Friedrich Nietzsche: Friend or Foe to Democratic Liberalism

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Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche occupies a contested, yet essential place of privilege in modern political philosophy. His poetic exhortations to readers to take personal responsibility for their beliefs and actions reveals an unsurpassed appreciation for individual liberty, but many contemporary theorists understand Nietzsche as dangerously inegalitarian, on account of his view that not all individuals are fit to achieve the highest freedom of self-creation. Nietzsche's tolerance of, and even preference for, hierarchies of power and human worth seem to put him at odds with contemporary liberalism: both see individual liberty as a central goal, but liberalism also strives uncompromisingly for the general reduction of suffering and equal political participation. Nietzsche's apparent apathy towards these latter two goals makes him a problematic ally for modern theorists, many of whom write him off as apolitical, insufficiently liberal, or even inherently fascist. In this essay, I will be arguing that such one-dimensional interpretations of Nietzsche overlook a fundamental affinity between Nietzsche and modern liberals such as Richard Rorty and threaten to obscure essential conceptual resources that contemporary political theorists would do well to avail themselves of. I begin by refuting recent readings of Nietzsche that see him as indifferent to political systems and theories. I then proceed to certain passages of Nietzsche's which have been used by his critics to suggest that any political system derived from his work would be tainted by despotic and aristocratic elements, arguing instead that Nietzsche's insistence on a division of rank among men can be beneficially understood as a frank examination of social and aesthetic power. I will then circle back to highlight the enduring debts that post-modern liberalism owes to Nietzschean thought, making the point that theorists such as Rorty, who cherry-pick certain aspects of his thought while disavowing others, make the mistake of reading Nietzsche as a mortal enemy of liberalism, when in fact he offers to be one of its greatest allies and most useful critics.

I Attempts to Construe Nietzsche as Apolitical

Nietzsche's legacy for contemporary political theorists is, to say the least, complicated. Walter Kaufmann, one of the preeminent translators of Nietzsche, claims that Nietzsche is primarily an anti-political thinker, concerned only with the private cultivation of perfection.[1] At first blush, this is not an unreasonable analysis: the titular protagonist of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* provides us with a template for applying Nietzsche's thought primarily through prolonged, self-enforced social isolation coupled only with sporadic involvement in the lives of others, characterized chiefly by non-political discourse. However, we would do well to remember that Kaufmann's translations and analyses of Nietzsche began at a time when the latter was still regarded by many as the well-spring of Nazi ideology—in order to downplay this connection, and to "rehabilitate" Nietzsche, Kaufmann might have felt somewhat compelled to deemphasize and marginalize Nietzsche's politics

[1] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 418.

in an attempt to "rescue [Nietzsche] from an association with Nazism" and fascism.[2] This project was doubtlessly made more plausible by the unsystematic nature of Nietzsche's work— without a comprehensive scaffolding of premises and arguments with an obvious coherency to be preserved, Kaufmann and others might have felt that many of Nietzsche's more popular aphorisms could stand on their own without being fully contextualized in Nietzsche's whole body of work. Other prominent Nietzsche interpreters, such as Alexander Nehamas, buttressed this non-political reading of Nietzsche by insisting that the emancipatory journey of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* necessitated an escape from politics.[3] Similarly, commentators such as Leslie Thiele have argued that the individuality championed by Nietzsche cannot flourish in the political domain, and that attempts to read him as a political thinker necessarily distort his individualistic vision of human flourishing.[4]

II Nietzsche's New Politics of Creative Power

Part of the reason why theorists like Kaufmann were able to discount the political implications of Nietzsche's work is because Nietzsche himself displayed great disdain for politics *as his contemporaries conceived of politics*. But this in itself is nothing new—Nietzsche was scornful of many contemporary practices, but even ethics, which he endlessly critiques, is not taken by him to be inessential to the point that it must be expunged from human existence. Rather, Nietzsche condemns old modalities of morality to make room for the new and does the same for politics. Confronted with the obvious reality that "Nietzsche viewed all politics as petty, herd-like behavior, beneath his dignity and that of his higher humans", we need not conclude that political action and theory must forever remain the object of derision.[5] There are several passages in Nietzsche's work which make abundantly clear that the old practice of politics is something to be overcome: Nietzsche speaks hopefully of a "grand politics", made possible by his critiques, that will "supersede petty politics" and create a domain of social and creative action which does not demean the political actor through participation.[6] Like the petty politics of old, this "grand politics" will necessarily involve cooperation and conflict on the level of power relations and authority, but the latter is distinguished from the former by the contributions of great individuals whose primary means of action is not the drafting of laws, but the creation of meaning and the shaping of culture.

