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Nietzsche's Aristocratism and Democracy – A Symbiotic Relationship?

Abstract

In this article, I will delve into Friedrich Nietzsche's views on democracy in light of his professed aristocratism. First, I will discuss Nietzsche's perfectionism, meaning his belief that humankind can be justified only by its perpetual advancement, made manifest in exceptional individuals. Afterwards, I will inquire into how this belief affected Nietzsche's political views, particularly his notoriously critical stance towards democracy. This will be followed by a discussion of Herman W. Siemens's arguments that Nietzsche's views on democracy and their relationship with his aristocratic leanings are nuanced, as well as of the limitations of Siemens's reading of Nietzsche. Finally, the article will show how Thomas Fossen expands upon Siemens's analysis to include Nietzsche's notable pathos of distance, as well as indicate directions for further research on this subject.

Keywords

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Herman W. Siemens, Thomas Fossen, perfectionism, aristocratism, democracy, pathos of distance, society

Introduction

The central claim of this paper is that Nietzsche's political vision is thoroughly shaped by his aristocratism. Despite certain textual evidence that speaks in favour of the compatibility between the aristocratic ethos and democratic society, I will argue that Nietzsche holds his view only insofar as democracy is to serve the minority of exceptional individuals bent on the enhancement of humankind. According to Nietzsche, these individuals are defined by the specific conception of themselves as the ultimate goals, and are, as I will show, descendants of the past aristocratic classes. To justify these claims, I will initially briefly lay out the discussion regarding Nietzsche's perfectionist vindication of humanity and the main trajectory of his critique of democracy, maintaining that Nietzsche is, indeed, a political perfectionist who is, consequently, highly critical of democracy. Subsequently, I will explore the finer details of this interpretation of Nietzsche's position, as well as its challenges. First, I will focus on Siemens's insightful, systematic analysis of Nietzsche's views of the relationship between exceptional individuals and democracy, with special emphasis on Siemens's understanding of certain unpublished notes of Nietzsche which put into question the alleged privileged position of exceptional individuals within Nietzsche's perfectionist vision. After arguing against Siemens's assessment of these passages, I will follow his lead and further develop the idea that Nietzsche holds that there is an inner dynamic between exceptional individuals and democracy. This will be achieved by employing Fossen's analysis of the *pathos of distance*, the pathos that, according to Nietzsche, originates in aristocratic society and eventually leads

to the yearning for self-perfection which characterizes exceptional individuals. Fossen's understanding is that it is the decline of aristocratic society and the ensuing struggle between different moralities within the individual that enables the emergence of the yearning for self-perfection in exceptional individuals, while I will further argue that Nietzsche implies these to be the descendants of aristocrats.

Finally, we will see that Fossen declares that Nietzsche believes that conceiving of oneself as the ultimate goal, thus instrumentalising others, is an ineliminable feature of exceptional individuals' projects of self-perfection, as well as that this attitude does not require aristocratic society to be manifested, and can also find its expression in democratic society. While essentially agreeing with this assessment, I will conclude by outlining a strand of thought hinted at in Nietzsche's writings, yet passed over by Siemens and Fossen, which grants that there is an inner dynamic between exceptional individuals and democracy, but holds that it is steering democracy into being displaced by an aristocratic structure.

Nietzsche's Perfectionism and Critique of Democracy

Many authors agree that Nietzsche's political views emanate from his perfectionism, according to which the only vindication of humanity consists in its constant enhancement, as expressed in its most excellent specimens (cf. *UM*¹ III 6; *GM* Preface 6, III 14).² This is the interpretation to which I too subscribe, since it is corroborated by plenty of textual evidence, as will become clear throughout this section. Some commentators call Nietzsche's perfectionism an "ethical" or "moral" position,³ others name it a "metapolitical" or "cultural" one,⁴ and some even deem it a "civilizational" standpoint.⁵ However one may call it, they all concur, and I with them, that Nietzsche holds politics subservient to this vision, which transcends politics in the conventional sense,⁶ in that it is concerned with the mindful establishment of an environment conducive to the appearance of these superior specimens through whom humanity advances, so that their emergence is not left to chance, as was mostly the case throughout history (cf. *UM* III 5–7; *BGE* 62, 203; *A* 3–4, 57).⁷ Daniel W. Conway, in one of the pioneering studies dedicated entirely to Nietzsche's political philosophy that was written in English language, notes that these exemplary individuals broaden the human potential in unpredictable directions that are not determined in advance and influence others to engage in similar perfectionist projects, although their achievements and influence may not be instantly perceptible (*BGE* 285; *EH* III 1).⁸

These exceptional individuals are viewed by Nietzsche as indispensable to a healthy community; they are the bearers of culture and only through them can others, who constitute the majority of the community, participate in culture in some manner, and so lead worthwhile lives (cf. *UM* III 5, 6).⁹ As correctly observed by Ken Gemes and Chris Sykes, according to Nietzsche's earlier and more optimistic view from the period of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the not-so-exceptional majority can be inculcated with the understanding and enjoyment of culture; his later views, which are the main focus of this paper, were more pessimistic – the majority of any community can "participate" in culture solely insofar as it is of an instrumental (primarily economic) value to the elite few who directly and truly participate in culture.¹⁰ However, Kathleen Higgins correctly observes that Nietzsche believes in a certain mutual dependence

between great individuals and the rest of the community (cf. *TI VI 8, IX 33*): the community's goal is to engender these individuals (*BGE 126*), while the noble individual's worth manifests itself in their advancement of culture, thus contributing to the overall health of the community (cf. *UM III 6; GM III 14*).¹¹

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Nietzsche's works are cited by volume and/or section numbers using the standard English-language acronyms: *The Birth of Tragedy (BT)*; *Untimely Meditations (UM)*; *Human, All Too Human (HH)*; *The Gay Science (GS)*; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Z)*; *Beyond Good and Evil (BGE)*; *On the Genealogy of Morality (GM)*; *The Twilight of the Idols (TI)*; *The Antichrist (A)*; *Ecce Homo (EH)*; *The Will to Power (WP)*; *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe (KSA)*.

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Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, Routledge, London – New York 1997, pp. 5–7, 36, 52; John Richardson, *Nietzsche's Values*, Oxford University Press, New York 2020, p. 467, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190098230.002.0003>; Matthew Sharpe, "Not Beyond Politics: The Metapolitical Dimensions of Nietzsche's Anti-Democratism in *Beyond Good and Evil*", in: Matthew McManus (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Politics of Reaction. Essays on Liberalism, Socialism, and Aristocratic Radicalism*, Palgrave Macmillan 2023, pp. 149–179, here pp. 168–169, 173, doi: [10.1007/978-3-031-13635-1_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13635-1_8); cf. Ronald Beiner, "Nietzsche, Politics, and Truth in an Age of Post-Truth", in: M. McManus (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Politics of Reaction*, pp. 37–59, here p. 48, doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13635-1_3.

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D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, p. 33, 52.

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M. Sharpe, "Not Beyond Politics", p. 170.

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R. Beiner, "Nietzsche, Politics, and Truth in an Age of Post-Truth", p. 48.

