

NIETZSCHE'S *HOMO NATURA* AND BIOPOLITICS

STEPS TOWARDS AN ETHICAL READING

Patrizio Caldara

patrizio.caldara@studenti.unimi.it

The controversial figure of *homo natura* has recently been a central issue in Nietzsche's studies. The debate regarding Nietzsche's biopolitical character has taken *homo natura* to be a fundamental concept in order to assess his stand in political philosophy. In the following article several readings of *homo natura* will be presented and evaluated. The main thesis of this contribution is that this Nietzschean figure is best interpreted primarily in an "ethical" sense, namely, as a way of being and behaving. The political dimension is a consequence of this "ethical" posture and defies any easy biopolitical labeling. It is claimed that Nietzsche's *homo natura* broadens the biopolitical discourse rather than taking place as one of its figures (as, e.g., Michel Foucault's *homo oeconomicus* or Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer*) by explicitly addressing and overcoming the anthropocentric challenge that resides at the core of biopolitics. If we are right, then, depending on which *homo natura*'s interpretation we favour, we are left with a different categorization of Nietzsche's political philosophy. Therefore, *homo natura* presents a cluster of questions that need to be addressed if we want to be able to fully grasp Nietzsche's practical philosophy.

Keywords: Nietzsche, *Homo Natura*, Biopolitics, Posthumanism, Ethics

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List of Abbreviations

For quotations of Friedrich Nietzsche's works I used the abbreviation system employed by *Nietzsche-Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung*, De Gruyter.

BGE = Beyond Good and Evil

BT = The Birth of Tragedy

D = Dawn

GS = The Gay Science

HS = Homer's Contest

KSA = Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden, ed. by G. Colli, M. Montinari, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1988.

SE = Schopenhauer As Educator

TGS = The Greek State

UM = Untimely Meditations

WP = Will to Power

Z = Zarathustra

1. Introduction

Defining Nietzsche's political philosophy is not an easy task. Multiple scholars in recent years embarked on this very enterprise. At first, the debate focused on Nietzsche's a-, un- or anti-political attitude and whether he could be categorized as modern or anti-modern,

democratic or aristocratic.¹ This happened particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, where the work of Walter Kaufmann² was very influential. According to Keith Ansell-Pearson's *Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*³ Kaufmann's work rehabilitated Nietzsche's philosophy, at the cost of de-politicizing it. The end of the 20th century and the first years of the new millennium produced a series of influential publications that pushed in the opposite direction⁴. Manuel Knoll and Barry Stocker, in their recent *Nietzsche as Political Philosopher*⁵ claim that we are far from a final reckoning. In fact, many recent contributions argued for a deflation of Nietzsche's political dimension⁶. The discussion kept developing and is still very alive today.

One of the branches of this inquiry area asks questions about the biopolitical character of Nietzsche's thinking. In her contribution to the *Routledge Handbook of Biopolitics*⁷ Vanessa Lemm discusses four readings of Nietzsche that label him as a biopolitical thinker. She distinguishes between four different meanings of the term «biopolitics», and hence respectively between the same number of ways of reading Nietzsche. The first one builds on Roberto Esposito's reading of the German philosopher⁸ and argues that Nietzsche is the one bringing the immunitary lexicon to its full extension. The second one inscribes Nietzsche in the *thanatopolitical* paradigm and associates him with a *totalitarian biopolitics* that finds its peak in the notion of *great politics*. The third one sees Nietzsche as a neoliberal biopolitician, committed in critiquing the modern state in order to

¹ See H Siemens, V. Roodt (ed. by). *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2008, for a complete overview of these topics.

² W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013.

³ K. Ansell-Pearson, *Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁴ See D. Conway, *Nietzsche & the Political*, London-New York, Routledge, 1997; H. Ottmann, *Philosophie un Politik bei Nietzsche*, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 1999; T. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, Urbana-Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2000.

⁵ M. Knoll, B. Stocker (ed. by), *Nietzsche As Political Thinker*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2014, p. 2.

⁶ T. Brobjer, "The Absence of Political Ideals in Nietzsche's Writings. The Case of the Laws of Manu and the Associated Caste-Society", in H. Siemens, V. Roodt (ed. by), *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*, Brlin, De Gruyter, 2008; B. Leiter, "Nietzsche and Aestheticism", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 30, n. 2, 1992, pp. 275-290; T. Shaw, *Nietzsche's Political Skepticism*, Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2007.

⁷ V. Lemm, "Nietzsche and Biopolitics: Four readings of Nietzsche as a biopolitical thinker", in S. Prozorov, S. Rentea (ed. by), *The Routledge Handbook of Biopolitics*, London-New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, pp 50-65.

⁸ See in particular R. Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

free the individual from its suffocating grasp. This view also interprets the Nietzschean overman as the embodiment of the *homo oeconomicus*, a super-entrepreneur.⁹

If the first three readings tackle classical nuances of the meaning of biopolitics, the last one tries to open up a new horizon of signification. Lemm herself argues for this biopolitical connotation of Nietzsche's work. She advocates for an *affirmative biopolitics*, a politics that «is no longer reduced to concerns around the stabilization of political forms or institutions or alternatively their critique, transformation and revolution»¹⁰. A politics that, instead, strives towards community and justice while overcoming the *hyper-immunitory* reaction. Lemm claims Nietzsche's philosophy being one of the most representative of such approach.