Unsurprisingly, this brings us back to where we began—the possibility that Nietzsche's views will lead to the endorsement of aristocratic domination or fascism. We must remember that Nietzsche believed that only a select few would be capable of the free re-creation of values, and recall his ominous and repeated warnings that all incapable of this feat are fated to "go under." Nietzsche believed that only a few great philosophers and leaders of the future would be able to "create values by which they themselves can live and flourish—they and perhaps a few others like them."[7] This has the unfortunate consequence (unfortunate for those who privilege democracy and equal political participation) that only those at the top of Nietzsche's hierarchy of self-creation enjoy the maximal degree of political or moral autonomy—those at the bottom seem destined to have their values forced upon them as the ruling elite see fit. There is, of course, a relatively uncontroversial way to understand this hierarchy—people of every age have looked to the intellectual and artistic elite for

[2]Ruth Abbey and Fredrick Appel, "Nietzsche and the Will to Politics," *The Review of Politics* 60, (1998), 113.

[3]Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 225.

[4]Leslie Thiele, "The Agony of Politics: The Nietzschean Roots of Foucault's Thought," *American Political Science Review* 84 (1990), 913.

[5]Abbey and Appel, 90.

[6]Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 208.

[7]Alexander Nehamas, "Beyond Good and Evil," *Reading Nietzsche*, ed. Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 57.

inspiration, and theorists such as Foucault have demonstrated that structures of authority tend to propagate values regardless of whether or not they are helmed by individuals who have measured up to Nietzsche's standards of self-creation. However, the concept of such a hierarchy becomes less attractive when we consider some of Nietzsche's other comments on *Rangordnung*, or the order of rank which would prevail in his ideal society.

III Natural Hierarchies of Cultural Power

Nietzsche famously wrote that "[e]very enhancement of the type 'man' has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and difference in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other."[8] This statement would seem to take us far beyond any benevolent aristocracy or reasonable meritocracy into the realm of outright exploitation. Yet here we should recall that Nietzsche's conceptions of exploitation and power do not necessarily entail an oppressive form of slavery. When he writes that exploitation is a fundamental organic process, what he has in mind is the essential striving of a being that takes nourishment and creates opportunity from its environment.[9] When he speaks of slavery as a necessity, he is not referring to the brutal tradition of buying and selling individuals, but to the more general role that unskilled labor and mediocrity play in supporting the loftier cultural endeavors of civilization.[10]

Lest we imagine that the power wielded by Nietzsche's intellectual elite would consist chiefly of forceful domination, theorists like Jacob Golomb remind us that the most important power wielded by Nietzsche's elites is not primitive force (*Kraft*), but rather the creative amalgamation (accomplished through *Macht*) of instinctual drives into a coherent being.[11] It is the former that is used to inflict misery on others, and Nietzsche contends that his ideal beings would refrain from the superfluous use of such force, which in fact undermines the project of self-creation by failing to attend to the inner needs of the individual. Exploitation of the other that fails to transform the exploiter is not strength, but weakness.[12] While Nietzsche's hierarchy of individuals may seem to trample on the dignity of "lesser beings," this need not be the case—those at the top are in fact bound to their "inferiors," not by the dictates of morality, but instead through their common bonds of "thrownness" into a certain time and place, as well as the self-interest of the elite in redeeming one's community and channeling societal energy towards a greater end which can be affirmed by all. If we can accept that these cultural elites, like experts of any type, cannot help but exert a greater proportional influence upon the determination of values and the direction of society, then Nietzsche's hierarchy of individuals might become slightly more palatable to modern liberal sensibilities. However, if this hierarchy is given too much importance—if those who fail to rise to Nietzsche's challenge of self-creation are treated as cattle and given no consideration whatsoever in the ordering of social priorities—then we will again have cause to challenge Nietzsche's claims. We will return to this question later in this essay.

[8] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 257.

[9] *Ibid.*, 259.

[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, trans. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57.

[11] Jacob Golomb, "How to De-Nazify Nietzsche's Philosophical Anthropology?" in *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?*, ed. Jacob Golomb and Robert S. Wistrich (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 22.

