The Review of Politics 82 (2020), 73–95.

doi:10.1017/S0034670519000755

Nietzsche on the Rise of Strong Political States and Their Cultivation of Higher Individuals

Simon Townsend

Abstract: I argue that Nietzsche offers an account of how strong political states develop and how the highest forms of individuality emerge when the political will of these strong states weakens. Communities develop strength in proportion to the hostility of their environment. In order to flourish in a hostile environment, they must cultivate powerful and ambitious citizens by intensifying their most powerful drives, such as a lust for power. To control these citizens they must ruthlessly suppress individuality and allow these drives to be discharged in ways that do not threaten the community. This is achieved through an inflexible value system. When the political will of the state declines and this moral code weakens, the highest forms of individuality emerge. This account clarifies why Nietzsche tends to praise aristocratic states and brings into focus the obstacles to achieving the highest forms of human flourishing within a democratic state.

There has been renewed interest in the political dimension of Friedrich Nietzsche's work, and with this a debate has emerged over the nature of his challenge to liberal democracies. There is near-universal agreement that Nietzsche's primary concern is with human flourishing, particularly with increasing the likelihood of the *highest* individuals, but little agreement over how he thought we might bring this about.[1] Scholars such as Bruce Detwiler, Ruth Abbey, Fredrick Appel, and Don Dombowsky have argued that Nietzsche endorsed the creation of an aristocratic political order that would be conducive to human flourishing, and that he is most useful to

Simon Townsend is Associate Lecturer in Politics in the Department of Politics, University of Exeter, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4QJ, United Kingdom (S.Townsend@exeter.ac.uk).

Thanks to Robert Lamb for comments on an early draft, and to Ruth Abbey and three anonymous reviewers for invaluable suggestions.

[1]See, for instance, Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 7–8; Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1997), 7; and Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), 114.

contemporary democrats as an opponent who can force them to defend and sharpen their convictions.[2] Others have argued that his work contains many philosophical insights that can enrich contemporary democracies. In particular, scholars such as Mark Warren, William Connolly, Lawrence Hatab, and David Owen have argued that if we sidestep at least some of Nietzsche's explicitly political statements, then his work provides philosophical resources which we can use to create democracies that are conducive to human flourishing—or at least more conducive than existing ones.[3] Both approaches have yielded valuable insights and predominantly make use of different aspects of his thought. I contribute to this debate by focusing on an aspect of Nietzsche's thought that has not been given sufficient attention: the analytic claims that he makes about the development of political communities and, in particular, his account of how the emergence of higher individuals has hitherto been tied to the rise and fall of what I will call *strong states*, which have frequently also been aristocratic states. Piecing together the details of this account not only clarifies *why* Nietzsche praises aristocracies but also brings into focus the obstacles to promoting flourishing within a democratic context.

I begin by critiquing Hugo Drochon's *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, which argues that Nietzsche endorsed the Hobbesian state of nature (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) but rejected the notion of a social contract in favor of an account where the state emerged through violent conquest. I argue instead that, in his mature work, Nietzsche constructs an account where

[2]Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*; Ruth Abbey and Fredrick Appel, "Nietzsche and the Will to Politics," *Review of Politics* 60, no. 1 (1998): 83–114; Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche contra Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche's Machiavellian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[3]For the most part these scholars do not attempt to conceal the aristocratic tendencies of Nietzsche's thought, but focus on other aspects of his thought, with various justifications. Mark Warren, for example, argues that Nietzsche's political statements rely on some of his weakest arguments and rest on discredited assumptions, whereas Lawrence Hatab argues that Nietzsche was more antiegalitarian than he was antidemocratic, and that his antiegalitarianism is compatible with agonistic forms of democracy. See Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); Lawrence Hatab, *Nietzschean Defense of Democracy: An Experiment in Postmodern Politics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995). Some scholars, however, have been criticized for selectively reading Nietzsche to try to make him appear more sympathetic to democracy than he was. See, for example, Mark Redhead's critique of William Connolly, "Debate: Nietzsche and Liberal Democracy: A Relationship of Antagonistic Indebtedness?," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (1997): 183–93, and see also William Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

political communities exist throughout human history and develop their values in response to the idiosyncrasies of the environment which they face.[4] The effect of this is that they become stronger in proportion to the degree of threat which they encounter. Communities situated in hostile conditions are forced to strengthen their citizens by creating intolerant value systems and institutions. They breed powerful and ambitious citizens by cultivating and intensifying their most powerful drives, such as a lust for power and vindictiveness. At the same time, they ensure social cohesion by ruthlessly suppressing individuality and allowing these drives to be discharged upon outsiders to the community. This creates citizens with an abundance of creative, organizing force, and these strong communities will tend to conquer and enslave other communities and become aristocratic states.[5] Next, I argue that when conditions become more comfortable the political will of these states weakens, they relax their restrictions on individuality, and their vigorous citizens emerge as the highest, creative individuals. Finally, I argue that this account sheds light on Nietzsche's praise of aristocracies and his grounds for criticizing liberal democracies. I engage with the arguments of prominent agonistic democrats—particularly Lawrence Hatab and David Owen—and cast doubt on whether the *highest* forms of Nietzschean flourishing are possible within a democratic framework, which is unlikely to support the profoundly illiberal process of protracted constraint which has hitherto engendered the highest forms of individuality.[6]

[4]I will construct my account of Nietzsche's *mature* political philosophy from his post-1882 writings, beginning with *The Gay Science*. I will argue that in this period we can find no trace of his early allegiance to the Hobbesian state of nature, and plenty of evidence that he constructs a rival account which contradicts this earlier one. In particular, I will emphasize the continuity between his broad overviews of the rise and fall of political communities—and how this connects to higher individuals—in *The Gay Science*, § 23, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, II 16–17, and *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§ 201, 257, 262, as well as how his criticisms of liberalism and democracy in *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§ 202–3 and *Twilight of the Idols*, Skirmishes 38–39, reflect the details of this account.

[5]It is likely that strong communities will need to organize themselves hierarchically to overcome a constant threat of extermination. Regardless, strong communities will tend to overthrow and subjugate other communities—often becoming slave-owning states—so they will certainly become aristocratic, even if they are not already organized in this way.

[6]There might be other mechanisms for flourishing. But for Nietzsche, the mechanism I describe here has hitherto been the *only* mechanism that has systematically engendered higher types. I argue that any attempt to promote Nietzschean flourishing should engage seriously with this account, and that any Nietzschean democrat should consider to what extent the process might be reproduced or modified within a democratic context.

Hugo Drochon on Nietzsche's Political Philosophy

Hugo Drochon's *Nietzsche's Great Politics* (2016) is significant for my purposes here because Drochon attempts to take Nietzsche seriously as a political philosopher who made a series of descriptive claims about the origin and development of political states. Furthermore, Drochon argues that these claims are crucial to explaining how higher individuals become possible. I argue, however, that while Drochon offers a useful account of Nietzsche's *early* writings on political communities, Nietzsche substantially revises his account, with important consequences for explaining how higher individuals emerge.

