

# NIETZSCHE ON AUTHORITY AND THE STATE<sup>1</sup>

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*I have never known anyone whom, judged in the  
most universal way, I have felt as an authority;  
at the same time, I have a deep need for such a person*  
Nietzsche<sup>2</sup>

Postmodern interpretations of Nietzsche emphasize his aversion towards authority. His work is seen as seeking to deconstruct the metaphysical foundations of authority and devoted mainly to personal emancipation and individual self-creation. For Michel Foucault, Nietzsche is the precursor of a philosophy of disparity, dispersion and difference, a philosophy that undermines unity and stability, ontological bulwarks that support the claims of authority. According to Foucault, Nietzschean genealogy “disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified” (Foucault, 1984: 82). The historical sense proper to genealogy dissolves the metaphysical and supra-historical; it consists of “the acuity of a glance that distinguishes, separates, and disperses...– the kind of dissociating view... capable of shattering the unity of man’s being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of the past” (ibid: 87). Nietzsche privileges freedom understood as change and dispersion, and dissolves the unity and stability demanded by authority. Alan Schrift, in agreement with Foucault, writes that the “question of authority and its legitimation is a central issue in Nietzsche’s writings... Whether he is dismantling the authority of the moral-theological tradition, deconstructing the authority of God, or excising the hidden metaphysical authority within language, Nietzsche’s refusal to legitimate any figure of authority remains constant” (Schrift, 2008: 1).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Richard Rorty associates Nietzsche with Kierkegaard, Baudelaire and Proust, and considers him to be an exemplary liberal ironist (Rorty, 1989: xiv). He acknowledges that he sponsors a determinate political vision which is “clearly anti-liberal.” But Nietzsche’s anti-liberalism is “adventitious and idiosyncratic,” and his ideal of self-creativity does not translate into social policy (Rorty, 1989: 99). Nietzsche, a free spirit, preaches abstention from politics and utopian individualism.

The most poignant manifestation of Nietzsche’s refusal to legitimate authority is his

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<sup>2</sup> “*Ich habe keinen Menschen kennen gelernt, den ich in den allgemeinsten Urtheilen als Autorität empfunden hätte: während ich ein tiefes Bedürfniß nach einem solchen Menschen hatte*” (Nietzsche, *KSA* 11, 26 [460]).

<sup>3</sup> According to Schrift, Nietzsche shares Derrida’s “deconstructive critique of the subject as a privileged centre of discourse in the context of his project of delegitimizing authority” (Schrift, 2008: 1)

abomination of the state as universal guarantor of security and welfare. His *cri de coeur* is: “the least possible state” (*Human All Too Human [HATH]*, §473; *A*, §179). Any form of public intervention should be considered a grievous hindrance to the full development of creative individualities. No social or institutional imperative can stand in the way of human creativity. Nietzsche’s (anti)metaphysical intuitions confirm this avowal of individual creative autonomy. He rejects what he perceives as the authoritarianism of a metaphysics based on the notions of “unity, identity, duration, substance, cause, thinghood, being” (*Twilight of the Idols [TI]*, III 5). As a protection against authoritarian collectivism, his epistemology is nominalist and does away with the notion of truth as discovery (cf. *KSA* 1, 878-81). Only perspectivism can ensure social pluralism as a safeguard against state centralization. Anti-authoritarianism is possibly the most prominent of the attributes postmodernism confers on Nietzsche. As Peter Berkowitz notes, “exaltation of the creative will instills an indiscriminate contempt for authority” (Berkowitz, 1995: 269).

Additionally, Nietzsche’s antipathy towards politics is seen as a confirmation of his rejection of state authority. In *Schopenhauer as Educator [SE]* he writes: “for he who loves the *furor philosophicus* will have no time for the *furor politicus*” (*SE*, section §7). Accordingly, many commentators deny the political orientation of his thought.<sup>4</sup> Thomas H. Brobjer observes that Nietzsche “very rarely speaks explicitly of politics” (Brobjer, 1998: 301), and according to Schrift, Nietzsche “seemed to be almost entirely disinterested in politics” (Schrift, 2000: 221).<sup>5</sup> Bruce Detwiler interprets this antipathy more appropriately as determined by a “thoroughgoing disgust with the modern ‘petty politics’ that [desolates] the German spirit,” and by his opposition to turn “the state into a new idol” (Detwiler, 1990: 60-1). His refusal actively to participate in politics matches his distrust of the modern state which he sees as an impediment for the development of culture. Only an instrumental approach to politics could make sense to him (*ibid*: 66; cf. Conway, 2008: 38).