[12] *Ibid.*, 26.

IV The Death of God and Liberal Ironism

Having established that Nietzsche is a "political" thinker, and that the "grand politics" which he envisioned is not *necessarily* hostile or abusive to those who fall outside the aristocracy of self-creation, we now turn to the more oblique debts which modern political thought owes to Nietzsche. Here I am not speaking of any explicitly political claims which Nietzsche made that have subsequently been accepted or adapted by modern theorists, but rather his metaphysical (or, more accurately, anti-metaphysical) claims that have been accepted by a great many modern theorists. These claims all relate to Nietzsche's attacks on the idea of absolute truth, and they can be summarized in three parts. First, Nietzsche claimed that there was no super-human perspective from which right and wrong, good and evil, could be adjudicated. The "death of God" meant, for Nietzsche, that humans could not ground their moral principles in something greater than or prior to themselves. Second, Nietzsche argued that humanity possessed no single distinctive essence which could provide us with an unquestionable sense of direction. This follows from his first point—our projects and preferences cannot be justified or judged by something greater than ourselves, because no such "something" exists. Finally, and following as well from the first point, Nietzsche claimed that language should be understood as a rhetorical device or social practice rather than a means of attaching truth values to what we say or think about the world. All of these insights have since been incorporated into the work of a bevy of political thinkers, including Richard Rorty, whose advocation of "liberal ironism" will serve as the focus of this part of my essay.

Rorty sums up his relationship with Nietzsche's thought by highlighting that which both of their philosophies share—the "idea that truth [must] be made rather than found."[13] This amounts to the recognition that scientific study, for all its value, cannot tell us what individual and social ends are worth pursuing. Rorty understands this recognition as having emerged in the aftermath of the French Revolution, when theorists came to grips with the fact that human institutions, when radically altered, would give rise to novel modalities of human existence.[14] The French Revolution not only demonstrated that such radical change in "human nature" was possible, but that such changes, even when justified through appeals to rationality and equality, could still be disputed on the basis of their value and desirability: the "righteousness" of such changes was not a matter of accordance with any essential nature belonging to human beings or of progress towards a pre-ordained teleology, but rather something to be measured against contemporary aesthetic sensibilities. The question, therefore, that Rorty seeks to address through his philosophy, is not "what sort of institutions will enable us to become what we *ought* to be", but instead "what modalities of life can we aspire to for our own sakes, and what institutions might tend to their realization." The same question is posed by John Rawls when he asserts that "[w]hat justifies a conception of justice is not its being true to an order antecedent and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realization that, given our history and the traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us."[15]

The affinity between Rorty (as well as other late-modern political theorists) and Nietzsche can be summarized by saying that both are philosophers of *contingency*. Having forsaken any reliance on supposedly absolute principles which might guide human endeavors, both philosophers willfully deprive themselves of the possibility of "philosophical foundations" which could be used to definitively ground systems of politics or belief. Nietzsche claimed that such absolute foundations were a fiction, and Rorty, accepting the wisdom of this claim, or at least believing that the post-modern revolution in philosophy (spearheaded, of course, by Nietzsche himself) makes the use

[13] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.
[14] *Ibid.*, 3.
[15] John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), 519.

of such foundations highly dubious, resolves to proceed without them.[16] This of course opens both men up to accusations of nihilism and relativism from those who feel that without absolute principles, we could not continue to live out our convictions with the same firmness and energy. However, much like Nietzsche, who suggests that the strongest of individuals will, despite this loss of "philosophical foundations", continue to exert themselves fully on behalf of beliefs that they understand to have no foundation outside themselves, Rorty contends that we can find fulfilment and motivation, even freedom, in the acceptance of our contingency: "a belief can still regulate action, still be thought worth dying for, among people quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstances."[17]

For both Rorty and Nietzsche, giving up on the project of securing "philosophical foundations" for our practices and beliefs does not entail the end of philosophy or of critical thought. It is not the case that, deprived of absolute foundations for our way of life, we must uncritically accept tradition and continue to live as we have been living. Instead, this change heralds a shift in how we practice philosophy—instead of looking *beyond* the human realm and justifying ourselves by recourse to incontestable rationality or omnipotent deities, we must look *behind* our contemporary circumstances and practices, to the history that has led us to the present. This is exactly what Nietzsche sought to accomplish through his cultivation of genealogies—he traced the history of ideas (as Foucault would later do with institutions), not to identify a unifying essence or rationality behind human history, but to re-describe our history in a way that gives us a fresh and useful perspective on the present. His particular accounts, such as his narrative of the emergence of "slave morality," are not presented as the *only* way to understand the past (as definitively *true*), but were carefully crafted to highlight aspects of our historical development that we can then take a normative stance on, accepting or overcoming based on values that may or may not have existed in the past, but are constitutive of our self- understanding in the present. These historical narratives are not to be understood as the *discovery* of who we are—rather, their very telling is a transformative act that cannot fail to alter our sense of self-understanding.