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Paul van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", *South African Journal of Philosophy* 26 (2007) 1, pp. 78–89, here p. 79, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/sajpem.v26i1.31458>. As Matthew Sharpe notes, Nietzsche does not even differentiate between conventional politics and his grander vision of it (M. Sharpe, "Not Beyond Politics", p. 170; cf. P. van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", p. 80). Essays from the volume edited by Matthew McManus, a number of which are referred to in this paper, including Sharpe's, exemplify the most

recent approach in interpreting Nietzsche as an aristocratic and anti-democratic thinker, in contrast to the previous dominant tendency to either understand him as a brutal proto-fascist or as some sort of post-modern liberal (Matthew McManus, "Introduction", in: M. McManus (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Politics of Reaction*, pp. 1–5, doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13635-1_1).

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D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, pp. 6–7, 12, 15, 17, 24, 33, 51–2, 79–80; Alexander Nehamas, "Nietzsche and 'Hitler'", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37 (1999), Supplement, pp. 1–17, here p. 8, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1999.tb01790.x>; cf. Kathleen Higgins, "Festivals of Recognition. Nietzsche's Idealized Communities", in: Julian Young (ed.), *Individual and Community in Nietzsche's Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2015, pp. 77–92, here p. 91, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107279254.005>.

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D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, pp. 8–9; cf. J. Richardson, *Nietzsche's Values*, p. 471.

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D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, pp. 8–9, 36; Julian Young, "Nietzsche. The Long View", in: J. Young (ed.), *Individual and Community in Nietzsche's Philosophy*, pp. 7–30, here p. 25, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107279254.002>; K. Higgins, "Festivals of Recognition", p. 81. Essays from the volume edited by Julian Young, some of which are referred to in this paper, focus precisely on the relationship between exceptional individuals and the wider community in Nietzsche's thought, and I recommend them for further exploration of the subject.

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Ken Gemes, Chris Sykes, "The Culture of Myth and the Myth of Culture", in: J. Young (ed.), *Individual and Community in Nietzsche's Philosophy*, pp. 51–76, here p. 53, 74–75, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107279254.004>.

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K. Higgins, "Festivals of Recognition", pp. 80–81; cf. D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, p. 36; J. Young, "Nietzsche", p. 25.

In Nietzsche's words, the community is justified "only as the substructure and framework for raising an exceptional type of being up to its higher duty and to a higher state of *being*" (*BGE* 258), "its higher duty" being the perfection of humankind.¹² This, however, leaves open the possibility for Nietzsche to ascribe an additional and more substantial value to the community – analogous to that ascribed to exceptional individuals – based on its inner hierarchical structure exhibiting certain formal features that are characteristic of the great works of art, as Maudemarie Clark cleverly argues.¹³

Nietzsche often refers to the deliberate production of exemplary human beings as "breeding",¹⁴ as opposed to "taming", which aims to level everyone down in conformity with the same pre-given model (cf. *BGE* 62, 262; *GM* II 2; *TI* VII 3, 5, IX 43; *A* 3; *WP* 957).¹⁵ Accordingly, Nietzsche is vehemently against the idea that the promotion of people's happiness and mending their suffering represent the main political task (cf. *A* 2; *TI* IX 37–38), deeming it incompatible with taking constant self-overcoming of great individuals through which humanity marches forward as the chief political aim, which he himself champions (cf. *HH* 438; *GS* 377; *BGE* 62).¹⁶ This is evident in Nietzsche's eventual disillusionment with the Franco-Prussian War, which he backed early on, since he did not regard Prussian victory as conducive to its culture (*UMI* 1), as well as in his fear of the Paris Commune, which he deemed to be dangerous to culture with its ideas concerning the emancipation of the masses.¹⁷

It goes without saying that not everybody willingly and knowingly accepts their place in the type of community entailed by Nietzsche's political vision. Many authors observe, quite accurately, that Nietzsche holds that exceptional individuals, besides fashioning themselves in artistic ways, also take part in fashioning others who are "lesser" than themselves in whatever manner they deem appropriate, given the ultimate goal of perfecting humanity (cf. *BGE* 62, 203, 211, 213, 259, 260, 265, 272; *GM* II 18; *WP* 957, 960).¹⁸ After all, Nietzsche states that his perfectionist vision is most fully, if not only, realizable in "aristocratic society", and therefore "in some sense needs slavery" (*BGE* 257; cf. *GS* 377). Accordingly, he was not in favour of the anti-slavery provisions, which originated from the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 (cf. *WP* 315).¹⁹ Furthermore, Nietzsche claims that:

"... the essential feature of a good, healthy aristocracy is that it does *not* feel that it is a function ([...] of the community) but instead feels itself to be the *meaning* and highest justification (of the [...] community), – and, consequently, that it accepts in good conscience the sacrifice of countless people who have to be pushed down and shrunk into incomplete human beings, into slaves, into tools, all *for the sake of the aristocracy*." (*BGE* 258; cf. *BGE* 62; *GM* III 14; *TI* IX 37; *WP* 660)²⁰

It is no wonder that Nietzsche often stresses the importance of being cruel and ruthless for these noble individuals (cf. *BGE* 210, 259; *GM* II 18; *TI* IX 37–38; *EH* III *The Birth of Tragedy* 4; *WP* 982), all in the name of supervising cultural productions that ought to last for generations (cf. *BGE* 62; *TI* IX 39; *EH* IV 4).²¹

Perhaps the most glaring aspect of Nietzsche's views examined so far, at least to contemporary sensibilities, is his unshakeable conviction that human beings, as human beings, are not all equally valuable and do not have any degree of intrinsic dignity, but rather that there exist "the abysmally different orders of rank and chasms in rank between different people" (*BGE* 62; cf. *GS* 377; *Z* II 7; *BGE* 257; *WP* 861, 872). True to his words, he was against universal suffrage, which the Prussian progressive liberals promoted in Nietzsche's lifetime.²²

This is in stark contrast to philosophers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville, also famous for celebrating individuality, just as Nietzsche does; they regard exceptional individuals as significant to society at large and express concern for their flourishing in the debased culture of conformism, but nonetheless believe that even the common folk

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Conway espouses that, according to Nietzsche, not all periods allow for the establishment and maintenance of this healthy type of community; it is in these barren times that the noble individuals should focus on their own advancement and forgo the pursuit of the grander political vision, at least until the right conditions emerge for the foundation of the healthy community (D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, p. 52).

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Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics*, Oxford University Press, New York 2015, p. 184, 195–200.

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Translations of Nietzsche's works are taken from: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, transl. Judith Norman, Rolf-Peter Horstmann – Judith Norman (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2002; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits*, transl. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 1996; Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, transl. Carol Diethe, Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2008; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, transl. Judith Norman, Aaron Ridley – Judith Norman (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York 2005; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, transl. Ronald Speirs, Raymond Geuss – Ronald Speirs (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 1999; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, transl. Josephine Nauckhoff – Adrian Del Caro, Bernard Williams (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2001; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power. Selections from the Notebooks of the 1880s*, transl. R. Kevin Hill – Michael A. Scarpitti, R. Kevin Hill (ed.), Penguin Random House UK, 2017; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*, transl. Adrian Del Caro, Adrian Del Caro – Robert B. Pippin (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2006; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, transl. R. J. Hollingdale, Daniel Breazeale (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New

York 2006; Herman W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So... Nietzsche's Equivocations on the Relation between Democracy and 'Grosse Politik'", in: Herman W. Siemens, Vasti Roodt (eds.), *Nietzsche, Power and Politics. Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin – New York 2008, pp. 231–268, doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110217339_2.231.

