

OF DANGEROUS GAMES
AND DASTARDLY DEEDS:
A TYPOLOGY OF NIETZSCHE'S CONTESTS

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Interest in Nietzsche's agonism has grown increasingly stronger during the past few decades.¹ Nietzsche's reflections on the role and function of competition in antiquity (most prominent in his "Homer's Contest" and *The Birth of Tragedy*), his critique of ant(i)-agonistic institutions in contemporary culture (notably in education, politics, and religion), and his experiments with performing an alternative agonistic critical practice (particularly in his post-Zarathustrian writings) have attracted the attention of philosophers, political theorists, literary scholars, and historians. That body of work contributes to a deeper appreciation of the aims of Nietzsche's well-known critiques of democracy, Christianity, and Platonic and scientific rationalism, while at the same time it indicates possibilities for the articulation and extension of less-recognized, affirmative strands in Nietzsche's work. These possibilities still require further investigation, and a number of significant questions about Nietzsche's view remain to be explored.

Persistent problems for those espousing and defending agonistic theories include: 1) defining agonistic actions and practices so as to distinguish them from other manifestations of power and resistance;² 2) specifying mechanisms for negotiating regulation of agonistic interactions so as to protect against exploitation and oppressive domination as well as to provide the radical openness that facilitates on-going provocation and the circulation of empowerment;³ and 3) discussing ways in which a propitious disposition toward agonistic

engagement might be cultivated and enhanced in prospective participants so that a culture supportive of agonistic relations emerges.⁴ Clearly, Nietzsche's texts do not sufficiently address all of these concerns, but they do offer ample, insightful conceptual resources for those who would take these as their own projects. This paper takes on just one small piece of that project, namely, providing a typology of agonistic structures and practices that emerges from Nietzsche's writings. The aim is to amplify and refine the different kinds of contests and modes of competing within them that Nietzsche first sketches in his "Homer's Contest." I attempt to outline some general criteria Nietzsche provides for distinguishing productive or healthy contests—"dangerous games," to borrow Nietzsche's term from *Beyond Good and Evil*⁵—from those that are destructive—or "dastardly," as my title suggests—and I conclude with some brief remarks about a possible ethos of agonism that draws on Nietzschean resources even if it ultimately leaves him behind.

I. "HOMER'S CONTEST" AND OTHER EARLY WRITINGS

The *locus classicus* for Nietzsche's conception of the *agon* is his discussion in his unpublished 1872 preface to an unwritten book, "Homer's Contest." Prefiguring the notion that would years later make his Basel colleague, Jacob Burckhardt, famous, Nietzsche examines the significance of the *agon* for Greek culture and considers how it animated ancient Greek ethics, education, art, and philosophy, and he briefly contrasts that orientation with contemporary cultural aims.⁶ Of particular interest to him in that work is how the dynamic of localization and circulation of power, specifically put to creative and constructive purposes, is cultivated and how it can decay.

"Homer's Contest" highlights the text of Hesiod's *Works and Days* that Pausanias describes in his *Travels in Greece*. The copy he reports to have seen during his travels in Greece began not with the hymn to Zeus but with the claim that there are two Eris-goddesses. Nietzsche is particularly attentive to the two types of activities they are reported to incite. One goddess drives people to *Vernichtungslust*, a desire to bring about the complete destruction of what opposes. The other incites people to better their opposition in fights of contest, *Wettkämpfe*. Nietzsche characterizes the latter as an activity among similarly skilled opponents, e.g., a struggle between rivals worthy of

each other. In *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, Nietzsche further distinguishes these two actions when he writes, "The envious man is conscious of every respect in which the man he envies exceeds the common measure and desires to push him down [*herabdrücken*] to it—or to raise himself up [*erheben*] to the height of the other: out of which there arise two different modes of action, which Hesiod designated as the evil and the good Eris" (WS 29). These modes of action—pushing down and rising above—distinguish not only individuals, but also varieties of culture. Nietzsche argues that the achievements of Greek culture were made possible by the proliferation of outlets organized on the agonistic model. Contests, through which the striving impulse could express itself, allowed and encouraged competitors to rise above one another. Creative action, Nietzsche claims, thrived in these institutions.

