



**Book Chapter - *Dionysian Politics:  
The Anarchistic Implications Of Friedrich Nietzsche's  
Critique Of Western Epistemology***

By: **Andrew Koch**

**Abstract**

Anyone who has more than a passing interest in Friedrich Nietzsche might be surprised to find a discussion of his work in the context of anarchism. Nietzsche repeatedly criticizes anarchism, along with socialism and Christianity, for being naïve and ignoring the natural inequality of human beings. The result, he claims, produced a dysfunctional political order. To Nietzsche, the anarchist, socialist, and Christian are the decadent purveyors of an unnatural and destructive interpretation of the human condition. However, one must be careful not to jump to a hasty conclusion on the issue of anarchism precisely because of Nietzsche's association of it with socialism and Christianity. When Nietzsche speaks of anarchism, he associates it with the ideals of equality and empowering the powerless discussed by anarchist writers such as Proudhon, Godwin, and Kropotkin. Thus, Nietzsche sees a similar thread to the "blessed are the wretched" ideas contained in Christianity. To him, this form of anarchism, along with socialism, is a "modern" addendum to the slave morality presented in Christianity.

**Koch, Andrew M.** "Dionysian Politics: The Anarchistic Implications of Friedrich Nietzsche's Critique of Western Epistemology." Book Chapter, *I Am Not a Man, I Am Dynamite!: Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchistic Tradition*. Moore, John and Spencer Sunshine, ed. 2004. Version of record available by Editors' permission, per Andrew Koch. For more information on the book or to order additional copies, please visit [www.autonomedia.org/nietzsche](http://www.autonomedia.org/nietzsche)

The following is excerpted from

**I Am Not A Man,  
I Am Dynamite!**

*Friedrich Nietzsche and the  
Anarchist Tradition*

John Moore, editor

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Book design: Ben Meyers  
Nietzsche stencil: Kevin Pyle

Thanks to Erika Biddle

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ISBN 1-57027-121-6

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Williamsburgh Station  
Brooklyn, NY 11211-0568  
email: [info@autonomedia.org](mailto:info@autonomedia.org)  
[www.autonomedia.org](http://www.autonomedia.org)

Printed in Canada

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# Dionysian Politics

*The Anarchistic Implications of Friedrich Nietzsche's Critique of Western Epistemology*



**Andrew M. Koch**

## Introduction

Anyone who has more than a passing interest in Friedrich Nietzsche might be surprised to find a discussion of his work in the context of anarchism. Nietzsche repeatedly criticizes anarchism,<sup>1</sup> along with socialism and Christianity, for being naïve and ignoring the natural inequality of human beings. The result, he claims, produced a dysfunctional political order. To Nietzsche, the anarchist, socialist, and Christian are the decadent purveyors of an unnatural and destructive interpretation of the human condition.

However, one must be careful not to jump to a hasty conclusion on the issue of anarchism precisely because of Nietzsche's association of it with socialism and Christianity. When Nietzsche speaks of anarchism, he associates it with the ideals of equality and empowering the powerless discussed by anarchist writers such as Proudhon, Godwin, and Kropotkin. Thus, Nietzsche sees a similar thread to the "blessed are the wretched" ideas contained in Christianity. To him, this form of anarchism, along with socialism, is a "modern" addendum to the slave morality presented in Christianity.

Read literally, it is not difficult to come away from reading Nietzsche with the view that he is seeking a return to an aristocratic ideal.<sup>2</sup> This is the conclusion drawn by Bruce Detwiler's detailed interpretation of Nietzsche's politics.<sup>3</sup> The values of strength and nobility are continually stressed throughout Nietzsche's various works and such a conclusion is quite plausible. Aristocracy is praised for its recognition of the fundamental inequality of human beings. However, aristocracy in the traditional sense implies far more structure than what Nietzsche has in mind.

Democratic politics provides far more openness than aristocracy. In his attempt to construct a Nietzschean defense of democracy, Lawrence Hatab pursues this theme using the concepts of contemporary post-structuralism.<sup>4</sup> However, democracy, as the political manifestation of the slave morality, is denounced repeatedly in Nietzsche's writings. Representative democracy's open structure and implied meritocracy are compatible with Nietzsche's ideas, but to Nietzsche the logic of representative democracy suffers from the same flaw that Plato identified in the *Republic*. How can inferiors be expected to select those that are truly their superiors? One must presuppose "equality" before democra-

cy becomes a logical political prescription. Ultimately, democratic political practice denies the "will to power" and the natural hierarchy among human beings.

Those who claim that Nietzsche had anarchist tendencies can find support in his undeniable hatred of the modern state. The State is for the "herd," the "superfluous ones."<sup>5</sup> The modern state perpetuates itself through promoting the lies of "liberty" and "equality," which serve to justify the continual expansion of state power. However, even considering these attacks on the nation-state, Nietzsche does not simply fall into the category of "anarchist." The criticisms of the nation-state, and its democratic ethos in the modern period, do not constitute a critique of power in general nor a criticism of the use of power. To Nietzsche, the exercise of power is not only strategically useful, but the desire to exercise power is argued to be part of the essential ontological constitution of all life.