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D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, p. 17, 33–36; cf. P. van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", p. 84; J. Young, "Nietzsche", pp. 419–420; K. Higgins, "Festivals of Recognition. Nietzsche's Idealized Communities", pp. 81–82.

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R. Beiner, "Nietzsche, Politics, and Truth in an Age of Post-Truth", pp. 48–49; Jordan DeJonge, "Nietzsche, Aristotle, and Aristocratic Being", in: Matthew McManus (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Politics of Reaction. Essays on Liberalism, Socialism, and Aristocratic Radicalism*, Palgrave Macmillan 2023, pp. 209–242, here p. 210, 232, doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13635-1_10.

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Frank Cameron, Don Dombowsky, "Introduction", in: Frank Cameron, Don Dombowsky (eds.), *Political Writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. An Edited Anthology*, Palgrave Macmillan 2008, pp. 1–23, here pp. 10–11.

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A. Nehamas, "Nietzsche and 'Hitler'", p. 8; H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", pp. 249–251; Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche. A Philosophical Biography*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2010, p. 483, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139107013>; Ronald Beiner, *Dangerous Minds. Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2018, p. 37; Stephen L. Newman, "Nietzsche as Muse to the Extreme Right", in: Matthew McManus (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Politics of Reaction. Essays on Liberalism, Socialism, and Aristocratic Radicalism*, Palgrave Macmillan 2023, pp. 61–85, here p. 66, 76, doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13635-1_4; M. Sharpe, "Not Beyond Politics", p. 159, 162.

have an intrinsic dignity which everybody ought to respect, as well as that almost anyone has a capacity to become ennobled given the right circumstances and effort.²³ Consequently, while Emerson, Mill, and Tocqueville saw their individualistic tendencies as in principle compatible with the democratic age, Nietzsche is infamous for his condemning views on democracy.²⁴

As Paul van Tongeren correctly observes in his concise and lucid article on Nietzsche's views on democracy, Nietzsche never focused on the phenomenon of democracy in an exhaustive and methodical manner, but rather commented upon certain aspects of democracy throughout his career.²⁵ Although Nietzsche sometimes employs the term "democracy" in its narrower, strictly political meaning, to refer to the specific forms of constitution and political organisation, he is predominantly interested in the wider, cultural aspects of the "democratic movement", which he frequently condemns and sees as the successor to the Socratic-Christian tradition, with its origins in the notions of the equality of all people and compassion for those suffering (cf. *BGE* 44, 202, 242; *A* 43; *WP* 957).²⁶ The democratic movement is said to permeate all spheres of life, including the sciences (cf. *GM* I 4, II 12), the arts (cf. *GS* 103; *BGE* 210), and society's treatment of the elderly and women (cf. *BGE* 138–139).²⁷ This results in the dismantling of the distinctions in rank and value that Nietzsche considers crucial to the health and future of humankind (cf. *BGE* 242; *WP* 854).²⁸ A person no longer regards themselves as having a determined role in a community, by which they contribute to the community's (future) greatness, but rather believes they are able to perform well in any role and goes on to experiment with them; thus, Nietzsche lamented, "we are all no longer material for a society" (*GS* 356).²⁹

Possibly the best indicator of Nietzsche's negative views on democracy is his following claim:

"*Aristocracy* symbolically expresses the belief in an elite of mankind and in a higher caste. Democracy symbolically expresses the *disbelief* in great men and in elite society: 'everybody is equal to everybody', 'at bottom, the lot of us are self-serving cattle and mob'." (*WP* 752)³⁰

Here democracy is represented as a negative and reactive movement without any positive ideal, as opposed to aristocracy.³¹ It was precisely because of Otto von Bismarck's perceived leniency towards the democratic movement, as well as towards the related labour movement (Bismarck enacted laws concerning social security, health and accident insurance, and free and compulsory education), that Nietzsche, after a lifetime of complex and changing judgements regarding the former, ultimately condemned the "Iron Chancellor" (cf. *BT An Attempt at Self-Criticism* 6).³²

Siemens's Reading of Nietzsche on Democracy

At first glance, bearing in mind everything said thus far and much more found in Nietzsche's writings, one may get the impression that Nietzsche's views on democracy are strictly negative and pessimistic. Yet one would be wrong. As with probably any other subject, Nietzsche's attitudes towards democracy are more nuanced than simple derision and despair.³³ Particularly enlightening is Siemens's reading of Nietzsche on this matter, which will be the focal point of this section. Siemens offers a penetrative, methodical analysis of Nietzsche's attitudes regarding the dynamic between exceptional individuals and democracy. Moreover, Siemens provides an interesting interpretation of

certain unpublished notes of Nietzsche that challenge the prevailing view, which I support, that accords to exceptional individuals the highest standing within Nietzsche's perfectionist vision. Therefore, I will present an alternative reading of the passages in question, which is consistent with the conception of Nietzsche's perfectionism laid out above.

Siemens agrees with the previously cited authors that Nietzsche's political views were shaped by his perfectionism and that his criticism of democracy mostly stemmed from his belief that it leads to conformity and mediocrity; Siemens particularly emphasises how Nietzsche, in his later years, relates this to the threat of nihilism.³⁴ According to Siemens, Nietzsche believed that the problems brought about by democracy (and nihilism) were to be overcome by establishing values and goals that would incorporate the hierarchical structure of different people's worth and pursue the advancement of humanity through them; that was to be achieved by the new stratum of philosophical-artistic lawgivers (cf. *BGE* 203).³⁵ This raises the question of the relationship between

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F. Cameron, D. Dombowsky, "Introduction", pp. 16–17.

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A. Nehamas, "Nietzsche and 'Hitler'", p. 8; S. L. Newman, "Nietzsche as Muse to the Extreme Right", p. 66.

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D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, pp. 34–35; A. Nehamas, "Nietzsche and 'Hitler'", p. 8; J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, pp. 418–419; R. Beiner, "Nietzsche, Politics, and Truth in an Age of Post-Truth", pp. 48–49; M. Sharpe, "Not Beyond Politics", pp. 162–163.

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F. Cameron, D. Dombowsky, "Introduction", p. 21.

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Marinus Schoeman, "Overcoming Resentment. Remarks on the Supra-Moral Ethic of Nietzsche and Hannah Arendt", in: H. W. Siemens, V. Roodt (eds.), *Nietzsche, Power and Politics*, pp. 431–449, here p. 446, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110217339.4.431>; R. Beiner, *Dangerous Minds*, pp. 8–9, 27, 51; S. L. Newman, "Nietzsche as Muse to the Extreme Right", pp. 63–66.

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R. Beiner, *Dangerous Minds. Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right*, pp. 8–9, 27, 51; S. L. Newman, "Nietzsche as Muse to the Extreme Right", pp. 63–66.

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P. van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", p. 79; cf. H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", p. 231.

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P. van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", pp. 79–80; cf. H. W.

Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", p. 233; J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, pp. 419–420; M. Sharpe, "Not Beyond Politics", p. 171.

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P. van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", pp. 80–81.

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Ibid., p. 81; cf. H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", p. 234.

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P. van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", p. 82; cf. H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", p. 249; J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 417, 430, 443–444.

