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“MISTRESS OF THE EARTH”:  
NIETZSCHE’S VISION OF THE EUROPEAN EMPIRE\*

INTRODUCTION

Since World War II, interpretations of Nietzsche have been dominated by what Domenico Losurdo dubs “the hermeneutics of innocence”. This refers to interpreters understating the more politically charged aspects of Nietzsche’s thought, often by uprooting it from its historical and political context and presenting his more troublesome statements as mere metaphors (LOSURDO 2019, 608–12, 615, 705, 723–26, 730, 733, 739, 820–21, 833–34, 997–1008; see also DROCHON 2016, 19, 23, 74, 180–81; HOLUB 2018, 258; BRENNAN 2014, 146). In recent decades, there has been an increasing number of authors who challenge this interpretive strategy. Nevertheless, old habits die hard, and even those contributing to this counter-current sometimes shy away from fully recognizing Nietzsche’s convictions on issues such as, for example, imperialism and colonialism.

The goal of this paper is to explicate Nietzsche’s vision of a united Europe, including its prominent imperialist and colonialist facets. To achieve this, I shall carefully gather and analyse relevant passages from Nietzsche’s writings. Comparing Nietzsche’s views with those of other prominent thinkers of the period and considering the broader historical context are necessary for a fuller understanding of his position on these issues (see also DROCHON 2016, 19, 23, 74, 180–81; HOLUB 2018, 258). Nonetheless, while I shall provide relevant

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historical background when needed, I shall not spend too much time comparing the beliefs of the German philosopher with those of his notable contemporaries on the matters at hand. That has already been covered to such an extent and depth in Losurdo's (2019) monumental treatise that such an effort can hardly be matched, least of all within the space of a single article. If there is any disadvantage to his study, it is that it lacks concision, which I shall endeavour to improve upon here. Prioritizing the survey of Nietzsche's oeuvre, I believe, must serve as the starting point for this type of inquiry. This allows me to concentrate on presenting the core tenets of Nietzsche's (geo)political vision of a united Europe as a world empire, since these are still not established in a sufficiently thorough yet succinct manner.

In pursuing the aim of this paper, I shall build upon some recent notable studies on the subject, while pointing out their shortcomings. One such work is the book by Hugo Drochon on Nietzsche's "great politics" (DROCHON 2016). He offers a helpful elucidation of Nietzsche's idea of a united Europe, particularly how it was envisioned to emerge and who its main rivals are. However, Drochon is far less clear about the roles that colonialism and war play in Nietzsche's conception of a united Europe's struggle for global supremacy. Likewise can be said for James S. Pearson's (2022) monograph on Nietzsche's ideas about conflict, struggle, and war. He provides an illuminating exploration of the subject, yet he does not apply his general theoretical framework to Nietzsche's particular (geo)political vision. These authors will be discussed in greater detail, and others will be considered as well.

## 1. TOWARD A UNIFIED EUROPE

It is widely accepted that Nietzsche was a political perfectionist.<sup>1</sup> He believed that humankind's imperative is to permanently enhance itself through its most outstanding exemplars (NIETZSCHE 2006b, III 6; 2008b, Preface 6, III 14; see also CONWAY 1997; BEINER 2023, 48). Therefore, the principal goal of politics ought to be the deliberate institution of the conditions favorable to the emergence of such individuals (NIETZSCHE 2006b, III 5–7; 2002, 62, 203; 2005b, 3, 4, 57; see also CONWAY 1997; NEHAMAS 1999, 8). This process Nietzsche called "breeding", and he contrasted it to "taming", which seeks to render everyone the same and mediocre (NIETZSCHE 2002, 62, 262; 2008b, II

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche's works are cited here by volume and/or section numbers.

2; 2005c, VII 3, 5, IX 43; 2005b, 3; see also CONWAY 1997, 17, 33–36). Nietzsche also rejected the related notion that political priority should lie in advancing the overall happiness of the population and lessening its suffering (NIETZSCHE 2005b, 2; 2005c, IX 37–38; see also BEINER 2023, 48–49). According to him, an aristocratic society containing some form of servitude is most suitable for “breeding” (NIETZSCHE 2002, 257; 2001, 377). All elements of such society are instrumentalized in the interest of the nobility, that is, for the production of great individuals (NIETZSCHE 2002, 62, 258; 2008b, III 14; 2005c, IX 37).<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche's political vision encompassed more than general attitudes concerning the primary political goal and the societal structure necessary to accomplish that goal. It was clearly and decidedly oriented toward a specific region, namely Europe, and its historical context. This is evident in Nietzsche's reflection from *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he stated that he was dealing with what he approached with the utmost gravitas, the “European problem”, namely, “the breeding of a new caste to rule Europe” (NIETZSCHE 2002, 251; see also NIETZSCHE 2008a, 37[8]; CONWAY 2002, 176; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 112; HOLUB 2018, 250–51; DROLET 2021, 155–56).

It should be noted that Nietzsche's life and career spanned the latter half of the 19th century. This period saw Europe undergo many important political, economic, and social transformations. To mention just a few of the most salient developments, the already established European powers, particularly Great Britain and France, achieved unprecedented territorial enlargement through their numerous overseas colonies. Meanwhile, the emerging powers—Germany and Italy—were united by nationalism and equally ambitious in the pursuit of their own national interests. Beyond colonial expansion, a major factor was the Second Industrial Revolution, which rendered the rising economic powerhouses increasingly eager to acquire resources and seek new trading opportunities. Nationalism also played a significant role in this pursuit of transoceanic dominions, as the possession of vast colonies was often viewed as proof of a nation's greatness and modernity. At the same time, other political and social trends, such as democracy and socialism, were also gaining momentum. These two challenged the older aristocratic order while frequently questioning the course being set for Europe, and the rest of the world, by the forces of imperialism and capitalism.