In this essay I challenge the anti-authoritarian understanding of Nietzsche by showing that his refusal to grant legitimacy to the state refers only to the modern state. He is critical of the normative authority demanded by the liberal state, an authority based on antecedent consensus.

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<sup>4</sup> Much has been written about Nietzsche’s abhorrence of the state. Walter Kaufmann thinks that Nietzsche was “basically anti-political” and for this reason he opposed both the idolatry of the state and political liberalism” (Kaufmann, 1968: 412). Again, according to Leslie Paul Thiele, for Nietzsche politics “constitutes a threat to the individual. The purpose of the state...ought to be the cultivation of individuals. But this is never the case” (Thiele, 1990: 47). Other scholars refer indiscriminately to Nietzsche’s “anti-state animus” (Hunt, 1991: 43), to his “critique of the state” (Brobjer, 1998; 306). A more balanced view is expressed by Don Dombowsky: “Nietzsche does not reject all states or political constitutions, rather he rejects the democratic and socialist states... He praises, for example, the Greek state, the Roman state, the military (Bonapartist) state and his contemporary Russian state (under Tsar Alexander III)” (Dombowsky, 2001: 389).

<sup>5</sup> A decade ago, articles published by Thomas Brodjer and Alan Schrift in *Nietzsche Studien*, sparked a lively discussion (Brodjer, 1998 & Schrift, 2000). Don Dombowsky (2001 & 2002; cf. Brodjer, 2001 & Schrift, 2002) convincingly responded to the claims made by those authors. In their recently published anthology of Nietzsche’s political commentary, Dombowsky, together with Frank Cameron, have demonstrated that ‘Nietzsche was an observer of and responded to the political events which shaped the Bismarckian era’ (Cameron & Dombowsky, 2008).

At the same time, he grants legitimacy to non-normative authority, either charismatic or traditional, like the one held by the aristocratic states of antiquity, and by modern strong commanders like Napoleon. I discuss this issue in three distinct moments of Nietzsche's intellectual development. (1) In his early work (1862-74), Nietzsche assigns an instrumental role to the state, namely facilitating the procreation of the artistic genius. This aim can only be attained by the Olympian existence of an aristocracy secured by the enforcement of slave labour. This is most evident in his essay "The Greek State" where the authority of the state is said to derive from the natural subordination of slaves. Slavery is the necessary condition for the development of an aristocratic culture. This is directly at odds with the liberal notion of state authority. Liberalism does not see authority as naturally given, but as something that is normatively grounded on an antecedent social contract or consensus. Consent is necessary due to the liberal claim that the equality among individuals is natural. In contrast, Nietzsche believes in natural inequality and derives authority from natural hierarchies. Nietzsche's anti-liberalism is already visible in an essay, written in 1862, where he celebrates Napoleon III and the monarchical principle to the detriment of liberal constitutionalism. (2) In *HATH* (1878), Nietzsche develops another facet of the notion of natural subordination conceived as the original foundation of authority. He understands the authority of the classical state as subordinate to religion. The triumph of liberal equality severs all links with religion and hierarchical conceptions. The state loses legitimacy and this marks the beginning of its extinction. What Nietzsche fears most are the revolutionary upheavals that follow the extinction of the state, and is willing to compromise with democracy to delay that occurrence. At the same time, he supports Bismarck's promulgation of anti-socialist legislation in 1878. (3) In 1881, a change takes place in his argumentative strategy when he realizes that the failure of that legislation has led Bismarck to promulgate welfare policies that further erode aristocratic authority. He now argues that the worst adversary of state authority is democracy. This is the point of departure of his campaign against current morality which he blames for the growth and consolidation of democracy. Simultaneously, he initiates a campaign in favour of a new aristocratic morality, a key element of which is an ethics of command and obedience. With respect to the authority of the state, his argumentative strategy has a dual aspect. He rejects the attempt by liberal contractualism normatively to ground the legitimacy of the state in a social contract, and at the same time, he defends the non-normative legitimacy of non-liberal authorities, both charismatic figures and the authority held by tradition.

I

On 24 September 1862, when Bismarck becomes Prime Minister of Prussia, Nietzsche is seventeen years old. Twenty six years later, on 3 January 1889, when he collapses on the streets of Turin, Bismarck is still Germany's Iron Chancellor. Nietzsche's adult life coincides with the duration of that regime and is pre-eminently determined by the culture and political conceptions current during the Bismarckian era. Nietzsche's interest in his political context is already in evidence during his years at Pforta. In 1862, he writes an essay in which he lauds the victory of Cavaignac over the socialists, "of the monarchical principle<sup>6</sup> over the republic" (Cameron &

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<sup>6</sup> This reference to the monarchical principle, by means of which the subject of constituent power stands above the constitution, coincides with Nietzsche's view of Napoleon I in *GS* §23 as one who can claim exceptional rights and who stands above morality (Dombowsky, 2008: 350-351; cf. Cristi, 2010).

