



# Nietzsche's Anti-democratic Liberalism

**Béla Egyed**

*Written for K&K*

## Introduction:

Since W. Kaufmann's attempt more than half a century ago (Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist, [N]1950) to rehabilitate Nietzsche as a progressive thinker there has been a lively debate about the relation between Nietzsche's philosophical and political positions. According to some, Nietzsche's "reactionary politics" follow naturally from his doctrines of Will to Power and the Overman. (Bruce Detwiler argues for this position in: Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism [D], 1990.) Others maintain that, properly interpreted, Nietzsche's philosophical views imply a progressive political

position which Nietzsche could not arrive at because he was captive of a number of misguided assumptions. (Mark Warren in Nietzsche and Political Thought [W], 1988; and William E. Connolly in Political Theory and Modernity [C], 1988, take this position.) I am going to defend a version of W. Kaufmann's thesis that Nietzsche's teachings on the Overman and the Will to Power ought not to be interpreted in (traditional) political terms. However, in contrast to Kaufmann, I will argue that in his middle period Nietzsche does put forth a fairly coherent political position and, furthermore, I will argue that his doctrine of Will to Power does have *some* political implications. In opposition to Kaufmann's

critics, on the other hand, I will argue that Nietzsche's attacks in his final period, on what he calls "herd morality", are compatible with constitutional liberalism.

The title of this paper reflects my view that, "liberalism" and "democracy" denote related but separable concepts. Fareed Zakaria, in a paper entitled "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy" (*Foreign Affairs*, 1997) had alerted us to the fact that outside the Western world "Democracy is flourishing, constitutional liberalism is not." C.B. McPherson in his *Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (1977) has argued, by contrast, that liberalism has not always been democratic. We could, then, say that just as democracy is possible without liberalism, liberalism is also possible without it? In fact, the debate about Nietzsche's political views would gain from the admission that, while Nietzsche was a sworn enemy of populism and egalitarianism, and that he gave only a grudging support to existing democratic institutions, he was also an enthusiastic supporter of the struggle for liberty. This is the position I want to defend in this paper. However, I must admit that making my case is not without difficulties. All interpretations, including mine, that attempt a unified reconstruction of Nietzsche's writings on politics, will be faced with some exegetical problems. A passage can always be found which presents problems for any given attempt at interpreting him. But mine, in particular, will also have to address some conceptual problems. In the course of this paper, I will have to clarify in what sense Nietzsche was a liberal but not a democrat. Also, I will have to show that Nietzsche's theory of Will to Power does not imply political domination of the

majority of people by what he calls the "higher types".

It might help if I stated my basic orientation to these two conceptual problems at the outset. First, I do not think that it is possible to divorce liberalism and democracy completely. Different people might understand different things by these two concepts. That is one reason why they are so often collapsed in to one another. Liberals must accept, minimally, the democratic idea that those in power should be willing to respond to the needs, and legitimate desires, of those over whom they rule. But, a liberal could reject populism, egalitarianism, and be skeptical of the merits of electoral politics without compromising his or her commitment to the rights of individuals to develop themselves, according to their needs, abilities, and inclinations. Second, I take Nietzsche's doctrine of Will to Power to be, essentially, about agency: spelling out the way in which agent unities are constituted, and about the conditions they have to meet if they are to remain as unities in an environment which is not within their control.

On the textual level, I need to show that there is substantial evidence that Nietzsche's political views, understood in the traditional sense, are the ones he articulates in his "middle period", in *Human, All-Too-Human* (HAH), and in *The Wanderer and Its Shadow* (WS). I need to show this in order to support my contention that Nietzsche gives a grudging support to the accomplishments of liberal democracy. This, in turn, raises the following conceptual question: In what sense is his liberalism "anti-democratic"? My short answer to this question is that

Nietzsche was, indeed, an “aristocratic radical”. He was, in other words, a nineteenth century European liberal, and, in spirit, a constitutional monarchist. And, those familiar with the politics of late nineteenth century Central European politics might agree with me that monarchists were much closer to liberalism than were their democratic opponents, namely, those who were populists and nationalist. And, as I will show later, Nietzsche’s most vitriolic attacks were against forms of populism, and his general criticism of “the democratic idea” was motivated mostly by his mistrust of the “new idols”, political imposters seeking to take the place left vacant by the death of God. In addition, I need to show that, in spite of his harsh criticism of liberal institutions, Nietzsche was a liberal: to show, in particular, that Nietzsche’s critique of liberalism was an internal critique. It will help my case to note, first, that he was at the same time an admirer of liberation movements and a critic of the ossification that sets in once these movements have reached their goal; and, second, that he was suspicious of the aspirations of the classical liberal project of achieving a harmonious community of equal individuals united by a common acceptance of universal moral laws.