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<sup>2</sup> See also NEHAMAS (1999, 8). This paragraph is a short summary of the first section of my paper (ČUKLJEVIĆ 2025, 240–44).

Once we understand this historical framework, Nietzsche's "European problem" becomes more meaningful. It becomes an existential question concerning Europe's identity. Faced with a collapsing old feudal order, driven by the forces of nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, democracy, and socialism, Nietzsche feared that Europe might lose its most valuable qualities. This he equated with its cultural distinctiveness, largely grounded in the Greco-Roman culture, which celebrated rationality and cultural excellence achieved by outstanding individuals (LOSURDO 2019, 241–43). Nietzsche believed that none of these modernizing forces prioritized cultural matters, thus endangering Europe's future. What was his solution to this problem?

As Drochon correctly claims, Nietzsche envisioned Europe as unified in some form of a single state. Besides maintaining the functioning of the more mundane affairs such as those pertaining to the economy, such state would stimulate the enhancement of humanity through its most excellent specimens. This type of state was contrasted to the nation-state of Nietzsche's time with its roots in nationalism to which all the cultural pursuits were subordinated (DROCHON 2016, 68; see also BRENNAN 2014, 171–72). It might be added that the 19th-century nation-state, along with nationalism itself, was deeply intertwined with the forces of capitalism and imperialism, as well as the democratization of society and, to some extent, socialism (DROLET 2021, 140). This further explains why Nietzsche was so opposed to the nation-state and the accompanying nationalism of his time.

Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that Nietzsche deemed nationalism "the most *anti-cultural* sickness", further calling it the national neurosis that plagued Europe, and the "immortalizing of Europe's provincial character, of *petty* politics".<sup>3</sup> According to him, nationalism was leading Europe into a *cul-de-sac* (NIETZSCHE 2005a, *The Case of Wagner* 2; see also NIETZSCHE 1996c, 87; 2002, 208; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 109, 137; 2014, 2, 9; ALTMAN 2013, 16–18; HOLUB 2018, 120; PEARSON 2022, 198). He believed this was demonstrated in the devastation of the Franco-Prussian War which made a deep impact on Nietzsche (DROCHON 2016, 179; DROLET 2021, 20). Instead of fostering European integration and celebrating a shared European culture, this conflict worked precisely against such an endeavour, being driven by what Nietzsche considered to be trifling political and economic interests of individual states. These, according to him, had nothing to do with matters of cultural excellence.

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<sup>3</sup> All italics within quotation marks are from the original.

Rather, Nietzsche championed “great politics” (NIETZSCHE 2009, 189). It aimed toward the unification of Europe spearheaded by its greatest exemplars, the “*good Europeans*” (NIETZSCHE 1996b, 475; 2002, Preface, 241, 254; see also NIETZSCHE 2001, 357, 377; 2008b, III 27; CONWAY 2002, 177; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 38; 2014, 63; HOLUB 2018, 245–46; LOSURDO 2019, 228, 373–74). Their principal duty would be to manage the entire global culture (NIETZSCHE 1996c, 87; see also NIETZSCHE 2002, 208; 2008a, 11 35[9], 37[8], 122[57]; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 53, 112; DROCHON 2016, 160; HOLUB 2018, 250–51; LOSURDO 2019, 322; DROLET 2021, 148). This would occur through a united Europe’s struggle for world domination, with foreign policy taking precedence over domestic (DOMBOWSKY 2004, 102; DROCHON 2016, 2, 18–20, 154–55). Ideas about a united Europe in some form had already been discussed in 19th-century Europe, particularly in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Nietzsche was among the thinkers who grounded such a prospect in aristocratic ideals, rather than in democratic principles. The former strand of thought was perhaps best exemplified in the political practice of Klemens von Metternich, Austrian chancellor and foreign minister—his post-Napoleonic “Concert of Europe” aimed to keep peace and stability among European powers through closer cooperation, while preventing further revolutions (see also LOSURDO 2019, 240–41). Nietzsche’s vision, however, was far more ambitious, as evidenced by his earlier words. Moreover, it seems that Nietzsche drew significant inspiration for his notion of a world-wide European empire from his closer surroundings, namely the rising German Empire of the 1870s and 1880s.

Peter Bergmann aptly notes that the term “great politics” (in German “*die große Politik*”), originally had an element of grandeur to it. This was embedded in the valorization of the international politics of world powers competing between themselves, in contrast to the internal affairs subservient to it (see also DOMBOWSKY 2004, 187–88; DROLET 2021, 145). It was no coincidence that Nietzsche started to employ this term just when Germany began emerging as a colonial power (BERGMANN 1987, 162–63; see also CONWAY 2002, 191; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 51; ALTMAN 2013, 75–76); DROCHON 2016, 162; HOLUB 2018, 252; DROLET 2021, 144–45). That happened under the guidance of its chancellor Otto von Bismarck and his own nationalistically driven “great politics”, which Nietzsche transformed to align with his culturally motivated perfectionism and Pan-Europeanism (CONWAY 2002, 176; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 51; BRENNAN 2014, 161; DROCHON 2016, 2, 18, 20, 154–55; HOLUB 2018, 253–57; LOSURDO 2019, 226–28; PEARSON 2022, 20). A case could be made

that Nietzsche, in a sense, sublimated the feelings of inferiority experienced by many Germans of the period, caused by the perception of Germany as lagging behind more modernized states, into this grander pan-European vision.