Thus, the critical question: if Nietzsche is not, at least overtly, an anarchist, and even his criticisms of the nation-state are not critiques of power, per se, but criticism of the modern configuration of power, then what can Nietzsche possibly have to say that is worthwhile to anarchists? The central point of this paper will be that it is not what Nietzsche has to say about politics that is important for a discussion of anarchism, but what he had to say about "truth." The concern about what validates statements as "true" or "false" is in either the foreground or the background of all of Nietzsche's texts from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Ecce Homo*. When Nietzsche examines the "truth" that lay under the emergence of the modern democratic political order, he finds the old metaphysics in a new guise.

However, the problem is more complex than simply one of rejecting the old slave morality and its secular and democratic form. If life should be viewed through an aesthetic rather than a moral lens, and life and art both depend on illusion,<sup>6</sup> then that aspect of life called the political must also be illusory. Lacking "truth," politics must operate under presuppositions. These presuppositions have their origins in the Apollonian dream, the will to construct, not in any essential truth about the world or human beings.

Only when confronted with Dionysus is the illusion revealed and the foundation for fixed structures destroyed. Nietzsche's epistemological critique leads to a denial of all assertions of foundational validity. The character of the world is anarchistic, without essential form or specific teleology. Therefore, the illusions by which we live are all transitory and ephemeral.

## I. Politics as an Apollonian Enterprise

Following his general genealogical methodology, Nietzsche seeks explanations for the existing social and political order not in the ideas and ideals of human consciousness, but in the historical necessities that arose as human beings struggled against nature and against each other for their survival. "Consciousness" has been nothing more than a recognition of that necessity. In the area of morality, this has led to the revaluation of values coming with Christianity and the rise of the underclass to a position of dominance.<sup>7</sup> In politics, Nietzsche claims that the nation-state arose out of the material concerns of landed and commercial interests.<sup>8</sup>

The character of the nation-state, and the validity of its foundations, represent another matter. If the nation-state arose out of conditions that are historical and dependent upon the material conditions of life then, obviously, there can be no link between the exercise of power and any transcendental notion of collective essence, human or social teleologies, or moral foundations. There is still a question, however, regarding the "will to structure" as part of the "will to power." What is the origin of the process that initiates the construction of a political structure? The will to any structure is, for Nietzsche, Apollonian will.

Nietzsche's position is that the relationship between human beings and the world of nature was essentially an aesthetic relationship. The world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> This claim has several facets. The world requires interpretation. Human beings do not engage in uncovering any hidden transcendental truths. Science does not uncover truth, but is only a form of interpretation that takes place within a strict syntactical structure. The "objectivity" it seeks to bring to interpretation produces an outcome of a lower order than the artistic.<sup>10</sup> Science's real character is actually the suspension of "will" in its interpretation.<sup>11</sup> The condition of artistic creation is the highest condition for the human being.

The Apollonian and Dionysian are the two forces whose tension produces art. Nietzsche uses the metaphors of "dream" and "intoxication" to indicate what he means by these two concepts.<sup>12</sup> The Apollonian is an aesthetic will to construct an illusion, a fantasy, that brings beauty and order. Through the construction of an image we interpret our place and activities in relation to the world. "If we could imagine an incarnation of dissonance—and what is man if not that?—that dissonance, in order to endure life, would need a marvelous illusion to cover it with a veil of beauty. This is the proper artistic intention of Apollo..."<sup>13</sup> We are redeemed through these illusions.<sup>14</sup> The illusions give us identity, purpose, and connection.

Nietzsche argues that this fantasy has its origins in necessity.<sup>15</sup> Necessity initiates the construction of the illusion, but that alone is insufficient to validate the tentative and contingent outcome as corresponding to the "true." This is important because it establishes the foundationless character of all political structure. If the origin of structure is aesthetic rather than "essential" or even "scientific," then the tentative and contingent nature of any structure is more apparent. As Nietzsche puts it, art is not an imitation of nature but its metaphysical supplement, raised up beside nature to overcome it.<sup>16</sup>

The construction of a political order is precisely the type of product that Nietzsche describes as the outcome of Apollonian will. A political structure is the residue of the "will to power" as it seeks to bring order to the world by constructing an image of its structure. This drive gives rise to the formation of an illusion. The origin of the "political" is the need to create order and structure, to raise human beings out of the dissonance of nature.

In political terms, the will to construction, driven by necessity, has generated the representation of "human nature" as a fixed reference point for a deductive process of political application. Once a definition of the human character

can be asserted, a political structure emerges as a logical outcome. This is the case regardless of the content of that representation.