Dombowsky, 2008: 27), and then the coup d'état of Napoleon III in 1851, which Nietzsche justifies on the basis of his charismatic authority. Nietzsche privileges the authority exercised by concrete individuals as opposed to the liberal rule of abstract normativity. Accordingly, in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* he praises the Greeks for whom “what is more abstract coalesces into a person”, as opposed to the moderns, for whom “the most personal sublimates into an abstraction” (*KSA* 1, 815; cf. Bertram, 2009: 171).

*The Birth of Tragedy [BT]* and *Untimely Meditations* have been interpreted as engaging in a “fierce attack” against the state, a “motif that remains characteristic of all of Nietzsche’s works” (Kaufmann, 1950: 123). Nietzsche proclaims, in *BT*’s dedication to Wagner, that art is the “most elevated task and true metaphysical activity” (*BT*, Preface). At the same time he declares that he sees no opposition between “aesthetic indulgence” and “patriotic enthusiasm” (ibid). This is significant for it constitutes an acknowledgment that the book does not have a purely contemplative intent. Nietzsche ponders on “a serious German problem... a problem that lies at the very center of German hopes” (ibid).<sup>7</sup> He believes that Germany needs a cultural rebirth and is confident that it can be attained. This is the historical context that makes it urgent to address aesthetic issues. Beneath the present artificial and decadent German culture Nietzsche discerns “the noble heart of popular culture... an immemorial, majestic and internally healthy force” (*BT*, §23). Later in 1886, in the prologue for a new edition of the book, Nietzsche acknowledges its optimistic spirit, but admits that he had placed his hopes where there was nothing to hope for. Germany, “which had recently demonstrated a will to rule Europe and also the strength to rule over it,” had given up on this task and found itself at that point in a process of “transition towards mediocrity, democracy and other modern ideas” (*BT*, Prologue §6). This observation may give us a hint about the direction of Nietzsche’s attack on the state. He sees parliamentary democracy on the rise in Germany and this has meant a weakening of the authority of the executive state. In turn, this constitutes a grave impediment for the advancement of culture. Culture, he acknowledges in *SE*, is “fairly independent of the welfare of the state” (*SE*, §4) and constitutes the highest goal of humankind. A well-ordered state is one which places itself at the service of culture and does not step beyond this ancillary role. It is clear that Nietzsche is not critical of a state that strongly promotes culture. His attacks are directed against a conception of the state which regards itself as “the highest goal of humankind” and which affirms that a human being “has no higher duty than to serve the state” (*SE*, §4).

Confirmation of this view is found in “The Greek State”, an essay originally intended to be included in *BT*. Nietzsche here postulates that two essential modern ideas, the dignity of human being and the dignity of labour, distinguish it from classical culture. The Greeks were able to develop a superior culture by exploiting slave labour. This was then, and continues to be now, a necessary condition for the growth of a superior culture. “The misery of workers must increase to make it possible for a small number of Olympic men to generate the world of art” (*KSA* 1, 767). The democratic state, grounded in popular consent, cannot aspire to develop a true culture. An aristocratic state is required for that purpose, a state whose matrix is a superhuman executive authority, a figure of divine proportions that can grant legitimacy to state authority. The modern democratic state cannot assume an authentic cultural task, which Nietzsche defines

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<sup>7</sup> Because of the interest shown here by Nietzsche about what determines the social and political identity of a nation Tracy Strong takes *The Birth of Tragedy* as “obviously the most political of his books” (Strong, 1996: 134).

as the breeding of superior human specimens. The Greek state, in contrast, was the “iron clamp” (ibid: 769) that allowed society to transcend its natural condition, the *bellum omnium contra omnes*. This allowed Greece to attain a superior culture favourable to the development of the Olympian genius.

When Nietzsche turns his attention to his own political milieu he perceives a dangerously atrophied state. This coincides with a loss of a “state instinct” (*Staatstendenz*) on the part of individuals, who, as a result, attribute value to it only “when it coincides with their own interest” (ibid: 772). The aim that guides them is the freedom to pursue their own ends without state interference. They promote “the politics of their convenience” (ibid: 772-3) and it is inconceivable that “they could sacrifice themselves in favour of a state instinct when they lack that instinct” (ibid: 773). Individuals seek protection for their own projects; they long for peace and the avoidance of war. This they are able to secure through the dissemination of “a liberal, optimistic view of the world, that has its roots in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, in a philosophy that is un-German, genuinely Latin, superficial and devoid of metaphysics” (ibid: 773). The antidote to prevent the state instinct to become a money instinct is “war, always war” (ibid: 774). War reveals the true essence of the state for it contributes to draw strict hierarchical lines of command and obedience, typical of a “belligerent society” in whose apex one finds “the military genius... the original founder of the state” (ibid: 775). Everything else becomes a docile instrument at the service of the aims set by the military genius. The obedience demanded by the military commanders is the reason why the dignity of human beings and the dignity of labour can find no place in a well-constituted state.