Still, perhaps the single greatest influence on Nietzsche's vision of a united Europe, at least the one Nietzsche himself acknowledged, was Napoleon I Bonaparte. Nietzsche traced his idea of Europe as a politically and economically integrated entity, with the primary aim of achieving global domination, back to Napoleon (NIETZSCHE 2005a, *The Case of Wagner* 2; see DOMBOWSKY 2004, 111; 2014, 2, 20, 62, 101; DROCHON 2016, 160). Napoleon desired a single united Europe to be, in Nietzsche's words, "*mistress of the earth*" (NIETZSCHE 2001, 362; see also NIETZSCHE 2008a, 11 37[8]; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 75–76, 109, 139, 173; 2014, 16–17, 31; BRENNAN 2014, 160; HOLUB 2018, 249–51; LOSURDO 2019, 374, 377; DROLET 2021, 148). Indeed, Napoleon's political, economic, and legal reforms in the conquered territories aimed to establish a centralized European empire with himself as the ruler. Furthermore, the German philosopher deeply admired the French emperor himself, both for his character and for his political acumen, believing him to be the embodiment of "*the noble ideal itself*" (NIETZSCHE 2008b, I 16; see also NIETZSCHE 2001, 23; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 110; 2014, 1–2, 20–22, 31, 35–36, 136; HOLUB 2018, 121).

This high regard for Napoleon and his plans for a united Europe aligns closely with Nietzsche's view of the significance of Europe's Greco-Roman past for its present identity, since Napoleon himself was deeply affected by this heritage. Don Dombowsky even argues that Nietzsche's political position is itself a type of Bonapartism, with both having as their main political ideal the Roman Empire (DOMBOWSKY 2014; see also NIETZSCHE 2008b, I 16; LOSURDO 2019, 365, 368). Hence Nietzsche's praise for the Roman Empire, which he deemed the most awe-inspiring system of governance in history that overcame its many challenges successfully, and in comparison to which all other efforts pale. Nietzsche even dubbed it the "most remarkable artwork in the great style" (NIETZSCHE 2005b, 58; see also NIETZSCHE 2008b, I 16; 2005b, 59; 2005c, IX 38–39; 2008a, 11 36[48]; CONWAY 2002, 176, 182; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 45–46, 173–74; 2014, 30, 62, 97).

As already noted, Nietzsche was not alone in his view of Europe as a political unity. He belongs to a whole tradition of similarly minded European thinkers (LOSURDO 2019, 240–41). Still, what did Nietzsche exactly mean by "Europe"? In his mature period, Nietzsche identified the origins of Europe in Ancient Greece, specifically in the rationality and scientific spirit often attributed to it. These, according to him, differentiated Europe from Asia (NIETZSCHE 1996b,

265; see also NIETZSCHE 1996a, 219; 1996b, 475; 2008a, VIII 566[373]; YOUNG 2010, 403–4; LOSURDO 2019, 241–43, 247, 321). On the other hand, and in contrast to his earlier period, Nietzsche later deemphasized the significance of being grounded in a particular (European) place and language. Instead, he celebrated a pan-European identity, which he perceived as largely exemplified in European Jews, who also embodied Ancient Greek and thus European tradition of critical thought (1996b, 23, 267, 475; see also YOUNG 2010, 403–4; LOSURDO 2019, 244–49; DROLET 2021, 148).

As to what specific regions belonged to his conception of “Europe”, Nietzsche had changes of opinion during his lifetime. For instance, in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Nietzsche included the United States as part of “Europe”. At the same time, he argued that “the cultural concept” of “Europe”, which he favoured, was not coextensive with the geographical region of “Europe”. “Europe” as a cultural area included only those countries and peoples sharing a tradition rooted in “Greece, Rome, Judaism, and Christianity” (NIETZSCHE 1996c, 215). This common heritage qualified the United States as “Europe”. In that way, as Losurdo argues, Nietzsche basically identified “Europe” with “the West” and excluded certain eastern European regions from it (LOSURDO 2019, 318; see also BRENNAN 2014, 176, 376). Yet elsewhere it is obvious that Great Britain and the Anglo-Saxon world in general were not to be parts of the united Europe as envisioned by Nietzsche, which was not a common opinion among his peers (see also NIETZSCHE 2008a, 11 26[336], 11 37[9]; BRENNAN 2014, 171). We will explore this more thoroughly in the next section.

Nietzsche not only urged for the unification of Europe but also firmly believed that this process was already well underway during his lifetime. Namely, he wrote that there was an ongoing “*physiological process*” operative in Europe, one that rendered Europeans much less distinct from one another and much more removed from their initial places of origin. This process brings about a fundamentally transnational and mobile breed of human being, a concept already advanced by Nietzsche with his Pan-Europeanism (NIETZSCHE 2002, 242; see also CONWAY 2002, 179; DROCHON 2016, 86). As he stated, there were “unambiguous signs declaring that *Europe wants to be one*” (2002, 256; CONWAY 2002, 177; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 110; DROLET 2021, 147–48).

Drochon accurately notes that Nietzsche discerned institutional, economic, and cultural aspects of the process of European unification (DROCHON 2016, 86, 102–13, 162, 175, 183). We will briefly consider each in turn.

Regarding the first, Nietzsche perceived the expansion of democracy in Europe as the political empowerment of masses which would, through parliamentary means, tax the upper classes and thus facilitate the emergence of a middle class. What would emerge is “a European league of nations”, with each specific nation, defined by its geographical boundaries, functioning as “a canton”. These cantons would be more oriented toward their democratic and collective future than toward their historic and tradition-bound past (NIETZSCHE 1996c, 292; see also DROCHON 2016, 86–87, 102; LOSURDO 2019, 321; DROLET 2021, 152–53). Thus, despite being notoriously critical of democracy, Nietzsche still recognized that it was unlikely to vanish entirely, at least not in the short term, and even believed it could play a positive role in the future he envisioned for Europe (ČUKLJEVIĆ 2025).