In the background of Lemm's perspective constantly resides the latent figure of Nietzsche's *homo natura*. This disputed concept has been addressed by Lemm herself in her recent book *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*.¹¹ According to Lemm, the image of *homo natura* stands for an *affirmative biopolitical posthumanism*, namely, «an affirmative discourse that opens up new ways of thinking about a community of life that is shared between humans, animals, plants and other forms of life».¹² This last development of Lemm's interpretation can be uncontroversially seen as building on her previous contribution. Although now the figure of *homo natura* does not inscribe Nietzsche under an *affirmative biopolitics*, but rather in a biopolitical variant of *posthumanism*. The shift is as crucial as slight. Depending on how much relevance we assign to *homo natura* in Nietzsche's production, we are left with a different categorization of Nietzsche himself. *Homo natura*, therefore, deserves a closer look. How central its role can actually be? How does it relate to other Nietzschean concepts, like the *eternal recurrence of the same* or the *overman*?

Pushing further Lemm's proposal, we can see the figure of *homo natura* as an interesting standpoint from which posing questions to the biopolitical paradigm itself. *Homo*

⁹ V. Lemm, "Nietzsche and Biopolitics: Four readings of Nietzsche as a biopolitical thinker", in S. Prozorov, S. Rentea (ed. by), *The Routledge Handbook of Biopolitics*, London-New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 60.

¹¹ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

¹² *Ivi*, p. 11.

natura demands to rethink the divisions between nature and culture, human and non-human animals that the classical biopolitics presupposes as its general framework.¹³ Can we still speak of biopolitics in both cases, the anthropocentric and the posthuman one?

2. *Homo Natura*: Naturalism, Historicism and Philosophical Anthropology

In her book, Lemm presents four different views on *homo natura*. The first one amounts to a naturalistic (or, as she calls it, scientific) reading. Brian Leiter¹⁴ is taken as the most prominent exponent of this approach.¹⁵ In his proposal, *homo natura* stands for a naturalistic conception of the human as a “natural organism”. Leiter argues that for Nietzsche human behavior and values are causally determined by «natural facts» or – as him and Joshua Knobe call them – «type-facts», namely, «heritable psychological and physiological traits».¹⁶ Borrowing a Foucauldian argument, Lemm discards this option. Lemm claims that a neo-Kantian fallacy resides at the very core of Leiter’s view. The transcendental subject that inquires human nature ends up understanding itself as a living organism with natural attributes that become accessible through the empirical sciences. Beatrice Han-Pile points out that Foucault’s argument is against an essentialism that turns «man» into a mere object of nature.¹⁷ As it is, in this view the transcendental subject is deprived of its transcendental attributes in favor of its empirical ones.

The second option presented is historicism. According to Lemm, Marco Brusotti advocates for a different reading of Nietzsche’s philosophy that is critical of Leiter’s reductionist approach.¹⁸ He claims that Nietzsche is committed to both a critique of natural

¹³ Thomas Lemke reports that G. Lindemann, *Die Grenzen des Sozialen: Zur sozio-technischen Konstruktion von Leben und Tod in der Intensivmedizin*, München, Wilhelm Fink, 2002, and B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, translated by C. Porter, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993 have «convincingly and from different perspectives criticized this anthropocentric curtailment of the biopolitical problematic» (T. Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, New York-London, New York University Press, 2011, p. 96).

¹⁴ B. Leiter, “Nietzsche and Aestheticism”, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 30, n. 2, 1992, pp. 275-290.

¹⁵ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 20. Lemm also refers to C. J. Emden, *Nietzsche’s Naturalism Philosophy and the Life Sciences in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014 in a footnote, but underlines his distance from Leiter’s approach.

¹⁶ J. Knobe, B. Leiter, “The Case for Nietzschean Moral Psychology”, in B. Leiter, N. Shinhababu (ed. by), *Nietzsche and Morality*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 83-109: 89-90.

¹⁷ B. Han-Pile, “The «Death of Man»: Foucault and Anti-Humanism”, in T. O’, C. Falzon (ed. by), *Foucault and Philosophy*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 118-142: 130.

¹⁸ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 24.

sciences and a thorough rethinking of the relation between them and the human sciences as a kind of natural history.¹⁹ By that, Brusotti means «the collection and surveying of a great variety of moralities in Nietzsche so as to be able to investigate what lies beneath the phenomenon of moral behaviour».²⁰ According to him, *homo natura* stands for a «repressed basic type» that has to be recovered.²¹ Lemm claims that in this view *homo natura* is meant to clear the slate from “mistaken metaphysical anthropologies”²² in order to “breed” a new higher type of human being».²³ She argues that «Brusotti’s reading of aphorism 230 produces a problem similar to the one found in Leiter’s».²⁴ If Leiter’s reduction flattens the *homo* dimension onto the *natura* one, Brusotti proposes the opposite reduction: his «focus is on *homo* (the seeker of knowledge) and thus may run the risk of reducing the human being to a (transcendental) subject of knowledge».²⁵

Both the presented accounts fail, for Lemm, to live up to what she calls the perspective of philosophical anthropology. Lemm claims that «the question of human nature cannot be separated from the question of human knowledge».²⁶ Philosophical anthropology considers the human as a living being that «produces knowledge that is lived and reflected in nature».²⁷ In her view, Nietzsche’s philosophy adheres to this conception. He writes: «Know thyself is the whole science. Only once the human being has gained knowledge of all things will the human being know itself. For things are nothing but the limits of the human being» (D 48).

For Lemm, this aphorism clearly states that knowledge produced by natural and human sciences «must be conceived within the human being’s experience of itself as a living

¹⁹ M. Brusotti, “Vergleichende Beschreibung versus Begründung. Das fünfte Hauptstück: «zur aturgeschichte der Moral»”, in M. A. Born (hrsg. v.), *Friedrich Nietzsche – Jenseits von Gut un Böse*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2014, pp. 111-130.