Drochon's account of Nietzsche's political philosophy draws extensively from the early unpublished essay "The Greek State" and is based on three claims. First, Nietzsche explicitly agrees with Hobbes (and Wagner, who follows him) that the political state emerges from a state of nature best characterized as a war of all against all.[7] Second, however, he rejects Hobbes's claim that this transition occurred through a social contract, instead arguing that states arose when a "conqueror with the iron hand" "suddenly, violently, and bloodily" seized control of a yet-unformed population and imposed hierarchy (*GSt*, 168).[8] Third, Nietzsche contends that this violent conquest is justified because "it opens up space within which culture, through genius, can for the first time flourish." This is because, freed from the perpetual strife of the war of all against all, and possessing slaves to liberate them from "labouring for life's necessities," the masters can devote their "time and energy" to "morality, artistic and cultural pursuits."[9]

This is an uncontroversial summary of Nietzsche's claims about political states as he presents them in "The Greek State." What I contest, however, is Drochon's claim that Nietzsche remains faithful to this account. His primary evidence for this claim is a passage from *On the Genealogy of Morality* describing the origins of slavery and the birth of bad conscience among the slaves. At first blush, there are obvious similarities with the account in "The Greek State." Nietzsche writes:

> I used the word "state": it is obvious who is meant by this—some pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race, which, organized on a war footing, and with the power to organize, unscrupulously lays its dreadful paws on a populace which, though it might be vastly greater in number, is still shapeless and shifting. In this way, "the state" began on earth: I think I have dispensed with the fantasy which has it begin with a "contract." (*GM* II 17).[10]

[7]Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, 54.
[8]Ibid., 54.
[9]Ibid., 56–58.
[10]I cite Nietzsche's texts using the standard English-language acronyms and section numbers and/or names where appropriate:

In quick succession, however, Drochon shifts from claiming that this passage is a "distinct echo" of the account in "The Greek State" to the stronger claim that "both 'The Greek State' and *The Genealogy*, therefore, present the same account of the birth and justification of the state." We are justified, Drochon argues, in concluding that Nietzsche's "view on the ancient state" remains the same throughout his work.[11] This is a striking claim if it is correct since it would entitle us to pin down Nietzsche's distinctive contribution to political philosophy to the three claims he makes in "The Greek State." I will argue, however, that although the account in *On the Genealogy of Morality* seems similar, in Nietzsche's mature work he has discarded one of the three claims and substantially modified the other two. First, he has dropped his commitment to a prepolitical state of nature. Second, although he does describe a moment of abrupt political transition in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, this moment is the creation of *one* iteration of a political community—the slave-owning state—and *not* the founding of the political state per se. Finally, the third claim remains accurate only to the extent that an aristocratic state is crucial for *eventually* generating higher individuals. However, the crucial moment in this generation is not, as Drochon has it, the *birth* of the state, but the moment when the political will of the strong state *weakens*. Only in the twilight of the strong state does the individual—that is, the creator of idiosyncratic values—become possible. Nietzsche therefore inverts the Hobbesian narrative: rather than emerging *from* warring individuals, the strong state makes individuals *possible*.

To vindicate these claims, I begin with *On the Genealogy of Morality* II 17 (quoted above), Drochon's primary evidence that Nietzsche continues to subscribe to the Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes*. Although Nietzsche

HC equals "Homer's Contest" and *GSt* equals "The Greek State," both in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006);
GS equals *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001);
Z equals *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006);
BGE equals *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002);
GM equals *On The Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006);
TI equals *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005);
A equals *The Antichrist*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005);
WP equals *The Will to Power*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967).

[11]Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, 58–59.

evidently does describe the creation of *a type* of political state here, he gives indications that this is no longer the transition from a state of nature. He depicts the conquering horde as "organized on a war footing" and *already* possessing "the power to organize others" and defines them in opposition to another group who are "shapeless and shifting." Such internal organization seems incompatible with a war of all against all. Unlike the passage in "The Greek State" that Drochon compares it with, Nietzsche's intention here is not to describe the *origin* of political communities; he is continuing the theme of the previous passage, explaining the origins of bad conscience. When "semi-animals [*Halbthieren*], happily adapted to the wilderness, war, the wandering life and adventure" are confined within society, they are prevented from discharging their instincts, which turn inwards and create bad conscience (*GM* II 16). The use of the word "semi-animals" might seem to conjure up an image of a state of nature. But section 17 makes it clear that only the soon-to-be slaves are the subject of the word "semi-animals," stating that the masters "are not the ones in whom 'bad conscience' grew" (*GM* II 17). The masters, in contrast, are *already organized*. In any case, the impending slave class do not exist in a state of nature either—they are "semi-animals" in the sense that they lack the interiority and capacity for reflective thought which emerges with a bad conscience and the internalization of instinct. As we will see, for Nietzsche culturally uniform political communities predate individuals capable of reflecting on the values of their community and creating their own values.

That Nietzsche has unceremoniously dropped his earlier state of nature account is even more evident in a passage from the same period which explicitly links the birth of an "aristocratic society" with the possibility of higher culture. He warns:

> Let us not be deceived about how every higher culture on earth has *begun*! Men whose nature was still natural, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, predatory people who still possessed an unbroken strength of will and lust for power threw themselves on weaker, more civilized, more peaceful races of tradesmen perhaps, or cattle breeders; or on old and mellow cultures. (*BGE* 257)

This account, which is stylistically and substantively similar to the one from *On the Genealogy of Morality*—and much closer temporally than "The Greek State"—explicitly describes the formation of an aristocratic, slave-owning state. Nietzsche's description of the soon-to-be slave class as "trading" or "cattle-raising" races does not match Hobbes's description of a war of all against all, and the characterization of the conquered types as more "civilized" and "peaceful," and their culture as "mellow," dispels the idea that Nietzsche is describing the end of a state of nature. Indeed, the phrase *bellum omnium contra omnes* has long since vanished from his vocabulary. After using it in "The Greek State" (1872), "On Truth and Lies in a Moral Sense" (1873), and "David Strauss" (1873), he uses it only once more, in

Human, All Too Human (1878), to refer not to an actual state of nature but to the idea that feelings of jealousy and vengefulness invoke the *bellum omnium contra omnes* (*HH* 615). In these passages from Nietzsche's mature work which describes the birth of the aristocratic state, he credits the master and slave groups with characteristics we associate with political communities, such as being organized for war or civilized.

Given that these political communities possess such divergent characteristics, Nietzsche's account of how political communities develop must be broader than the moment where one community violently enslaves another. There is much to gain from explaining *how* such unevenly powerful groups arose in the first place. For, although the powerful barbarians are clearly not the highest individuals, Nietzsche does credit them with some similar traits. For example, he remarks upon their tremendous vitality and ability to discharge their energy creatively (*GM* II 17), which anticipates his praise of higher individuals such as Napoleon (*TI* Skirmishes 44). Explaining how they acquired these characteristics therefore promises to provide insight into the conditions that make higher individuals likely. Although in *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche dodges these questions and focuses on tracing the development of slave morality, I will focus on explaining how political communities develop such unequal quantities of strength.