Further, concerning the economic side of the process of Europe’s unification, Nietzsche argued that all European states, whether large or small, would soon become economically unviable in isolation. This would be caused by unrestrained struggle for control over regional and global commerce. Nietzsche believed that this economic factor was already driving Europe toward unification at the very moment he was writing (NIETZSCHE 2008a, 11 37 [9]; see also NIETZSCHE 2008a, 13 11[235–36]; DOMBOWSKY 2014, 63; DROCHON 2016, 87; HOLUB 2018, 251; DROLET 2021, 149). Economic integration was indeed growing in 19th-century Europe, at least in its more industrially advanced states. Closer to Nietzsche’s home, many small German states became economically (and politically) consolidated under the Prussian initiative.

Moreover, Nietzsche held that the European cultural and intellectual elite has also been working, consciously or not, toward the unification of Europe. He believed that all the greatest individuals of the 19th century essentially worked for and served as exemplars for the coming of the “Europeans of the future” (NIETZSCHE 2002, 256; 2008a, 11 37[9]; DROCHON 2016, 87). The best example of this was perhaps Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whom Nietzsche profoundly admired. Particularly relevant here is Goethe’s idea of “world literature”, which encouraged the development of a transnational literary culture, albeit primarily focused on Europe.

As we can see, Nietzsche advocated the unification of Europe, which he perceived as already happening, and its engagement in the global “great politics”. Furthermore, his vision of a united Europe was not merely a fantasy, since there was historical reason to believe in the eventual political, economic, and cultural integration of at least those parts of Europe that were more developed institutionally and industrially.

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### 3. A UNITED EUROPE AND THE OTHERS

Throughout the history of Nietzsche's reception many authors from across the political spectrum had read him as an apologist of a kind for European imperialism (BRENNAN 2014, 144, 174; LOSURDO 2019, 742; DROLET 2021, 99). Bearing in mind the rhetoric that Nietzsche employed in expressing his vision of a united Europe, which we have seen in the previous section, Nietzsche indeed seems to have imagined a united Europe as a global empire. After all, he described the envisioned united Europe as the "mistress of the earth", as a politically and economically consolidated entity, with the goal of overseeing the entire global culture, and with the Roman Empire serving as its ideal. It is perhaps this proposed stewardship over world culture, in particular, that recalls Europe's professed "civilizing mission", which was frequently invoked to justify European imperialism and colonialism.

Given this, we should explore how Nietzsche conceived of the relationship of the united Europe towards other regions of the world and determine whether it also has an imperialist connotation. These non-European regions can be divided into two types: those roughly similar in power to the envisioned united Europe, expected to be viewed as its competitors for world dominance, and those that are significantly weaker than a united Europe, expected to be seen as its potential colonies in one way or another. We will start with the first.

Drochon contends that beginning with *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche conceived of the British and Russian empires as the united Europe's rivals for global domination in order to impress its culture upon the whole world (DROCHON 2016, 2, 20, 155, 161). Let us analyze if and to what degree this thesis holds.

Nietzsche indeed seemed to regard the British Empire as an undesirable part of the proposed united Europe. This was primarily because of its allegedly ingrained utilitarian ideology which he vehemently denounced as constituting a herd morality (NIETZSCHE 2002, 228, 252; 2005c, IX 39; see also DROCHON 2016, 159; LOSURDO 2019, 748–49). The German philosopher even went so far as to state that the modern Europe's pettiness essentially came from England (NIETZSCHE 2002, 253; see also NIETZSCHE 2002, 254; 2008b, I 4; 2005c, IX 44). He similarly regarded the United States, criticizing the American belief in democracy which was rapidly spreading to Europe. According to this creed, anyone can choose any role in society as they see fit, contrary to Nietzsche's strongly hierarchical view of a healthy society's structure (NIETZSCHE 2001, 356; see also NIETZSCHE 2001, 329; 2005a, II 4; LOSURDO 2019,

748; ČUKLJEVIĆ 2025). Aside from philosophical reasons, his negative attitude towards the Anglosphere was likely motivated by practical, if not personal, considerations. After all, the British Empire was the preeminent European and global power at the time. Any attempt to realize Nietzsche's vision of a united Europe would have to face this reality. Not to mention the resentment and animosity that many Germans felt toward what they regarded as their more advanced rival across the sea in the late 19th century.

As a matter of fact, in an unpublished note, Nietzsche asserted that for Europe to achieve global dominance, it “must probably ‘come to an understanding’ with England”, adding that its colonies were vital for Europe's future as a world leader. Later in the same note, he expressed some doubt—which he believed to be shared by many—regarding the British Empire's ability to sustain its position as the leading intercontinental power on its own over the next half a century (NIETZSCHE 2008a, 11 37[9]; see also BRENNAN 2014, 172; DROCHON 2016, 160; HOLUB 2018, 251–52; DROLET 2021, 144). As Nietzsche explained, this was due to the assumed inherent instability of its multiparty political system (NIETZSCHE 2008a, 11 37[9]). Thus the British Empire would cease to be the united Europe's contender.

Does this mean that England, together with its colonies, would become part of a united Europe? Perhaps Nietzsche might have thought of this as a possibility. However, recall that he felt a profound disdain for the English. Moreover, he was convinced that their empire was heading toward an inevitable demise. Additionally, he used scare quotes when writing of a possible “understanding” between the united Europe and England, with the outcome of the former using the colonies of the latter. These all seem to suggest that Nietzsche believed that a genuine understanding between these two parties was not possible, or at least not desirable. Rather, he may have meant that England may be persuaded or even coerced to part with its colonies, without being granted a place in the united Europe.