²⁰ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 24.

²¹ M. Brusotti, “Vergleichende Beschreibung versus Begründung. Das fünfte Hauptstück: «zur aturgeschichte der Moral»”, in M. A. Born (hrsg. v.), *Friedrich Nietzsche – Jenseits von Gut un Böse*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2014, sect. 7.4.

²² *Ivi*, sect. 7.5.

²³ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 25.

²⁴ *Ivi*, p. 27.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ivi*, p. 28.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

being. [... T]ruth is produced by and inseparable from the living philosopher's self-experimentations».²⁸

The third option is the philosophical anthropology approach proposed by Karl Löwith.²⁹ In his study he argues that Nietzsche does not understand philosophy as a closed metaphysical system. Rather, philosophy resolves in the “basic question” about what the human being is. Truth is no longer at the center of the philosophical enterprise: probity (*Redlichkeit*) takes its place.³⁰ For Lemm, what Löwith thinks is at stake in BGE is «the transformation of a pure philosophy of spirit into a multifaceted philosophy of the human being whose authors understand themselves as both “last” and “future” philosophers».³¹ The key for such a transmutation is the probity to see as necessary the return to a more natural human being. But *homo natura*, for Löwith, cannot be the figure that stands for this enterprise. Its features are too polemical and reactive against Christian morality: *homo natura* shows itself being still a parasitic notion, not standing by itself. Lemm also recalls that Löwith deems Nietzsche's conception of life as vague and indeterminate, «oscillating between purely naturalistic and physiological explanations of the human and an articulation of moralistic/immoralistic interpretation of the world».³²

Lemm herself proposes a fourth reading that adheres to the philosophical anthropology approach. We will talk further about her proposal in the following section. Nonetheless, she extensively criticizes Löwith's view, proposing some revisions.³³ She argues that his account of human nature has a too anthropocentric character that prevents him from adequately capturing Nietzsche's conception of human life.³⁴ In fact, «[f]rom the perspective of philosophical anthropology, “life” can only be conceived within the horizon of the human being's lived experience of the world».³⁵ Even knowledge itself is nothing but a self-understanding of the human being: the notions of «life», «human», «nature» and «natural» are «constructs of the human being's lived experience in the world».³⁶ Löwith

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 29.

²⁹ K. Löwith, “Kierkegaard und Nietzsche”, in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 11, 1933, pp. 61-80.

³⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 43-44.

³¹ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 29.

³² *Ivi*, p. 30.

³³ *Ivi*, ch. 2.

³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 44.

³⁵ *Ivi*, p. 46.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

himself writes that for Nietzsche: «[m]eaning exists only in accordance with what the human being means to himself».³⁷ But this focus on the human is not what Nietzsche had in mind, according to Lemm. Rather, «what Nietzsche uncovers behind the “many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations” (BGE 230) of human nature is the animality of human being».³⁸ The anthropocentric tendency is for her what drives Löwith to read the figure of *homo natura* as non-coherent, and hence to fail to apply the charity principle. The naturalness of human life can no longer be expressed from a human point of view.

Lemm moves a further critique to all the mentioned approaches. Their understanding of «nature» does not coincide with Nietzsche's one. When conceiving of nature, the first two accounts draw from the life sciences in the nineteenth century.³⁹ But Nietzsche explicitly refuses such an approach. She reminds us that the German philosopher asks to «beware of saying that there are laws in nature. There are only necessities». But necessity for Nietzsche means anarchy: «there is no one who commands, no one who obeys, no one who transgress» (GS 109). As a posthumous fragment from summer 1882 makes clear: «Chaos sive Natura» (KSA 9:21[3]). This Dionysian conception of nature is what Lemm thinks none of the previous interpretations had sufficiently considered.

Lemm claims that what Nietzsche is attempting is to recover «the animality of the human being as the wellspring of its creativity: as the source of what is “human and in its own human way natural”»⁴⁰.⁴¹ Animality, here, does not refer to a «Darwinian account of biological life», nor to «a consideration of the natural history of morals, where animality is simply what needs to be “repressed” and “disciplined”».⁴² Animality is crucial to Nietzsche's understanding of human culture as self-cultivation: invoking the truth of *homo natura*, Nietzsche «seeks to transform the human being back into an animal that

³⁷ K. Löwith, “Kierkegaard und Nietzsche”, in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 11, 1933, p. 60.

³⁸ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 51.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 43.

⁴⁰ K. Löwith, “Kierkegaard und Nietzsche”, in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 11, 1933, p. 64.

⁴¹ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 51.

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 52.

generates culture».⁴³ This idea comes directly from his early philosophical production. In HC Nietzsche opens with the following statements:

If we speak of *humanity*, it is on the basic assumption that it should be that which *separates* man from nature and is his mark of distinction. But in reality there is no such separation: “natural” characteristics and those called specifically “human” have grown together inextricably. Man, at the finest height of his powers, is all nature and carries nature’s uncanny dual character in himself. Thus the Greeks, the most humane people of ancient time, have a trait of cruelty, of tiger-like pleasure in destruction, in them [...]. (HC 174)

A kind of natural and animal cruelty is therefore what defines and is inextricably bound to humanity. Accordingly, Lemm reports that for Nietzsche culture is a thirst for «the spicy potions of the great Circe, “cruelty”» (BGE 229). We can already see emerging the belief that will be further explored in BT, where Nietzsche develops the idea that Greek’s beauty is only possible as an Apollonian sublimation of the dreadful Dionysian substratum. «But what lies *behind* the world of Homer, as the womb of everything Hellenic? [...] W]here do we look if we stride backwards into the pre-Homeric world, without Homer’s guiding and protecting hand? Only into night and horror, into the products of a fantasy used to ghastly things» (HC 175).

