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REVIEWS

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DANIEL TUTT, *HOW TO READ LIKE A PARASITE: WHY THE LEFT GOT HIGH ON NIETZSCHE*, LONDON: REPEATER BOOKS, 2024.

Milan Urošević

The intellectual output of leftist thinkers after the 2008 financial crisis has been marked not only by a revival of Marxism but also by a critical reckoning with post-structuralist authors. Thinkers such as Deleuze and Foucault have for years been subject to scrutiny and reevaluation of their legacies and their influence on critiques of capitalist society and visions of emancipation. More recently, another figure has come under the spotlight of leftist scholars in the humanities and social sciences: Friedrich Nietzsche. This renewed attention stems, in part, from Nietzsche's significant influence on post-structuralist thought. The book in question draws inspiration from previous critical readings of Nietzsche by thinkers like Domenico Losurdo and Jan Rehmann.

Tutt approaches Nietzsche from a critical and historical standpoint, primarily aiming to demonstrate his fundamental incompatibility with leftist thought and emancipatory politics. He sets out to demystify what he calls the "hermeneutics of innocence" in Nietzsche studies – approaches that intentionally overlook the more troubling aspects of Nietzsche's thought in order to portray him as an apolitical thinker. For Tutt, Nietzsche must be read

historically, not as a timeless sage, but as a product of his era, an author engaged with the socio-political issues of his time.

Tutt argues that Nietzsche should be understood first and foremost as an enemy of socialism. He positions Nietzsche's philosophy as a reaction to the rise of the working class and socialist politics in the 19th century. According to Tutt, Nietzsche's thought is infused with a radical anti-egalitarianism and an aristocratic ideology that champions the intensification of social hierarchies and opposes movements aimed at their dissolution. Central to Tutt's reading is the idea that Nietzsche must be reckoned with as a formidable adversary to leftist and Marxist thought – an intellectual opponent who must be understood and confronted in order to build a truly progressive political project.

Yet the book is more than a philosophical critique. In the introduction, Tutt shares his personal journey of discovering Nietzsche in his youth. He describes how Nietzsche sparked his interest in philosophy and draws a parallel between his own youthful infatuation with Nietzsche and the broader allure Nietzsche has held for the left. The metaphor of "getting high" is deliberate: in

his early twenties, Tutt was captivated by Nietzsche's thought and adopted it uncritically. He compares this to the way leftist intellectuals embraced post-structuralism and Nietzsche, before many turned toward Marxism in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Now, Tutt returns to Nietzsche to reassess him from a Marxist standpoint and asks what Nietzsche means to us today.

Chapters two through four form a sustained analysis of Nietzsche's political project. Tutt argues that the core of Nietzsche's philosophy lies not in his moral, metaphysical, or aesthetic writings, but in his political intentions. Through concepts like the "pathos of distance", "perspectivism", and *otium*, Tutt presents Nietzsche as a thinker fundamentally opposed to the egalitarian aims of socialist movements. Nietzsche's political project, according to Tutt, sought to establish a new form of radical aristocracy, where the suffering, austerity, and mediocrity of the masses would create the conditions for a minority of "free spirits" to flourish. For Tutt, this vision represents a precursor to "accelerationism" – an ideology, found in both left and right variants, that advocates pushing capitalist dynamics to their extremes, including deepening social inequalities.

In chapter five, Tutt examines how leftist thinkers have appropriated Nietzsche in their theoretical and political work. He seeks to show the fundamental incompatibility between Nietzsche's and Marx's worldviews, warning of the risks involved in relying on Nietzschean thought for leftist theory. He illustrates this with the example of American writer and socialist activist Jack London, who attempted to reinterpret Nietzsche by casting workers as the "noble rulers" Nietzsche envisioned. Tutt contends that this appropriation ultimately led London to blur class and race distinctions, adopt social Darwinist views of class struggle, and develop racist attitudes.

Chapters six and seven examine Nietzschean concepts, which Tutt considers ideological tools for legitimizing capitalist society. In chapter six, he focuses on the concept of "eternal recurrence", contrasting it with Marx's thought. Tutt argues that eternal recurrence can be interpreted as a philosophical justification for capitalist domination and as a rejection of revolution, which Nietzsche viewed as an attempt to erase social differences. Nietzsche, according to Tutt, offered a perspective that legitimized cruelty and domination by elites in order to suppress the "moral tarantula" of egalitarianism that was spreading across Europe in his time.

Chapter seven centers on Nietzsche's concept of "ressentiment". This chapter is notable because Tutt argues that this concept should be rejected entirely. He believes that adopting this term leads to an ontologization of resentment, effectively dismissing entire social groups as irredeemably trapped in this mindset. For Tutt, this hinders the formation of solidarity and the building of emancipatory movements. While bold, this chapter makes some conceptual leaps: Tutt overlooks the potential usefulness of the concept of resentment as a tool for ideological critique. It can be used to analyze the discursive mechanisms through which individuals justify their social positions by appealing to moral narratives. Tutt does not sufficiently explore why using the term must necessarily essentialize resentment and prevent us from seeing it as something that can be overcome.

In the final chapter, Tutt calls for a "parasitic" reading of Nietzsche. He acknowledges that Nietzsche is an unavoidable opponent for the left but also a revealing symptom. Nietzsche's epistemology and ideological stance are, in Tutt's view, fundamentally incompatible with leftist politics, and his appeal among the left is a symptom that can teach us something about the left's

condition since the mid-20th century. By reading Nietzsche parasitically, we can develop new intellectual tools to revitalize leftist theory. Tutt does not advocate discarding Nietzsche altogether; rather, he calls for learning from him. As he remarked in an interview, Nietzsche should be “moved from the driver’s seat to the passenger’s seat” in the vehicle of leftist thought – still present, but no longer steering.

Ultimately, *How to Read Like a Parasite* is not written for a narrowly academic audience. It is aimed at a broader public and stands as a notable example of an engaged social theory. Through a deft combination of personal reflection

and historically grounded critique, Tutt guides readers deep into Nietzsche’s philosophy, enacting a Nietzschean “philosophizing with a hammer” that shatters the idealized myths surrounding the thinker. The book is marked by Tutt’s deep ambivalence toward Nietzsche: a mix of fascination with his ideas and awareness of the deeply reactionary core of his political vision. Tutt resolves this ambivalence by treating Nietzsche as an adversary – a figure who must be reckoned with if we are to advance our own thought. For all its Marxist grounding, *How to Read Like a Parasite* is, above all, a Nietzschean analysis of Nietzsche.