Nietzsche's rejection of the Western philosophic tradition would, therefore, also constitute a rejection of the Western political traditions. From the perspective of genealogy, the characterizations of human nature that have served as the foundation for political prescriptions from Plato to Hobbes, Locke, Kropotkin, and Marx<sup>17</sup> have their origins in specific historical and contextual necessities. Human nature was represented in order to provide a basis for an Apollonian construction, the need to bring order and structure. The practice of politics is the application of that illusion.

## II. What Dionysus Knows: Nietzsche's Critique of Western Epistemology

In the tension between Apollo and Dionysus, Nietzsche declares himself a disciple of Dionysus.<sup>18</sup> The metaphor Nietzsche uses to describe the power of Dionysus is "intoxication." However, an important question remains: what is the significance of intoxication within the general construction of art, interpretation, and Western epistemology? Nietzsche describes the condition directly. The world is to be understood as an aesthetic phenomenon. It is the Dionysian energy that is art's original power.<sup>19</sup>

The stirrings of Dionysus represent a condition of ecstasy, an emancipation from all symbolic powers.<sup>20</sup> The Dionysian state suspends the ordinary barriers of existence.<sup>21</sup> Under the influence of Dionysus one is no longer an artist, but a work of art.<sup>22</sup> While Nietzsche presents some self-criticism of his overly metaphorical language in *The Birth of Tragedy*,<sup>23</sup> he never abandons the basic distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian forces in the fabrication of both art and life.

This begs a question. What is it that Dionysus knows? Nietzsche makes the claim that the meaning to life can only be addressed as an aesthetic, interpreted phenomenon, and that any such interpretations are illusions. Dionysus knows that any claim to truth is nothing more than the assertion of an illusion. Truths are illusions that we have forgotten are illusions.<sup>24</sup>

There exists neither "spirit," nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use. There is no question of "subject and object," but of a particular species of animal that can prosper only through a certain relative rightness; above all, regularity of its perceptions (so that it can accumulate experience)...<sup>25</sup>

The living organism embodies the will to power. The will to power manifests the will to survival. In order to survive, Nietzsche claims that the human being must have some grasp of the regular functions encountered in the environment in order to enhance the chances of survival. Preservation is the motive to knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Nietzsche claims that it was unlikely that our knowledge would ever extend beyond what is necessary for survival.<sup>27</sup> The species must be

able to comprehend enough of the calculable and constant occurrences in the world to base a scheme of behavior on them. However, the character of the world is chaos, with no essential order or beauty.<sup>28</sup> Those Apollonian constructs come as human beings interpret the world.

The human species creates illusions as a means of survival.<sup>29</sup> The criteria for truth is biological utility.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, there can be no *a priori* truths.<sup>31</sup> There are no "facts," only interpretations.<sup>32</sup> There is no single truth, but countless truths, no single meaning but countless interpretations.

Interpretations require language, which is an expression of power.<sup>33</sup> The word is a nerve stimuli.<sup>34</sup> It is an illusive bridge between things that are eternally apart.<sup>35</sup> The properties that words assign, however, are arbitrary.

Nietzsche also describes a sequence by which concepts are formed. First the organism has a sensation, then a word is created, and from the words concepts are built.<sup>36</sup> Concepts are used to designate cases where there are some similar characteristics.<sup>37</sup> But our language is metaphorical; it does not describe the essence of an object. To borrow terminology from semiotics to explain Nietzsche's point, our words refer to other words. They do not connect a sign to a referent, or some essential "thing-in-itself."

From Nietzsche's perspective, language sets the parameters for that which can be conceptualized. We think in the form that language provides for us.<sup>38</sup> This is the case with the rules that connect the words as well. It is grammar that has forced us to imagine that every deed must have a doer and that every result must have a cause. Grammar compels us to distinguish the lightning from its flash, conditioning us to think in terms of cause and effect.<sup>39</sup>

As images and impressions are turned into concepts, they allow for the construction of pyramidal structures, laws, subordination and boundaries, all of which appear to us as more stable than the uniqueness of each impression.<sup>40</sup> Thus, language contains power, not only as the constructs serving survival, but also as a set of structures to manipulate, control, establish hierarchies, and regulate behavior. Nietzsche refers to the product of this process using the metaphor of a "prison."<sup>41</sup>

Nietzsche is not just speaking of the issue of "knowledge" within the realm of social and artistic activity. In contrast to the transcendental tradition in Western epistemology going back to Plato, Nietzsche argues that knowledge is created, not discovered. All knowledge is a human construction. Science builds and rebuilds concepts.<sup>42</sup> Human beings build a conceptual web the way a bee builds a wax structure in order to hold its honey.<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche then gives another example to make his point. If human beings construct a definition of a mammal, and in looking at a camel pronounce, "There is a mammal," Nietzsche asks, "Of what truth value is such a claim?" That the camel is a mammal is not true in itself, but only in relation to the human category created for it. Nietzsche concludes by saying, "At bottom, what the investigator of such truths is seeking is only the metamorphosis of the world into man."<sup>44</sup>

The "truth" of these conceptual schemes does not rely on their capturing what is essential in a object, but only in that we have the will to believe in them

as truth. The metaphors congeal and take on a reality of truth just as an eternally repeated dream would appear to be reality.<sup>45</sup> Apollonian dreams now impose themselves as the "real." The strength of these truths comes not from their inherent power, but from their antiquity, the fact that they have been so often repeated that to deny them is regarded as madness.<sup>46</sup>

The outcome of this critique of the dominant trend in Western epistemology is to reduce all speech to rhetoric. However, rhetoric is mastery of speech, not the capturing of "truth." Driven by necessity, all knowledge is interpretive, contingent, and historical. We grasp at fragmentary utilities, we do not construct universals in morals, nor do we capture essence in our search for understanding.