Just as Nietzsche understood the method of genealogy to be an essential tool of philosophy in a de-deified world, Rorty characterizes the work of modern philosophers as "re-description." Rorty's ideal philosophers give up on the project of identifying the essences that idealists assume lie behind appearances, and instead set out to engage with appearances by "re-describ[ing] lots and lots of things."[18] Recognizing that language is a provisional toolkit for human relations and self-expression rather than an accurate means of representing reality (since "reality," in the objective sense, does not exist to be represented), Rorty's "ironist" philosophers play the role of poets more so than traditional academics. Like Nietzsche himself, they conceive of "truth" as a "mobile army of metaphors", and therefore are willing to find value in highly personal, distinctly contingent accounts of human experience, so long as these resound with their listeners and help them to think and act in ways appropriate to the times.[19] This is not unlike what Nietzsche sought to accomplish by deemphasizing traditionally absolutist debates over morality—what should we become to best accord with our human nature? —and instead focusing on an entirely different question: how can we live in such a way that we could take responsibility for our lives and will their eternal recurrence? The hallmark of ironist philosophy is that it is willing to disregard perennial questions that have always been treated with deference, instead taking up pragmatic debates that are all the more useful for their ability to be argued differently from various perspectives. Accepting, with Nietzsche, that language is essentially rhetorical, and that the objects which it describes are subject only to our

[16] Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in *The Pragmatism Reader*, ed. Robert B. Talisse and Scott F. Aikin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 377.
[17] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 189.
[18] *Ibid.*, 9.
[19] *Ibid.*, 27.

own, contingent evaluations of worth, ironist philosophers are undeterred by objections that stem from pure logic or correspondence-views of truth. Their re-descriptions succeed or fail in the same way as the work of an artist—purely based on merit in terms of accessibility and rhetorical force.

V The Prospects for Liberal Solidarity According to Nietzsche

Thus far I have only outlined the "ironist" component of Rorty's "liberal ironism" as that which accords with Nietzsche's vision of an improved philosophy of the future. But the second component—the "liberal" part—is what differentiates the two men. Nietzsche threw open the floodgates of re-description such that any creative and self-disciplined attempt at revaluation would count as a victory for personal freedom, but Rorty is anxious to endorse only those metaphors and re-descriptions that tend to reduce cruelty and humiliation.[20] Rorty justifies this limitation on re-description through a move that comes dangerously close to a revival of the universalist doctrines that he rejects: he argues that, although people lack a shared essence or absolute teleology, they are sufficiently alike in terms of their susceptibility to suffering and humiliation to be bound together in "solidarity."[21] Of course, Rorty does not expect this morally salient commonality to be sufficient to convince all people to treat all others with compassion—he recognizes that "because [the other] is human" is generally an unconvincing call to generous action.[22] What is needed is a thicker sense of shared identity, one that can only be achieved (in the post-absolutist world) only by a community of liberal ironists who, having accepted the contingency of their beliefs and values, are nonetheless capable of insisting upon these as *their* preferred and most appropriate means of creating meaning in an inherently meaningless world.

In order to make such a community a reality, Rorty insists that we must maintain a strict separation between our public and private lives. In private, we can be as Nietzschean as we please, questioning dominant norms and living, as best we can, by our own reevaluations of the world. However, when it comes to public life and our actions that affect others, Rorty would constrain action by Mill's harm principle, nipping any lifestyles that unfavorably impact others in the bud.[23] The alternative threatens to undermine the anti-suffering aspirations of a liberal community by allowing "the prodigious power of subjectivity [to simply undo] all the potential allegiances which might bind it."[24] If we side with Nietzsche and encourage people to put into practice all conceivable re-descriptions of the world, then it seems inevitable that someone will come up with a revaluation of values that posits an end more important than the reduction of cruelty, and this is simply unacceptable for Rorty's committed *liberal* ironist.[25] Therefore Nietzsche, as someone for whom the reduction of suffering is only of secondary importance to the task of self-creation, is understood by Rorty to be a corrosive influence on liberalism and ought to be treated as a foreigner or "madman" and accorded zero influence on questions of public life.[26]