The goal here is the preservation and advancement of aristocratic culture. Only culture possesses an intrinsic value; everything else retains instrumental value. “The proper aim of the State [is] the Olympian existence and ever-renewed procreation and preparation of the genius, compared with which all other things are only tools, expedients and factors towards realization” (ibid: 776). Slaves are instruments par excellence and a society that appreciates culture must necessarily be a slave society. Such a society requires a state that sponsors an ethics of command and obedience. The state must remain in the service of an aristocratic society and culture, and serves as an “iron clamp” to establish and preserve the institution of slavery. The modern state, in contrast, has been demeaned by liberals who urge “the emancipation of the masses from the rule of great individuals,” and seek to dismantle the most sacred order, namely “the servitude of the masses, their subservient obedience” (*KSA* 1, 698).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche owes his early conception of the state to Burckhardt (cf. Regent, 2008: 635). Together with other political historians, like Treitschke and Sybel (whose lectures Nietzsche attends while a student at the University of Bonn), Burckhardt adheres to the agenda of the right-wing section of the National Liberal Party whose motto is *Bildung und Besitz*. These historians are conservative liberals who support free trade policies combined with a strong government. They are suspicious of parliamentary democracy and the equalization of rights, and support Bismarck’s anti-socialist legislation. Typically, Burckhardt, as a staunch conservative, defends patrician authority, and, as a liberal, stands for individual freedom, particularly freedom of education. Alfred von Martin perceptively notices the conservative liberal duality characteristic of Burckhardt: “Genuine authority cannot be grounded on the sheer reality of power. Authority, in its highest sense, is a conservative notion, which, in the case of Burckhardt, combines with a liberal notion of freedom to make up an anti-revolutionary *complexio*” (von Martin, 1941: 65;

## II

In May 1878, Nietzsche publishes *HATH* which he dedicates to Voltaire. He takes a distance from Wagner's attempt to renew German culture and reconciles himself with Enlightenment ideals, which he radically distinguishes from those of the French Revolution. He favours Voltaire's moderation and rejects Rousseau's radicalism. He thinks that "the revolution energizes the most savage energies" and cannot be "regulator, architect, artist and enrich human nature" (*HATH* §463).

In an extensive section titled *Religion and Government* (*HATH*, §472), Nietzsche analyzes the decline and fall of the modern state. This development, determined by the relation between the state and religion, has two stages. Initially, the state maintains a close internal relationship with religion. One determinate social class takes custody of the state and uses religion as a form of legitimation. "As Napoleon understands it, even today, without the help of priests no power may be 'legitimate' (*legitim*)" (*ibid*). The second stage in this development takes place when religion begins to be perceived as a mere instrument of legitimation. This is typical of liberal regimes. When this happens religion ceases to be public or civic, and turns into a purely private affair. Religious pluralism, a consequence of privatization, gives rise to numberless conflicts. Without the unity secured by the state, multiple religious manifestations, previously repressed, ascend to the surface and generate sectarian conflicts. To face this situation rulers adopt a hostile attitude towards religion. Concurrently, those who take religion seriously adopt a hostile attitude towards the state. The transitional conflicts that ensue further erode the authority of the state which is no longer perceived as a "transcendent (*überweltliche*) institution" (*ibid*). Among other things, it cannot guarantee the compliance of state commands. Individuals do not feel obligated to obey the laws and majoritarian politics become decisive. "Private enterprises come into action and absorb the functions discharged by the state" (*ibid*). The most essential of state functions, namely the protection of persons, is privatized, and this, more than anything else, accelerates the death of the state.<sup>9</sup>

Nietzsche summarizes these two stages of the process of state extinction. He asserts that the state can sustain itself only when its interests coincide with those of religion. When that identity vanishes the foundations that sustain state legitimacy collapse. "When religion evaporates the state inevitably loses its ancient veil of Isis and ceases to inspire reverence" (*ibid*). This process of secularization is spearheaded by democracy, by the sovereignty of the people. When the authority of the people dissolves divine authority, the outcome is the dissolution of state authority. But this does not end here. There may be an intermediary stage that may delay the extinction of the state and the rise of revolutionary chaos. Hoping that this stage can take effect, Nietzsche concludes with an exhortation that reveals how much he loathes the politics of revolution: "Let us trust the prudence and the self-interest of individuals who seek to prolong the existence of the state for a while and reject the destructive experiments of impatient and fanatical

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my translation).