### III. Subjectivity and Morality as the Foundational Lies of Politics

The political implications of Nietzsche's critique of epistemology are profound. If every concept exists only as words, and if there is no link between the words and some essential truth about the world, we only really "know" words. Therefore, "[Truth] is a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms; in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding." Truth is an illusion that we have forgotten is an illusion.<sup>47</sup> The grandest illusion that governs our political lives is a fixed and constant notion of "subjectivity."

The "subject" is an invention.<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche means this in the strictest possible sense. Challenging Descartes, Nietzsche claims that a stable representation of subjectivity is grammatical custom, not fact.<sup>49</sup> What Nietzsche is really questioning is not the ontological certainty of being but the content of any configuration of being as it appears as a construct used in language. The "subject" is the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum.<sup>50</sup> Subjectivity is the rhetorical imposition of unity, but it is we who construct that unity.<sup>51</sup> This imposed unity produces an effect, which allows for the assertion that ego has substance.<sup>52</sup> That has allowed the concept of "free will" a place to take up residence.

Like many philosophers before him, Nietzsche understands the link between the assertion of free will and the idea of morality. As Kant describes it, the autonomy of the will is the supreme principle of morals.<sup>53</sup> The reason for this link is simple: if one does not have the freedom to act, then one cannot be accountable for one's actions. To Nietzsche, the declaration that human beings have free will represents a link between religion, especially Christianity, and the transcendental tradition in Western philosophy, and the punitive nature of secular law.

Nietzsche's anti-moralism must be seen in this context. He denies traditional morality because it could not be justified without the assumption of free will. Nietzsche asserts that today free will could no longer be considered a faculty.<sup>54</sup> Free will is a human creation.<sup>55</sup> It holds sway only in half-educated people. In the real world there is no such thing as free will, only strong and weak wills.<sup>56</sup>

If free will is not the natural condition of human kind, where did the idea

of morality come from and what is the origin of our contemporary errors about morality? This is a complicated issue because Nietzsche must confront different configurations that have justified moral prescriptions. In answering this question Nietzsche contrasts his own view to that of the explanation offered by the British empiricist tradition, even while acknowledging the importance of their non-theological approach to the issue of morality. British "psychology" is problematic in that it has an atomistic explanation that ignores the role of will, as will to power, and it assumes that morality is linked to unegoistic deeds.<sup>57</sup>

Nietzsche is interested in how morality has come to exercise power over individuals, especially in light of his critique of Western epistemology. Denying the "truth" of any definitions of a transcendental subject, Nietzsche concludes that there must be another method by which an analysis of our present condition must proceed. Hence, his genealogical exploration of the origins of morality links the exercise of power and the construction of subjectivity. The genealogical method represents a materialist approach to the study of social phenomena that seeks to explain the origins of constructs without reference to a transcendental subject as an explanatory basis for existing or past practices. If moral practice cannot be grounded in the "truth" of subjectivity, then it must be grounded in the exercise of power. There are no moral facts. Morality must be read as a symptom.<sup>58</sup> Because morality does not reflect universal truth or divine commandments, the real question of morality is what it tells us about its creators.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, when Nietzsche analyzes the transvaluations of values that occurs between antiquity and the rise of Christianity, he is looking for an explanation in the competition among differing classes from which a definition of subjectivity would emerge. Nietzsche assumes that different classes would have different experiences and, therefore, different outlooks on life. The concept of "good" has its origins in the actions of a noble class. To Nietzsche, the Greek concept of "noble" embodied values of strength, activity, happiness, health and vigor.<sup>60</sup> The noble person creates an image of "good" from itself and is so secure in that image that it can even see it in enemies.

The coming of Christianity brought about the first transvaluation of values. In itself, Nietzsche claims that religion has nothing to do with morality. It is simply a way of life backed up by a system of rewards and punishments.<sup>61</sup> Morality and religion are simply the means by which human beings seek to gain control over others. Encouraged by a class of priest that craved power over human beings, the great masses of people began to believe that their superior numbers gave them superior virtue. The values of strength, vigor, and happiness were replaced by guilt, blame, and revenge, personified by the Old Testament god of vengeance. The New Testament brought the "seducer of the poor"<sup>62</sup> who could entice ears hungry to hear that the wretched, ugly, depraved, and stupid are really the blessed of the earth. Armed with such a morality, the "herd" can now storm the castle and replace the noble values with the doctrine of equality and engage democratic political practice.