### Interpreting Nietzsche:

For the sake of simplicity, I divide interpretations of Nietzsche’s political writing into three main categories. First, there are those, like Walter Kaufmann, who consider Nietzsche’s philosophical position politically irrelevant. For them, Nietzsche is primarily a psychologist advocating

the self-perfection of solitary individuals. According to Kaufmann, for example, Nietzsche’s teaching of Will to Power requires the distinction between “true power” and “mere power”. True power is an attribute of the creative, strong, individual who seeks not to dominate others, but to overcome himself. “[The] leitmotif of Nietzsche’s life and thought, Kaufmann says, [is] the theme of the anti-political individual who seeks self-perfection far from the modern world.” (N, p. 418). Mere power, on the other hand, is the attribute of the weak who strives desperately to attain power it does not have.

Second, there are those, like Mark Warren and William E. Connolly, who hold that Nietzsche’s philosophical position does have political implications, but not the ones Nietzsche drew from them. Warren, whose point of view might be considered neo-Kantian, maintains that Will to Power is an “ontology of social practice”. He sees Will to Power as universal will to agency, a self reflective motive of action, (“Nietzsche and Political Philosophy”, in: Political Theory [P], 1985, p.197) “sanctioning some values – positive freedom, autonomy, individuality and plurality, for example – and not others” (P, p.205 ). But, in Warren’s view Nietzsche failed to draw the right political conclusions from his philosophy because he was captive of a number of “uncritical assumptions” (*ibid.*) Connolly, who follows Foucault in his interpretation of Nietzsche, sees in the doctrine of Will to Power a healthy suspicion about the assumptions of modern liberalism. Nietzsche’s agonistic philosophy, Connolly believes, keeps the identity of the communal self open, by preserving the tensions and ambiguities of political

life. Connolly also finds Nietzsche's political thinking somewhat inadequate: by failing to take into account the reality of economic and political practices which intensify resentment (C, p. 171) he did not explore the possibility of "democratic politics as a medium through which to expose resentment and to encourage the struggle against it" (C, p. 175).

Third, there are those who hold that Nietzsche's philosophy of Will to Power implies an anti-democratic, anti-liberal politics. The most profound defender of this position is Bruce Detwiler. In fact, it is against his interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy that I have developed my own. The interpretation in question is highly nuanced. Its most outstanding feature is the great thoroughness with which it examines all of Nietzsche's relevant texts. Detwiler is the only commentator in the English language who confronts Nietzsche's political writings from the earliest ("The Greek State") to the latest [The Will to Power (WP)]. Also, he goes farther than Kaufmann, Warren or Connolly in analyzing the political implications of Nietzsche's doctrine of Will to Power.

I have some sympathy with all three positions mentioned so far. I agree with Kaufmann that Nietzsche's politically sounding language in his late period, say from 1883 on, does not add up to a "political theory". As I will show in a moment, there is ample evidence in these writings against interpreting them as advocating a political program. Nietzsche's concerns there, are primarily ethical. His doctrine of Will to Power is primarily about self-constitution – we might call it an "ontology of agency". And, the role he envisions for the "higher types" is not political dom-

ination of the "lower types" but to act as role models, and creators of new values. But, I find Kaufmann's account of Will to Power both too generous to Nietzsche, and not deep enough. Warren's interpretation is ingenious, but highly speculative. While I agree with his emphasis on Will to Power as contribution to the theory of subjectivity, I cannot follow him in subsuming it under the rubric of neo-Kantian critical theory. Nor can I agree with his ascribing a repressive political position to Nietzsche. I am most sympathetic to Connolly's Foucault inspired reading of Nietzsche. However, like Kaufmann and Warren he does not give a satisfactory analysis of Will to Power. In addition, I do not share his implicit criticism of what he, too, takes to be deficient in Nietzsche's political position. However, my main focus will be on Detwiler's critique of Nietzsche's "aristocratic politics". I wish to examine three major claims that Detwiler makes in his Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism: first, the claim that Nietzsche's middle period writings are far less significant than those of the early and late period, second, the claim that the first period writings are to serve as the main guideline for Nietzsche's political views, and, third, that Will to Power is not simply about self-overcoming, it is also about dominating others.