She argues that, in order to really grasp Nietzsche’s conception of culture, nature and animality, one ought to turn to his reception of the Greek thought.⁴⁴

This move is precisely what distinguishes Lemm’s approach from Löwith’s. Having in mind specifically the Cynics, she claims that Greek thought elicited in Nietzsche the belief that animality is «a source of value in its own right».⁴⁵ The natural aspect of the human being needs to be enhanced not in order to better define the boundaries of the *anthropos* (as Löwith seems to suggest), but to move beyond the Roman-Christian conception of *humanitas*. As it is, for Lemm, Nietzsche’s philosophy moves «beyond both humanism and anthropocentrism».⁴⁶

3. *Homo Natura*: Cynics, Sex and Posthumanism

Let’s now turn to Lemm’s interpretation of *homo natura*. As mentioned above, what clearly departs Lemm’s philosophical anthropology approach from Löwith’s is the focus

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 55.

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, p. 54.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

on the Greeks. Aided by Foucault's text *The Courage of Truth*,⁴⁷ she proposes that the Nietzschean probity (*Redlichkeit*) is the best translation of Cynics' *parrhesia*. This virtue of «truth-telling» and «free-spokenness» is, according to Lemm, comparable to the probity required by Nietzsche to approach the «terrible basic text (*schreckliche Grundtext*)» *homo natura*. Interestingly, Cynics' objective is to recover a more natural way of living and, already for them, «this return to nature passes through an overcoming of conventional and hence false interpretations of human nature and is an essential aspect of their understanding of *parrhesia*».⁴⁸ Furthermore, according to Lemm, the ancient Cynics provide «an example of the philosophical life and of probity as lived and embodied truth where the return to nature [...] enables a transvaluation of all values».⁴⁹ As the Nietzschean free spirits must scrape any «overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over the eternal basic text *homo natura*» (BGE 230), so too the Cynics «seek to overcome the barriers that civilization has erected between nature and the human being».⁵⁰ The results of this enterprise are puzzling: this new naturalization reveals the plural and ever-becoming character of human nature. No essence or foundation can be found at the very bottom of the human. In Lemm's words: «[t]he question of *homo natura* is not a question of what we are (scientistic naturalism) or how we have become what we are (natural history), but of what else we could become (philosophical anthropology)».⁵¹ All those commonalities lead her to argue that «Nietzsche's notion of probity and of the natural human being may have been inspired by the ancient Cynics».⁵²

One of the most original theses proposed by Lemm is that Nietzsche's *homo natura* is not just an attempt to recover nature in the form of *animality*, but also in the form of *vegetality*. In BGE 44 Nietzsche speaks of the human being as the «human plant» that has been uprooted from its natural soil. Human beings share with plants what she calls a «transformative force»⁵³ that enables the both of them to relate with their environment.

⁴⁷ M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

⁴⁸ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 31.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 32.

⁵¹ *Ivi*, p. 33.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ *Ivi*, p. 62.

Furthermore, since antiquity plants are thought to possess the most basic soul, namely the nutritive one, that is also shared by all the other living beings. Interestingly, this very attribute is also central to Nietzsche's will to power. She recalls a posthumous aphorism that describes life as will to power in such terms: «a multiplicity of forces linked to each other through a common process of nutrition» (KSA 10:24[14]). This nutrition process is not merely preserving the human being, it is also a transformative force. In BGE 231 Nietzsche speaks of this other kind of nutrition that changes us, as well as learning and knowledge do. Lemm claims that this following aphorism is meant to be read in the same context of 230. She writes: «[f]rom the perspective of plant life, transplanting the human back into nature produces a type of nutritive knowledge which has transformational power and is future-oriented».⁵⁴

It is exactly the weight put by Nietzsche on knowledge – particularly on the transformative character of self-knowledge – that drives Lemm towards a Greek reading of *homo natura*. Pierre Hadot⁵⁵ has claimed that ancient philosophy was ultimately intended as practical. Knowledge was primarily self-knowledge: a way to learn how to properly live, how to face death, and so on. From modernity onwards, philosophy as a spiritual exercise was progressively abandoned. Notwithstanding rare exceptions – like Spinoza – the first contemporary philosopher to break this pattern is Nietzsche.⁵⁶ One more time the pursuit of knowledge «can no longer be considered apart from the life of the philosopher».⁵⁷ What differs in Lemm's reading is the lack of focus on an explicit ethical dimension of analysis. Knowledge as a transformative force is not just simply intended as a *spiritual exercise* of the self. To be sure, the question of how far truth can be embodied (GS 110) is still an experiment, a continuous self-experiment meant to discover and create new forms of life.⁵⁸ But, for her, with *homo natura* also a (bio)political dimension is disclosed.

The author argues that «Nietzsche's pursuit of the theme of *homo natura* does not end with aphorism 230», rather, «aphorisms [...] 231-9 introduce sexuality as a third element in the relationship between the human being (*homo*) and nature (*natura*) that is crucial to

⁵⁴ *Ivi*, p. 66.

⁵⁵ P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Oxford-Cambridge, Wiley-Blackwell, 1995.

⁵⁶ *Ivi*, p. 108.

⁵⁷ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 31.