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Cf. P. van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", p. 79; M. Sharpe, "Not Beyond Politics", p. 170.

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P. van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", p. 79; J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 421; M. Sharpe, "Not Beyond Politics", p. 170.

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F. Cameron, D. Dombowsky, "Introduction", pp. 3–4, 15, 22.

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Cf. H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", p. 231.

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Ibid., pp. 235–236.

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H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", pp. 236–237, 242; cf. J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche. A Philosophical Biography*, p. 422.

this elite lawgiving class and democracy. Siemens observes that Nietzsche's answer oscillates between two poles: on the one hand, Nietzsche often puts forward the idea of instituting a sort of aristocratic political regime in the place of democracy, with the latter perceived as antagonistic to the stated mission as explored in the previous section (cf. *GM* II 12; *A* 43; *TI* IX 37);³⁶ on the other hand, Nietzsche sometimes implies the possibility of “more exploitative or symbiotic relations between this higher caste and democracy” (cf. *BGE* 44, 200, 242).³⁷ The second option concedes that democracy is here to stay, at least for the time being, and even sees it as having the potential to assist the elite legislators in managing their function.³⁸ Siemens argues that Nietzsche thinks of this potential either as “an *exogenous* relation between democracy and the higher caste”, in which the latter employs the former in a strictly unilateral and instrumental fashion, or as “an *endogenous* relation”, where the internal development of democracy is such that it calls for the arrival of elite legislators with a certain interdependence between the two.³⁹

Siemens's distinction between the two types of relations that can be found in Nietzsche's remarks on democracy and its relation to exceptional individuals is of particular interest. It sheds further light on the nature and realisability of Nietzsche's perfectionist vision in democratic society. Speaking of the exogenous relation, Siemens identifies four relevant aspects in Nietzsche's writings.⁴⁰ First, while exceptional individuals are always feared and suspected by the conformist and mediocre democratic majority, they are also reasonably well protected by the democratic law and order from that same majority (cf. *KSA* 12 10[61]).⁴¹ Further, the democratic majority must work in order to survive and in the process create sufficient free time for the minority of others, which is indispensable for the exceptional individuals pursuing their perfectionist projects (cf. *KSA* 12 9[174]; *HH* 439; *WP* 953).⁴² Subsequently, precisely because people under democracy have become uprooted and adaptable to suit almost any role, they serve as pliable material for the elite legislators to be moulded according to the legislators' visions of humankind's perfection (cf. *GS* 356; *KSA* 11 34[112]; *KSA* 12 2[57]).⁴³ Finally, the democratic movement has rendered the majority unable to command and exert strong will; hence they are predisposed to obey the few who do not lack the will to command, representing a good occasion for the visionary and commanding legislators of new values to pursue their grand designs (cf. *BGE* 242; *KSA* 11 26[449]).⁴⁴

While the exogenous relation between democracy and the class of philosophical-artistic legislators presupposes unilateral and even exploitative use of the former by the latter, the endogenous relation between the two implies that elite legislators may not only use, or even need, democracy for their own ends, but that democracy also, in a sense, needs these legislators.⁴⁵ This is already implied when Nietzsche speaks of the democratic majority's predisposition to obey, for elsewhere he talks of their need to be commanded (cf. *BGE* 242; *KSA* 12 2[179]).⁴⁶ Similarly, Nietzsche states that the population turned into highly specialised functions of a vast economic apparatus under democracy will need those still capable of commanding and seeing the broader picture to provide a direction for this working majority (cf. *KSA* 12 10[17]).⁴⁷ More generally, Nietzsche remarks that those who, for whatever reason, lack the ability to set themselves goals, will require those who can do this (cf. *KSA* 12 9[153]).⁴⁸ Moreover, Nietzsche claims that most human beings, the so-called average people, are not persons, strictly speaking; only the exceptional ones

are persons, those with a will strong enough to unify their drives and set themselves a direction (cf. *KSA* 12 10[59]).⁴⁹

Nevertheless, as Siemens claims, this does not mean that Nietzsche held that the common people have no value at all; rather, as is evident in some of the philosopher's notes, Nietzsche holds that value is relative to the specific form of life and consists in that which enables such form of life to thrive; hence "one ought not to evaluate the solitary type according to the herd-like, nor the herd-like type according to the solitary" (*KSA* 12 10[59]; cf. *WP* 886).⁵⁰ Siemens further states that, according to Nietzsche's notes, both types of human beings are to be advanced, as well as that, given that their respective conditions of existence are both opposed to and dependent on each other, their difference is to be maintained and not overcome: "what each needs for its identity is *antagonistic relations to the other*".⁵¹ Therefore, exceptional individuals should not regard the average majority as enemies to be defeated, since the existence of the latter is crucial for the identity and values of the former (cf. *KSA* 12 9[158]).⁵²

From this, Siemens infers that Nietzsche, in these notes, precludes even giving instrumental value to the democratic masses within the perspective of exceptional individuals, because the criteria for evaluating a particular form of life can be determined solely by the circumstances required for the given form of life to thrive, and thus cannot be imposed by a different form of life.⁵³ Hence the mentioned affirmation of both forms of life, as well as their irreducible difference and antagonism. Siemens emphasises that Nietzsche, in the unpublished note that Siemens scrutinises, abandons the philosophical-artistic legislator's perspective assumed elsewhere, and embraces a different and higher perspective, as allegedly evidenced in Nietzsche's remark that "[s]een

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H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", pp. 237, 242–244, 246.

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Ibid., p. 237; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 242–243, 245, 247.

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Ibid., p. 237.

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Ibid., pp. 237–238; cf. *ibid.*, p. 243, 248.

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Ibid., p. 248.

41

Ibid., pp. 247–248.

42

Ibid., pp. 248–249; cf. Thomas Fossen, "Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited", in: H. W. Siemens, V. Roodt (eds.), *Nietzsche, Power and Politics*, pp. 299–318, here p. 310, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110217339.3.292>; J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 508; K. Gemes, C. Sykes, "The Culture of Myth and the Myth of Culture", p. 74.

43

H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", pp. 249–251.

44

Ibid., pp. 251–252.

45

Ibid., pp. 252–253.

46

Ibid., p. 253.

47

Ibid., pp. 253–256; cf. T. Fossen, "Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited", p. 311.

48

H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", pp. 254–255, 257.

49

Ibid., p. 258.

50

Quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 259.

51

Ibid., pp. 260–261.

52

Ibid., pp. 261–262.