Although it is now common for those citing "Homer's Contest" to point to the distinction Nietzsche highlights between the good and bad Eris-goddesses, less critical attention is paid to the purposes toward which his discussion is put. Nietzsche is not merely suggesting that there are good contests and bad ones, and that the good ones are those in which the truly superlative competitor emerges as the victor. His aim lies beyond the rather banal assertion that competition is a good source of motivation. Nietzsche cites Hesiod's account of the two Erises—that the one who inspired motivational envy was a gift and that the other who provoked deadly jealousy was a curse—specifically to highlight a difference between his own culture and what is indicated in the relevant passage from the *Works and Days*. The view that envy could have a productive and positive function in the economy of human desires reflects a different ethical orientation: what distinguished the Eris-goddesses were their contributions specifically to the good of humankind in its own right. The one sort of envy is good because it creatively draws excellence out of human beings, at its best inspiring them not to *out do* each other in any way possible but to do so in such a way that advances human possibilities generally.⁷ The bad Eris also arouses a concern about disparity between oneself and another but inspires a destructive response: its answer to what offers itself as a manifestation of excellence is an effort to annihilate it, thereby obliterating the possibility that it might be surpassed. It is in the interest of humankind, of raising humanity collectively to its peak that these distinctions between the two Erises

are drawn. This particular distinction in Greek culture indicates for Nietzsche a crucial difference between his own culture and that of the Greeks. Human excellence is at the center of the latter whereas it is subordinate to the will of a supernatural Other in the view of the former.

What we can gather from "Homer's Contest" and some other early writings as they relate to our pursuit of articulating types of competition are: 1) there are at least two different ways of competing: one aims to win by destroying what opposes (i.e., it engages the activity of pushing down (*herabdrücken*) what poses a challenge), the other aims to win by excelling what opposes (i.e., it engages the activity of rising above (*erheben*) opposition); 2) the former Nietzsche identifies with an annihilative desire (*Vernichtungslust*), the latter with a competitive, agonistic drive reminiscent of early Greek modes of contest (*Wettkämpfe*); and 3) the latter mode of competing can be embraced as good not only for the competitor but also for its promotion of the general welfare, because competition of that sort *potentially* advances human possibilities generally, i.e., it *can*—provided a relevant goal is sought—promote meaningful excellence.

Our understanding of *agon* will be enhanced if we distinguish it from other forms of struggle and play.⁸ I have argued above for a distinction between creative and destructive modes of contest, emphasizing the distinction Nietzsche draws between rising above and pushing down one's competitors. However, in order to link *agon* with superior accomplishment, and to recognize institutionalized *agon* as culturally productive, we need to recognize agonistic play as different from other potentially non-destructive contests. Contests of chance, games of mimicry, and self-induced vertigo are modes of playful activity that do not typically involve competition in which opponents face-off and try to beat each other.⁹ Consider the kind of play associated with the lottery. Although lotteries have enormous appeal and the rewards are great, success in the lottery indicates little about the character or value of the person who, by chance, happens to win. A lottery winner may be wealthier, but there is little reason to believe that kind of success will make the person better; at least there would not seem to be any intrinsic connection between winning the lottery and being a productive contributor to the cultural development of a society. Furthermore, it is not clear that there is any way in which *playing* the lottery makes one a better person or contributes to

the development of productive skills. While the winner of a lottery might think that her new wealth makes life worth living, that disposition would seem to be significantly different from the positive valuation of life that Nietzsche identifies with the Greeks.

The agonistic game is organized around the test of a specific quality the persons involved possess. When two runners compete, the quality tested is typically speed or endurance; when artists compete, it is creativity; craftsmen test their skills, etc. The contest has a specific set of rules and criteria for determining (i.e., measuring) which person has excelled above the others in the relevant way. What is tested is a quality the individual competitors themselves possess; and external assistance is not permitted. (This is not to say that agonistic games occur only between individuals and that there can be no cooperative aspects of agonistic engagement. Clearly individuals can assert themselves and strive against other individuals within the context of a team competition, but groups can also work collectively to engage other groups agonistically. In those cases what is tested is the collective might, creativity, endurance, or organizational ability of the participating groups.)