Nietzsche indisputably took the Russian Empire as a much more relevant competitor to a united Europe than the British (DROCHON 2016, 160; DROLET 2021, 144). He claimed that in Russia, “[t]he strength to will” was the highest, and that this will was menacing, biding its time to be released (NIETZSCHE 2002, 208). One of the more immediate reasons for Nietzsche's regard for and caution toward Russia might be the fact that, at the time of writing, the Tsar of Russia was Alexander III, a staunch autocrat known for his many reactionary reforms, which no doubt elicited Nietzsche's approval (DOMBOWSKY 2004, 47, 187). In the same segment, he even referred to Russia as Europe's “greatest

danger” and described different methods of weakening it (NIETZSCHE 1996c, 231; 2002, 251; 2005c, IX 39; DOMBOWSKY 2004, 47; ALTMAN 2013, 15; DOMBOWSKY 2014, 97; BRENNAN 2014, 165; DROCHON 2016, 160–61; LOSURDO 2019, 323, 375–76, 560–61; DROLET 2021, 144). Yet, Nietzsche did not desire this outcome. On the contrary, continuing this line of thought, we see that he hoped for Russia to become even more intimidating. The German philosopher believed this could compel Europe to follow Russia’s example. Specifically, he hoped that this would result in Europe “acquir[ing] a single will” through which a new-fashioned nobility would govern the continent (NIETZSCHE 2002, 208; see also ALTMAN 2013, 15; DROCHON 2016, 19, 160–61; HOLUB 2018, 257–58; LOSURDO 2019, 376; DROLET 2021, 144).

Nietzsche’s ideas regarding a rivalry between a united Europe and Russia should not be surprising, given the geopolitical realities of that time. In the 19th century, the Russian Empire expanded its territory extensively, often causing tensions with other European powers. Perhaps the most famous friction was with the purported rival to a united Europe, namely the British Empire, famously depicted in the popular imagination as the “Great Game” and played out across Central Asia (ALTMAN 2013, 13–14, 178; DROCHON 2016, 19, 158–61; DROLET 2021, 143). After all, it is no coincidence that both the “Great Game” and the “great politics” share the same tenor of “greatness”.

Not only had Nietzsche regarded Russia as a greater threat to Europe in a potentially constructive way, but he also held a significantly more favourable opinion of Russian culture compared to British culture. Nietzsche even occasionally entertained the idea of European culture thriving under Russian dominion as Greek culture had thrived under Rome (NIETZSCHE 2008a, 11 25[112]; see also ALTMAN 2013, 14; DROCHON 2016, 161–62). However, he predominantly preferred an independent and dominant European faction which he saw as already emerging (DROCHON 2016, 161–62).

At other times Nietzsche propounded closer ties between united Europe and Russia, seeing Anglo-American utilitarianism and democratism as the chief cultural threats to Europe. In this regard, he stated that Europeans needed to establish a comprehensive partnership with Russia, including a joint policy, with the primary aim of preventing Russia from becoming culturally anglicized due to a possible British takeover of its leading elements. In Nietzsche’s words, there should be “[n]o American future” for Russia (NIETZSCHE 2008a, 11 26[336]; see also ALTMAN 2013, 179; DOMBOWSKY 2014, 18, 63, 100).

What Nietzsche was saying here, I believe, is not that Europe and Russia should cease to be rivals (“rival” does not equate to “enemy”, as we will see

more clearly in the next section). Rather, they should reach an agreement of sorts concerning their dedication to secure themselves from the supposed harmful effects of Anglo-American ideology. This would allow them to engage in a “great politics” game with each other, which is undermined by utilitarianism and democratism. Hence Nietzsche’s call to abandon “the English principle of representation of the people”, since he held that what Europeans needed was “the representation of the great interests” (NIETZSCHE 2008a, 11 26[336]).

The same sentiment also underpins Nietzsche’s claims that the alleged parochial mindset of the English posed an exceptional peril to the world at the time, even considering Russian nihilists as having more merit than the utilitarians from England. Nietzsche finished this note with the proclamation that “[t]he German and the Slavonic races ought to grow into one another” (NIETZSCHE 11 26[335]; see also ALTMAN 2013, 177–78; DOMBOWSKY 2014, 63; LOSURDO 2019, 560). One should not immediately conclude that this necessarily meant that a united Europe and Russia should eventually merge, as such a conclusion would undermine the rivalry Nietzsche sought. Rather, I believe he is referring here to other Slavic nations, primarily West Slavs—Nietzsche often lavished praise on Poles, even (incorrectly) believing himself to be of noble Polish descent (NIETZSCHE 2005a, I 3; HOLUB 2018, 79). Therefore, Nietzsche’s comment on the union of Germanic and Slavic peoples further reveals his aspiration toward a unified Europe, and particularly his opposition to German nationalism, which contained a significant element of Slavophobia.

What about other world regions, those that are significantly weaker than united Europe and thus cannot be deemed its rivals in any substantial way? How did Nietzsche envision a united Europe’s relationship toward them? More precisely, given that Nietzsche conceived of a united Europe in imperial terms, aiming for dominance over the earth in order to imprint its culture upon it, did he perceive these weaker regions as Europe’s potential colonies of some sort?

Let us first address Nietzsche’s views on colonialism in general. In *Day-break* Nietzsche encouraged Europe’s colonialism as a solution to its social problems. He conveyed to the impoverished European working class that they should consider migrating to uncharted, foreign lands, where they should strive “to become *master[s]*” by all means necessary, including military. He saw this as the preferred alternative to their continued existence as the ignoble, subjugated class within Europe, which could cause them to become resentful and vengeful, plotting against the ruling classes of the continent (BRENNAN

2014, 173; DROCHON 2016, 158; LOSURDO 2019, 323, 374; DROLET 2021, 146). As if it were not clear enough how Nietzsche expected these workers-colonists to relate with the colonized peoples, the section continues with his pronouncement that instead of becoming ill-tempered and turning toward a life of crime in their European homelands, these potential flaws would be sublimated overseas into “a wild beautiful naturalness” and “heroism” (NIETZSCHE 2009, 206; see also BRENNAN 2014, 173–74; HOLUB 2018, 247–48; LOSURDO 2019, 375; DROLET 2021, 147). In the same vein, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra lamented for the times long gone when human beings craved “to be ruler over peoples” (NIETZSCHE 2006a, III 12; see also LOSURDO 2019, 572, 575). Once again, this idea of encouraging European workers to migrate to foreign lands did not arise to Nietzsche outside of any context. European workers were indeed urged to venture into colonies, as both workforce and settlers were always needed there, whereas at home they often faced hardship and a scarcity of business opportunities (HOLUB 2018, 258).