The question of whether we can truly separate public from private life takes on a new character within Rorty's liberal ironism. Any student of John Stuart Mill will recognize that it can be exceedingly difficult, sometimes impossible, to draw a firm distinction between self-regarding and

[20] *Ibid.*, 91.
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] *Ibid.*, 191.
[23] *Ibid.*, 63.
[24] Gerald M. Mara and Suzanne L. Dovi, "Mill, Nietzsche, and the Identity of Postmodern Liberalism," The *Journal of Politics* 57 (1995), 3.
[25] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 65.
[26] Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in *The Pragmatism Reader*, ed. Robert B. Talisse and Scott F. Aikin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 389.

other-regarding action. However, Rorty, per usual, takes a unique approach by acknowledging that this distinction is not an *essential* one, but rather one that is provisionally made within a self-critical vocabulary and set of changing traditions.[27] This will be of some comfort to those who are able to accept his overall framework, but it means that not only the particular distinction that gets drawn between public and private life is up for debate—the whole concept of a public/private divide is open to challenge. Accordingly, I shall be arguing that this division (if taken too seriously), coupled with Rorty's willingness to cast Nietzsche aside after borrowing so much of his theoretical foundations, threatens to obscure an important aspect of life that makes essential reference to both the "private" and the "public", and in doing so actually undermines the prospects for solidarity. I am speaking here of what Nietzsche referred to as the "Dionysian" aspect of human life—those experiences in which one is able to ecstatically (or depressively) experience oneself as continuous with all life and existence.

Although he disavowed the existence of any unifying essence of humanity that could give direction and justification to our projects, Nietzsche was not as critical of the prospect of political solidarity as Rorty seems to suggest. In fact, much like Rorty, he believed that people's shared susceptibility to suffering and sensitivity to art could serve as the grounds for a strongly felt cultural identity which translated to political solidarity and mutual understanding. In Nietzsche's analysis of ancient Greek society, it was the public theater and the art form of tragedy which helped the Greeks shed in their egoistic private identities and collectively identify as a cohesive cultural unit: "Under the spell of the Dionysian... the bond between man and man... is re-established."[28] In the creation, performance, and enjoyment of such art forms, culture itself was manufactured as the basis for a political identity far stronger than many with which we are familiar today.[29] Such public aesthetic displays are necessary for Nietzsche because he felt language to be woefully inadequate at expressing the strong feelings that both individuate and unite us as humans.[30] As politics is essentially a matter of negotiation or outright conflict between these feelings, artistic expression serves not only to foster compromise (by revealing a common basis for strongly held views), but to forestall conflict altogether (by propagating a shared aesthetic sensibility and general worldview). It is for this reason that Tracy Strong ascribes to Nietzsche the position that "[p]hilosophy and politics and tragedy are close to being coterminous—or they should be."[31] Far from simply serving public aims of solidarity or functioning as private projects, music and tragedy have the power to aid all of us on our journey to self-creation—the figure of the great artist and his works can serve as an exemplar, something which "one recognizes as part of oneself but which one is not yet and to which one feels an obligation of becoming."[32] It becomes impossible, when speaking of culture and art, to maintain a strict division between private and public existence: aesthetic experiences of this sort define the self by essential reference to the unspeakable feelings of the other, and instill the "public" virtues of compassion and empathy through shared moments of catharsis.

Conclusion

Obviously, Nietzsche is not as hostile to the project of solidarity as Rorty's dismissal of him as a "madman" makes him out to be—he believes that the success of any political endeavor is bound up with the success of creative attempts to inspire identification with one's contemporaries. How

[27] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 86.
[28] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.
[29] Tracy B. Strong, "Nietzsche and the Political: Tyranny, Tragedy, Cultural Revolution, and Democracy," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 35/36 (2008), 52.
[30] *Ibid.*, 54.
[31] *Ibid.*, 58.
[32] *Ibid.*, 53.