Political Communities and Values

In his mature writings, Nietzsche characterizes humans as gregarious. As the "most endangered animals," they must congregate in search of "help and protection" (*GS* 354). He now claims that communities exist throughout human history, "for as long as there have been people, there have been herds of people as well (racial groups, communities, tribes, folk, states, churches)" (*BGE* 199). Gregory Moore argues that, as Nietzsche immersed himself in the scientific literature, he increasingly asserted the herd nature of human beings:

> Nietzsche claims that our strongest—and oldest—drives are what he calls the "social instincts." Humans evolved not as solitary organisms, but in communities—as "herd animals." Consequently, our drives and instincts—like the rest of human physiology—have been formed by generations of ancestral inheritance, evolving "throughout tremendous periods of time in social and family groups (and before that in ape herds)".[12]

This evolutionary account of ubiquitous communities replaces his earlier state of nature account. In this later account the basic political unit, which predates

[12]Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 75.

the slave-owning state, is a people (*Volk*). This term designates a group of people whose experience of living in close proximity leads them to develop a shared understanding and common values. Nietzsche writes, "when individuals have lived together for a long time under similar conditions (of climate, soil, danger, necessities, work), there *arises* something that 'understands one another'—a people" (*BGE* 268). At this primordial stage, values are not created by individuals but emerge organically at the level of the group. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche writes, "First peoples were creators and only later individuals; indeed, the individual himself is still the youngest creation. Peoples only hung a tablet of the good over themselves" (*Z* I On a Thousand and One Goals) and also formulates this idea as "The You is older than the I" (*Z* I On Love of the Neighbour). Value-creating *individuals* do not yet exist.

Several commentators have noted this idea but have not delved deeply into the question of *how* these individuals come into existence. In 1988 Mark Warren lamented that Nietzsche had been almost exclusively interpreted as a radical individualist "who has little use for a society"—a view that is "simply wrong."[13] Bruce Detwiler also notes Nietzsche's claim that "in the earliest times" peoples created values, but entirely glosses over the question of *how* individual value-creators emerge, writing only that "gradually … innovators appeared—exceptional human beings who were driven by singular passions."[14] I focus on explaining *how* value-creating individuals emerge, and why this is most likely to happen in certain types of political communities.

Communities develop strength unequally because they create and live according to *different* tables of values. Their values are different because groups positively appraise the character traits or virtues that help them overcome the idiosyncratic challenges posed by their environments. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche claims that a people valorizes whatever helps it to "maintain" itself and fulfill its ambition to "rule and triumph and shine." The "good and evil" of a people is the "voice of their will to power" (*Z* I On a Thousand and One Goals). Values in this preindividual period are therefore *predictable* responses to the challenges posed by the environment, and so "once you discover a people's need and land and sky and neighbour, you guess as well the law of their overcomings" (*Z* I On a Thousand and One Goals). The Persians, for example, made a virtue of hunting on horseback, since this skill enabled them to flourish in their environment (*Z* I On a Thousand and One Goals). This idea reoccurs frequently in this period of

[13]Warren does offer a brief explanation of how the individual emerges from the collective, which he draws from *The Gay Science* and an unpublished note: "Nietzsche locates the possibility for individuation in those cultures that attribute freedom, responsibility, or selfhood to those individuals in ways fostering their self-images as centers of activity" (*Nietzsche and Political Thought,* 59–60). As will become clear, this account has little in common with the one I am endorsing, which relies primarily on *Beyond Good and Evil*.

[14]Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, 139.

Nietzsche's work.[15] Since differences between peoples can be traced back to differences in their environment, it is here that we can explain how divergent degrees of strength emerge.

The Strategies of Strong Communities

The strength of a people develops in proportion to the hostility of their environment. Nietzsche writes, "*A species* (Art) originates, a type (*Typus*) grows strong and sturdy, in the long struggle with essentially constant *unfavourable* conditions" (*BGE* 262). These unfavorable conditions might consist of aggressive neighbors, unforgiving terrain, or a lack of natural resources, but *anything* that generates the threat of extermination forces a community to strengthen itself if it wants to avoid destruction.[16] To survive in hostile environments communities must create inflexible values and institutions that prioritize long-term strengthening over individual freedom. Accordingly, Nietzsche claims that "every aristocratic morality is intolerant about the education of the young, disposal over women, marriage customs, relations between old and young and penal laws" (*BGE* 262). The communities that Nietzsche praises are those that possess these kinds of future-oriented, intolerant moralities. The Greeks, for example, mastered the "will to tradition, to authority, to centuries-long responsibility" (*TI* Expeditions 39), and elsewhere he emphasizes that they "needed to be strong—danger was close—, it was lurking everywhere" (*TI* Ancients 3). By contrast, peoples without harsh conditions to struggle against lack the *compulsion* to create intolerant moralities. For example, those with relatively peaceful or few neighbors can roam over a wider terrain to secure natural resources. Without the constraints imposed by a dangerous environment, communities can permit themselves more *tolerant* values and institutions—hence Nietzsche argues that communities with "advantages, excesses, and protections" are "favourable to variation" (*BGE* 262). Nietzsche therefore explains the rise of the strong state through the degree of *danger* that it faces: "the peoples with any value at all *became* valuable, and not through liberal institutions: *great danger* made them into something deserving of respect, the danger that first made us know our resources, our arms and weapons, our *spirit*,—the danger that *forces* us to be strong" (*TI*

[15]Earlier he writes: "valuations and orders of rank are always expressions of the needs of a community" (*GS* 116), and, later, "A tremendous range of experiences teaches it which qualities are primarily responsible for the fact that, despite gods and men, it still exists, it keeps prevailing. It calls these qualities virtues, and these are the only virtues it fosters" (*BGE* 262).

[16]See also *The Gay Science* § 19, where Nietzsche argues that the "most fruitful people and peoples" have grown up amid "misfortune and external resistance." Once strong states have acquired a slave class, the possibility that the "oppressed" might rebel provides another form of resistance that the masters must struggle against (*BGE* 262).

Untimely 38). Although his account in *On the Genealogy of Morality* depicts the *sudden* appearance of the nobles, who appear "like fate, without cause, reason, consideration or pretext," this is only because the account is told from the perspective of the soon-to-be slaves (*GM* II 17). Noble character is actually the result of an arduous—and for the most part predictable—process of forced strengthening. "You must need to be strong," Nietzsche writes, "or else you will never become it." It is "great danger … that *forces* us to be strong" (*TI* Untimely 38).