I find Detwiler's first two claims highly problematic. There is enough evidence in Nietzsche's later writings to support the view that he not only abandoned but also condemned the Romanticism, the Schopenhauerianism, the Wagnerism, and the Statism of the early period. Or to put it differently, Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Bismarck who were the dominant in-

fluences on his political views in the early seventies, became his nemeses after 1883. For these reasons, it is safe to dismiss Nietzsche's initial cult of genius, his fetishism of the state, along with his yearning for metaphysical comfort as parts of his immature views on politics.

Still, claiming, as I do, that Nietzsche abandoned his political romanticism of the early period, does not mean that no traces of the early writing remain in the later writings. Nietzsche's emphasis on art, artistic creation and culture, as fundamental conditions of social existence, remain throughout his writings. And this should surprise no one who takes his critique of moral and religious absolutism seriously. If there is no divine creator, no absolute standards, how are values to be created and justified? Already, in *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT) we get a glimpse of Nietzsche's conviction that culture and art have an essential political role in so far as they prepare peoples for a tragic vision of existence. Prepare them, in other words, for accepting that life, and social existence in general, is transitory, tension ridden – beyond rational control. This, I think, is the meaning of his claim that, "we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art – for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*" (BT, p. 52). But this does not, as I shall argue, lead Nietzsche to a repressive political aesthetics in the later years. Consequently, my disagreement with Detwiler is not that I deny that Nietzsche's politic in his early period – especially in the essay "The Greek State" – is offensively romantic and authoritarian. Nor do I deny that Detwiler is sensitive to some of the changes in Nietzsche's philo-

sophical views from the early to the late period. What I disagree with is making these politically objectionable elements of the early period central to interpreting Nietzsche's political views.

Detwiler is the only commentator I am aware of who takes Nietzsche's positive comments about democracy in his middle period seriously. I assume he does so because these comments do not sit well with his view that Nietzsche is an anti-democratic, anti-liberal, authoritarian political thinker. Indeed, Nietzsche does say some surprising things about liberal democracy in *HAH* and in *WS*:

...if religion disappears the state will unavoidably lose its ancient Isis veil and cease to excite reverence...Modern democracy is the historical form of the *decay of the state* – The prospect presented by this decay is, however, not in every respect an unhappy one. (*HAH* 472, p. 173)

...the liberation of the private person (I take care not to say: individual) is the consequence of the democratic conception of the state; it is in this that its mission lies. When it has performed its task ...when every lapse into the old sickness has been overcome, a new page will be turned in the storybook of humanity in which there will be many strange tales to read and perhaps some of them good ones. (*HAH* 472, p. 172)

Democratic institutions are quarantine arrangements to combat that ancient pestilence, lust for tyranny: as such they are very useful and very boring. (*WS* 289)

The democratization of Europe is irresistible: for whoever tries to halt it has

to employ in that endeavor precisely the means which the democratic idea first placed in everyone's hand makes these means more wily and more effective. (WS 275, p. 376)

Democracy has the capacity, without employing any kind of violence but simply by applying continual constitutional pressure, to render the offices of king and emperor hollow. (WS, p. 379).

These passages show a grudging acceptance of democratic institutions as inevitable and practically necessary. Also, they are consistent with a token acceptance of monarchism, provided it is not tyrannical. And, they seem to be at odds not only with the commonly accepted view of Nietzsche's politics, but with things he says himself in his later writings. To explain this dissonance is the challenge interpreters of Nietzsche's writings must face up to. The title of Detwiler's book is inspired by Nietzsche's enthusiastic endorsement of being called an "aristocratic radical". I, too, accept willingly that Nietzsche was an aristocratic radical. However, in my view this does not mean that Nietzsche was a supporter of tyrannical political aristocracy, nor does it mean that he was an opponent of the fundamental tenets of liberalism. He was in favor of a mild form of political aristocracy, but he was primarily an aristocrat of the spirit. Also, he was in favor of liberalism but not the kind that Detwiler seems to want to endorse: one based on the negative freedoms of the fully constituted atomistic individual (D, p. 95).