<sup>9</sup> In *The Twilight of Idols*, Nietzsche confirms this diagnosis. "Democracy has always been the declining form of the power to organize: I have already, in *Human All Too Human*, characterized modern democracy, together with its imperfect manifestations such as the 'German Reich', as the decaying form of the state" (*TI IX*, §39

dilettantes” (ibid). This section shows that Nietzsche is not hostile against the state *per se*, but only against bureaucratic, administrative states legitimated by a manufactured normativity.<sup>10</sup>

In 1878, with the social tension in Germany rising, Bismarck fears an explosion like the French Commune in 1871. This accounts for the passage of his anti-socialist legislation on October 19 of that same year. Nietzsche supports these emergency measures. In the summer of 1879, after resigning his position at Basel, he writes *The Wanderer and his Shadow [WS]* where he charges the Revolution with setting “the Enlightenment on its fanatical head.” The Enlightenment, which is “so alien to the Revolution,” has now become “violent and impulsive.” The essential task is to cleanse it from this “impurity” and proceed “to strangle the Revolution at birth” (*WS*, §221). Nietzsche understands that he must proceed with caution. He announces his decision to remain in seclusion, “to withdraw into concealment,” not just because of his reticence to participate in politics, but also strategically as a way to accumulate a capital of ideas with which to confront these “very dangerous times” (*WS*, §229). Strategic is also his qualified acceptance of democracy. The democratization of Europe is now “irresistible” and may help as prophylaxis against revolutionary upsurges. Nietzsche appeals to democracy as a protection for the “orchards of culture” that may be “destroyed overnight by wild and senseless torrents” (*WS*, §275).

### III

Bismarck soon realizes that his anti-socialist legislation is not successful and thus decides to modify his strategy. In November 1881 he reaches a compromise with the socialist movement by inaugurating policies conducive to a welfare state. In the *Gay Science [GS]*, Nietzsche opposes these concessions and radicalizes his rejection of the discourse of equality and social security. He thinks that the European situation approximates that of China where for millennia life goes on without disruption and the desire for change has died (*GS*, §24). In *Dawn [D]*, Nietzsche recognizes in this current “fashionable morality”, characterized by the importance given to “sympathy for others” and the urge to “distance life from any danger” (*D*, §174). The Christian altruism feeds the growth of socialism. What is now seen as most perilous is the “development of rationality, of greed, of the desire for independence”, in one word, the eclosion of “the individual” (*D*, §173). This is the point of departure, as Nietzsche will acknowledge later in *Ecce Homo [EH]*, of his “campaign against morality” (*EH*, AI) and marks the beginning of his despair on the possibility of restoring an aristocratic state. Bismarck’s capitulation in the face of socialism makes it evident that the liberal contractual state is not an appropriate vehicle to foster an aristocratic hegemony. Bismarck’s state succumbed to the Christian imperatives

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<sup>10</sup> This section plays a crucial role in Tamsin Shaw’s argument. Based on Nietzsche’s claim that modern states “must be perceived to be legitimate” (Shaw, 2007: 4), she argues that for Nietzsche the state is the subject of “normative authority”, that it “requires normative consensus in order to rule,” and that it “must establish its authority by promoting the acceptance of laws, norms, and obligations” (ibid: 3 & 13). It seems to me that Shaw has too narrow a conception of legitimacy, which she equates with liberal normativity (cf. Schmitt, 2008: 136-9). Liberalism postulates the priority of rights and thus can only legitimize contractual authority. Shaw does not take into account that Nietzsche rejects the normative authority of the state not only because he is skeptical about attaining a non-coercive consensus, but also because he privileges non-contractual (charismatic and traditional) forms of authority.

inherited by socialism.

Nietzsche believes socialism is to be blamed for undermining the foundations of a healthy ethics of entrepreneurship. The captains of industry no longer seek to cultivate and heighten their superiority, and have thus lost their noble manners. Military society has yielded to an industrial society which shuns the ethics of command and obedience. Present-day workers understandably perceive their bosses as “clever, bloodsucking dogs, who exploit their needs, and whose name, figure, habits and reputation are indifferent to them” (*GS*, §40). To be able to command subordinates, capitalists must cultivate a charismatic presence; only then will they be exempted from justifying their ascendancy; only then will the worker find obedience natural. The oriental temperament, contemplative and phlegmatic, is not advisable for the development of an entrepreneurial ethics, but Nietzsche recommends the immigration of Chinese workers for their pre-disposition towards obedience and a lifestyle similar to “industrious ants” (*A*, §206).