⁵⁸ *Ivi*, p. 32.

the transformation of the human civilization towards a more genuine and natural humanity».⁵⁹ She argues that *homo natura* is linked to the problem of sexuality since, while speaking about the «basic problem “man and woman”», «woman as such» and the «Eternal Feminine», Nietzsche also speaks about woman’s *nature* and claims it to be «more “natural” than man’s» (BGE 239). He also warns that «[w]herever the industrial spirit has triumphed» women want to become more and more like men: «“woman as clerk” is inscribed on the gate to the modern society» (BGE 239). But this movement, seen as a form of *progress*, is producing a departure of women from nature: once again, a new layer is being added to the «basic text *homo natura*», and «woman is retrogressing» (BGE 239). Lemm claims that the re-naturalization of the human being is seen by Nietzsche as a «liberating because empowering experience that allows individuals to rediscover in their sexuality a creative and transformative force».⁶⁰ According to her, Nietzsche is close to nowadays feminists – like Judith Butler – when advocates for a re-embodiment of sexuality that affirms the human as a «more natural» sexual being. Sexual nature here is not a biological given, anterior to any social or symbolic construction.⁶¹ The anti-foundational character of Nietzsche’s philosophy points toward a Dionysian human nature as chaos of drives that, precisely in this lack of a clear and defined biological path, can establish a creative-sexual life.

For Lemm, «Nietzsche’s discourse on sexuality needs to be situated within the broader biopolitical context of the nineteenth century».⁶² As argued by Foucault,⁶³ sexuality emerges as a dispositive of governmentality due to a biopolitical reason: it is the pivotal point around which revolve both the production and re-production of individuals. To have a firm grasp over the ways through which sexualization happens means to have control on the modes of subjectification. It makes sense, then, that Nietzsche decided to enquiry sexuality and human nature in chapter 7, *Our Virtues*, of BGE. In it, he «sets the tone for a cultural renewal of Europe [...] by raising the question of what virtues, if any, are required to realise a transition (*Übergang*) towards a morality beyond good and evil».⁶⁴

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, p. 118.

⁶⁰ *Ivi*, p. 112.

⁶¹ *Ivi*, p. 113.

⁶² *Ivi*, 116.

⁶³ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, translated by R. Hurley, New York, Vintage Books, 1990.

⁶⁴ V. Lemm, *Homo Natura: Nietzsche, Philosophical Anthropology and Biopolitics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, p. 122.

Furthermore, Lemm claims that for Nietzsche «the debate on the Dionysian is decidedly biopolitical: the Dionysian approach to sexuality understands it from the start as entanglement of nature and politics».⁶⁵ Following Johann Jakob Bachofen, Nietzsche highlighted the female and matriarchal character of Dionysus' cult in order to critique the bourgeois Christian civilization.⁶⁶ According to Lemm, Nietzsche «places the task of fashioning *homo natura* under the name of Dionysus in order to identify in sexuality the primary site of the liberation of the modern individual», but also to embrace “sexuality as a vehicle of social transformation”».⁶⁷

This Dionysian interpretation of sexuality is, for her, a direct consequence of Nietzsche's archaic conception of nature as an «uninterrupted becoming» and an «underlying force» that determines an «eternal cycle of life» made of «contest or war between opposites».⁶⁸ She argues that, for Nietzsche, «sexual difference arises out of a relationship, a productive tension or *agon* between “man and woman”, and as such undermines any attempt to conceive their relationship as one between opposite binary poles».⁶⁹ This *tragic* conception of sexes is precisely what enables him to critically address «the socialization of sexuality in the nineteenth century».⁷⁰ If *homo* is *natura*, and nature is tragic, so is the human being. But then, all the social constructs that fixate the human are nothing but unnecessary layers painted over *homo natura* that need to be scraped off. Here, nature immediately has a political charge, as well as politics (culture) has a (second) natural dimension. Borrowing Lemm's words: «[t]he biopolitical dimension of Nietzsche's thinking about sexuality and gender requires bringing together both the sexualization of nature and the socialisation of nature».⁷¹

She goes even further with her claim. *Homo natura* does not stand just for a biopolitical figure – as *homo sacer* could be for Giorgio Agamben's *thanatopolitics* or *homo oeconomicus* could be for Foucault's biopolitical interpretation of neo-liberalism. From a biopolitical perspective, «and employing Giorgio Agamben's concept, there is no *an-*

⁶⁵ *Ivi*, p. 125.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ *Ivi*, p. 124.

⁶⁸ *Ivi*, p. 155.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ *Ivi*, p. 153.

⁷¹ *Ivi*, p. 157.

thropos without an ‘anthropological machine’ that works by separating an originary community of life for which the distinction between *zoe* and *bios* is untenable, and recombin-ing *zoe* and *bios* in an apparatus through which power is exercised over life».⁷² But such an *anthropological machine* is exactly what is missing in *homo natura*. What Lemm pro-poses is a *biopolitical posthumanism* that «turns on recovering a community of life be-yond all attempts to immunize one species being against another».⁷³ This markedly anti-humanistic and anti-anthropocentric approach is, for her, the key for an *affirmative bio-politics* that acknowledges life as a becoming that «continuously forms and transforms, creates and recreates itself in and through its multiple encounters with other forms of life».⁷⁴ Nietzsche’s *homo natura* embodies, according to Lemm, all those features.