53

Ibid., p. 265.

from a height: both [the herd type and the exceptional type] are necessary; and equally, their antagonism is necessary” (*KSA* 12 10[59]; cf. *WP* 886).⁵⁴ Siemens acknowledges that it is problematic to attribute to Nietzsche such a “higher” perspective, removed from the needs and interests of the particular forms of life; drawing on Nietzsche’s views on the will to power, Siemens suggests that we should think of this “higher” perspective not as transcendent but as relational, mediating between the perspectives of the exceptional type and the herd type.⁵⁵ Still, Siemens wonders whose values this perspective furthers, if not the values of one of these two types, and for whose sake should one affirm their difference and antagonism? Siemens believes that the answer to these questions is found in Nietzsche’s perfectionism, which promotes the enhancement of entire humankind.⁵⁶

What Siemens fails to mention is that, as discussed, Nietzsche believes that the perfecting of humankind is revealed precisely in the exceptional individuals who are thus to be “bred” and not in the (democratic) masses whose significance is only derivative within the perfectionist perspective. This point is also saliently absent when Siemens claims that “[a] stake for Nietzsche is not the interests of one class, an elite of ‘higher’ or ‘exceptional’ humans in whom he invests exclusive value, but *the future of humankind*”,⁵⁷ or that Nietzsche’s perfectionism is “general or generic in orientation, not to the lives of a few select individuals, but to the species as a whole”⁵⁸ and “generic or general in orientation and thus maximally inclusive”.⁵⁹ Therefore, the “higher” perspective that Siemens claims is present in some of Nietzsche’s unpublished notes appears to either collapse back to the perspective of the philosophical-artistic legislators, or, at the very least, to privilege the perspective of these legislators as superior to that of the (democratic) masses.

It is worth noting that in claiming that some of Nietzsche’s writing contains relativisation of the evaluation of distinct human types Siemens, *prima facie*, appears to contradict his own claim made elsewhere:

“Common to all the positions he [Nietzsche] occupies is an uncompromising critique of democratic ideals or values.”⁶⁰

If one can evaluate a form of life only relative to its specific needs and interests, from which perspective can Nietzsche criticize democracy and its values? From the “higher” perspective assumed in the mentioned notes according to Siemens both the exceptional type and the (democratic) herd type are to be affirmed in their difference and antagonism; how is it possible for Nietzsche to launch “an uncompromising critique of democratic ideals or values” within this perspective? What Siemens probably means is that, within the “higher” perspective, Nietzsche restricts the universalistic feature of democratic values, according to which all people are to be in conformity with democratic values, thereby allowing both the herd type and the exceptional type to exist simultaneously (cf. *WP* 287).⁶¹ This highlights another problem with the interpretation that Siemens proffers. Considering that the noted universalistic feature of democratic values – the advancement of one type of human at the expense of all others – is characteristic of the (democratic) herd type and its values, but not of the exceptional type and its values (which are staunchly anti-universalistic), the very idea of a “higher” perspective from which Nietzsche affirms both human types appears to be nothing more than another way to say that – from the perspective of the exceptional type – Nietzsche recognises that the herd type is necessary for the identity and values of the

exceptional type and hence should not be eliminated wholesale but rather “affirmed”, albeit with its universalistic pretension contained.

Does all this mean that Siemens is wrong in interpreting some of Nietzsche's unpublished notes as putting forward the idea that a certain human type should be evaluated only relative to its own standards, rather than external standards? Not necessarily. After all, these are unpublished notes in which Nietzsche may simply have explored an idea without yet fully committing to it; perhaps he would have discarded it after a more thorough examination. Nonetheless, I would argue that Siemens's interpretation is not entirely convincing even as an attempt to fathom Nietzsche's intentions beyond the note in question.

To repeat, Siemens asserts that the following passage from Nietzsche contains the notion that one should not evaluate the herd type, instrumentally or otherwise, from the perspective of the exceptional type:

“First question with regard to hierarchy: how solitary or how herd-like someone is (in the latter case his value lies in the qualities which secure the existence of his herd, his type, in the former case, in what separates, isolates, defends and makes it possible to be solitary.) Conclusion: one ought not to evaluate the solitary type according to the herd-like, nor the herd-like type according to the solitary. Seen from a height: both are necessary; and equally, their antagonism is necessary.” (*KSA* 12 10[59]; cf. *WP* 886)⁶²

It should be noted from the outset, as shown in Richardson's comprehensive study, that when Nietzsche discusses values he does so on two different levels, frequently moving from one level to the other without clear indication, or even operating on both simultaneously. One level is *descriptive*: it is concerned with values that are, as a matter of fact, valued by some human being(s) and which Nietzsche scrutinises in an uninvolved manner (as much as possible) without valuing them himself and advancing them as the values to be valued. The other is *valuative*, and it deals with the values valued by Nietzsche and put forward by him as the values to be valued because they advance power and thus life.⁶³

In light of this, I will analyse the previously cited passage segment by segment. First, the claim that “in the latter case his value lies in the qualities

54
Ibid., p. 266.

55
Ibid., pp. 266–267.

56
Ibid., p. 267.

57
Ibid., p. 234.

58
Ibid., p. 235.

59
Ibid., p. 239.

60
Ibid., p. 233.

61
Cf. *ibid.*, p. 234.

62
The last two sentences are cited by John Richardson as evidence for his claim that Nietzsche believed that both the herd type and the exceptional type are essential for humankind's advancement, but he does not analyse them in any detail (J. Richardson, *Nietzsche's Values*, p. 444). Instead, Richardson develops an interesting interpretation of Nietzsche, albeit not particularly substantiated by Nietzsche's texts, according to which there exists a certain “dialectic” between the exceptional individuals and the herd, with the herd's social norms providing the ground from which the exceptional individuals emerge, while the exceptional individuals effect changes in social norms that govern the herd and thus elevate the ground from which the future exceptional individuals will emerge (*ibid.*, pp. 444–448, 466, 468).

63
Ibid., pp. 2–8, 266.

which secure the existence of his herd, his type, in the former case, in what separates, isolates, defends and makes it possible to be solitary” is, in my view, just an application of Nietzsche’s general definition of values as “physiological requirements for the preservation of a particular type of life” (*BGE* 3), or, as in the extended version, “the *conditions of preservation and growth*” (*WP* 507; cf. *WP* 715).⁶⁴ This belongs to the descriptive level of discussing values and I see no need to read into it anything further. An additional fact that speaks in favour of this hypothesis is that this claim is preceded by the note “First question with regard to hierarchy: how solitary or how herd-like someone is”, which suggests that Nietzsche is starting with the most basic account of what types of human beings are there, that is grounded in the already existing values that they value, regardless of how Nietzsche relates to these values. From the claim in question Nietzsche concludes that “one ought not to evaluate the solitary type according to the herd-like, nor the herd-like type according to the solitary”. Given the context, I believe that Nietzsche is simply saying here that if one is to properly study these two forms of life one should know what their distinct values are and not confuse one with the other. This is still the descriptive level. However, Siemens contends that Nietzsche is advancing a much stronger claim in this passage, one concerned with one’s valuation of these forms of life rather than one’s mere understanding of them based on their own values: one is forbidden to evaluate, from within the perspective of one’s own form of life (e.g., the exceptional type), a different form of life (e.g., the herd type). This stronger claim is not implied by the immediately preceding claim that is merely an application of Nietzsche’s definition of values. Still, perhaps one could maintain that Nietzsche did not advance this claim to follow from its predecessor, although he clearly presents it as a “conclusion” (perhaps he meant it as an enthymeme?). In defence of his interpretation, Siemens draws attention to the claim succeeding Nietzsche’s “conclusion”: “Seen from a height: both [the herd type and the exceptional type] are necessary; and equally, their antagonism is necessary”. Siemens believes that the phrase “seen from a height” indicates that Nietzsche is speaking here from within a perspective that is neither the perspective of the herd type nor the exceptional type, but one above them both. Yet, Nietzsche frequently uses phrases such as “seeing from above”, “heights of the soul”, “a higher type of man” and their variations to refer to exceptional individuals and their perspective (cf. *UM* III 6; *Z* passim; *BGE* 201, 211, 256, 265; *A* 43). Moreover, he does this in the context of discussing how what is good for one human type is not good for the other (cf. *BGE* 30).