Ideally, agonistic endeavors draw out of the competitors the best performance of which they are capable. Although agonistic competition is sometimes viewed as a "zero-sum game" in which the winner takes all, in the cases that Nietzsche highlights as particularly productive agonistic institutions, all who participate are enhanced by their competition. Winning must be a significant goal of participation in agonistic contests, but it would seem that winning might be only one, and not necessarily the most important one, among many reasons to participate in such a competition. In his later writings, Nietzsche appears to be interested in thinking about how the structures of contests or struggles can facilitate different possibilities for competing well within them. In other words, he questions whether the structure of the game might limit the way in which one might be able to compete. His study of slavish morality illuminates well that concern.

II. DASTARDLY DEEDS

The so-called "Good Eris," described in "Homer's Contest," supposedly allowed the unavoidable urge to strive for preeminence to find expression in perpetual competition in ancient Greek culture. In

On the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche seeks to critique Christianity for advocating a kind of altruism, or selflessness, that is essentially self-destructive, and for perverting the urge to struggle by transforming it into a desire for annihilation. Read in light of "Homer's Contest," Nietzsche's *Genealogy* enables us to better grasp his conception of the value of contest as a possible arena for the revaluation of values, and it advances an understanding of the distinctions Nietzsche draws between creative and destructive forms of contest and modes of competing within them.

Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, a *Streitschrift*—a polemic, a writing that aims to provoke a certain kind of fighting—portrays a battle between "the two opposing values 'good and bad,' 'good and evil.'" Nietzsche depicts slavish morality as that which condemns as evil what perpetuates the *agon*—namely, self-interest, jealousy, and the desire to legislate values—but rather than killing off the desire to struggle, slavish morality manipulates and redirects it. Prevention of struggle is considered by Nietzsche to be hostile to life: an "order thought of as sovereign and universal, not as a means in the struggle between power-complexes but as a means of *preventing* all struggle in general . . . would be a principle *hostile to life*, an agent of the dissolution and destruction of man, an attempt to assassinate the future of man, a sign of weariness, a secret path to nothingness" (*GM* II:11). "The 'evolution' of a thing, a custom, an organ is . . . a succession of . . . more or less mutually independent processes of subduing, plus the resistances they encounter, the attempts at transformation for the purpose of defense and reaction, and the results of successful counteractions" (*GM* II:12). For Nietzsche, human beings, like nations, acquire their identity in their histories of struggles, accomplishments, and moments of resistance. The complete cessation of strife, for Nietzsche, **robs** a being of its activity, of its life.

In the second essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche identifies the notion of conscience, which demands a kind of self-mortification, as an example of the kind of contest slavish morality seeks: "Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction—all this turned against the possessors of such instinct: that is the origin of the 'bad conscience'" (*GM* II:16). Denied all enemies and resistances, finding nothing and no one with whom to struggle except himself, the man of bad conscience:

impatiently lacerated, persecuted, gnawed at, assaulted, and maltreated himself; this animal that rubbed itself raw against the bars of its cage as one tried to "tame" it; this deprived creature . . . had to turn himself into an adventure, a torture chamber, an uncertain and dangerous wilderness—this fool, this yearning and desperate prisoner became the inventor of the "bad conscience." But thus began the gravest and uncanniest illness . . . a declaration of war against the old instincts upon which his strength, joy, and terrible-ness had reached hitherto. (GM II:16)

Bad conscience functions in slavish morality as a means of self-flagellation, as a way to vent the desire to hurt others once external expressions of opposition are inhibited and forbidden. "Guilt before God: this thought becomes an instrument of torture to him" (GM II:22). In that case, self-worth depends upon the ability to injure and harm oneself, to apply the payment of self-maltreatment to one's irreconcilable account with God. It is the effort expended in one's attempt to make the impossible repayment that determines one's worth.¹⁰ The genuine struggle, that which truly determines value for the ascetic ideal is one in which one destructively opposes oneself—one's value increases as one succeeds in annihilating oneself.