Having explained why some communities become stronger than others, I argue that Nietzsche connects these strong communities to the origins of higher culture. We have already seen that in "The Greek State" Nietzsche confines higher culture to aristocratic states by claiming that it cannot be produced without slavery. This appears to fit well with the passage in *Beyond Good and Evil* 257 where he argues that "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," clear evidence that, even in his mature work, he thinks that higher types are necessarily connected to aristocracies.[17] This passage subsequently claims that the enhancement of man "in some sense needs slavery," and it is tempting to suppose that Nietzsche still views slavery as the crucial link. Drochon, for example, argues this. However, as Drochon notes but then downplays, Nietzsche is increasingly slippery in defining slavery, as suggested by this reference to needing it "in some sense."[18] As early as *Human, All Too Human* he broadens his definition of slavery to include everyone without two-thirds of their day to themselves (*HH* 283). Since we might find *these* kinds of slaves in many types of political state, the claim that slavery is necessary to enhance man is not sufficient to explain Nietzsche's praise of aristocracy.

There are stronger reasons to link aristocratic states with higher individuals, grounded in interpreting a thriving aristocracy as a strong state forged under harsh conditions.[19] Admittedly, there seems to be an insurmountable obstacle to higher individuals emerging within the strong state, which is that ruthlessly suppressing individuality is a key part of the process through which a state becomes strong in the first place. Nietzsche's explanation is that higher individuals emerge *only* when the political will of the strong

[17]See for instance Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, 45.

[18]Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, 93.

[19]Another promising explanation for Nietzsche's claim that aristocratic societies produce the highest individuals is that aristocratic societies produce a "pathos of distance" and the highest individuals emerge when they *internalize* this feeling. This compelling explanation has been developed elsewhere; see Mark Alfano's argument that aristocracies produce *contempt* in the nobles for the slaves, and that they come to also feel this contempt for the slavish aspects of themselves (Mark Alfano, "A Schooling in Contempt: Emotions and the Pathos of Distance," in *The Nietzschean Mind*, ed. Paul Katsafanas [London: Routledge, 2018]).

state *relaxes*. In *Beyond Good and Evil* 262 he claims that the "genius of the race" only emerges when "the bonds and constraints of the old discipline are torn." This echoes an earlier account he gives in *The Gay Science* where he claims that it is in "ages of corruption," when the common faith of a people declines, that the "*firstling* instances of individuals" appear, the fruits that hang "ripe and yellow on the tree of a people" and justify its existence (*GS* 23). What we need to explain, then, is what happens when the political will of the strong state relaxes and *why* this is conducive to individuality.

Relaxation occurs when the hostile conditions which made a tyrannical morality *necessary* are lost. If a state becomes sufficiently strong it is likely to conquer its enemies and secure sufficient resources, whether through plundering or cultivation. Once it no longer needs its tyrannical morality to survive, its citizens begin to view it as an "archaic *taste*." Without the compulsion to remain intolerant, the state is likely to relax the strictness of its values and institutions. This allows "variation" to appear on the scene, where "the individual dares to be individual and different" (*BGE* 262). Clearly, however, permissiveness is not a sufficient condition for higher individuals to flourish, or they would flourish in *any* state possessing abundant resources and lacking external threat. To plausibly link strong states to higher individuals, some aspect of the process of strengthening—one that is conducive to individuality—must survive the relaxation of the tyrannical morality. Section 262 is not clear on this point, and I suspect this uncertainty is behind the general lack of attention paid to it in accounts of Nietzsche's politics.

Hothousing and the Intensification of Dangerous Drives

We can locate the link between higher individuals and strong states in Nietzsche's theory of the unconscious forces which shape thought and behavior. There has been an increased interest in unconscious elements (drives, instincts, affects, emotions) in recent Nietzsche scholarship but little attempt has been made thus far to connect this to his political philosophy. His overarching claim is that the role of conscious decision-making in explaining actions has been overemphasized. In particular, the pivotal role of drives has often been overlooked, even though "we cannot get down or up to any 'reality' except the reality of our drives (since thinking is only a relation between these drives)" (*BGE* 36). Mattia Riccardi argues that "it is now widely held that drives are the primary explanatory items of Nietzsche's philosophical psychology" and that "most scholars agree that at bottom they are behavioural dispositions towards specific patterns of goal-directed behaviour."[20] Although we can recognize times when our thoughts are *more*

[20]Mattia Riccardi, "Virtuous Homunculi: Nietzsche on the Order of Drives," *Inquiry* 61, no. 1 (2018): 21–41.
See also Paul Katsafanas, who defines drives as "non-conscious dispositions that

influenced by particular drives or emotions than others, Nietzsche's point is that thought is never neutral but is *always* structured by drive-activity, affects, and emotions.

Drive expression can be modified in a variety of ways. The values of a culture, for instance, powerfully influence drive expression because a drive is experienced differently if one experiences it with a good or bad conscience. If a drive is slandered and devalued this can make its bearer feel shame and fear its expression. When a powerful drive is fused with "depressive affects" like "suspicion, fear, dishonour" then it reduces the chances that the bearer will turn out well—it is a "recipe for physiological degeneration" (*TI* Skirmishes 45). Value systems therefore affect how individuals interpret and *feel* about their drives. Moreover, Riccardi argues that the very way in which we interpret our inner life is "mediated" by "whatever folk-psychology framework we learn from the surrounding environment."[21] Folk-psychologies frame how citizens interpret their drive-activity. For instance, believing in the existence of a freely choosing subject enables the weak to frame passivity as an "accomplishment" (*GM* I 13).

How does Nietzsche's drive psychology inform his political claims? Although he puts more focus on unmasking how Christian value systems systematically weaken the drives of higher types, he does also suggest that strong states tend to adopt value systems that *actively* cultivate drives conducive to individual flourishing. As we have seen, hostile environments force communities to adopt strengthening value systems if they want to flourish. One aspect of this strengthening is that, surrounded by aggressive neighbors and starved of resources, they must intensify drives that make for effective warriors, hunters, and plunderers. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche lists the "strong and dangerous drives" that an imperiled community *must* cultivate as "enterprise, daring, vindictiveness, cunning, rapacity, and a domineering spirit [*Herrschsucht*]" (*BGE* 201), and compiles an overlapping list —"hatred, envy, greed, and power-lust [*Herrschsucht*]"—of the "conditioning affects of life" which "need to be enhanced where life is enhanced" (*BGE* 23).[22] These drives are often viewed as *negative* traits which we would prefer to eradicate. But Nietzsche prides himself on recognizing that "everything

generate affective orientations" (*The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016], 77).

[21]Mattia Riccardi, "Inner Opacity: Nietzsche on Introspection and Agency," *Inquiry* 58, no. 3 (2015): 226.