This transvaluation moved from what Nietzsche considered a more "natu-

realistic" morality to one that is "anti-natural." Natural morality is dominated by the instincts of life.<sup>63</sup> What is natural embraces the "will to power." The will to power is a "pathos," an event or activity in which life seeks to extend its force.<sup>64</sup> Anti-natural morality turns against the instincts of life.<sup>65</sup> It turns human beings into despisers of life, as it demands that they turn their energies against what is instinctual.

This transvaluation was largely carried out by a class of priests armed with a message of debt owed to their doctrine. The Christian priests asserted that one is bound to a creditor who has sacrificed himself to a debtor.<sup>66</sup> These priests are "the poisoners of life."<sup>67</sup> The priests invented sin in order to make the people subservient to them.<sup>68</sup>

The practical side of "free will" now emerges. The doctrine of "free will" has utility for the existing order of power. Nietzsche claims that free will was invented by theologians in order to make people "responsible" and, therefore, allow them to be punished.<sup>69</sup> Human beings are told they are free and responsible in order to justify subjugation and punishment as transgressors and sinners. Through the process of creating sinners, the church both legitimates its existence and extends its power, as the ability to punish. To Nietzsche, this is where Christian morality has taken Western culture.

While Nietzsche's target generally remains the exercise of church power, the imposition of "responsibility" has a parallel within the state. Morality and religion can shape men if it shapes legislation.<sup>70</sup> Given that claim, the myth of "free will" also serves the interest of the state as it is embodied in the structure of the judicial system. Using the concept of free will, the state can invent criminality and moral responsibility. This serves a very important function, because the more it can extend the idea of criminality, the more the state can extend its power. The more it can punish, the more it can justify its existence. In a time of peace, observes Nietzsche, the human being turns its aggression back on itself.<sup>71</sup>

The state has no claims to moral standing. It is an organization of power that protects a particular mode of existence. "The state organized immorality—internally: as police, penal law, classes, commerce, and family; externally: as will to power, to war, to conquest, to revenge."<sup>72</sup> By dividing responsibility and making virtues of patriotism and duty, the state can do things that no human being would ever consider. The state is a powerful entity, particularly in its ability to shape beliefs, but it has no intrinsic moral character.

This is particularly evident in the state's judicial function. Nietzsche claims that while the meaning of punishment is uncertain, its effects are not. The attempts of punishment to instill guilt are continually hindered as the practice of brutalization, lies, and violence against criminals by the state only makes prisoners hard and cold, strengthening their resistance.<sup>73</sup> Punishment is, therefore, only vengeance carried out by a collective power.

The impact of such a system extends beyond those labeled as the criminal.<sup>74</sup> As the "slave morality" has imposed its power on society, it has promoted ideals that Nietzsche identifies as being contrary to life. Weakness is seen as meritorious, impotence is called virtue, and misery is asserted as a sign of being chosen

by god. In this "workshop where ideals are manufactured" the great mass comes to believe that they have to lick the "spittle" of the lords of the earth because their god had commanded them to obey authority. Nietzsche says of this workshop, "it stinks of so many lies."<sup>75</sup>

Nietzsche claims that what was needed was a new type of human being.<sup>76</sup> This person understands the world beyond the concepts of good and evil inherited from an age of decadence. They must be able to inhabit a culture in which there is no special purpose bestowed upon humanity, and understand that no one is responsible for being here.<sup>77</sup> Mankind has no special mission to fulfill, no purpose to realize. No one is to blame for us being who we are.<sup>78</sup>

To Nietzsche, human beings have the will and the ability to construct illusions. Life cannot be lived without them. Subjectivity and morality constitute the residue of Apollonian will. Apollo is the deity of self control.<sup>79</sup> Apollonian illusions direct life activity. Thus, it is the Apollonian will that also directs the production of morality. This 'will to construct' establishes a fabrication of subjectivity, from which it can impose a particular order of life on the world. This process is natural. The problem is that the current set of illusions are destructive to life, to people, and to the superior individual, who is not just the carrier of culture, but is its creator. What Apollo creates, Dionysus must destroy.

#### IV. Dionysian Politics

In his work, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*, Lawrence J. Hatab makes the claim that given Nietzsche's critique of Western moral and epistemological foundations, democracy wins by default.<sup>80</sup> Democracy, Hatab asserts, is the only form of government that can accommodate an "ungrounded" politics, embrace the idea of political struggle, and still remain compatible with the kind of meritocracy that Nietzsche implied in his writings.<sup>81</sup> Representative democracy constitutes a temporary aristocracy, chosen by the citizens, securing that the best will rule.<sup>82</sup> The proceduralist approach of democratic practice secures that the mechanism will adjust to any change in the configuration of forces between the competing interests in the political arena.