Slavish morality is still driven by contest, but the mode of this contest is destructive. It mistakes self-inflicted suffering as a sign of strength. The ascetic ideal celebrates cruelty and torture—it revels in and sanctifies its own pain. It is

a discord that wants to be discordant, that enjoys itself in this suffering and even grows more self-confident and triumphant the more its own presupposition, its physiological capacity for life decreases. "Triumph in the ultimate agony": the ascetic ideal has always fought under this hyperbolic sign; in this enigma of seduction, in this image of torment and delight, it recognized its brightest light, its salvation, its ultimate victory. (GM III:28)

Slavish morality, particularly in the form of Pauline Christianity, redirects the competitive drive and whips into submission all outward expressions of strife by cultivating the desire to be "good"¹¹ in which case *being good* amounts to abandoning, as Nietzsche portrays it, both the structure of the contests he admired in "Homer's Contest" and the productive ways of competing within them. It does not merely redirect the goal of the contest (e.g., struggling for the glory of Christ rather than competing for the glory of Athens); rather how one

competes well is also transformed (e.g., the "good fight" is conceived as tapping divine power to *destroy* worldly strongholds¹² rather than excelling them). In other words, the ethos of contest, the ethos of the *agon*, is transformed in slavish morality.¹³

III. DANGEROUS GAMES

Moralities effect contests in two ways: 1) they articulate a structure through which the meaning of human being (e.g., excellence, goodness, etc.) can be created and meted out, and 2) they simultaneously cultivate a commitment to a certain way of competing within those structures. By cultivating not only a desire to win but a desire to compete well (which includes respect for one's competitor and the institutions that set forth the terms of the engagement),¹⁴ we can establish a culture capable of deriving our standards of excellence internally and of renewing and revaluing those standards according to changes in needs and interests of our communities. This is the legacy that Nietzsche strives to articulate in his "Homer's Contest," one that he intends his so-called "new nobility" to claim. If the life of slavish morality is characterized by actions of annihilation and cruelty, Nietzsche's alternative form of valuation is marked by its activity of surmounting what opposes, of overcoming opposition by rising above (*erheben*) what resists, of striving continually to rise above the form of life it has lived.

As a form of spiritualized striving, self-overcoming must, like Christian agony, be self-directed; its aim is primarily resistance to and within oneself, but the agony—that is, the structure of that kind of painful struggle—differs both in how it orients its opposition and in how it pursues its goals. Self-overcoming does not aim at self-destruction but rather at self-exhaustion and self-surpassing. It strives not for annihilation but for transformation, and the method of doing so is the one most productive in the external contests of the ancient Greeks: the act of rising above. Self-overcoming asks us to seek hostility and enmity as effective means for summoning our powers of development. Others who pose as resistances, who challenge and test our strength, are to be earnestly sought and revered. That kind of reverence, Nietzsche claims, is what makes possible genuine relationships that enhance our lives. Such admiration and cultivation of opposition serve as "a bridge to love" (*GM I:10*) because

they present a person with the opportunity to actively distinguish himself, to experience the joy and satisfaction that comes with what Nietzsche describes as "becoming what one is."¹⁵ This, Nietzsche suggests, is what makes life worth living—it is what permits us to realize a certain human freedom to be active participants in shaping our own lives.¹⁶

Agonists, in the sense that Nietzsche has in mind, do not strive to win at all costs. Were that their chief or even highly prominent goal we would expect to see even the best contestants hiding from serious challengers to their superiority or much more frequently resorting to cheating in order to win. Rather, agonists strive to claim maximal meaning for their actions. (That's the *good* of winning.) They want to perform in a superior manner, one that they certainly hope will excel that of their opponent. In other words, the best contestants have a foremost commitment to excellence, a disposition that includes being mindful of the structure through which their action might have any meaning at all—the rules of the contest or game.¹⁷