[22]Lust for mastery (*Herrschsucht*) crops up again, along with greed, when Nietzsche identifies them as examples of "actual *active* emotions," which are of "much greater biological value than those of reaction" (*GM* II 11). However, hatred and envy make the counterlist of reactive emotions, rooted in *ressentiment*, and so the distinction between active and reactive emotions is of limited use in trying to make sense of Nietzsche's lists of the drives that imperiled communities cultivate.

evil, terrible, tyrannical, predatory and snakelike serves just as well as its opposite to enhance the species 'humanity'" (*BGE* 41). To make sense of this claim, we need to work out why he considers *these* drives to be (eventually) conducive to the flourishing of individuality.[23]

The exact expression of drives will always depend upon how they interact with other drives, and also on the social context in which they operate. As we will see, it is possible for societies to mitigate their effects. But we can identify several tendencies which these drives have in common. They are drives which generally make citizens ambitious and motivate them to strive for distinction from one another. While a drive such as greed is not intrinsically good, it could play a role in motivating a citizen to strive for self-improvement and self-overcoming, especially when combined with a lust for power. Accordingly, these drives will also tend to provoke discord and strife between people. They are likely to incite competition and possibly even conflict. They are also predominantly *egoistic* drives. Zarathustra, for instance, praises "lust to rule" (*Herrschsucht*) as one of three drives which have often been slandered but *can* contribute to a "sound, healthy selfishness" (*Z* On the Three Evils). In some circumstances—but as we will see shortly, not all—they will induce people to feel that their interests are distinct from the interests of their community and incline them to pursue them at the expense of the collective good. Returning to the original list of drives, we can see that Nietzsche describes them as the "highest and strongest drives" which, when they erupt, drive "the individual up and out and above the average" (*BGE* 201). It should be clear, then, how in the right circumstances such drives might be conducive to *individuality*. Another quality of these drives is that they often motivate vigorous action. In *The Antichrist*, when arguing that pity is an unhelpful affect, Nietzsche castigates it as the opposite of the "tonic affects that heighten the energy of vital feelings." Pity is *depressing* and causes a loss of "vital energy" (*A* 7). While in this passage he does not offer any examples of what these "tonic affects" *are*, it seems likely he is thinking of similar drives to the ones quoted above. If so, then part of the reason these drives can enhance life is that they tend to *increase* our "vital energy", that is, they rouse us into vigorous action.

While such drives may, therefore, be conducive to the development of powerful and ambitious citizens, these drives will tend to pose a threat to communal harmony by creating rifts within the social body. Accordingly, such drives will usually be ostracized by communities whose priorities are peace and safety. A state grappling with the threat of extermination, however, cannot

[23]There has been a general lack of attention paid to how a drive such as greed can enhance humankind. It is true that much has been written on power, but this has focussed on the broader concept of the will to power, rather than the *lust* for power, which Nietzsche explicitly identifies in these passages as a drive. For a rare example of work on the value of one of these specific drives, see Herman W. Siemens, "Nietzsche's Philosophy of Hatred," *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie* 77, no. 4 (2015): 747–84.

afford to weaken its most ambitious citizens. But it also needs a disciplined citizen body if it is to present a unified front against external threats. Since it *has* to cultivate ambitious citizens, it must also prevent them from entering into conflict with one another and destroying the cohesion of the state. It can achieve this, at least temporarily, through a double-pronged strategy of making subordination to the common good *instinctive* and offering outlets for releasing the pressure of dangerous drives. As well as cultivating certain drives, then, the intolerant value system must emphasize (and ruthlessly enforce) conformity to the common interests of the society. Over generations, values are woven into the fabric of society, and once sufficiently entrenched, can be elevated to the status of inviolable religious laws (*A* 57). This fixing of the social structure puts an end to experimentation with modes of living and ensures that consciousness no longer needs to concern itself with "scrutiny, selection, and criticism of values *ad infinitum*"—the values become *instinctive* (*A* 57). Creating this kind of instinctive certainty has the added advantage of increasing vigor by ensuring a coordinated and efficient use of energy resources. For this reason, Nietzsche argues that "perfect automatism of the instinct" precedes "every type of perfection in the art of life" (*A* 57). In *Beyond Good and Evil* he marvels at the fact that "*obedience* in one direction for a long time"—no matter *what* the direction—has, in the long run, "brought about something that makes life on earth worth living" (*BGE* 188). The "*narrowing* of *perspective*" is the "condition for life and growth," because making some thought processes instinctive and unreflective is vital for purposeful, vigorous action. As Nietzsche tells us in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, "the complete certainty of function of the governing *unconscious* instincts" is a key component of nobility (*GM* 1 10).

The strong state must intensify powerful drives, but since this will tend to drive citizens apart and make them strive for distinction, it must also cultivate instinctive subordination to the common good. If it succeeds in both aims, then both strategies will contribute to enhancing the vigor of its citizens. To achieve this precarious balancing act the pressure of these dangerous drives must be periodically released. In Nietzsche's lavish descriptions of the rampaging nobles in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, we can see that outsiders to the community often provide this opportunity. While the nobles treat each other with "consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride and friendship," held in check by "custom, respect, habit, gratitude," they behave "not much better than uncaged beasts of prey in the world outside," enjoying "freedom from every social constraint" as they discharge their dangerous drives on outsiders (*GM* I 11). Every social body within which citizens treat each other as equals will "have to treat other bodies in just those ways that the individuals it contains *refrain* from treating each other" (*BGE* 259). Enemies thus act as "flue holes, as it were, for the effects of jealousy, irascibility, arrogance" (*BGE* 260). During this process, a "tremendous amount of force" constantly accumulates in the strong state but is detonated in

controlled explosions (*BGE* 262).[24] All of these aspects combine to form "those great hothouses for the strong, for the strongest type of people ever to exist" (*TI* 38). With this account of how the strong state generates surplus force and vigor in place, we can return to unpacking the significance of the moment when the threat of extermination lessens and its political will correspondingly *relaxes*.

The Emergence of Higher Individuals

With the relaxation of the tyrannical morality and laws of the strong state, the vigorous and powerful citizens it has cultivated are suddenly free to pursue their own idiosyncratic passions. This intense squandering of the force accumulated by the strong state is conducive to the emergence of higher individuals. This is because discharging an abundance of energy is closely connected to creative activity.[25] This is true for the vigorous noble-barbarian as much as it is for creative geniuses. When they vent their drives on outsiders the barbarians instinctively create forms. In discharging their "unbroken will to power" they force the shapeless, nomadic population into a "structure of domination" and are the "most involuntary, unconscious artists … [who] create and imprint forms instinctively." Wherever they appear, "something new arises" (*GM* II 17). Their accumulated vigor gives them the "power to organize," they are "born organizers" (*GM* II 18). This helps explain why the strong state will tend to become an aristocracy: its most powerful citizens vent their strength in "organizing" other communities. In this capacity to expend tremendous vigor creatively the nobles are the precursors to the higher individuals, whose creation *might* involve more finesse—such as in the creation of great artistic works—but who are nonetheless also preceded by an "accumulation of enormous force" (*TI* Skirmishes 44). In fact, the concentration of great force more reliably identifies the Nietzschean higher individual than specific character traits, which vary across higher types.[26] One of

[24]In this same passage Nietzsche likens this accumulation to putting "a threatening tension into the bow," repeating the same idea in notes when he writes, "The significance of protracted despotic moralities: they tense the bow, if they do not break it" (*WP* 961 / *KSA* 11:34[178]).