4. *Homo Natura: Stoics, Ethics and Politics*

Let’s now draw our attention to a different reading that develops in an alternative direc-tion the common insight shared by Lemm and Hadot about philosophy as a practical mat-ter. We will call this other approach the *ethical* reading of Nietzsche. With this term, here, is not intended a moral meaning: «the word “ethical” denotes a way of being and behav-iour. Somebody’s ethos is evident in their clothing, appearance, gait, and in the calm with which they respond to every event».⁷⁵ *Ethos* is also the character of an individual,⁷⁶ the set of his *existential habitus*. In his contribution to *Nietzsche as Political Philosopher*, Keith Ansell-Pearson claims that we can read Nietzsche’s enterprise precisely in this ethi-cal sense, at least during his middle period. According to him, Nietzsche is looking for a personal ethics: «Nietzsche wishes to replace morality [...] with a care of the self. We go wrong when we fail to attend to the needs of the ‘ego’ and flee from it».⁷⁷ He recalls a posthumous fragment to support his claim:

⁷² *Ivi*, p. 170

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ivi*, p. 175.

⁷⁵ K. Ansell-Pearson, “Care of Self in Dawn: On Nietzsche’s Resistance to Bio-political Modernity”, in M. Knoll, B. Stocker (ed. by), *Nietzsche As Political Thinker*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2014, pp. 239-266: 283.

⁷⁶ R. Fabbrichesi, *Vita e Potenza: Marco Aurelio, Spinoza, Nietzsche*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2022, p. 21.

⁷⁷ K. Ansell-Pearson, “Care of Self in Dawn: On Nietzsche’s Resistance to Bio-political Modernity”, in M. Knoll, B. Stocker (ed. by), *Nietzsche As Political Thinker*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2014, pp. 239-266: 282.

It is a myth to believe that we will find our true or authentic self once we have left out or forgotten this and that. That way we pick ourselves apart in an infinite regression: instead, the task is to *make ourselves*, to *shape* a form from all the elements! The task is always that of a sculptor! A productive human being! *Not* through knowledge but through practice and an exemplar do we become *ourselves*! Knowledge has, at best, the value of a means! (KSA 9:7[213]).

For Ansell-Pearson, the original source of such beliefs is to be found in ancient thought. In particular, he identifies in Nietzsche the influence of Epicurus and of the Stoic Epicetus.

Both Lemm and Ansell-Pearson stress the Greek heritage in Nietzsche's thought. But, if she goes along with Esposito and claims for a clear (bio)political dimension of Nietzsche's operation, Ansell-Pearson takes the opposite direction. To be sure, is not that Nietzsche's thought is disinterested in or lacks a political level. He «recognizes the fundamental bio-political tendencies of modernity and the way they will impact on individuals, leading ultimately to a political technology of control and discipline».⁷⁸ But, even if Esposito is right and it can be claimed that although Nietzsche did not formulate the term «biopolitics» he nonetheless «anticipated the entire biopolitical course that Foucault then defined and developed»,⁷⁹ for Ansell Person «[t]his is not to say that Nietzsche is a political thinker in *Dawn*; it would be much more incisive to describe his project at this time as one of an ethics of resistance».⁸⁰ We encounter «a Nietzsche preoccupied with the care of the self and in opposition to the fundamental disciplinary tendencies of bio-political modernity».⁸¹

Belonging to the same productive period of D is the GS. In it we can clearly see emerging for the first time in Nietzsche's thought some of the critical notions that will be further developed in the last part of his career, like *amor fati* (GS 276), eternal recurrence (GS 341) and Zarathustra (GS 342). If Ansell-Pearson is right, then such concepts are to be interpreted in the wider context of Nietzsche's quest for a personal ethics (a *techne tou biou*), a unique way to cope with the difficulties he was facing during his life. This is also what Rossella Fabbrichesi claimed in her recent book *Vita e Potenza: Marco Aurelio*,

⁷⁸ *Ivi*, p. 273.

⁷⁹ R. Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 85.

⁸⁰ K. Ansell-Pearson, "Care of Self in Dawn: On Nietzsche's Resistance to Bio-political Modernity", in M. Knoll, B. Stocker (ed. by), *Nietzsche As Political Thinker*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2014, pp. 239-266: 270.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

Spinoza, Nietzsche. Browsing in Nietzsche's writings and correspondence, Fabbrichesi weaves a narrative that brings together the German thinker's life and philosophical production in an untangleable knot. *Amor fati* and *eternal recurrence* are *spiritual exercises* meant to help facing some of the darkest periods of Nietzsche's existence and to strive to attain what he calls the *great health* (GS 382). In order to do so, a posthumous fragment from 1882 exhorts us to become *periodical beings*, *identical* to existence (KSA 10:1[70]).⁸² The exhortation is then to conform to the primordial law of the circle and to go through the ring of recurrence (KSA 9:11[157]).⁸³ Indeed Nietzsche admonishes us that «Everything becomes and recurs eternally – escape is impossible!» (WP 1058). Escape is then perhaps not even desirable. According to Fabbrichesi, even the «become who you are» motto is, in the end, an exhortation to go through the ring of recurrence. The aim of *eternal recurrence* would then be to unmask the ego and to redirect man towards nature. Assertions as «[t]he *ego* is a hundred times more than merely a unit in the chain of members; it is this chain itself, entirely» (WP 682) or «[w]e are *more* than the individuals: we are the whole chain as well, with the tasks of all the futures of that chain» (WP 687) seem to confirm what we just suggested. Like the Stoic thinkers, Nietzsche asks us to become *homologoumenos* with nature. The best existential attitude (*ethos*) is then the one that merges man and nature together. In Fabbrichesi's words: «feeling like “fragments of fate” must not be reduced to a diminutive formulation that weakens the singular part, rather, it should be read as the adhesion to a physics that listens to the “eternal basic-text *homo natura*”».⁸⁴ In the ethical reading, *homo natura* stands for the best ethical attitude (*ethos*) humans should strive for. At the end of the path of renaturalization we find the former human beings that were able to make *amor fati* their innermost nature (EH, Wagner 4) and to bear the abysmal thought of the *eternal recurrence*, namely the *overmen*. But this attainment is reached only after a long way of self-knowledge and self-empowerment (*enkrateia*) in which one has *become who one's learned to be*.