What makes this contest dangerous?¹⁸ To be engaged in the process of overcoming, as Nietzsche describes it, is to be willing to risk oneself, to be willing to risk what one has been—the meaning of what one is—in the process of creating and realizing a possible future. The outcome is not guaranteed, that a satisfactory or "better" set of meanings and values will result is not certain. And when the contest is one in which rights to authority are in play, even the Nietzschean contest always runs the risk of supporting tyranny—of supplying the means by which the tyrannical takes its hold. Nietzsche is, of course, mindful of this danger, which is why in his account of the Greek *agon* he finds it important to discuss the alleged origin of ostracism as the mechanism for preserving the openness of contest.¹⁹

Nietzsche claims agonistic institutions contribute to the health of individuals and the culture in which these institutions are organized because *agon* provides the means for attaining personal distinction and for creating shared goals and interests. Pursuit of this activity, Nietzsche claims, is meaningful freedom. Late in his career, Nietzsche writes, "How is freedom measured in individuals and peoples? According to the resistance which must be overcome, according to the exertion required, to remain on top. The highest type of free men should be sought where the highest resistance is constantly overcome: five steps from tyranny, close to the threshold of the danger of

servitude" (TI "Skirmishes" 38). Nietzsche believes that it is only when our strength is tested that it will develop. Later in the passage just cited, Nietzsche continues, "Danger alone acquaints us with our own resources, our virtues, our armor and weapons, our *spirit*, and *forces* us to be strong. First principle: one must need to be strong—otherwise one will never become strong" (TI "Skirmishes" 38). Nietzsche takes upon himself, in his own writing, the task of making these kinds of challenges for his readers. Nietzsche's critiques of liberal institutions, democracy, feminism, and socialism should be read in the context of his conception of human freedom and the goal he takes for himself as a kind of liberator. Read thus, we could very well come to see the relevance of agonistic engagement as a means of pursuing a kind of democracy viewed not as a static preservation of some artificial and stultifying sense of equality, but as a *process* of pursuing meaningful liberty, mutual striving together in pursuit of freedom conceived not as freedom from the claims of each other but as the freedom of engagement in the process of creating ourselves.²⁰

IV. A NIETZSCHEAN ETHOS OF AGONISM

In a recent essay, Dana R. Villa examines the general thrust of arguments of those advocating agonistic politics. These "contemporary agonists,"²¹ he claims, largely look to Nietzsche and Foucault (cast as Nietzsche's heir, at least with regard to his conception of power and contest) for inspiration as they make their "battle cry of 'incessant contestation'," which is supposed to create the space for a radical democratic politics. These theorists

remind us that the public sphere is as much a stage for conflict and expression as it is a set of procedures or institutions designed to preserve peace, promote fairness, or achieve consensus. They also (contra Rawls) insist that politics and culture form a continuum, where ultimate values are always already in play; where the content of basic rights and the purposes of political association are not the objects of a frictionless "overlapping consensus" but are contested every day in a dizzying array of venues.²²

Villa would commend them for this reminder, but he claims that "recent formulations of an agonistic politics ... have tended to celebrate conflict, and individual and group expression, a bit too unselectively."²³ He argues that "Nietzsche-inspired" agonists would