[25]Nietzsche's emphasis on the vigor and vitality of the highest individuals and the ages in which they tend to appear has generally been overlooked by his commentators. The best account is offered by Daniel Conway, who argues that the strong ages are those "overflowing with vital energy" and draws the connection between "genius" and vitality: "The order of rank among individuals and types is thus determined by a measure of the relative capacity of excess affect that one can afford to reserve and expand" (*Nietzsche and the Political*, 23, 48). However, Conway offers little explanation for *how* these qualities are cultivated, which is what I am focusing on here.

[26]On the idea that greatness is correlated with degree of force, see also *WP* 863: "The concept 'stronger and weaker man' reduces itself to the idea that in the first case a great

the defining characteristics of "great human beings" is that they squander tremendous amounts of energy, as the "pressure of the out-flowing" forces renders caution impossible (*TI* Skirmishes 44)

The political decline of the strong state, then, instigates an outpouring of creative force. Individuality, long repressed, now blossoms. The "wild egoisms" cultivated by the strong state are freed from all restraint and turn "explosively against each other" (*BGE* 262). Thus the first "tyrants" emerge and wrestle for political domination, as they try to impose their idiosyncratic evaluations of existence upon society and compete for the support of other more obedient citizens. The sudden opportunity for vigorous citizens to discharge their organizational force into their idiosyncratic passions is also conducive to artistic and cultural flourishing—this is the "highest and most fruitful stage" of culture (*GS* 23).[27] We can now see the problem with Drochon's claim that culture blossoms in the *thriving* aristocratic state: higher culture and strong political will are mutually exclusive; "all the great ages have been ages of political decline: anything great in the cultural sense is apolitical, even *anti-political*" (*TI* Germans 4). Since a strong political will grows in hostile conditions which preclude the individual freedom required for higher culture, culture cannot flourish until the political will of the state wanes.

deal of force is inherited—he is a summation—in the second, as yet little— (inadequate inheritance, splintering of that which is inherited … the starting point is where great force is, where force is to be discharged)" (*WP* 863 / *KSA* 13:15[78–79]). On the lack of a single higher type, see Mark Alfano, "An Enchanting Abundance of Types: Nietzsche's Modest Unity of Virtue Thesis," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 49, no. 3 (2015): 417–35.

[27]Nietzsche indicates that the highest philosophers are likely to flourish in such periods too. The philosopher must be a "strong, independent spirit," a quality which is more likely to originate in those who possess "harshness and cunning" than in the "gentle, fine, yielding good nature" that we associate with scholars (*BGE* 39). Furthermore, the strength and vitality needed to be an *individual* is also linked to the capacity to face reality without needing to take comfort in transcendence and illusion. In *The Gay Science*, for example, Nietzsche argues that "he who is richest in fullness of life" can allow himself "the sight of what is terrible and questionable" (*GS* 370), and elsewhere he makes it clear that this capacity is crucial to the highest forms of philosophy: the "measure of value" in philosophy is how much truth a spirit can "tolerate" and "withstand" (*EH* Preface 3 and *BGE* 39). Aside from the vigor which is required to face reality, there is another reason to expect that these conditions would be fertile for producing philosophers. Nietzsche claims that "every great philosophy so far has been … a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir," because a philosopher's morals reflect how his drives stand "with respect to one another" (*BGE* 6). It follows, therefore, that the cultivation of drives that are usually ostracized will provide an advantage in discovering "certain *aspects* of the truth" which are usually ignored (*BGE* 39).

These periods, when the common morality is "outlived," are the "turning points of history, a magnificent, diverse, jungle-like growth and upward striving," times of "immense destruction and self-destruction" (*BGE* 262). If any period in Nietzsche's political philosophy corresponds to the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, it is not the prehistorical period—which is populated by culturally homogeneous communities—but this period of uncertainty and conflict. Although Nietzsche sometimes dramatically claims that the very *highest* individuals, such as Napoleon, comprehensively exhaust an age and represent its "terminus" (*TI* Skirmishes 44), this period of upheaval and squandering *might* persist for several generations. This is because values that are culturally entrenched often outlive the loss of the conditions from which they emerged and even the loss of their justification. The idea that Christian values remain entrenched in society long after their ostensible justification has lost its force is central to Nietzsche's account of the madman and the death of God (*GS* 125). Similarly, the influence of a tyrannical morality responsible for intensifying powerful drives might retain its influence long after its overarching justification—the need to overcome hostile conditions—has become redundant. The vigor and vitality produced by this morality will accordingly persist for a while.

Another reason that this chaotic period might last for several generations is that it will force the strongest citizens to increase their capacity for self-mastery. When faith in the common good has crumbled—and the corresponding instinctive certainty lost—drives will struggle for mastery *within* individuals. While this period will usually result in weak and uncertain citizens, the most vigorous individuals will be strengthened through the struggle to create their own unifying values and impose order on their drives (*BGE* 201).[28] Furthermore, the widespread danger and uncertainty of the period force them to strengthen themselves, acting as a microcosm of the hostile conditions that germinated the strong state in the first place. Such conditions might produce a Caesar, a "most magnificent type" who develops the "maximal amount of authority and discipline" so that he can control his "merciless and terrible instincts" (*TI* 38). In chaotic conditions, such an individual

[28]In 1888 Nietzsche begins to describe the loss of instinctive certainty as *decadence*. For a detailed account of Nietzsche's use of the term "decadence," see Daniel Conway, "The Politics of Decadence," in "Nietzsche and Politics," supplement, *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37, no. S1 (1999): 19–33. According to the account I have sketched, *some* decadence is the precondition for cultural and artistic growth. But the more decadent a society becomes, the more people "*instinctively prefer* things that disintegrate, that accelerate the end" (*TI* 39); in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche describes *complete* decadents as those who "always choose the means that hurt themselves" (*EH* Wise 2). But the presence of great vitality acts as a kind of protective against the negative effects of decadence because it enables people to impose order upon their drives and to give themselves purpose. It is only once this vitality diminishes that decadence becomes an obstacle to future flourishing.

might triumph over rivals and forge new strengthening values and institutions.

This period of upheaval is also likely to generate a countermovement which aims to destroy those powerful drives that had previously been intensified. Without an "escape valve" for the drives of ambitious citizens they will fuel conflict within the community and so, over time, these drives will invariably be met with increasing hostility and denounced as immoral (*BGE* 201). Just as fear of external enemies drove the intensification of these drives, the fear of one's *own* citizens motivates the average citizen to turn on precisely those individuals who had previously safeguarded the community from threats. With the community secure against external threats, a "herd morality, the morality of timidity" becomes increasingly appealing, based on the desire to produce a society in which there is "*nothing more to fear*" (*BGE* 201). At this point, the organizing force exercised by vigorous individuals might manifest in a new widespread tyrannical morality or eventually dissipate.[29] If average citizens successfully prosecute the war against powerful drives then we will see a decline in those individuals capable of creating values and organizing society—and the triumph of the "hopelessly *mediocre*" (*BGE* 262). Since higher culture also originates in great quantities of vigor and organizing force, the war on tyrants is also inadvertently a war on higher culture.