⁸² «Wir dürfen nicht Einen Zustand wollen, sondern, müssen periodischen Wesen werden wollen = gleich dem Dasein».

⁸³ «Der Kreislauf ist nichts Gewordenes, er ist das Urgesetz».

⁸⁴ R. Fabbrichesi, *Vita e Potenza: Marco Aurelio, Spinoza, Nietzsche*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2022, p. 173 (my translation).

The political need can only follow this process. To be sure, Nietzsche's philosophy does not lack a political dimension at all. Manuel Knoll⁸⁵ presents a reading of Nietzsche's whole parable that advocates for a continuity in Nietzsche's political thinking from the start of his philosophical production to the end. Knoll claims that already in Nietzsche's posthumous essay TGS (written in 1872) his political view is clear: «Nietzsche claims that the "Olympian existence", the "generation and preparation of the genius", is the "actual goal of the state"».⁸⁶ Knoll argues that such a view is confirmed in UM III, SE (appeared in 1874), in which it is stated that «[m]ankind must work continually at the production of individual great men—this and nothing else is its task» (SE 6). Knoll proposes two theses in his contribution: 1. the early writings already «contain essential elements of Nietzsche's later conception of the "Übermensch"», setting then the overman «at the center of Nietzsche's entire philosophical thought»;⁸⁷ 2. «Nietzsche conceives the generation of a higher type of man or "Übermensch" not primarily as the affair of an isolated individual but as a social and political task».⁸⁸ In contrast, what Ansell-Pearson and Fabbrichesi show is that politics was probably not always at the core of his concerns. First of all, one has to empower oneself to then be able to turn to society at large in order to transform it.

5. Conclusions

Notwithstanding the clear differences, Lemm's reading and the ethical one are compatible with each other. Their pictures of *homo natura* find a strong connection in the anti-anthropocentric character of the Nietzschean figure. In the ethical view, such a feature is declined as anti-humanistic. Specifically, Nietzsche's enterprise is seen as an overcoming of the Christian *humanitas*. There is no separation between nature and culture, humans and animals, material and spiritual. We are «pieces of fatum» and, as such, we have to find the best *habitus* (*ethos*) to cope with existence. But this is not solely a human prerogative: every living being is up for this challenge. No God makes human beings special; no afterlife should distract us from this self-empowering (spiritual) exercise of self-

⁸⁵ M. Knoll, B. Stocker (ed. by), *Nietzsche As Political Thinker*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2014, pp. 239-266.

⁸⁶ *Ivi*, p. 241.

⁸⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 241-242.

⁸⁸ *Ivi*, p. 242.

knowledge. On the other hand, Lemm focuses more on the social and political implications of Nietzsche's *homo natura*. In her view, the anti-anthropocentric character takes the shape of an *affirmative biopolitical posthumanism*. Since no line can be drawn between humans, animals and plants, we should strive for the creation of a political community that breaks up with immunitary logic. This paper argues that Lemm's reading can be interpreted as the political concretization of the ethical need that we find at least since Nietzsche's middle period.

This combined view puts a lot of weight on *homo natura*'s shoulders. Its figure becomes central in Nietzsche's thought: it is another name for the natural aspect of the overman, «the meaning of the earth» (Z, Prologue 3). It also stands for the best spiritual exercise that can be attained by men, the extremization of *amor fati*, namely the thought of the *eternal recurrence of the same*. It is, furthermore, the highest expression of *will to power*, and the political device that Nietzsche proposes when envisioning a cultural and social renewal. A great importance for a concept explicitly mentioned by Nietzsche only three times: once in a posthumous aphorism of 1882 (KSA 12:2[131]) and twice in BGE 230.

If we take *homo natura* to be a critical concept in Nietzsche's production, then suddenly we are left with a categorization of the German thinker that leaves no room for biopolitics – at least in the classical nuances of the term. Nietzsche's political project is markedly anti-anthropocentric and none of the three readings presented in the introduction is compatible with this feature. Immunity, *thanatopolitics* and neoliberalism all want to breed and foster a specific kind of human being, a specific human community at the expense of the other living beings. They have to produce *homines sacri* or *homines oeconomici*. *Homo natura* is no longer a human being. Even the concept of *great politics* does not need to have biopolitical roots. Friedrich Balke argues that *great politics* is «essentially [a] politics of selection (*Auslese*) and extinguishing: a selection of positively evaluated abnormalities over those that are negatively evaluated»,⁸⁹ the expression of an inherently racist «bad aristocratism» that envisages the continuum of life as «divided into a hierarchy of species, and where the destruction (death) of one species, or life form, is

⁸⁹ F. Balke, "From a Biopolitical Point of View: Nietzsche's Philosophy of Crime", in *Cardozo Law Review* vol. 24, n. 2, 2003, pp. 705-722: 709.

understood as the condition for the protection of the life of another species».⁹⁰ The *thanatopolitical* character of *great politics* should be confirmed by posthumous fragments that describe it as a politics that «measures the rank of races, people and individuals according to the degree of life and future they carry within themselves» (KSA 13:25[1]). This would be true if the community that has to be immunized was not nature itself. *Homo natura* is no longer the humanized product of an immunitary logic. The selection is not made in human terms: what is evaluated is the «degree of life and future» carried within natural beings. That is to say, the hierarchical ranking is made on ethical basis: which are the beings that embody the *ethos* that best enables them to cope with life? Then, of course, comes the political decision to foster only life forms that live up to such standards. But this operation can hardly be deemed anthropocentric.