do better to look to Arendt's conception of the *agon* and its place in political life for pursuing democratic aims, because she stipulates "that action and contestation must be informed by both judgment and a sense of the public if they are to be praiseworthy. The mere expression of energy in the form of political commitment fails to impress her." " 'Incessant contestation,' like Foucauldian 'resistance,' is essentially reactive." What such a politics boils down to is "merely fighting"; so conceived, "politics is *simply* conflict."²⁴ Placing the expression of energies of the individual, multiplicities of selves, or groups at the center of an agonistic politics that lacks some aim beyond just fighting does not advance the aims of democracy. Without specifying an agonistic ethos that crafts a sense of "care for the world—a care for the public realm," politics as the so-called "contemporary agonists" conceive it cannot be liberatory. Arendt, Villa argues, supplies such an ethos in a way that Nietzsche does not. My goal here has been to argue that Nietzsche does supply us with an agonistic ethos, that despite the fact that the advocates of "incessant contestation" might fail to distinguish agonistic conflict from "mere fighting" or "*simply* conflict," Nietzsche does. My aim is more than mere point-scoring. I am not interested in supporting a case that Nietzsche's views are better than Arendt's. I do think Nietzsche's work offers conceptual resources useful for amplifying and clarifying agonistic theories that are pervasive in numerous fields, including political science, moral psychology, and literary criticism. If we are attentive to how Nietzsche distinguishes different kinds of contests and ways of striving within them we can construct an ethos of agonism that is not only potentially valuable for the cultivation of a few great men but which also contributes to the development of a vibrant culture. By way of concluding, I shall draw on the distinctions developed in Nietzsche's conception of *agon* and sketch the outlines of a productive ethos of agonism.

Some competitions bring with them entitlements and rewards that are reserved for the sole winner. Nearly all of these can be described as zero-sum games: in order for someone to win, others *must* lose. Further, if I choose to help you to prepare your dossier for your promotion application for the only available post, I risk reducing my own chances for success. Let's call these kinds of competitions *antagonistic* ones, in which the competitors are pitted against each other in an environment hostile to cooperation.

We can also imagine competitions that are not zero-sum games, in which there is not a limited number of resources. Such contests would allow us to enact some of the original meanings at the root of our words for competition and struggle. The Latin root of *compete* means "to meet," "to be fitting," and "to strive together toward." The Greek word for struggle, which also applied to games and competitions, is *agon* (*ἀγών*), which in its original use meant "gathering together."²⁵ Practicing an agonistic model of competition could provide results of shared satisfaction and might enable us to transform competitions for fame and status that inform so much of our lives into competitions for meeting cooperatively and provisionally defined standards of aesthetic and intellectual excellence.²⁶

If we can revive the sense of *agon* as a gathering together that vivifies the sense of competition that initiates a striving together toward, we can better appreciate the unique relational possibilities of competition. Recalling the definitions of *agon* and competition provided above, from which I tried to indicate a sense of competition that could facilitate a process of gathering to strive together toward, consider another example. When two runners compete in order to bring out the best performances in each, their own performances become inextricably linked. When I run with you, I push you to pull me, I leap ahead and call you to join me. When you run faster, I respond to your advance not by wishing you would run slower or that you might fall so that I could surge ahead. I do not view your success as a personal affront, rather I respond to it as a call to join you in the pursuit. When in the course of running with me, you draw from me the best of which I am capable, our performances serve as the measure of the strength in both of us. Neither achievement finds its meaning outside of the context in which *we* created it. When two (or more) compete in order to inspire each other, to strive together toward, the gathering they create, their *agon*, creates a space in which the meaning of their achievements are gathered. When your excellent performance draws mine out of me, together we potentially unlock the possibilities in each. For this we can certainly be deeply indebted to each other. At the same time, we come to understand and appreciate ourselves and our own possibilities in a new way.²⁷ Furthermore, this way of coming to understand and appreciate our difference(s), and of recognizing perhaps their interdependence, might be preferable, to other ways in which differences might be determined. Al-

though surely not appropriate in all circumstances, agonistic endeavors can provide an arena for devising a more flexible and creative way of measuring excellence than by comparison with some rigid and externally-imposed rule.²⁸

Agonism is not the only productive way of relating to each other, and we can certainly play in ways that are not agonistic, but I do think such an ethos of agonism is compatible with recognition of both the vulnerability of the other and one's dependence upon others for one's own identity. It incorporates aggression, instructive resistance, as well as cooperation, and it is compatible with the practice of generosity. It cultivates senses of yearning and desire that do not necessarily have destructive ends. It requires us to conceive of liberation as something more than freedom from the constraints of others and the community, but as a kind of freedom—buttressed with active support—to be a participant in the definition and perpetual recreation of the values, beliefs, and practices of the communities of which one is a part. That participation might entail provisional restraints, limitations, and norms that mark out the arenas in which such recreations occur.