In other places, when Nietzsche claims that virtues, like values, are relative to a human type, he maintains that exceptional individuals are “the higher, the rarer, the privileged” and that “Morals must be compelled from the very start to bow before *rank order*” (*BGE* 221; cf. *BGE* 228),⁶⁵ with one’s rank being determined by one’s (will to) power (*WP* 855–859).⁶⁶ Since, as we have seen, Siemens’s attempt to answer the question from which perspective both the herd type and the exceptional type should be affirmed relies on the idea of the will to power, Siemens’s interpretation that the exceptional type has no right to establish that the herd type has only an instrumental value within its own perspective once again bites its own tail. It is precisely rank ordering based on the will to power that grants the exceptional type and its perspective a privileged and higher status: they are not merely different and on the same level as the herd type and its perspective.⁶⁷ Finally, as detailed in the following

section, Nietzsche accords great importance to the exceptional individual's instrumental view of others. With all this in mind, one would wonder why, rather than accepting Siemens's interpretation of Nietzsche's note, we do not go with the simplest explanation, provided in Siemens's observation (which he immediately dismisses):

"It is easy to see this [Nietzsche's affirmation of both the herd type and the legislator type, as well as their antagonism] as yet another instrumental affirmation of democratic conditions from a standpoint in the legislator type and *its* needs (antagonism)." (cf. *WP* 936)⁶⁸

Siemens's (mis)interpretation of Nietzsche's note in question is informed by a deeper misunderstanding of Nietzsche. Siemens claims that Nietzsche attacks the uniform aspect of democratic values because they compromise Nietzsche's own value of pluralism, which stems from his "perfectionist demand, *nota bene*, that has a general or generic in orientation, not to the lives of a few select individuals, but to the species as a whole".⁶⁹ The same opinion is shared by van Tongeren:

"What he [Nietzsche] opposes to that [democracy's advancement of the herd type] is not only, and not in the first place (even if it sometimes looks that way) another type, but a plurality of types instead of the absolute power of only one type."⁷⁰

As already stated, Siemens (along with van Tongeren) overlooks the fact that Nietzsche's perfectionism ascribes this crucial role to exceptional individuals through whom humanity is perfected, and that his "pluralism" is reserved for these individuals,⁷¹ who are, furthermore, not to pursue just about any way of living as they please, but rather must fashion themselves according to classical values so that they can further human potential.⁷² After all, Nietzsche proclaims that "[c]ulture is, above all, unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people [...] the opposite of culture, barbarism, [...] is lack of style or a chaotic jumble of all styles" (*UM* I 1).

Siemens leaves open the question of what Nietzsche's comments on democracy amount to at the practical political level.⁷³ He believes that Nietzsche's writings have political implications, but that they are insufficiently developed to arrive at concrete solutions to the problems that Nietzsche discerns in democracy.⁷⁴ Although Siemens's analysis of Nietzsche's views on the relationship between exceptional individuals and democracy is insightful, despite its unconvincing interpretation of certain of Nietzsche's unpublished notes, it

64
Cf. *ibid.*, p. 16.

65
Cf. J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 425.

66
Cf. J. Richardson, *Nietzsche's Values*, pp. 282–283.

67
Cf. *ibid.*, p. 461, 465.

68
H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", p. 266.

69
Ibid., p. 235.

70
P. van Tongeren, "Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence", p. 88.

71
Cf. R. Beiner, *Dangerous Minds*, pp. 29–30; 36–38; R. Beiner, "Nietzsche, Politics, and Truth in an Age of Post-Truth", pp. 46–47.

72
Cf. J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, pp. 403–404, 417.

73
H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So...", pp. 240–243, 262–263.

74
Ibid., p. 232, 263–264.

mostly focuses on Nietzsche's *Nachlass* and thus leaves out a great deal of relevant material from his published writings. This is particularly pertinent to what is probably Siemens's chief insight, that of the existence of an internal and antagonistic relationship between philosophical-artistic legislators and the democratic mass population. A reader well-acquainted with Nietzsche would almost certainly think of the (in)famous "pathos of distance" when discussing this matter, but Siemens curiously mentions it only once, as a part of a longer quotation from Nietzsche,⁷⁵ and occasionally speaks of "distance" based on a few comments by Nietzsche that he cites.⁷⁶ Fortunately, Fossen attends precisely to the significance of the pathos of distance within this context, and it is to him that we now turn.

Fossen's Analysis of Nietzsche's Remarks on the Pathos of Distance

Fossen offers a compelling take on Nietzsche's aristocratism, which he construes as primarily ethical rather than a political position.⁷⁷ He does this by undertaking a close inspection of the "pathos of distance", which Nietzsche deems so significant. Nietzsche holds that this pathos is generated by aristocratic society and consequently gives rise to the yearning for self-perfection that is found in exceptional individuals. Fossen's interpretive claim is that it is the collapse of aristocratic society, followed by the clash of opposing moralities inside the individual, that makes possible the appearance of the yearning for self-perfection in exceptional individuals. Additionally, as I will argue, Nietzsche believes these individuals to be of aristocratic ancestry. Subsequently, it will be seen that Fossen claims that regarding oneself as the final goal and hence treating others as mere means is a defining trait of individuals pursuing self-perfection in Nietzsche's view. Fossen ultimately argues, as part of his interpretation, that this outlook can also exist in democracy and not only within aristocratic society, a claim which I agree with.

Similar to Siemens, Fossen believes that there is not enough evidence in Nietzsche's writings to ascribe to him an aristocratic or any other political theory. On the contrary, Fossen claims that Nietzsche is not advancing a substitute political system for democracy, but rather "an ethic that is hostile to democratic civility".⁷⁸ Fossen agrees that Nietzsche is a perfectionist, as previously discussed, but argues that this does not imply political aristocratism, as some hold based on Nietzsche's claims that an aristocratic society is essential for human enhancement (cf. *BGE* 257–260).⁷⁹ In particular, Fossen questions the interpretation of the following often-discussed passage by Nietzsche:

"Every enhancement so far in the type 'man' has been the work of an aristocratic society – and that is how it will be, again and again, since this sort of society believes in a long ladder of rank order and value distinctions between men, and in some sense needs slavery. Without the *pathos of distance* as it grows out of the ingrained differences between stations, out of the way the ruling caste maintains an overview and keeps looking down on subservient types and tools, and out of this caste's equally continuous exercise in obeying and commanding, in keeping away and below – without *this* pathos, that *other*, more mysterious pathos could not have grown at all, that demand for new expansions of distance within the soul itself, the development of states that are increasingly high, rare, distant, tautly drawn and comprehensive, and in short, the enhancement of the type 'man,' the constant 'self-overcoming of man' [...] Of course, you cannot entertain any humanitarian illusions about how an aristocratic society originates (and any elevation of the type 'man' will presuppose an aristocratic society): the truth is harsh. Let us not be deceived about how every higher culture on earth has *begun!*" (*BGE* 257; cf. *GS* 377; *BGE* 188, 239)⁸⁰