In addition, Detwiler's placing greater exegetical value on the early, in favor

of the middle, period writings is seriously undermined by the fact that while Nietzsche, in his later writings distances himself from his early Schopenhauerian / Wagnerian position, he is, at the same time consistently laudatory about the positions he took in the middle period. Nietzsche's severe self-criticism of the "aberration of my instinct" infecting the early period, is too well known to be in need of documentation. What is perhaps less well known is how positively he felt in 1888 (in EH on HAH) about his change of orientation starting in 1878. This is what he says about his middle period in EH:

What then resolved itself within me was not merely a breach with Wagner – I sensed a total aberration of my instinct of which the individual blunder, call it Wagner or my professorship at Basel, was merely a sign. I was overcome with *impatience* at myself; I realized it was high time for me to think back to *myself*. (EH, p. 91)

...One has only to look at 'Daybreak' or perhaps 'Wanderer and its Shadow' to grasp what this return to *myself* was: a highest kind of *recovery* itself! ... The other kind merely followed from this. (EH, p. 93)

However, in the final analysis, the debate between Detwiler and me hinges on whether one can give a better reconstruction of Nietzsche's political writings using the middle period as a guide, as I do, or using the first period as does Detwiler. And just as the onus is on Detwiler to explain passages of the middle period in terms of his interpretation, the onus is on me to explain passages of the late period

in terms of mine. Detwiler sees Nietzsche as the “first avowed atheist of the far right” who repudiates the “dominant social ideals of modernity” (D 190). He sees him as someone who insists that the “goal of society should be the promotion and enhancement of the highest type even at the expense of what has traditionally been thought to be the good of all or of the greatest number” (D 198). By contrast, I maintain that while Nietzsche does repudiate the dominant ideals of modern society, in particular the democratic ideal, he does not advocate any kind of political reform, and certainly not that of the political right.

I take seriously Nietzsche's self description as the “last anti political German” (EH, “Why am I so Wise?” 3, p.41) for whom democracy was a *fait accompli*. By his middle period he recognizes that the democratization of Europe is “irresistible” and he grudgingly acquiesces in that fact. What he is opposed to is the democratic ideology which he attacks relentlessly for its promoting mediocrity and the basest of human instincts. In short, he believes that moral and spiritual leadership (“legislation”) is required in order to transcend “herd morality”. It is a mistake to construe Nietzsche's elitism of the spirit as an advocacy of a rigid political hierarchy. His “higher type” does not denote a political category: it refers to those who possess the aristocratic instincts as a countervailing force against the instinctive hatred of any form of distinction on the part of the “democratic herd”. Also, and more significantly, higher types have the role of providing, beyond the needs for material survival, the true meaning of human existence.

There are plenty of passages from the late period indicating that Nietzsche thinks of the higher types as spiritual, not political, leaders who can thrive in democratic societies: “In a certain sense the latter [higher type] can maintain and develop itself most easily in a democratic society” (WP 887). “...the ‘higher nature’ of the great man lies in being different, in incommunicability, in distance of rank, not in an effect of any kind” (WP 876). In section 258 of Beyond Good and Evil (BGE) he suggests that “a good and healthy aristocracy” should see itself not as a “function” of society but as its “meaning”. This idea is restated at WP (901) “Main consideration: not to see the task of the higher species in leading the lower...but the lower as a base upon which higher species perform its *own* task – upon which alone it can stand”. And, for reasons I have already given, Nietzsche maintains that: “the destiny of humanity depends upon the attainment of the highest type” (WP 987).

One might offer more passages in support of the view that Nietzsche does not see any inconsistency in combining a liberal democratic political shell with an aristocratic spiritual core. But, a passage from the unpublished note books, one which does not appear in WP is decisive:

Morality had up till now the limits that corresponded to that of the species: all past moralities were useful for the purpose of giving to the species, first of all, an absolute resistance: once this has been achieved, the aim could be placed higher.

The first movement is unconditional – leveling of the species, great ant-buildings etc. ...

The other movement: mine: is, con-

versely, the sharpening of all oppositions and widening of all gaps, to remove equality, the creation of over-powers.

The first created the last man. Mine the overman.

It is absolutely not the aim to consider the last [overman] as the masters of the first: rather: two types have to exist, one at the same time as the other – separated to the greatest possible extent: the one, like the gods of Epicurus, do not preoccupy themselves with the others.(1883, Colli-Montinari (Ed.): 7[21], my translation.)

