Burton 2017, 22) that are predominant in the Anthropocene. This entails that ecological reason is not a solution, but rather an expression of our ecological situation, which can be reacted to in various ways – some of which one cannot and should not agree to. With an ecological reason, one can even act more harmfully than with

⁸I try to acquire a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon I propose to call the “Resilience of Modernity” in a forthcoming paper.

classical reason, because one can reflect the ecological interrelation of one's actions and act according to a maximization of harm, if one desires. This means, in line with a pluralization of reasons, that ecological reason will not be the new paradigm that we will have to try to unitarily adjust ourselves to as fast as possible. Rather, we must understand it as a form of reason that necessarily needs to put aside our classical mode of reason, which could not understand what it produces. Ecological reasons allow us to "sketch general-ecological plateaus [of the Anthropocene]" (ibid.), but we should never idolize it as our solitary reason, because this would reproduce problematic structures of our occidental heritage (stating that there is only one reason) that will render us incapable of leaving dead-end modernity and its ecological devastation behind.

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