Nietzsche announces his new morality, one that is more appropriate to belligerent times, a morality of manliness that exalts the ethics of command and obedience. He notices that “the emotion of commanding is a decisive sign of force and self-sovereignty” (*GS*, §347). Those who ignore how to command “wish for someone who can command, who commands with severity – a god, a prince, a class, a physician, a confessor, a dogma, a party” (*ibid*). Future commanders will make a habit of commanding and they will exercise it with aplomb. They will also be disposed to obey their peers, but will do so with the same arrogance of their command (*GS*, §40). Each member of the dominant elite is an autonomous individual, but it is clear that Nietzsche thinks that the leadership of this aristocratic minority must rule itself by an ethics of command and obedience to insure its own interest. This is an impossible task within an industrial and mercantile world, because its commanders, even if they assume an aristocratic stance, lack “the nobility of obedience” (*HATH*, §440). To obey nobly and in dignity fashion occurs within aristocratic families. This is something inherited from one’s feudal ancestry and cannot “flourish in our cultural climate” (*ibid*).

All these texts address a select audience and are not normatively guided by universalist imperatives. Nietzsche is opposed to require the state to guarantee universal security and welfare. His sole interest is the creation of the cultural conditions for breeding new aristocrats, who will only need to cultivate a “disposition to command,” and also to obey when required (*GS*, §283). These “valiant precursors” will be ready for war and “will honour heroism again” (*ibid*). Nietzsche recommends that they live dangerously. “Build your cities on the slope of Mt. Vesubius! Send you ships to unknown seas! Conduct war against your peers and against yourselves!” (*ibid*). He admires the architecture, opulent and autocratic, of the mansions and villas built on the heights of Genoa. “The whole district distills that splendid and insatiable selfishness typical of the desire to possess and exploit” (*GS*, §291). In Germany, the building of cities lays bare the existence “of laws, and a generalized delight in legality and obedience” (*ibid*). German architects are ruled “by the propensity to equality and submission” (*ibid*). In a fragment of 1885 he declares that current morality hinders breeding the “men of colossal creativity.” Morality now desires “a happiness of green meadows on earth, a morality that yearns for security, the absence of danger, tranquility and a lightness of being.” Most of all, a morality that shuns “every type of shepherd and leader” (*KSA* 11, 37 [8]).

When Zarathustra makes its entry he breathes new life to Nietzsche's campaign in favour of new aristocratic morality. In the chapter "On Self-Overcoming" he bases the patrician ethics of command and obedience on the notion of the will to power.

Wherever I found living beings, I have also heard the language of obedience.  
Every living thing obeys (*Alles Lebendige ist ein Gehorchendes*).  
And this is what I heard next: whoever does not obey himself shall be commanded. Such is the nature of living beings.  
Thirdly, I heard that to command is more onerous than obeying...  
Wherever I found living beings I have also found the will to power; even in the will of the servant I have found the master (Z, "On Self-Overcoming")

One may obey or disobey the commands of the will to power. Those who disobey will end up being commanded, and those who obey will be commanders. The will to power is not merely a drive for self-transcendence in pursuit of self-perfection; it also articulates an interpersonal relationship that involves command and obedience.<sup>11</sup> Both commanders and their subordinates obey the will of power that transcend them.

The ethics of command and obedience demanded by the will to power is essentially aristocratic for it determines a hierarchical inequality between commanders and their subordinates. In the chapter "On the tarantulas", Nietzsche points to Bismarck as one who surrenders before "the preachers of equality," full of envy, jealousy and revenge. His response in the name of justice is: "human beings are not equal", and this nourishes his own "love for the *Übermensch*" and life's desire to "transcend itself" (Z, "On the tarantulas"). In the chapter "On old and new tablets," Nietzsche laments the lack of remembrance. The crowd has no sense of history; for them time ceases with their grandparents. Some day the crowd may become master "and down all time in shallow water." Therefore, "a new nobility is needed, which shall be the adversary of all rabble and despot rule" (Z, "On old and new tablets", section §11). He rejects both democracy and Bismarck's autocracy which has surrendered to democrats and socialists. The new aristocracy will look at the future and nobody will be able "to buy it... with merchant's gold" (ibid, section §12). These new nobles will be essential commanders. Their quest is: "Who can command, who must obey..." And then he adds: "Human society: this is a quest... it seeks the commander... and not a contract" (ibid, section §25).

Christian morality clears the way for the rise of liberal egalitarianism and the social contract, which Nietzsche was to turn into a morality of "opposed intentions". In a fragment dating from 1885, Nietzsche describes the way in which this opposed morality "will discipline individuals in order to ascend heights, and not for comfort and mediocrity." This will be "a morality that will breed a leading caste – the future masters of the earth" (KSA 11, 37 [8]).