then are we to make sense of his continued insistence on an order of rank which establishes and denigrates a lower class of beings, thereby actively interfering with this very project of solidarity? One possibility, which Nietzsche himself might have endorsed, is that this order of rank itself is based upon one's ability to appreciate or create great works of art, the experience of which helps transform or found culture.[33] Although we might hope that in this case, those at the top of the hierarchy would feel compassion for those below them, or at least be limited in what kinds of sensibilities and values they could impress upon their inferiors by the latter's tastes, there remains the possibility that these "aesthetic overlords" would craft a culture that benefits themselves to the disadvantage of the less culturally fluent and creative. Another possibility, more intriguing for contemporary liberals and liberal ironists, is that Nietzsche would have been wholly in favor of such predatory artistic practices, but that he only persisted in his advocation of authoritarian structures because he himself was steeped in an authoritarian culture. Psychologist Wilhelm Reich has suggested that "the authoritarian psychic structure can be so ingrained in an individual that even if other important needs conflict with it, the individual will hold fast to authoritarian values... [and find himself] especially drawn to authoritarian political leadership and to authoritarian social structures."[34] This might help explain why Nietzsche seems, *contra* his usual anti-essentialism, to take so seriously his categorization of those who fail to self-create as intrinsically inferior.[35] Of course, there is also a third possibility, suggested by Zarathustra's love of those who must "go under" (but made uncertain by Nietzsche's penchant for ironic prose)—that he does not mean for us to take his *Rangordung* too seriously, as if those who fail to rise to the challenge of aesthetic re-valuation are to be despised and abused at the whim of their "superiors." It might be that such individuals are merely excluded from the political process by their own shortcomings—unable to influence the transformation of culture through creative action, they are realistically only capable of taking cues from their more poetically-inclined fellow citizens.

I have argued that we need not understand Nietzsche as the natural enemy of liberalism that Rorty makes him out to be— there is at least one reading of Nietzsche which offers to buttress the twin pillars of irony and solidarity which serve as the basis for Rorty's political thought. My rehabilitation of Nietzsche as a potential ally to contemporary liberalism turns primarily on his re-description of politics as essentially being an affair of cultural transformation: if we can understand his hierarchy of rank to be a descriptive tool for gauging the aesthetic genius of individuals and their consequent impact upon cultural trends and feelings of solidarity, then his claim that some men are fated to be "slaves" of some manner or other amounts merely to the unremarkable and relatively inoffensive claim that such individuals will be followers rather than leaders or equal participants in the political/cultural arena. However, the Nietzsche that I have described is still a long way from being a committed democrat. But this is merely because he does not conceive of the ballot-box as the primary arena in which politics is carried out. Insisting that all citizens are equal participants in a democracy by virtue of their equal ability to cast votes is, to Nietzsche, patently absurd. The truth is that citizens will vote based on their values and interests, and that, more often than not, these values and interests will be the products of the cultural hegemony of an aesthetically-gifted intellectual elite. Ironically enough, this inegalitarian reality means that representative democracy does not preclude the emergence of the hierarchical power structures which liberal theorists routinely criticize Nietzsche for endorsing.

In this essay, I have endeavored to show that the longstanding tension between Nietzsche and modern liberals is mostly a product of the latter misunderstanding the former. Having borrowed so much from Nietzsche, contemporary theorists have been deterred from a full engagement with

[33] *Ibid.*, 56.

[34] Ofelia Schutte, "Nietzsche's Politics" in *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 298.

[35] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 107.

the great thinker's work by the lingering fear that something in Nietzsche's philosophy pulls one inexorably towards fascism or a domineering aristocratic form of government. Far from this being accurate, it is actually the case that Nietzsche himself provides the essential techniques for political transformation and cultural renewal in a de-deified world, techniques which theorists like Richard Rorty have only recently begun to pick up on. By treating Nietzsche as an enemy and a "madman", modern political philosophers have not only deprived themselves of a crucial source of inspiration, but have prematurely foreclosed the possibility of taking seriously some of Nietzsche's potential critiques of liberalism, such as William Connolly's suggestion that liberal policies contribute to a toxic buildup of resentment.[36] Whether these such critiques have the potential to transform liberal democracy for the better is, unfortunately, a topic for another essay. All that is certain is that, until modern liberals are able to approach the whole of Nietzsche's corpus without bias or irrational fear, they will be unable to avail themselves of the full force of Nietzsche's creative genius.

[36]William Connolly, *Identity and Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 78.

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