While Hatab's work is a strong defense of democracy, it is open to question how strong a case he makes for involving Nietzsche in the discussion. One is left with the impression that Nietzsche either has to be pacified and turned into a democrat or dismissed as too radical and dangerous. Hence, Hatab discusses the "danger of the aesthetic approach" as requiring too grand a refashioning of society,<sup>83</sup> disassociating Nietzsche from the scope of his observations and the depth of his insights. This final section of this paper will try to bring together Nietzsche's critique of epistemology and morality and argue that the only political stance that can be consistent with these anti-foundational claims is anarchism.

Thus far, it has been argued that the "will to construct" is essentially an Apollonian activity. But Nietzsche claims to be a disciple of Dionysus. As such, Nietzsche asserts that these constructions are products of context, language, biological need, and historical circumstance. The structures produced are the result

of circumstances, not reflections of any essential truths, universal conditions, or absolute knowledge. Our problem, according to Nietzsche, is that we have invented a myth about who and what we are, and then have taken it to be universal truth. That has led us to cultural, philosophic, religious, and political errors.

To say that Nietzsche had a dislike for the nation-state would be a gross understatement. "Fatherlandishness" is irrational "soil addiction."<sup>84</sup> In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he refers to the state as "the coldest of all cold monsters." It is the "New Idol,"<sup>85</sup> now that god has died. Nationalism is a swindle, perpetrated by politicians.<sup>86</sup> It is "insanity."<sup>87</sup> Perhaps, most importantly, Nietzsche claimed that nationalism is a "fiction," something that has been made.<sup>88</sup>

From these, and many other passages, it is clear that Nietzsche abhors the nation-state. But there is still a question about whether or not this disgust is the result of the current configuration of the state around a democratic ethos, or whether the configuration of any organized power within a collective would likely result in the same response. Simply put, it is both.

Nietzsche's venom toward democracy is expressed in places too numerous to mention. Democracy represents a decline in the way in which the state organizes power.<sup>89</sup> It puts power in the hands of the "herd."<sup>90</sup> In democracy all are equal, as with cattle.<sup>91</sup> The idea of "equal rights" is a "superstition that turns everyone into part of the "mob."<sup>92</sup>

Socialism and anarchism, along with liberal democracy, are caught in the web of criticism. Socialism is the doctrine of the most stupid of the herd animals. It represents the rebirth of the Christian idea of a "social instinct," in a secular form.<sup>93</sup> In asserting a "social instinct," socialism denies the uniqueness and differences among human beings. Therefore, Nietzsche concludes that socialism is opposed to life.

Anarchism is associated with socialism in Nietzsche's writings. Anarchism is a means, a form of agitation, in the service of socialist ideals.<sup>94</sup> According to Nietzsche, anarchism demands equality for a declining social strata.<sup>95</sup> The "last judgment" and "the revolution" both constitute otherworldly escapes.<sup>96</sup> They are both symptoms of decadence.

Liberalism, with its democratic ethos, also relies on a the metaphysics of equality. It seeks to make men small.<sup>97</sup> The liberal notion of a social contract does not change the basic problem of democratic politics. The contract simply constructs the idea of community around the invention that everyone is a debtor, owing allegiance to the state as their creditor.<sup>98</sup>

Socialism, anarchism (as associated with socialism), and liberalism are all rejected. What Nietzsche embraces is aristocracy. But what does he mean by aristocracy, and how can this vision be made compatible with the epistemological critique offered by Dionysus? In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche states, "...I defend aristocracy." What he is defending against is extremely important. His target is the "herd animal ideals."<sup>99</sup>

Nietzsche is defending an aristocracy, but an aristocracy of merit, not of structure. Dionysus is opposed to structure. It interferes with the passion and

spontaneous joy that Dionysus represents. Everything in the state is contrary to man's nature.<sup>100</sup> The legal structure in the state represents a partial restriction on the "will to life."<sup>101</sup> Human beings do not realize their creative force as part of the collective, but only as individuals.

However, there are only a few of these truly great individuals. People and races exist for the production and maintenance of the few of value in any civilization.<sup>102</sup> The rest are "superfluous."<sup>103</sup> The masses exist to serve great human beings and to emulate them.<sup>104</sup> Thus, power is not rejected as a part of social life. Power is necessary to order the mass. Even this age in which human beings are increasingly turned into "cogs in a machine"<sup>105</sup> may have its advantages. The turning of the masses into machines may provide a precondition for the invention of a "higher man."<sup>106</sup>

The arena of social life must be open to the influence of great individuals. Nietzsche's ideal is expressed in the *Use and Abuse of History*:

The time will come when we shall wisely keep away from all constructions of the world-process, or even of the history of man—a time when we shall no more look at the masses but at individuals who form a sort of bridge over the wan stream of becoming.... One giant calls to the other across the waste space of time, and the high spirit-talk goes on, undisturbed by the wanton, noisy dwarfs who creep among them. The task of history is to be the mediator between these, and even to give motive and power to produce the great man.<sup>107</sup>

Nietzsche's defense of the individual is not the result of the types of transcendental assertion that arose from some Enlightenment thought. This is not humanism. All "constructions of the world-process" are to be rejected as Apollonian fictions that contain no truth, no essential representations of human nature, political, or social life. Such representations are fictions created out of fear and circumstance. They have no intrinsic validity and are arbitrary in nature. One cannot construct a political edifice where there is no place on which to build a foundation. Hence, Nietzsche rejects much of the Western tradition in philosophy, since it has sought to fabricate an image of the human being and of consciousness as the basis for social and political life.