Fossen accepts as evident that Nietzsche is arguing here for a certain relationship between aristocratic society and perfectionism, but contends that the precise character of this relationship remains elusive, particularly the way in which the aristocratic pathos of distance leads to the individual's yearning for self-perfection.⁸¹

Fossen notes that Nietzsche does not speak of the “aristocratic *class*” but of “aristocratic *society*” as bringing about the enhancement of humankind; this means that yearning for self-perfection may not stem straightforwardly from the aristocratic class and its pathos of distance, but rather presuppose other factors present in the aristocratic society or the disbandment of this very society, as Fossen argues.⁸² He claims that we must remember that Nietzsche thinks of aristocratic society, and its moralities, as originating in the power relations of commanding and obeying between the masters and the slaves, which both precede the aristocratic society and persist within it.⁸³ This affects how different people experience and evaluate themselves and others: the masters experience feelings of power and superiority, which are the results of their commanding the slaves – this is the previously mentioned pathos of distance; consequently, everything that feeds and furthers this affect is valued as “good” by the masters, while anything that hinders it is judged as “bad” by them (cf. *BGE* 187, 257, 260; *GMI* 2).⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the slaves experience the absence of power and forced obedience which leads to their resentment towards the masters who oppress them; hence their evaluation is reactive and antithetical to that of the masters (*BGE* 260; *GMI* 10).⁸⁵ These moralities are not only generated by the power dynamics between masters and slaves, but also help further fuel it (cf. *BGE* 265; *GMI* 10, II 11).⁸⁶ Fossen believes that while this narrative may explain the origins of the pathos of distance, it does not explain why and how this pathos leads to the individual's yearning for self-perfection.⁸⁷

Fossen's own answer to this question is self-consciously influenced by van Tongeren's analysis of Nietzsche's historical exploration of the meaning of the concept of nobility, an exploration that starts from the locus of nobility in the aristocratic class and leads to the locus of nobility in the exceptional

75

Ibid., p. 246.

76

Ibid., p. 244, 257, 262.

77

Clark offers a similar interpretation (M. Clark, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics*, pp. 164–183).

78

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, p. 299; cf. D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, pp. 38–39.

79

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, pp. 300–301.

80

Cf. T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, p. 301; J. Richardson, *Nietzsche's Values*, p. 443.

81

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, p. 301.

82

Ibid., p. 302.

83

Ibid.

84

Ibid., pp. 302–303; cf. J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 418.

85

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, p. 303; cf. J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 418.

86

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, p. 304.

87

Ibid., pp. 304–305.

individuals, with the tension between the classes accordingly being replaced by the tension within the individual.⁸⁸ Fossen observes that while the aristocratic class is made stronger by overcoming its many obstacles, once there is no more opposition to confront, it becomes exhausted and its remaining energy is directed within the individual; therefore “the individual [who] dares to be individual and different” emerges from the decline of the aristocracy (*BGE* 262).⁸⁹ However, this does not necessarily result in the individual’s yearning for self-perfection: the waning of aristocracy leaves the opposing master and slave moralities, their attachment to the particular social caste being broken, vying for one’s adherence; people will generally crave this tension to be over, but only exceptional individuals will be able to wield the emerged tension for self-enhancement as Nietzsche propounds it (cf. *BGE* 200, 260, 262).⁹⁰

There is something missing from this narrative: why do such exceptional individuals appear at all? Is it merely due to chance that not all human beings are disinclined to engage in the project of self-perfection under the given circumstances? Fossen seems unaware of this issue, although he unwittingly hints at what I believe is the answer to this question in stating:

“It is not clear from *BGE* 262 [which Fossen had been discussing] whether Nietzsche thinks individuals [those who yearn for self-perfection] are remnants of the dissolving aristocracy or arise from other castes as well.”⁹¹

Fossen does not pursue this matter further nor does he deem it significant,⁹² which is curious for two reasons. First, in *BGE* 200, which Fossen had also been referring to, Nietzsche states that exceptional individuals arise “if conflict and war affect such a nature as one *more* stimulus and goad to life –, and if genuine proficiency and finesse in waging war with himself (which is to say: the ability to control and outwit himself) are *inherited* [my emphasis] and cultivated along with his most powerful and irreconcilable drives”. Second, it is well known that Nietzsche was a Lamarckian, meaning he held that the characteristics one acquires over the course of one’s lifespan are passed on to one’s progeny.⁹³ Nietzsche is quite explicit about this:

“... only your descent, your ancestry can give you a right to philosophy – taking that word in its highest sense. Even here, “bloodline” is decisive. The preparatory labor of many generations is needed for a philosopher [an exceptional individual] to come about; each of his virtues needs to have been individually acquired, cared for, passed down, and incorporated [...] above all the eagerness for great responsibilities, the sovereignty of his ruling gazes and downward gazes, the feeling of separation from the crowd with its duties and virtues [...] the art of command, the expanse of the will [...]” (*BGE* 213; cf. *HH* 440; *GS* 10; *BGE* 251; *WP* 373, 942)

This provides a ready answer to the previous question: the emerging self-perfecting individuals are descendants of the aristocrats, whose characteristic strong will and propensity to command are inherited by their posterity, who now use them not for social domination and competition, as their forebears did, but for organising and directing their own drives, which constitutes the project of self-enhancement.

Keeping its shortcomings and the amendment in mind, although Fossen’s explanation shows how the individual’s yearning for self-perfection arises from aristocratic society without explaining it solely by referring to the affairs of the aristocratic class, Fossen acknowledges that the account leaves unexplained Nietzsche’s claim that the enhancement of humankind will always “in some sense need[s] slavery” (*BGE* 257).⁹⁴ Fossen observes that Nietzsche uses the term “slave” to refer not only to a person with a specific socio-political position but, and more essentially Fossen argues, also to the person towards whom

an exceptional individual has a specific outlook, that of a purely instrumental use that one feels deeply entitled to because the exceptional individual regards themselves as the ultimate goal.⁹⁵ This is the outlook that the project of self-perfection demands from the exceptional individuals,⁹⁶ allowing even parts of these individuals to be used as mere means to that end.⁹⁷ The particular form that this project takes – i.e. who are the exceptional individuals who see themselves as the end, who are the “slaves” who are seen as the means by exceptional individuals, and what this instrumental relation exactly looks like in practice – depends on the particular sociohistorical circumstances of exceptional individuals (*GS* 377; *BGE* 200, 225, 257, 258, 265, 270, 273, 287).⁹⁸

Fossen concludes that to ascribe an aristocratic political theory to Nietzsche means to overlook the fact that the individual's yearning for self-perfection presupposes the tension between the master and the slave moralities within the individual, which arises when aristocratic society disintegrates, as well as the fact that the exploitative attitude towards others (even oneself), which the project of self-perfection demands of exceptional individuals, takes different forms throughout history and does not always necessitate an aristocratic socio-political caste system.⁹⁹ Nietzsche's recurrent praise of this system Fossen briefly brushes away as the philosopher's indirect attack on slave morality which Nietzsche believed was predominant in the society of his time (in contrast to the aristocratic societies of the ancient Greek polis, the Roman Empire, and Venice, which were bent on producing noble individuals),¹⁰⁰ and so as more of a polemical strategy than a proposal for a valid substitute for

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Ibid., p. 305; cf. P. van Tongeren, “Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence”.

89

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, pp. 306–307.