At this point an account of what Nietzsche means by “types” might be helpful. He agrees with the fundamental liberal idea, derived from Kant, that *autonomy* and self-realization are privileged human values. He also accepts the Kantian idea that moral valuation is intimately tied up with *legislation*. However, rejecting Kant’s emphasis on Reason, and the universality of moral values, he has to modify the Kantian position radically. The reason that aesthetic plays such a central role in Nietzsche’s conception of morality is that both self-legislation and legislation for others becomes highly problematic for him. It is worth noting here that Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* (CJ) maintains that “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good; and only because we refer the beautiful to the morally good [we all do so naturally, and require all others also to do so as a duty] does our liking for it include a claim to everyone else’s assent” (CJ, p.353). And if we were to continue this line of thought, we might say that if Nietzsche’s conception of morality is also closely related to his aesthetics, it is related not to the aesthetic of the beautiful

(harmony) but to the aesthetic of the sublime (discordant harmony).

Nietzsche’s problem is that by rejecting traditional morality he has “wiped away” those horizons which have hitherto served to stabilize and give meaning to social existence. Since absolute and permanent values are no longer available to him, he needs to give an account of how valuation - something he deems to be essential for human existence - is still possible. It is at this point that Nietzsche’s doctrine of Will to Power, his ontology of agency, becomes significant. According to him human subject are not absolutely stable unities. They are more or less stable organizations of heterogeneous multiplicities: structures of dominance. These fragile unities are complexes of competing drives (passions, emotions, affects). Under the regency of one of these drives:

We gain the correct idea of the nature of subject-unity, namely as regents at the head of a community (not as “souls” or “life forces”), also of the dependence of these regents upon the ruled and of an order of rank and division of labor as the conditions that make possible the whole and its parts. In the same way, how living unities continually arise and die and how the “subject” is not eternal; in the same way, that the struggle expresses itself in obeying and commanding, and that the fluctuating assessments of the limits of power is part of life. (WP 492)

On the basis this conception of subjectivity, Nietzsche envisions three different human types: first, those in whom the struggle among the drives is so intense that even a fragile unity cannot result



from them; second, those whose dominant drive is so strong that they remain in a constant defensive struggle against a hostile Other in order to preserve it; finally, those who are capable of organizing the greatest number of different drives under the greatest possible unity. “The highest man, Nietzsche says, would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured” (WP 966). Or again: “I believe that it is precisely through the presence of opposites and feelings they occasion that the great man, the bow with the greatest tension, develops” (WP 967).

It is worth repeating: Nietzsche is an elitist. He holds, in my opinion, the following paradoxical complex of views: Liberal democratic institutions are here to stay. The great danger is that the democratization of Europe leads to the debasing of the human spirit. The material survival of humanity requires some measure of stability which can only be provided by a permanent working force. For its spiritual survival, humanity needs values: spiritual horizons. Since God is dead, there are no absolute values, therefore, new spiritual horizons, new creators, are needed, and these will be legislators/diagnosticians of human drives. These higher types need to understand, but keep their distance from, the herd and its values. Societies, in spite of their democratic structure, will always require, and will always have, extra-political aristocratic features. The higher types will lead by example only; their political role can only be negative. Their task will be to subvert outworn human values, propose new ones, all along insisting that human existence is essentially tragic. By so doing, they will also, indirectly, enhance

the power of all individuals to overcome themselves.

I feel fairly confident about all but the last sentence of the previous paragraph, and I am also fairly confident that Detwiler too would agree with most of it. But what evidence is there that Nietzsche would have accepted both my non-interventionist account of his politics, as well as my suggestion that in spite of their *pathos of distance* higher types could still be educators of the “herd”? The picture that one can easily get from his “The Greek State” and, indeed, some of his later statements, is that he was only interested in educating higher types – cultivating genius. At times he does suggest that “a good and healthy aristocracy ... [should accept] with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who *for its sake*, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments” (BGE 258, p.202) (also WP 954). Comments like these are disturbing, and they definitely go against any attempt to construe Nietzsche as “moderate aristocrat” and a liberal.

One has only a few options here. One could dismiss comments like this as the ranting of a desperate, hardly sane, person. Or, one could try, as Kaufmann does, to take the sting out of such passages by reading them strictly metaphorically. More to the point, however, one could ask: how can comments like these be reconciled with Nietzsche’s view that “the destiny of humanity depends upon the attainment of its highest type” (WP 987)? Surely, if the higher types are to have any relevance for the destiny of humanity they cannot be completely irrelevant to it. Even if we admit that they need to keep

their distance, and admit, also, that they cannot enter into communication with the herd on its terms; if the herd learns nothing from them, even indirectly, what is their social use? What is art, what is culture, worth, if it does not contribute to the perfection of human nature? To deny them that role would go against even what Nietzsche says in BT.