Implications for the Aristocratic and Democratic Readings of Nietzsche

We now have a framework in place to explain the long-term development of higher individuals, and can use this to shed light on Nietzsche's praise of aristocracies and his critique of liberalism and democracy. We can then draw some conclusions about what Nietzsche's analytic claims about political communities mean for the debate over whether he is best conceived of as an aristocratic opponent to democracy or a source from which to enrich democracy.

By piecing together Nietzsche's analytic claims we have discerned three features that have been present in societies that have cultivated the kind of vigor and organizing force possessed by the highest individuals. First, the most powerful and dangerous drives of at least a portion of the citizenry must be intensified. Second, since it is counterproductive to cultivate such drives without also ensuring that these citizens will not discharge on each other and the rest of the community, ambitious citizens must be convinced to

[29]Nietzsche describes one variant of this period of political decline in his account of Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols*. Socrates exemplifies the "fanaticism with which all of Greek thought threw itself on rationality" because their "instincts were in anarchy." Socrates sensed that the "degeneration" was spreading and the ability to master and order the drives was being lost, and so he developed a "counter-tyrant" out of reason (*TI* 4–10). This is one example of a "morality of timidity."

instinctively subordinate their own interests to the good of the community. Third, since these drives must have *some* release, there must be "flue holes" for their discharge.

These analytic claims clarify Nietzsche's praise of aristocratic states. Aristocracies *result* from the process of protracted strengthening which is required to overcome hostile environmental conditions. They are formed when the powerful and ambitious citizens cultivated by strong states (which might themselves be hierarchically organized) vent their drives on other, weaker communities. They are therefore a *consequence* of an abundance of vigor and organizing force.[30] Since the highest forms of individuality have tended to emerge in the relaxation of these aristocracies, we can understand why Nietzsche praises the contribution of aristocracies to the emergence of higher individuals. It is, however, unlikely that an aristocracy capable of producing such effects could be created ex nihilo, since thriving aristocracies have emerged *from* a protracted struggle against the threat of annihilation. Only with the re-emergence of such conditions are they likely to appear again. Nietzsche does suggest that a new warlike age might be re-emerging (*BGE* 209), because as the spirit of scientific enquiry continues to undermine traditional value systems, we are likely to see "wars such as the earth has never seen" (*EH* Destiny 1). If a constant threat of extermination reappears then this will provide fertile conditions for "*new peoples*" to emerge (*Z* III On Old and New Tablets 25). Peoples that embark on a regime of strengthening *might* form new aristocracies. In notes, however, Nietzsche also ponders whether it might be possible to create the highest individuals *without* recourse to the conditions that have hitherto made them possible, which at least raises the possibility that we might encourage human flourishing without the constant threat of extermination (*WP* 883 / *KSA* 12:9[119]). It seems pertinent, then, to enquire as to whether any iteration of democracy might support human flourishing. To begin to answer this, we can turn to what light the account I have developed can shed on Nietzsche's criticisms of liberalism and democracy.

There are multiple strands to these criticisms. Commentators have often focused on Nietzsche's claim that the "*democratic* movement" is a continuation of Christian values—he associates it, for instance, with an attempt at equalization, motivated by *ressentiment* (*BGE* 202).[31] But he also offers

[30]Conway also recognizes this point: Nietzsche values aristocracies because they *express* the highest degree of "strength and vitality." Since political regimes will "accurately reflect the vitality of the peoples and ages they serve … (an aristocracy) is not a better regime for those epochs that can afford only democracy" (*Nietzsche and the Political*, 41).

[31]Hatab, for instance, argues that "Nietzsche's primary political target is egalitarianism… . The promotion of political equality is unmasked as the weak majority grabbing power to incapacitate the strong few" (*A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*, 28). Pursuing a different line of argument, Maudemarie Clark argues that Nietzsche is

criticisms that are rooted in the claims I have made about his political philosophy. To begin with, while the aristocracies that Nietzsche praises arise from an abundance of organizing force, liberal democracies are a *symptom* of a lack of vitality and organizing force. Democracies only emerge when those powerful individuals who are capable of bestowing meaning and imposing direction upon society are lacking; Nietzsche diagnoses democracy as the "form in which the organizing force manifests its decline" (*TI* 39), and claims that it reflects "*declining* life, the loss of all the forces of organization, which is to say separation, division, subordination, and domination" (*TI* 37). Contemporary institutions reflect a "general loss of vitality"—the vitality that is produced by strong states. That liberal democracies exist at all, then, indicates a dearth of the highest individuals.[32]

Many of his other criticisms reflect his concern that liberal and democratic values and institutions are antithetical to flourishing. I will develop this line of argument through engagement with contemporary attempts to envision democracies more conducive to Nietzschean flourishing, particularly Lawrence Hatab's and David Owen's accounts of agonistic democracies. Among a whole host of agonistic democrats, their work is the most useful for my purposes because they both offer explicitly Nietzschean visions, and because both argue that certain forms of democracy are the best way to realize Nietzsche's interpretation of human flourishing—even if he did not draw this conclusion himself.[33] These visions of Nietzschean democracy—as well as many other theories of agonistic democracy—explicitly draw their inspiration from Nietzsche's account of the Greek *agon* in his early unpublished preface "Homer's Contest" (1872). In this essay, Nietzsche claims that an agonistic education and the opportunity to participate in competition games, such as running, throwing, and singing, provided an outlet

not concerned that democratic institutions will produce *actual* equality, but is troubled by a democratic culture that claims that people are of equal *worth* and thus denies the existence of "*more spiritual* human beings" (Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], 183).

[32]See also *Z* On Old and New Tablets: "For the best should rule, my brothers, and the best also *want to* rule! And wherever the teaching says differently, there—the best are *missing*."