While Nietzsche opposed nationalistically driven colonialism, in line with his disdain for nationalism, he was not against colonialism in itself as the excerpts cited above reveal (LOSURDO 2019, 323, 573; DROLET 2021, 147). Nietzsche even offered a certain justification for colonialism, as indicated in the claim of his cited by Losurdo. Here Nietzsche stated that when dealing with actors of roughly equal power, it was wise to establish rules and regulations to prevent futile expense of energy and resources in potential conflict. However, in a situation where one side is evidently stronger than its opposition, a legal framework can no longer apply and force becomes the only law (NIETZSCHE 1996c, 26; LOSURDO 2019, 323).

Furthermore, to replace the departing European workers, whom he grew to regard as colonists, Nietzsche entertained the idea of bringing Chinese workers to Europe, since there were a great many of them and they were, allegedly, both mentally and physically suited for that kind of predicament (NIETZSCHE 2009, 206; see also BRENNAN 2014, 173–74; HOLUB 2018, 248; LOSURDO 2019, 319). Nietzsche might have derived this idea from the prevailing practice of frequently employing Chinese workers in European colonies and in the United States at the time. His writings contain prejudices that were prevalent in the West of his time concerning the Chinese’ supposed natural passivity and reluctance to change. The German philosopher believed these rendered Chinese the ideal obedient workers (NIETZSCHE 2006b, II 8; 2001, 24, 69, 377; 2005b, 20, 21; 2008a, 12 10[17]; see also BRENNAN 2014, 176; LOSURDO 2019, 204, 261, 313–17, 320, 788, 962). This is consistent with the general

stance of the superiority of Western over non-Western peoples that can occasionally be found in Nietzsche's writings, again shared by many of his contemporaries, with non-Western peoples sometimes referred to as "savage(s)" (NIETZSCHE 1996b, 12, 13, 111; 1996a, 119; 2009, 50, 206; 2001, 329; see also HOLUB 2018, 248; LOSURDO 2019, 318, 320).

Although Nietzsche directly addressed united Europe's colonialism only on rare occasions, when he did so, his stance was unequivocal. For example, in the previously mentioned unpublished note concerning the British Empire, Nietzsche proclaimed that for a united Europe to achieve global dominance, it required the British colonies, just as the German Empire of his time depended on Dutch colonies to strengthen its international standing (NIETZSCHE 2008a, 11 37[9]; DROCHON 2016, 160; HOLUB 2018, 248–49, 251–52; DROLET 2021, 144). Again, one should remember the historical context of the newly united Germany carving up its place alongside the already established European and world powers.<sup>4</sup>

Considering all this, it is reasonable to suppose that Nietzsche envisioned that a united Europe, in its quest for world domination and the expansion of its culture, would treat those regions significantly weaker than itself as its potential colonies of one form or another. In this regard, his vision closely resembled the political practices of his time, particularly the rhetoric of Europe's assumed "civilizing mission", which justified its imperialism and colonialism (see HOLUB 2018, 258–59). Nonetheless, Nietzsche seems to be more honest about the whole affair, since he did not claim that this arrangement would benefit the colonized peoples in any way, and instead focused solely on Europe's interests (see LOSURDO 2019, 949–53).

#### 4. THE UNITED EUROPE'S FOREIGN POLICY AND WAR

Given that the ultimate goal of the struggle between the great powers, in Nietzsche's vision, was to attain cultural hegemony over the entire earth, how was such world domination to be achieved? To be more specific, was this global contest expected to include military conflict since Nietzsche predicted "wars such as the earth has never seen" as a consequence of "great politics" (NIETZSCHE 2005a, IV 1; see also DROLET 2021, 5–6)? *Prima facie*, it would seem so, as there are numerous places in Nietzsche's oeuvre where he spoke

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<sup>4</sup> I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

of war in positive terms. After all, Nietzsche frequently declared that aggression and conflict are necessary parts of a healthy life, both of individuals and society at large (NIETZSCHE 2001, 283; 2008b, I 11; see DOMBOWSKY 2004, 95; 2014, 75; LOSURDO 2019, 372–73, 694, 698; DROLET 2021, 165).

Even more to the point, Nietzsche every so often related his perfectionist vision of politics to militarism. Hence the claim such as that “[t]he *maintenance of the military state* is the very last means” for safeguarding the practice of cultivating exceptional individuals (NIETZSCHE 2008a, 13 11[407]; see also NIETZSCHE 1996a, 320; 2005b, 57; 2008a, 11 34[203], 13 11[152]; ALTMAN 2013, 186; DOMBOWSKY 2014, 75, 115; DROCHON 2016, 168; LOSURDO 2019, 321, 685, 689–91). Here, it should be noted that many German intellectuals of the time supported the centralized form of the state, the view that was probably most famously expressed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.<sup>5</sup> However, in this very sentence, “the military state” is said to be “the very last means” of upholding Nietzsche’s political perfectionism. This suggests that Nietzsche perhaps thought of it as helpful but not as the preferred method for achieving the goal, if circumstances permit.