One possible meaning of the quotation from BGE is that, once again – as he was already in his middle period – Nietzsche is ranting against socialists and their dogmas about the “dignity of labor”. He is saying: there is nothing dignified about necessary labor. It is demeaning but necessary for the survival of societies, and those who are free of necessary labor should accept that fact with clear conscience. On a more positive note, one might point to passages in which Nietzsche intimates that the “lower types” might by themselves be capable – given the moral and spiritual leadership of higher types – of overcoming the limitations imposed on them by their own narrow image of themselves. The subtitle of Thus Spoke Zarathustra: “A Book for Everyone and No One” already points in that direction. What it says is that anyone who is willing to enter the dangerous world of self-overcoming is welcome: no one is excluded a priori. Also, given Nietzsche’s anti-essentialist conception of human subjectivity, it is plausible to assume that the distinction between types must have a certain degree of “fluidity”. Presumably, all actually existing human beings would have “high” and “low” moments. In which case, type distinctions would reflect only predominance, and not permanence, of one of the traits mentioned above. In fact, in a passage of WP Nietzsche, himself,

says as much:

And as for decadence, it is represented in almost every sense by every man who does not die too soon: – thus he also knows from experience the instincts that belong to it: – almost every man is decadent for half his life. (WP 864)

Nevertheless, a positive case for Nietzsche’s optimism about the coming of a new humanity might be made more convincingly by listening to passages where he suggests that there is a difference between “persons” and “individuals”. Already, in a passage quoted earlier from HAH 472, he warns that by “person” he does not mean “individual”. But in two further passages, one from WP and the other from WS, he puts the distinction in a historical context:

*Individualism* is a modest and still unconscious form of the will to power... most modest stage of the “will to power”; here it seems sufficient to the individual to get free from an overpowering domination by society (whether that of the state or of the church). He does not oppose them as person but only as an individual; he represents all individuals against the totality. That means: he instinctively posits himself as equal to all other individuals: what he gains in this struggle he gains for himself not as a person but as a representative of individuals against the totality ... individualism is the *most modest* stage of the will to power. (WP 784)

The time has, it seems, still not yet come when all men are to share the experience of those shepherds who saw the heav-

ens brighten above them and heard the words: 'On earth peace, good will toward men.' – It is *still the age of the individual*. (WS 350)

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Nietzsche envisions here the possibility that at some future date, at a higher “stage of the will to power”, at a time “still not yet to come” all men [will] share the experiences of those shepherds who saw the heavens brighten above them”. Nietzsche’s implicit criticism of individualism in these passages is significant. The distinction he makes between persons and individuals is deliberate: “I take care not to say: individual”. It is something to be overcome: “it is still *the age of the individual*”. And, it represents the existing, still merely reactive, stage of the will to power: “individualism is the *most modest* stage of the will to power”. The fact that they occur at three different times between 1878 and 1887 is also significant. How, then, to reconcile these comments with Nietzsche’s harsh criticism of democracy, his contempt for the “herd”, and his advocacy of the “*pathos of distance*”?

By way of an answer, I offer the following hypothesis: While Nietzsche has no doubt that there will always be a significant distinction between higher and lower types - between those who create new visions of existence freely, and those who produce the requirements of material existence under some forms of moral and material constraints, given his ontology of agency, the distinction must remain relatively open. Individualism is a virtue of those who exist under some form of constraint; their will to power – reminding us of the lion’s in *Zarathustra*’s “Prologue” –

is sufficient only to get free from an overpowering domination by society. Their struggle is not that of the higher types, although the living examples and the visions created by the higher types might serve them in their struggle. And, individuals struggling for their liberation might, at the end of those struggles, with themselves, as well as with their external “constraints”, become persons. “Persons”, as I understand them, will not be only higher types. Nevertheless, they will be like the third type I described earlier. They will be open to experimentation with ways of being, tolerating diversity, and imposing on the tensions within themselves, and those surrounding them, the maximum order compatible with that diversity.