[33]Some forms of agonistic democracy are less explicitly Nietzschean. Chantal Mouffe's account, for example, owes more to Carl Schmitt's theorizing of the friend/enemy distinction than it does to Nietzsche. Mouffe's form of agonistic democracy is less concerned with human flourishing, too (although there is some emphasis on it): agonistic democracies are primarily desirable because they offer a way to transform *antagonistic* conflict, characterized by hatred and violence, into *agonal* conflict, which is civil and peaceful. It thus focuses more on protecting societies from violence, rather than enhancing the species. See, for example, Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

for drives such as envy, greed, and spite. Selfishness was deliberately "lit" but also "curbed and restricted," since one was taught from childhood that success in competition brought glory to the competitor's town (*HC*, p. 179). Both Hatab and Owen emphasize the same aspect of this essay: through competition and contestation, individuals developed their capabilities and strove for new standards of excellence.[34]

Building on this account, Hatab argues that Nietzsche fails to realize the agonistic potential of democratic states. Democracies are ideal for reaping the benefits of competition since democratic activity is a "perpetual ritual of organized conflict" which "*presumes* and even *encourages* political conflict."[35] Moreover, democracy is the *only* way to do justice to Nietzsche's "nonfoundationalism," that is, his undermining of any universal or a priori common good, since it allows an open contestation of the meaning of the good. Finally, if we maximize equality of opportunity, then this allows for "*more* cultural productivity than is possible in closed, regulated, or stratified societies"—particularly if we expand the *agon* to cultural spheres.[36] Hatab argues that it is not clear what a political aristocracy would accomplish that is not possible within an appropriately structured democracy.[37] Owen also claims that an "agonal political culture" can avoid the cultural leveling that Nietzsche associates with "the democratic movement."[38] For Owen, agonistic democracies are conducive to human flourishing because the highest forms of self-overcoming are only possible through a public contestation over what "virtues and values should be communally cultivated."[39] Participating in a public debate over the common good enables us to cultivate the capacities that we require to be a "sovereign individual," such as "the most important powers, namely, reason and imagination"[40] and the capacity for independence of mind and "self-rule."[41]

In both these accounts, then, political contestation is valuable as a means to achieve excellence, and political contestation is best achieved within a democratic framework that enables and promotes pluralism. A degree of agonistic respect is required to confine conflict to appropriate channels. For both these authors, the conflict permitted and encouraged by agonistic democracies means that they offer the *best* opportunity to cultivate abilities that are conducive to human flourishing. While such visions might indeed be preferable to

[34]Hatab discusses this essay in *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*, 62, and Owen in *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason* (London: Sage, 1995), 139.
[35]Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*, 76.
[36]Ibid., 133.
[37]Ibid., 138.
[38]David Owen, "Equality, Democracy, and Self-Respect: Reflections on Nietzsche's Agonal Perfectionism," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 24 (2002): 126.
[39]Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, 160.
[40]Ibid., 146.
[41]Owen, "Equality, Democracy, and Self-Respect," 126.

other iterations of democracy, I want to use the account of Nietzsche's political philosophy I have developed to cast doubt on whether agonistic democracies—and democracies more generally—can support the processes that have hitherto been *most* conducive to human flourishing.

Nietzsche loses interest in the Greek *agon* as an exemplary model—in fact, the concept all but disappears in his mature work—and the account of flourishing that replaces it is far less easy to transplant to a modern democratic setting. The kind of *intense hothousing* that Nietzsche identifies as conducive to the highest individuals in his mature work does not require pluralism, and seems to preclude it. This hothousing requires simultaneously intensifying powerful and dangerous drives while also ensuring instinctive subordination to the good of the state, and this is accomplished through the creation of a uniform and *intolerant* system of values. This idea is at the center of Nietzsche's critique of liberal institutions and values. Freedom in the liberal tradition—freedom from constraint—does not permit the protracted constraint that *strengthens* citizens. Strengthening institutions necessarily constrain individual freedoms in order to promote the future flourishing of the collective—they must embody a "type of will, instinct, imperative that is anti-liberal to the point of malice" (*TI* 39). Although respect between equals is possible, this is only when "individuals have genuinely similar quantities of force and measures of value"—which seems to undermine the degree of pluralism favored by agonistic democrats.

Furthermore, even this level of respect is *only* possible because of the existence of "flue holes" for releasing the pressure of drives. When Nietzsche outlines what he owes to the ancients in *Twilight of the Idols*, he briefly mentions the "agonistic instinct" but he places far more emphasis on the fact that the "city-states tore each other apart so that the citizens in each one were able to find peace from themselves." The tremendous force of their strongest drive, the will to power, meant that a "terrible and ruthless hostility" towards other states was *required* so that citizens could be protected from another (*TI* What I Owe to the Ancients 3). This clearly runs contrary to modern democratic sensibilities. Without recourse to the strategies used by strong states to maintain social cohesion and mutual respect, it is unclear how any society can *afford* to cultivate the powerful and dangerous drives, such as lust for rule, envy, and greed, which Nietzsche claims are an essential part of the long-term cultivation of higher individuals. Even if the social fabric remains intact long enough for this process to bear fruit, there is every reason to think that, if such intense hothousing is successful, at least some of the higher individuals it cultivates may well explode the democratic framework.[42] It therefore seems unlikely that a democratic scaffolding can support the *degree* of protracted constraint which has hitherto cultivated the

[42]While some have construed Nietzsche's higher types exclusively in cultural terms (see Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*), others have argued persuasively that at least some of

vigor and organizing force present in the highest individuals. It is true that the details of Nietzsche's account do not readily yield an alternative normative vision to rival that of agonistic democracy—this process has only occurred out of the *necessity* of overcoming hostile conditions. Nevertheless, what we can conclude is that *any* attempt to promote Nietzschean flourishing should engage seriously with his account of this process, in a way that Hatab, Owen, and agonistic democrats in general do not do.[43] Nietzschean democrats should consider to what extent the different parts of this process might be replicated—in less extreme form—within a democratic framework.

Conclusion

I have drawn from Nietzsche's post-1882 writings to establish a connection between the rise and decline of strong political states and the emergence of the highest individuals. In doing so, I have emphasized a number of themes that are underdeveloped in Nietzschean scholarship but are crucial to making sense of his political writings. First, the way in which environmental constraints shape the values of a community and explain their unequal development of strength. Second, the details of the strategy by which strong states hothouse powerful and dangerous citizens. They use tyrannical values and institutions to intensify the dangerous drives of their citizens while keeping them subordinate to the common good. In doing so, they develop vigorous citizens with the power to organize. Third, the way in which the capacity for individuality and creativity has emerged, paradoxically, from the protracted constraint and uniformity of tyrannical moralities. It is in the chaotic periods when the political will of a strong state decays that the highest forms of individuality flourish. This account not only clarifies the claims of Nietzsche's political philosophy, but also sheds light on his criticisms of liberalism and democracy and brings into focus the challenges faced by those who wish to adapt his thought to a democratic context. Any attempt to promote Nietzschean flourishing should engage seriously with his account of the conditions under which the highest individuals have hitherto emerged.

the highest individuals will be drawn inexorably to the political realm. See Abbey and Appel, *Nietzsche on the Will to Politics*, 101–2.

[43]While Hatab, for example, does compile a list of passages that seem to support an "aristocratic, authoritarian political arrangement" (*Nietzsche's Defense of Democracy*, 39–42), he does not discuss the *process* by which the highest individuals have hitherto arisen, which is what I have focused on here. Neither does Owen in *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, where his account of Nietzschean flourishing is predominantly drawn from "Homer's Contest"and the account of the sovereign individual in *On the Genealogy of Morality*.