Homo natura is utterly not a human anymore. Any residue of *humanitas* has been wiped out: no *pietas*, no guilt, no *civilitas*. That is because the purpose of this notion is to express and embody the best ethical posture (*ethos*) to assume towards existence, namely to become one with it. *Homo natura* is no longer an individual, yet on a biological level: it is a center of centripetal and centrifugal forces, that clashes and blends with other more or less powerful *nuclei*. This is the key difference that overcomes any modern form of politics. In fact, utilitarianism, Kantian deontology, and biopolitics all have the individual as cornerstone for their whole theoretical apparatus: whether it is sentient, metaphysical or the product of power, the individual is the main character. Precisely this is what lacks in Nietzsche. It is no longer – as in the biopolitical framework – a matter of *power* (or the juridical, *what shapes and oppress*), on the one hand, and the *subject* (or the biological, *what is shaped and resist*), on the other. With *homo natura* it's existence – or life – that exerts its *powers* within and on itself.

In order to highlight the abysmal difference that occurs between Nietzsche and the modern paradigm, let's briefly discuss the question of non-humans in politics. The matter regarding the place for non-human animals in politics is as ancient as Aristotle.⁹¹ Determining our relationship with animals has become an increasingly fundamental task in our society. To draw a sharp line of separation has often catastrophic consequences since

⁹⁰ V. Lemm, “Nietzsche and Biopolitics: Four readings of Nietzsche as a biopolitical thinker”, in S. Prozorov, S. Rentea (ed. by), *The Routledge Handbook of Biopolitics*, London-New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, p. 57.

⁹¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

overlooking them would mean endangering the equilibria that allow our own survival. This is even more true in an epoch in which, as a species, we seem to have a great impact on the ecological dimension of the planet. Some also adopt the term *Anthropocene* to refer to such a state of affairs.⁹²

The Aristotelian paradigm set forth in *Politics* positions animals as subordinate in the “Great Chain of Being” and identifies their only purpose (*telos*) in being useful to humans. This view was challenged in the Modern era. Aided by anatomical studies and a materialistic conception of animals’ soul and body (mainly influenced by René Descartes) philosophers like Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751) started questioning the superiority of human beings. Speaking about apes, La Mettrie writes in *Machine Man*:

the similarity of the ape’s structure and functions is such that I hardly doubt at all that if this animal were perfectly trained, we would succeed in teaching him to utter sounds and consequently to learn a language. Then he would no longer be a wild man, nor an imperfect man, but a perfect man, a little man of the town, with as much substance or muscle for thinking and taking advantage of his education as we have.⁹³

This kind of reflection opened up the possibility for later philosophers to propose a radical shift in the ways in which we ought to treat animals. The utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) exhorts to minimize suffering for the greater number, including animals. Their work had a strong influence on the contemporary debate. Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation*⁹⁴ – the publication that single handedly started what today is the anti-speciesism movement, for instance, takes an explicit utilitarianist stand. To be sure, other philosophers proposed different ways to grant rights for animals.⁹⁵

However important and interesting these works may be, they do not represent a real shift in paradigm in conceiving of non-human animals. Rights are simply extended to them. Anyway, such a move is not able to invest animals of an active political dimension:

⁹² C. Hamilton, C. Bonneuil, F. Gemenne, *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in A New Epoch*, London-New York, Routledge, 2016.

⁹³ J. O. de La Mettrie, *Machine Man and Other Writings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 12.

⁹⁴ P. Singer Peter, *Animal Liberation*, New York, HarperCollins, 1975.

⁹⁵ See the deontological approach of T. Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983, the capability approach of M. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006, and S. Donaldson, W. Kymlicka, *Zopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011 for a comprehensive political theory of animal rights.

they do not participate in the political life of society. In these views, politics is still too anthropocentric and forcing animals to enter the public debate would have the same ridicule effect of seeing Caligola's horse Incitatus behind the benches of the Roman Senate.

With *homo natura* this whole discussion crumbles. It is less a matter of what rights to grant to whom, and more an issue of how to compose a collective that *empowers* life itself. Since no difference can be drawn between different kinds of entities on the individual level (that is, juridically or metaphysically), this operation can only be brought forward *ethically*, *i.e.* by selecting the entities that assume the ethical posture that best fits life.

If what we said until now is convincing, classical biopolitics is not a good label for Nietzsche. In fact, Lemm herself proposes an *affirmative* connotation of biopolitics to better describe his work. But such a move is not enough when we face *homo natura*. Its anti-anthropocentric character seems to push Nietzsche further away from biopolitics. If we still want to call him a biopolitical thinker we will need to propose a new meaning of the term: a meaning so distant from classical ones that it almost seems to belong to an entirely different category. *Homo natura* is able to question the biopolitical paradigm that articulates in *biopower* (power *over* life) and *biopolitics* (power *of* life), *i.e. thanatopolitics* and *affirmative biopolitics*, *i.e. anthropocentric* and *anti-anthropocentric* biopolitics. Can we still really speak of biopolitics when the focus is no longer on human beings, but rather *over* them? Isn't it still a *human all too human* politics?

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