Nietzsche's connection to anarchism stems, therefore, from his critique of Western epistemology. The representation of the human character that provides the foundation for political prescriptions is, to Nietzsche, nothing more than an image used to justify a particular configuration of power. The schematization of experience follows from arbitrarily assigned categories, the basis of which cannot be validated in any essential way. The products of this process of knowledge creation serve only to maintain and extend the arbitrary character of structure.

In place of truth, there is only language and power. In the absence of truth, there is no form of political life that can be given priority. Given the absence of epistemological validity for any moral or structural underpinnings to a particu-

lar form of political life, the superior individual emerges as the "default" condition. Where there is no possibility of constructing *a priori*s about human nature, there can be no universals regarding politics.<sup>108</sup> The superior individual is given primacy in Nietzsche's political thinking only because of the essential anarchistic character of the world.

### **Conclusion: Anarchism and the Overman**

With every structure open to Dionysian deconstruction, the essentially anarchistic nature of life is revealed. Nietzsche does not perceive this in negative terms, but as opening up the possibilities for human achievement. The human task is to interpret, to live and reflect life in creative achievements. It is the anarchistic nature of the world that makes this both possible and necessary.

In Nietzsche's claim that a tension exists between Apollo and Dionysus which is essential to art and life, he introduces a question for political life that cannot be ignored. If politics is grounded in presuppositions that cannot be validated, then the order of life manifested by those presuppositions is open to challenge. To put it simply, there can be no moral or ethical grounds for obedience. Further, since any practical-utilitarian justification for obedience can always be superseded by another order of life, another set of illusory goals, the order of the state remains foundationless. With "truth" deconstructed, all that remains is power.

Anarchism emerges from Nietzsche's philosophy not as a political prescription but as an underlying condition to social and political existence. The world is anarchistic, devoid of any specific content and meaning. Since representation of the human character is possible, any politics constructed on a characterization of human nature must be false. Owing to this epistemological void, the aspirations of the superior individual, an individual who is bound to a particular historically determined condition of necessity, becomes paramount. Only individuals in the process of life are real. All else is illusion.

Nietzsche's critique of existing morality and of politics is oriented to the present, but his understanding of political possibilities is oriented toward the future. Nietzsche claims that his politics is for an age not yet born.<sup>109</sup> Politics, as it is presently conceived, must come to an end. Does this mean that Nietzsche is a utopian? He never claims that the age of the overman would end conflict, bring the reign of "truth," or end suffering. He simply argues that it would function better than an age in which human beings are taught to despise themselves.

The overman is an ideal, but it is a concept devoid of any particular content, of any particular image. The overman comes after the anarchistic nature of the world is understood, after a recognition that the world does not contain a singular truth or a teleologically destined way of life. The overman embodies creativity and is capable of self-sacrifice, and as such, love, but Nietzsche adds little that is specific. To do so would be to suggest the content of a future before we get there. In the light of his critique of such sorcery, Nietzsche cannot justify the assertion of any specific character, except the overman's recognition that it must create itself in a world without structure. It is a world in which there is

power, but a world in which all knowledge and meaning are recognized as human inventions.

The overman can be a future for mankind only after the historical and contingent nature of Apollonian illusions are revealed. With the death of that collective illusion called "god," human beings must have a new goal in order to be able to soar. "...[T]his is what the will to truth should mean to you: that everything be changed into what is thinkable for man, visible for man, feelable by man."<sup>110</sup> Our new knowledge expresses praise and a justification for "impermanence."<sup>111</sup>

The overman is created from the Dionysian. It is the activity of creating and recreating ourselves, the hammer chipping away at the stone until the image is revealed.<sup>112</sup> The overman is in mankind's future only in a context free from structure, free from a predetermined image to which the future and human kind must conform.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example *Twilight of the Idols*, in Walter Kaufmann, trans. and ed., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 534; *The Antichrist* in Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, pp. 647-48.
- 2 It should be noted that this is not a Burckian type of aristocracy, with the strong component of tradition, but an open notion of aristocracy, more consistent with a deontologized Plato.
- 3 Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
- 4 Lawrence J. Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995).
- 5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 161.
- 6 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), p. 10.
- 7 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989).
- 8 Nietzsche also recognized that there were forces at work eroding the continued existence of the nation-state; see *Human all too Human*, pp. 61-62.
- 9 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, §24.
- 10 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Press, 1968), §816.
- 11 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §812.
- 12 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*; Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §798.
- 13 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, §25.
- 14 *Ibid.*, §§4, 16.
- 15 *Ibid.*, §1.
- 16 *Ibid.*, §24.
- 17 See the critique of Marx in Jacques Derrida's *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
- 18 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), §295.
- 19 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, §25.
- 20 *Ibid.*, §2.
- 21 *Ibid.*, §7.
- 22 *Ibid.*, §1.
- 23 See the 1886 Preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, entitled "Backward Glance."
- 24 "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," in *Nietzsche Selections*, ed. Richard Schacht (New