The question is: If what I say represents Nietzsche’s position, why did he not make it more explicit? Part of the answer, surely, must be Nietzsche’s extreme suspicion of the masses as carriers of the pathogen of Christian morality. In any commerce with them, the higher types would be in danger of infection. For that reason they must keep their distance. They could not, as Connolly proposes, be engaged in “democratic politics”. Democratic politics might indeed be liberating for individuals, or groups of individuals, negotiating about divergent “hegemonic” interests, but such negotiations are fraught with great danger for the higher types. For that reason they must avoid them. Still, if my analysis here is correct, it does not follow from it that the higher types are politically irrelevant. They could, as I will show in a moment, help individuals in their becoming-persons – in achieving, as Connolly would say, “contingent identities”. Also, they could help in the drawing and re-draw-

ing of socio-political horizons providing a limited, fragile place within which a true political militancy could evolve.

Still, someone who takes Detwiler's position might object to this particular line of argument. They might say that most of the evidence I have marshaled in support of my claim that Nietzsche's elitism is not essentialist, comes from the middle period and, therefore, it does not have much weight. My reply to that possible objection would be that the onus is on those who deny the relevance of the middle period wrings in assessing Nietzsche's political views, to explain how it is that there is such a remarkable congruence between passages coming from it and from the late period. But, as I said earlier the onus is also on me to offer an explanation for those passages which have nourished the opinion that Nietzsche advocates the political oppression and exploitation of the "masses", by the higher types. Perhaps the most embarrassing passages for my interpretation are the following:

Put in the crudest form: *how could one sacrifice the development of mankind to help a higher species than man to come into existence?* (WP 859)

A declaration of war on the masses by *higher men* is needed! (WP 861)

The dwarfing of man must for a long time count as the only goal; because a broad foundation has first to be created so that a stronger species of man can stand upon it. (WP 890)

These passages, however, need to be read in the context of others where Nietzsche speaks of: a) the higher type's need for a

"base" upon which it can perform its task (WP 901); and b) where he speaks of the need to protect the strong against the weak (WP 684-5, 863-4). These passages imply that for Nietzsche the "lower types" will be essential not only in the production/reproduction of the means of material survival, but are also essential as the bearers of a relatively stable moral base serving as a context in which the creation of new visions of human existence will become possible. Nietzsche's call for the *pathos of distance* has a very specific purpose. It is to prevent that: "The values of the weak prevail because the strong have taken them over as devices of leadership" (WP 863). The danger for the higher types is that they may be seduced by herd morality. But that does not mean that they can ignore it. In fact, their main role is, having recognized its *practical* necessity, to prevent it from becoming ossified, and to revitalize it. So, I would maintain that, in spite of some of the troubling statements he makes, it would be rash to exclude the possibility that Nietzsche allowed for the open ended-ness of, not only of higher type subjectivity, but also of a lower type one. And, indeed this is as it should be. Otherwise he would be guilty of precisely that type of essentialism which he wishes to avoid.

### **The Politics of Will to Power:**

There remains one last issue that needs to be cleared up. Detwiler accuses, in my opinion quite rightly, both Kaufmann and Warren of giving only a one sided view of Nietzsche's doctrine of Will to Power. Since Nietzsche conceives, Detwiler says, Will to Power as "a generalized inclination

to grow, to increase, to overcome resistances and to become more through the appropriation of, or the participation in, what is alien ... [it] therefore encompasses more than a narrow will to domination, just as it encompasses more than the process of human self-constitution" (D, p. 160). And he goes on to say that:

Once the struggle among the drives has forged a unity in diversity that we call the self into a cohesive center of power unto itself, the interaction among selves within society might well resemble the interaction of the drives within the body. ...and if the above interpretation is correct, his discussion of the political ramifications of life as will to power do indeed flow from the same ontology as his thoughts on self-constitution. (D, p. 161)

For my reading of it, this is the most important passage in Detwiler's text. It allows me to state clearly where I agree, and where I disagree, with him. I agree with his characterization of Will to Power, also I agree with his implied criticism of Kaufmann and Warren. Where I disagree with him is his too easy slide from the psychological to the political level. In my view this move is a reflection of his commitment to the traditional liberal conception of the political subject. If, in fact, we allow that the struggle among drives results in the emergence of a stable "cohesive center of power", then we have cancelled out any political gain we might hope from Nietzsche's ontology of subjectivity. The point of that ontology, however, is that any subjective unity, any center of power, is always fragile and provisional. If we adopted Detwiler's shift from drives