There are other remarks in Nietzsche’s writings that some authors cite as evidence that military conflict is not a part of his grand political vision, at least not in the ideal situation envisioned. Nietzsche’s disillusionment with the devastation brought about by the Franco-Prussian War is sometimes mentioned in this regard (DROCHON 2016, 179; DROLET 2021, 22). Further, Nietzsche questioned whether training so many people as soldiers in order to engage in wars between nations for economic gains was worthwhile, when they could have developed in other, more cultural ways (NIETZSCHE 1996b, 481; see also NIETZSCHE 2005c, VIII 4; DROCHON 2016, 156–57; DROLET 2021, 192–93). He even declared that peace between neighbourly nation-states, rather than war, was a higher and more preferable form of their interaction (NIETZSCHE 1996c, 284; see also LOSURDO 2019, 322; DROLET (2021, 162–63).

Yet, Losurdo rightly claims that all that such textual evidence implies is that Nietzsche opposed European states waging wars against each other (LOSURDO 2019, 322–23, 742). Hence Nietzsche’s lament: “But as the Greeks once waded in Greek blood, so Europeans now do in European blood” (NIETZSCHE 1996b, 442). Nietzsche was against wars driven by nationalism, as expected. After all, he envisioned a united Europe, not its nation-states, as a

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<sup>5</sup> I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

great contender on the global stage. Furthermore, he believed that the unification of Europe would be accomplished by various institutional, economic, and cultural factors rather than violent ways, which we have already discussed. This permitted Nietzsche to embrace military conflict as one of united Europe's legitimate methods of engagement in foreign affairs, both regarding its competitors and its potential colonies (LOSURDO 2019, 322–23, 742).

Still, there are authors who believe that when Nietzsche spoke of “war” as a necessary part of life, even celebrating it, he did not mean actual military conflict, but rather a spiritual, intellectual, or cultural struggle concerned with values (DOMBOWSKY 2004, 60). For instance, Drochon observes that Nietzsche's “great politics” presupposes “a war of spirits” (NIETZSCHE 2005a, IV 1). This Drochon construes as the struggle of master morality against slave morality (DROCHON 2016, 165–66, 171–73). Such type of war, according to Drochon, Nietzsche regarded as paramount because it represented the “intellectual war” bound to decide humanity's fate (179). In other words, when Nietzsche spoke of “war” he allegedly meant “a nonphysical war” that did not seek to completely destroy one's opponent (169).

To be fair, it should be mentioned that Drochon appears to be primarily addressing the manner in which the envisioned European unification would be brought about, rather than the manner in which Nietzsche envisioned a united Europe to relate to other world regions (2016, 175). As previously mentioned, he holds that Nietzsche's vision of a united Europe included its struggle with the Russian and British empires for world domination in order to impress its culture over the whole earth. However, he omits to tell us what exact forms this struggle would take (2, 20, 155, 158–62; see also NIETZSCHE 2005c, V 3; YOUNG 2010, 465; DROCHON 2016, 173–76). Moreover, although Drochon touches upon certain views of Nietzsche on colonization, he never directly confronts the issue of whether Nietzsche envisioned a united Europe as having colonies itself and whether armed forces, if needed, could be used in this regard (158–60, 162). Worse still, Drochon at times seems to suggest that Nietzsche's “great politics” would reject colonialism (159). Still, at other times, he appears to imply that Nietzsche might have viewed colonies as necessary for a united Europe (160).

In the end, it is true that Nietzsche frequently meant “war” in some metaphorical sense. Additionally, there are numerous instances where it is not entirely clear whether he referred to physical conflict or not (PEARSON 2022, 8, 26–28). Nevertheless, Nietzsche all too often spoke positively of war as of actual military conflict with physical violence and human casualties rather

unambiguously (NIETZSCHE 1996b, 444, 477; 2001, 362; 2002, 209; 2008b, III 25; 2005c, IX 38; 2008a, 11 25[105], 11 26[417]; see also DOMBOWSKY 2004, 60, 94; 2014, 75–76; DROCHON 2016, 179; LOSURDO 2019, 373, 375, 607–79, 685; PEARSON 2022, 29, 58). Indeed, Dombowsky convincingly argues that if one were to take war over values on a global scale as seriously as Nietzsche did, one would be hard-pressed to limit one's options solely to “spiritual” or “intellectual” warfare methods and completely reject the more coercive means (DOMBOWSKY 2014, 18–19; see also DOMBOWSKY 2004, 50, 109, 173; DROCHON 2016, 18). Thus, I believe, any interpretation of Nietzsche that disregards military conflict in his conception of a united Europe and its foreign policy is unsustainable.

But what is exactly the role of war in Nietzsche's (geo)political vision? The best approach to answering this is to examine Pearson's meticulous analysis of Nietzsche's general conception of conflict and apply it to the case at hand. Pearson claims that there are four chief types of conflict that Nietzsche concerned himself with. First, there are conflicts that aim at an opponent's physical annihilation, be it an individual or a group. Then, there are “agonal” conflicts which are supposed to be restrained, nonbelligerent, and equitable, waged between opponents that are roughly equal in strength. Still, some conflicts' purpose is to subdue and make use of weaker individuals or groups without obliterating them. Finally, if an individual or a group cannot be successfully utilized, a conflict arises by which they are sought to be eliminated in ways that vary from some form of repression to complete destruction (PEARSON 2022, 28–29).

Pearson correctly notes that Nietzsche both praised and condemned each type of conflict in his writings. This often led to selective readings and biased interpretations (2022, 29–32). Pearson's central claim is that Nietzsche, depending on the context, embraced both the more destructive types of conflict that seek to eliminate an opponent in some way and the more balanced types that aim to have a more productive relation toward an opponent (32–33). Sometimes these types of conflicts are combined into a single process. Such is the case with what Pearson calls “organisational struggle”. It simultaneously seeks to incorporate those elements within a society that can be exploited and to eliminate in various ways those elements that cannot be utilized (34–35, 173, 269–70).