90

Ibid., pp. 306–307; cf. J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 418.

91

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, p. 307.

92

Cf. *ibid.*, p. 307.

93

J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 374.

94

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, pp. 307–308.

95

Ibid., pp. 308–310; cf. J. Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche. A Philosophical Biography*, p. 40.

96

Jordan DeJonge offers what I believe to be essentially the same interpretation as Fossen of Nietzsche's claim that some sort of slavery is necessary for the exceptional individual's self-enhancement, albeit in slightly different

(and less clear) terms. DeJonge states that Nietzsche does not merely hold that slavery enables exceptional individuals free time to utilize for their projects of self-enhancement (the socio-economic type of slavery), but that, more importantly, slavery is indispensable for cultivating the right attitude in exceptional individuals, the attitude that stems from “the affective experience of conscious superiority over a human “base” from which you [an exceptional individual] expropriate” and according to which the exceptional individual is “the architectonic *telos* that the *telos* of other individuals ought to serve” (J. DeJonge, “Nietzsche, Aristotle, and Aristocratic Being”, pp. 239–240). This attitude is the same as the outlook discussed above and analysed by Fossen.

97

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, pp. 308–310.

98

Ibid., pp. 308–310.

99

Ibid., pp. 314–315; cf. D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, pp. 37–39.

100

Cf. *BGE* 262; *TI* IX 38.

the democratic form of government.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, Nietzsche urges a new nobility to arise (cf. *Z III 12*), one that will regard itself as the ultimate ends of a democratic society and exploit it accordingly, a comportment that goes against the democratic spirit.¹⁰²

Conclusion

To conclude, I will briefly present a line of thought that is suggested in Nietzsche's texts but ignored by Siemens and Fossen. According to it, there is indeed an inner dynamic between the perfectionist projects of exceptional individuals and democracy, which, however, eventually leads to democracy being essentially replaced by some form of aristocratic regime. This is perhaps most clearly present in the following passage:

“... considering the fact that the overall impression of such future Europeans will probably be of exceedingly garrulous, impotent and eminently employable workers who *need* masters and commanders like they need their daily bread [...] the democratization of Europe is at the same time an involuntary exercise in the breeding of *tyrants* – understanding that word in *every sense* [my emphasis], including the most spiritual.” (*BGE* 242; cf. *WP* 128, 132, 866, 898, 954)

While it is widely noted that Nietzsche sometimes claims, or seems to claim, that democracy will be succeeded by an aristocratic political system, it is often overlooked that there are remarks by Nietzsche that indicate that this might happen as a result of democracy's own evolution through its dynamic relationship with exceptional individuals.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, a more thorough discussion of this subject must be left for another paper.*

Filip Čukljević

Nietzscheov aristokratizam i demokracija – simbiotički odnos?

Sažetak

U ovom ću članku razmotriti stavove Friedricha Nietzschea o demokraciji u svjetlu njegova deklariranog aristokratizma. Najprije ću se osvrnuti na Nietzscheov perfekcionizam, tj. njegovo uvjerenje da se čovječanstvo može opravdati jedino putem neprestanog napretka koji se očituje u iznimnim pojedincima. Zatim ću ispitati kako je to uvjerenje oblikovalo Nietzscheove političke stavove, osobito njegovu zloglasno kritičku poziciju prema demokraciji. Nakon toga slijedi rasprava o argumentima Hermana W. Siemensa, koji tvrdi da su Nietzscheovi pogledi

101

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, pp. 316–317; cf. D. W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political*, p. 37.

102

T. Fossen, “Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited”, pp. 317–318. Schoeman also argues that Nietzsche does not propose an overthrow of a democracy in favour of an aristocratic government, but unlike Fossen he fails to acknowledge that “an aristocracy of culture”, which he believes Nietzsche champions, includes exploitation and thus an antidemocratic ethos (M. Schoeman, “Overcoming Resentment”, pp. 443–446).

103

Cf. P. van Tongeren, “Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence”, p. 86; H. W. Siemens, “Yes, No, Maybe So...”, p. 243, 252; M. Sharpe, “Not Beyond Politics”, pp. 176–177.

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na demokraciju i njihov odnos prema njegovim aristokratskim sklonostima nijansirani, kao i o ograničenjima Siemensova čitanja Nietzschea. Na koncu, članak će pokazati kako Thomas Fossen nadograđuje Siemensovu analizu uključivanjem Nietzscheova značajnog patosa distancije te naznačiti smjerove za daljnja istraživanja ove teme.

Ključne riječi

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Herman W. Siemens, Thomas Fossen, perfekcionizam, aristokratizam, demokracija, patos distance, društvo

Filip Čukljević

Nietzsches Aristokratismus und Demokratie – eine symbiotische Beziehung?

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Beitrag werde ich mich in Friedrich Nietzsches Ansichten zur Demokratie im Lichte seines erklärten Aristokratismus vertiefen. Zunächst werde ich auf Nietzsches Perfektionismus eingehen, womit seine Überzeugung gemeint ist, dass die Menschheit einzig durch ihre fortwährende Höherentwicklung gerechtfertigt werden kann, die sich in außergewöhnlichen Individuen manifestiert. Anschließend werde ich untersuchen, wie sich dieser Glaube auf Nietzsches politische Ansichten auswirkte, im Besonderen auf seine berüchtigt kritische Haltung gegenüber der Demokratie. Darauf folgt eine Erörterung der Argumente von Herman W. Siemens, wonach Nietzsches Auffassungen zur Demokratie und deren Verhältnis zu seinen aristokratischen Neigungen differenziert zu betrachten sind, sowie eine Diskussion über die Einschränkungen von Siemens' Nietzsche-Deutung. Abschließend wird der Beitrag darlegen, wie Thomas Fossen die Analyse von Siemens erweitert, indem er Nietzsches bemerkenswertes Pathos der Distanz einbezieht, und zugleich Richtungen für weiterführende Forschungen zu diesem Thema aufzeigen.

Schlüsselwörter

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Herman W. Siemens, Thomas Fossen, Perfektionismus, Aristokratismus, Demokratie, Pathos der Distanz, Gesellschaft

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L'aristocratie chez Nietzsche et la démocratie – une relation symbiotique ?

Résumé

Dans cet article, j'examine les positions de Friedrich Nietzsche sur la démocratie à la lumière de son aristocratie revendiquée. Je commencerai par analyser le perfectionnisme de Nietzsche, c'est-à-dire sa conviction que l'humanité ne peut être justifiée que par son progrès perpétuel, qui s'incarne chez des individus exceptionnels. J'étudierai ensuite l'impact de cette conviction sur les vues politiques de Nietzsche, en particulier son attitude notoirement critique envers la démocratie. S'ensuivra une discussion des arguments de Herman W. Siemens, selon lesquels les positions de Nietzsche sur la démocratie et leur rapport à ses inclinations aristocratiques sont nuancées, ainsi que des limites de la lecture de Nietzsche proposée par Siemens. Enfin, l'article montrera comment Thomas Fossen enrichit l'analyse de Siemens pour inclure le pathos de distance caractéristique de Nietzsche, et indiquera des pistes pour des recherches ultérieures sur ce sujet.

Mots-clés

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Herman W. Siemens, Thomas Fossen, perfectionnisme, aristocratie, démocratie, pathos de distance, société