At his best, I think Nietzsche envisions a similar form for the agonistic life. Competitive "striving together toward" can be a difficult condition to create and a fragile one to maintain. It requires the creation of a common ground from which participants can interact. It needs a clearly defined goal that is appropriately demanding of those who participate. It requires that the goal and the acceptable means of achieving it are cooperatively defined and clearly articulated, and yet it must allow for creativity within those rules. It demands systematic support to cultivate future participants. And it must have some kind of mechanism for keeping the competition open so that future play can be anticipated. When any one of the required elements is disrupted, the competition can deteriorate into alternative and non-productive modes of competition and destructive forms of striving. But when an agonistic contest is realized, it creates enormous opportunities for creative self-expression, for the formation of individual and communal identity, for acquiring self-esteem and mutual admiration, and for achieving individual as well as corporate goals. It is one of the possibilities that lie not only beyond good and evil but also beyond the cowardly and barbarous.²⁹

NOTES

1 See, for examples: Jean-François Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich with an essay by Samuel Weber (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985); William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991) and *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1995); Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993); Lawrence Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1995); David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1995); Janet Lungstrum and Elizabeth Sauer, eds., *Agonistics: Arenas of Creative Contest* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1997); Herman Siemens, "Nietzsche's Hammer: Philosophy, Destruction, or the Art of Limited Warfare," in *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 2 (June 1998): 321-47; Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1999); numerous articles in Alan D. Schrift, ed., *Why Nietzsche Still?* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000); and the collection of articles on Nietzsche and sport in *International Studies in Philosophy* XXX:3 (1998).

2 A problem addressed neither by Foucault nor the editors of *Agonistics: Arenas of Creative Contest*.

3 A challenge unmet by Lyotard, Honig, Hatab, and Appel, and discussed in limited ways by Siemens and Villa (in Schrift).

4 A need recognized by Connolly and discussed by Owen, which would benefit from further analysis.

5 See BGE 41 and 205. I utilize the Kaufmann translations of BGE, *TI*, the Hollingdale translation of *WS*, the Kaufmann-Hollingdale translation of *GM*, and the translation of *WPh* that appears as "We Classicists," trans. Werner Dannhauser in *Unmodern Observations*, ed. William Arrowsmith (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990).

6 See Jacob Burckhardt, *The History of Greek Culture*, trans. Sheila Stern, ed., with an introduction by Oswyn Murray (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), especially "The Agonal Age." I briefly discuss the connection between Burckhardt and Nietzsche in the introduction to my translation of "Homer's Contest," "Re/Introducing 'Homer's Contest': A new translation with notes and commentary," *Nietzscheana*, Fall 1996.

7 Plato's *Republic*, of course, thematizes the difference between an ethic organized around the drive to out do and that of doing well. Nietzsche's response to the account offered by the Platonic Socrates is that there is not a problem with the drive to "out do" as such but rather, the issue is how that

drive is cultivated and directed. It is not clear to me that the Socrates of the *Republic* and Nietzsche are in significant disagreement on this point, since it would seem that Thrasymachus' account of justice as a certain kind of power (namely, outdoing others and getting whatever one wants), is ultimately refuted only with regard to what one pursues in that striving (i.e., power over others), not the striving itself. Justice, according to Socrates in the *Republic*, is still conceived as a certain kind of power, which manifests itself in a certain sort of *agon*, the contours of which are to some extent sketched in the heart of the *Republic* (see especially *Republic* IV, V, and IX). For a somewhat different account of Socrates as a philosophical agonist, see Richard Patterson, "Philosophos Agonistes': Imagery and Moral Psychology in Plato's 'Republic'," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35, No. 3 (1997): 327–54.

8 This paragraph and the two that follow are slightly revised versions of what appear in my "Nietzsche's Problem of Homer" in *Nietzscheforschung* 5/6 (Spring 2000): 553–74.