Although Pearson does not apply this analysis to Nietzsche's vision of a united Europe and its foreign policy, some of his remarks are instructive. Let us first focus on the united Europe's relationship with its rivals. Recall that

they are envisioned as roughly equal in strength, as well as what was previously said on this issue, especially how Nietzsche hoped that Russia's might would grow and so compel Europe to become unified and stronger. Given that, it is reasonable to assume that Nietzsche would endorse the aforementioned agonal struggle between these powers as a fitting model. They would be expected to try to outdo but not destroy each other in the process, thus putting them in a better position to exploit weaker factions (DOMBOWSKY 2004, 45; PEARSON 2022, 270). Nietzsche would certainly agree that they would use various diplomatic, cultural, and economic means in their struggle for world domination. However, what about military means, since the agonal struggle is restrained?

Here it is important to consider Pearson's remark in a footnote regarding war. He notes that each war consists of various small-scale struggles to death between individual soldiers. Nevertheless, seen from the broader perspective of warring factions, the goal is much more frequently to coerce the opponent into yielding to certain demands rather than utterly annihilate them (2022, 28, 39). Pace Drochon, the fact that, as a rule, Nietzsche did not conceive of war as seeking total obliteration of one's adversary does not mean that it is "non-physical". Hence, from Nietzsche's standpoint, as long as a global power is not set to destroy its rival, there is no reason not to consider military conflict one of the available options in the struggle for world domination.

What about Nietzsche's vision of a united Europe's relation to regions significantly weaker than itself? Having in mind Nietzsche's apparent endorsement of the united Europe's colonialism, this relation would fit well within the aforementioned category of organizational struggle. Namely, the united Europe would seek to forcibly submit the weaker foreign lands in order to incorporate and exploit them in some manner. Concomitantly, it would aim to eliminate in various ways the elements within them that cannot be subjugated and made useful. Nietzsche permitted the world power's domination over weaker regions to be accomplished in cultural or economic ways. Still, it would include military effort on certain occasions, although it may not always be the most efficacious strategy, as Pearson points out (254, 269–70).

## CONCLUSION

After considering the key passages from Nietzsche's writings, three main elements emerge as central to his vision of a united Europe. First, he believed

that institutional, economic, and cultural factors were already driving most of Europe, although not all, toward becoming a single political unity bent on producing exceptional individuals and spreading its culture over the world. Furthermore, the German philosopher thought of Russian and British empires as primary competitors to a united Europe, while other regions of the world were seen as its colonies of one kind or another. Finally, Nietzsche regarded war as a significant part of united Europe's foreign policy.

We can conclude that Nietzsche's vision of a united Europe and its foreign policy expressed an imperialist outlook closely related to but not identical to the existent European imperialism of his time. While his primary reason for envisioning a colonialist future for a united Europe was not economic, and even less so nationalist, Nietzsche's idea of a united Europe bore an undeniable resemblance to historic European imperialism, the German philosopher's perfectionist rationale notwithstanding. His aspirations for a united Europe that would oversee world culture also echo Europe's alleged "civilizing mission", a concept often invoked by defenders of European imperialism and colonialism. To explore this relationship more deeply, it is necessary to take into account the broader historical context more extensively than was done here, and to compare Nietzsche's views with those of other prominent thinkers of his time. However, this goes well beyond the scope of this paper.

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“MISTRESS OF THE EARTH”:  
NIETZSCHE'S VISION OF THE EUROPEAN EMPIRE

SUMMARY

In this article, I explore Friedrich Nietzsche's vision of a unified Europe as a global empire bent on global domination in order to impress its culture upon the whole world. My goal is to demonstrate that this vision contained significant imperialist and colonialist elements, which I achieve by collating and perusing pertinent sections of Nietzsche's writings, while considering the work done by leading interpreters on the subject. First, I discuss what Nietzsche meant by “Europe” and how he understood its unification process. Subsequently, I address how Nietzsche envisaged the foreign policy of a united Europe, identifying world regions roughly similar in power to a united Europe as its rivals, while treating regions significantly weaker than the united Europe as its potential colonies of one form or another. Finally, I demonstrate whether and to what extent Nietzsche viewed war as an important part of the united Europe's foreign relations.

**Keywords:** Friedrich Nietzsche; Europe; imperialism; colonialism; foreign policy; war

“PANI ZIEMI” – IMPERIUM EUROPEJSKIE W UJĘCIU NIETZSCHEGO

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule przeanalizowano wizję zjednoczonej Europy przedstawioną przez Friedricha Nietzschego jako globalnego imperium dążącego do światowej dominacji w celu narzucenia swojej kultury całemu światu. Autor pragnie wykazać, że obraz ten zawierał istotne elementy imperialistyczne i kolonialistyczne. W tym celu zestawia i analizuje odpowiednie fragmenty pism Nietzschego, uwzględniając jednocześnie prace czołowych badaczy zajmujących się tym tematem. Omówiono, co Nietzsche rozumiał pod pojęciem „Europa” i jak wyobrażał sobie proces jej zjed-

noczenia. Autor następnie przedstawia Nietzschego wyobrażenie polityki zagranicznej zjednoczonej Europy, identyfikując regiony świata o sile zbliżonej do zjednoczonej Europy jako jej rywali, a regiony znacznie słabsze od zjednoczonej Europy traktując jako jej potencjalne kolonie w takiej czy innej formie. Na koniec pokazano, czy i w jakim stopniu Nietzsche postrzegał wojnę jako ważną część stosunków zagranicznych zjednoczonej Europy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Friedrich Nietzsche; Europa; imperializm; kolonializm; polityka zagraniczna; wojna