- York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 49.
- 25 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §480.
- 26 Ibid., §480.
- 27 Ibid., §494.
- 28 Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1960), §109.
- 29 Ibid., §110.
- 30 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §584.
- 31 Ibid., §862.
- 32 Ibid., §481.
- 33 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, p. 26.
- 34 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," p. 47.
- 35 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 328.
- 36 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §506.
- 37 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," p. 48.
- 38 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §522.
- 39 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, p. 45.
- 40 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," p. 49.
- 41 Ibid., p. 52.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., p. 50.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid., p. 51.
- 46 Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, §110.
- 47 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," p. 49.
- 48 Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, §481.
- 49 Ibid., §484.
- 50 Ibid., §485.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid., §488.
- 53 Immanuel Kant, "Metaphysical Foundations of Morals," in *The Philosophy of Kant*, ed. Carl Friedrich (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 187.
- 54 Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §14.
- 55 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, p. 69.
- 56 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §21.
- 57 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, pp. 24–26.
- 58 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in Schacht, *Nietzsche Selections*, p. 315.
- 59 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §187.
- 60 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, pp. 28–38.
- 61 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §146.
- 62 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, p. 35.
- 63 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in Schacht, *Nietzsche Selections*, p. 311.
- 64 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §§635–36.
- 65 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in Schacht, *Nietzsche Selections*, p. 311.
- 66 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, pp. 90–92.
- 67 Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §8.
- 68 Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, §26.
- 69 Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, p. 314, and in *The Antichrist*, p. 598.
- 70 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §144.
- 71 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, pp. 84–85.
- 72 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §717.
- 73 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, pp. 80–82.
- 74 Although, it should be noted that Nietzsche asserted that all great men were criminals in relation to their time. See Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §736.

- 75 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, p. 46-47.
- 76 Ibid., p. 96.
- 77 Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, p. 315.
- 78 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §765.
- 79 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, §4.
- 80 Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*, p. 4.
- 81 Ibid., p. 117.
- 82 Ibid., p. 125.
- 83 Ibid., p. 232.
- 84 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §241.
- 85 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 160.
- 86 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §78.
- 87 Ibid., §256.
- 88 Ibid., §251.
- 89 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 543.
- 90 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §156.
- 91 Ibid., §752.
- 92 Ibid., §864.
- 93 Ibid., §§20, 30.
- 94 Ibid., §784.
- 95 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 534.
- 96 Ibid., p. 534.
- 97 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in Schacht, *Nietzsche Selections*, p. 317.
- 98 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, pp. 71-72.
- 99 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §936.
- 100 Ibid., §383.
- 101 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, p. 76.
- 102 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §679.
- 103 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 161-62.
- 104 Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: Macmillan, 1988), p. 61.
- 105 Ibid., p. 44.
- 106 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §866.
- 107 Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, p. 59.
- 108 Andrew M. Koch, "Poststructuralism and the Epistemological Basis of Anarchism," in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. 23 (3) 327-51, 1993, p. 339.
- 109 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §958.
- 110 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 198.
- 111 Ibid., p. 199.
- 112 Ibid.

7 Andrew M. Koch, "Dionysian Politics: The Anarchistic Implications of Friedrich Nietzsche's Critique of Western Epistemology", in John Moore (ed.), *I am not a Man, I am Dynamite, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*, Autonomedia, New York 2005. 8 See for example the comparison between Nietzsche and the Libertarian Worker's Movement: Daniel Colson, "Nietzsche and the Libertarian Worker's Movement", in John Moore (ed.), *I am not a Man, I am Dynamite, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*, Autonomedia, New York 2005. renovation of politics through a subverting and radical path Given Nietzsche's emphasis on the limitations on human freedom, his critique of the notion of *causa sui* (self-creation out of nothing), and his critique of morality for relying on the assumption that we have free will, it may be surprising that he could be taken seriously as an existentialist—existentialism characteristically takes freedom and self-creation to (...) However, being Western Metaphysics' zenith is the greatest thing that can be said of a thinker, since being the one who brings to completion a school of thought makes one, at the same time, the precursor of the "other" beginning and thus his concept of God's dead, nihilism and truth really can open the door to a kind of post-metaphysical thought. Why are we still intrigued by Nietzsche? This chapter argues that sustained interest