9 A French sociologist, Roger Caillois, provides an analysis of these games in *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961).

10 Nietzsche links the birth of contemplation to the same instinct: "The earliest philosophers knew how to endow their existence and appearance with a meaning, a basis and background, through which others might come to fear them: more closely considered, they did so from an even more fundamental need, namely, so as to fear and reverence themselves. For they found all the value judgments within them turned against them, they had to fight down every kind of suspicion and resistance against 'the philosopher in them.' As men of frightful ages, they did this by using frightful means: cruelty toward themselves, inventive self-castigation—this was the principal means these power-hungry hermits and innovators of ideas required to overcome the gods and tradition in themselves, so as to be able to believe in their own innovations. I recall the famous story of King Vishvamitra, who through millennia of self-torture acquired such a feeling of power and self-confidence that he endeavored to build a new heaven—the uncanny symbol of the most ancient and most recent experience of philosophers on earth: whoever has at some time built a 'new heaven' has found the power to do so only in his own hell" (*GM* III:10). Compare Nietzsche's *Daybreak* 42. Perhaps this is why Nietzsche writes, "The bad conscience is an illness, there is no doubt about that, but an illness as a pregnancy is an illness" (*GM* II:19).

11 For a historical survey of the development of the agonistic theme in early Christian philosophy and literature, see Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1967).

12 See Paul's numerous appeals to fighting the good fight, especially I Corinthians 9:24–27, II Corinthians 10:3–6, I Timothy 4: 7–10, and II Timothy 2:5. An interesting study could compare the Greek and Luther's translation of the Bible for a comparison of how "agon" and "kampf" and related terms are figured there.

13 Slavish morality has been discussed here as applying specifically to Christianity, but an analysis of the "slavishness" of Socratism as Nietzsche depicts it, in which Plato stands as the revaluator who initiated it just as Paul is cast as figuring Christianity, would reveal similar concerns about the agonistic ethos that emerges from Socratic philosophy.

14 For a brief but insightful discussion of the virtues of agonistic engagement that can be derived from Nietzsche's conception, see David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, pp. 139–46.

15 In my "Thus Spoke Zarathustra as Postmodern Bildungsroman," in *Nietzsche, Postmodernismus und was nach ihnen kommt*, ed. Endre Kiss and Uschi Nussbaumer-Benz (Cuxhaven and Dartford: Junghans, 2000), I discuss the connection between Zarathustra's love of his disciples and his desire to make them his enemies.

16 BGE 44 should be read in this light.

17 See also Connolly on "agonistic respect" in *The Ethos of Pluralism and Identity/Difference*.

18 For more on "dangerous games" and how Nietzsche himself played them, see Daniel W. Conway's illuminating book *Nietzsche's Dangerous Games: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998).

19 See "Homer's Contest" in *KSA* 1, pp. 788f.

20 For an interesting discussion of the possibility of creating an agonistic tension between theory and politics as it relates to democracy, see Wendy Brown, "Nietzsche for Politics," in *Schrift, Why Nietzsche Still?* pp. 205–23.

21 Villa identifies these as Sheldon Wolin, William E. Connolly, Chantal Mouffe, and Bonnie Honig, among others. See Dana R. Villa, "Democratizing the Agon: Nietzsche, Arendt, and the Agonistic Tendency in Recent Political Theory" in *Schrift, Why Nietzsche Still?* pp. 224–46.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

26 I have borrowed the phrasing of Valerie Miller in my formulation here.

27 No one has taught me more about how real-life competition is enhanced by cooperation than Mariah Burton Nelson. See her *Embracing Victory: Life Lessons in Competition and Compassion* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1998).

28 Although the confines of this paper do not permit full elaboration, I also think this notion of agonistic engagement can be rendered compatible with various feminist relational theories, including those that are most critical of competition.

29 This work was supported in part by the Summer Faculty Research Fund of the University of Maine.



*International
Studies in
Philosophy*

XXXIV/3 2002

ISSN 0270-5664