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<sup>11</sup> According to Walter Kaufmann, for Nietzsche "power means something specific...: self-overcoming" (Kaufmann, 1968: 261). Will to power is the striving that requires us to "sublimate" our impulses so as to organize our internal chaos and give style to our characters (ibid: 480). Because Nietzsche constructs it not as a political, but as a psychological notion, it cannot accurately be described as "a will to affect others or as a will to 'realize' oneself: it is essentially a striving to transcend or perfect oneself" (ibid: 248). Self-mastery, and not the control or domination of others, is the primordial manifestation of the will to power.

Nietzsche refines his aristocratic vision, characterized by a hierarchical order, class differentials and the ethics of command and obedience.<sup>12</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil [BGE]*, Nietzsche notes that the legendary strength and inventiveness of the European aristocracy have been weakened by the “profound averageness” of the English people. He observes that “European vulgarity” and the “plebeianism of modern ideas” were the “work and invention” of England (*BGE*, §253). Traditionally, the British parliamentary model allowed aristocratic rule to co-exist with democratic institutions. To this “parliamentary imbecility” (*BGE*, §208), Nietzsche opposes his radical aristocratic proposal determined by his ethics of command and obedience. His aristocratic commanders will demand “critical discipline and every habit conducive to cleanliness and severity in the things of the spirit” (*BGE*, §210). They will constitute an “aristocracy of peers who are used to ruling jointly and understand how to command” (*KSA* 40 [42]).

In the *Genealogy of Morals [GM]*, Nietzsche re-visits the theme of the birth of the state in terms similar to those he used in “The Greek State.” The state is born as a “terrible tyranny”, as an “oppressive and pitiless machine” (*GM*, II, 17). A dominant group, “a pack of blond beasts of prey” hurls itself on a nomadic, disorganized multitude, and impresses on it a state form which is no more than naked exploitation.<sup>13</sup> How can we talk here of state authority? Are we not in the presence of the arbitrary imposition of a will to power, of the robber who points his gun at me and demands my money? One has to take into account that Nietzsche is considering the birth of the state and not its further evolution. Once the state begins to function properly, as he observes in “the Greek State,” it must adhere to criteria of legitimacy. The authority of the state is legitimate when it submits to a higher, normatively autonomous authoritative source. This may be religion or, as liberalism demands, it may be the consent of individuals who can claim prior autonomy. Nietzsche emphatically rejects consent as a source of legitimacy. To think that state authority is legitimized by a contract is “a romantic illusion.” And he adds: “Whoever can command, whoever is lord by nature, whoever steps forth violently, in deed and nature – what does he have to do with contracts!” (*GM*, II, 17). This marks Nietzsche’s determination not to ground the legitimacy of state authority on contractual formalities. At the same time, he defends other forms of authority as legitimate – charismatic authority and traditional authority.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ruth Abbey observes that Nietzsche distinguishes between aristocracy by birth and by merit. She notes that in Nietzsche’s later writings “the traditional notion of aristocracy by birth triumphs over the more meritorious notion mooted in the middle period” (Abbey, 2000: 98).

<sup>13</sup> This description of a predatory state matches the one presented by John Stuart Mill in the chapter 1 of his essay *On Liberty*: “as the king of the vultures would be no less bent upon preying on the flock than any of the minor harpies, it was indispensable to be in a perpetual attitude of defence against his beak and claws” According to Brobjer, Nietzsche read *On Liberty* in 1880 (Brobjer, 2008: 149).

<sup>14</sup> My use of the Weberian taxonomy to analyze Nietzsche’s concept of authority is justified by the fact that Weber is in debt to Nietzsche in this respect. According to Horst Baier, “Weber’s doctrine of charismatic authority is immediately determined by Nietzsche’s perception of political Caesarism” (Baier, 1981-82: 26; cf. McGuinn, 1975: 109 & 112). Nietzsche does not explicitly distinguish between forms of authority, but Weber’s taxonomy is present in his acceptance of traditional authority in *The Twilight of the Idols*, in his estimation for the authority that issues from an exceptional commander like Napoleon, and in his denunciation the “hypocrisy of the commanding classes” in contemporary Europe, who wield formal juridical authority to protect themselves from their “bad conscience” (*BGE*, §199).