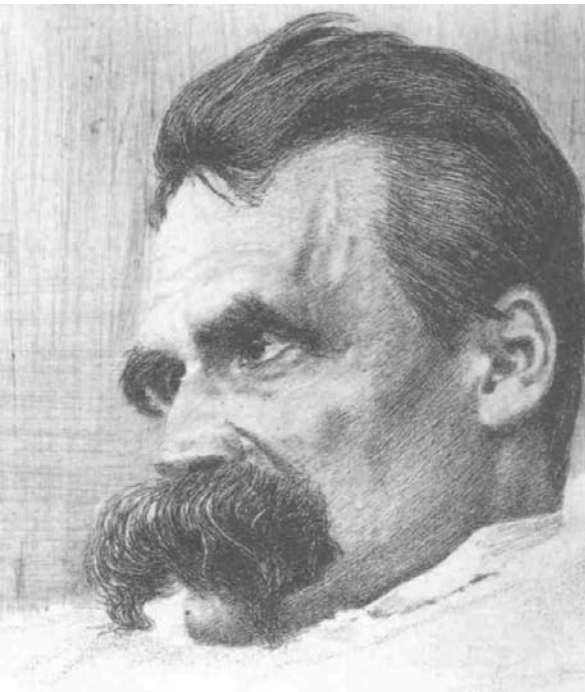
to persons we would be open to the following Kantian objection: a self may be a complex of drives, but for moral and political purposes we could treat it as an essential subjective unity. Consequently, Nietzsche's ontology of the subject is not so much offensive as it is irrelevant.

The only way to avoid this Kantian objection is to insist that the drives constituting a self are not discrete, homogeneous, multiplicities like atoms, but continuous, heterogeneous, multiplicities like the organs of a living body. Furthermore, they are both pre-personal and supra-personal, composed of unconscious biological and social forces in constant tension. So, if we want to extend Nietzsche's ontology of agency to political agents we must take into account, not fully formed individuals but those forces that over-whelm them, forces without which the project of self-overcoming - of transmuting one's actual "beings-in-the-world" - would never amount to anything. This way of seeing things would satisfy both requirements, the requirement that Will to Power be understood as "a general inclination to grow", and the requirement that it not be understood as endorsement of the *political* domination of the weak by the strong. In other words, it would privilege in the analysis of social encounters: tensions, relations of domination or appropriation, those factors and tendencies which are not transparent to agents because they are overflown by them, both on the pre-personal and the supra-personal levels.

In defense of Nietzsche's liberal critics, as well as his liberal defenders, it must be said that he, himself, was never absolutely clear on how his analysis of private agency could be extended to social and political

agency. Also, in their defense it must be said that in the real world of politics - the world of *individuals* - drives, passions and affects have only a limited currency. But, perhaps this is the whole point of debating Nietzsche's politics. His being anti-political meant that he disdained the real world of politics. Unfortunately, in spite of his disavowals, his language is full of political imagery. And, my thesis in this paper is that Nietzsche has, in fact, two politics: the one is a perfunctory endorsement of existing institutions he considers essential, inevitable and contemptible, the other is a proto-politics of para-personal drives and intensities, practiced by genealogists and critics of existing values and institutions.

Lest I be accused of being too abstract, I offer the following clarification of my



last point: Nietzsche's doctrine of Will to Power has the most immediate application on the personal or the micro-political level. It is there that encounters involve the clash, or convergence, of feeling passions, and where drives are alternately dominating or dominated. It has broader political implication in cases of specific struggles against intolerable conditions, or in cases where specific passions or drives are mobilized to achieve some desired goal. It invites suspicion about totalizing party politics, and it is positively hostile to forms of identity politics that confine persons within narrow limits. A Nietzsche inspired politics would focus on local, punctual, issues. It would encourage not so much a critique of the most obvious and loudest political events or issues, but a diagnosis of the imperceptible forces and tendencies driving them. It might, in this way, prepare the conditions for a truly radical militancy, and it might unleash a truly effective subversion of entrenched values, be they that of "the people" or, indeed, that of the "higher types" themselves. This would, in my view, capture the true spirit of liberalism, one that advocates a true autonomy, one that welcomes contest, and one that is more interested in the process of liberation than in its achievements. Let me give the last word to Nietzsche:

Liberal institutions immediately cease to be liberal as soon as they are attained: subsequently there is nothing more harmful to freedom than liberal institutions... As long as they are still being fought for, these same institutions produce quite different effects; they then in fact promote freedom mightily. (*Twilight of the Idols* 38, p.92)