The dominant position in the Anglo-American tradition, which stems from the seminal work of Walter Kaufmann, views Nietzsche as a steadfast anti-political thinker whose orientation is essentially cultural. As the bearer of an aristocratic outlook and advocate for a new nobility, he puts forward cultural, not political proposals. Nietzsche, the argument goes, is not committed to the establishment of an actual aristocratic regime; his patrician heroes are not “authoritarian, elitist and exploitative” political agents, intent, as he puts it, “on setting masses in motion” (*KSA*13, 16 [39]).<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Cameron and Dombowsky do not accept what they consider to be “the extreme view that Nietzsche’s concern with culture was not also political” (Cameron & Dombowsky, 2008: 1).

Nietzsche is not interested in drawing up constitutional schemes or governmental programs. His reserved aristocratic stance depends on the cultivation of exceptionally high human specimens who wield charismatic authority to overstep the claims of formal legal authority. The early essay which “celebrates Napoleon III as a political genius, one ‘who is governed by other and higher laws than the ordinary person’ and whose genius can be recognized by his success” (Cameron & Dombowsky, 2008: 24), illustrates the point. By underscoring its charismatic gist, Nietzsche traces the legitimacy of authority back to the will, to instinct. Cameron and Dombowsky rightly note that Nietzsche evokes Napoleon “as an exemplar...intended to capture his politics of the future” (*ibid*: 173) and Dombowsky suggests that Napoleon is “the model for the Nietzschean commander” (Dombowsky, 2008: 368).<sup>16</sup> The authority claimed by Caesar, Napoleon and Bismarck is not grounded in abstract reason. The authority Nietzsche has in mind is meant to issue commands that do not require rational or dialectical justification. In contrast to Socrates’s contrived intellectualism, and closer to Luther’s voluntarism, Nietzsche understands that “wherever authority is still part of good ethical custom (*zur guten Sitten gehört*) and one does not ‘give reasons’ (*begründet*), but commands (*befiehlt*), the dialectician is a kind of buffoon: he is laughed at, he is not taken seriously” (*TI*, II, §5).<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche proceeds to contrast the contingency of freedom to the stability of institutions. “One lives for today, one lives very fast – one lives very irresponsibly: it is precisely this one calls ‘freedom’. That which makes institutions institutions is scorned, loathed and repudiated: whenever the word ‘authority’ is so much as whispered one believes oneself in mortal fear of a new slavery” (*TI*, IX, §39).

Nietzsche is critical of the normative authority demanded by liberalism, namely an authority normatively grounded on a social contract or antecedent consensus. In no case does he intend to subvert the notion of authority *per se* or the legitimacy of non-normative authority. The priority that liberalism assigns to freedom means that any authority not stemming from consensus imposes slavery. What is natural, for classical liberalism, is the equality of

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<sup>15</sup> Recently, this position has been brilliantly defended by Vanessa Lemm in “Nietzsches Vision einer ‘neuen Aristokratie’”, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol 56 (2008), p. 370 & 373

<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Burckhardt distrusted Napoleon. He saw in him a provincial parvenu who lacked every social grace and sought to exercise raw military power. In his preference for the nobility of Talleyrand, embodiment of the gentler, if venal, aristocratic ethos of the *ancien régime*, one can see how he differed from Nietzsche’s more radical aristocratism (cf. von Martin, 1941: 150)

<sup>17</sup> According to von Martin, this passage lends itself to a comparison with Carl Schmitt’s decisionism (von Martin, 1941: 93).

individuals, hence its historical struggle for the elimination of feudal hierarchies. Nietzsche, in contrast, postulates natural inequality, and derives authority from the hierarchical subordination he finds in natural formations. Here he finds the fertile soil for the breeding of the aristocratic commanders he seeks.

Nietzsche may think that to “serve the state... is not paganism but stupidity” (*KSA* I, 365); he may acknowledge that “what is most important... is culture,” and that “culture and the state are antagonists” (*TI*, VIII, §4); Zarathustra may proclaim: “Where the state ends begins the man who is not superfluous” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra [Z]*, I, “Of the new idol”). But these assertions all have the modern state in sight. When Nietzsche looks back towards antiquity, he recognizes that the richest and most fecund culture flourishes in Attica, and that the Homeric state is not the antagonist of that culture, but a condition of its possibility. As opposed to the modern state, the classical state is not democratic, but governed by aristocrats for aristocrats; it is not an end in itself, but an instrument for the development of a higher culture. “The ancient state is far from sharing the utilitarian point of view of recognizing as culture only what is directly useful to the state itself” (*KSA* I, 708-9). In contrast, the modern democratic state “presents itself as a mystagogue of culture,” promotes itself “as the highest goal,” and subordinates “all cultural endeavours to its own ends” (*ibid*: 707-8). Nietzsche despairs of his actual political circumstances and this radicalizes his longing for the rebirth of the commanding authority wielded by an aristocratic state.

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