

Nietzsche, Democracy and Transcendence¹

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Abstract

Socialism, utilitarianism and democracy are, according to Nietzsche, secularised versions of Christianity. They have continued the monomaniac one-sidedness of the Christian idea of what a human being is and should be, and they have even strengthened this monomania through its 'immanentisation'. The article shows that this 'immanentisation' is of crucial importance for Nietzsche's critique of democracy. This critique may suggest that Nietzsche's alternative for the disappeared Christian faith is not only a more radical rupture from the religious past, but also a re-interpretation or recreation of the notion of transcendence implied in that faith.

It may sound dangerous to present Nietzsche's thoughts on this precious good that we call 'democracy'. Nietzsche's extremely derogatory remarks on democracy are well known. He speaks about 'the softhearted and effeminate taste of a democratic century' (1966: §210). He calls 'the democratic movement [...] not only a form of the decay of political organization but a form of the decay, namely the diminution, of man, making him mediocre and lowering his value' (1966: §203). Democracy is, according to Nietzsche, one of the 'symptoms of declining life' (1969: III, §25), and in *Twilight of the Idols*, he writes: 'The man *who has become free* – and how much more the *mind* that has become free – spurns the contemptible sort of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats.' (1990a: IX, §38)

Even if it was only through the obvious *abuse* of his thinking that the Nazis could link themselves to him, we must admit that Nietzsche's writings – also with regard to democracy – at least allowed for this abuse. It therefore not only sounds, but *is* dangerous to read Nietzsche on democracy. And yet, or by that very token, it might be important to confront ourselves with Nietzsche's critique of democracy, not only for historic reasons, but also in order to test our own democratic convictions, as well as to acknowledge and to understand better our possible unease with some features of contemporary democracy.²

1. Nietzsche's critique of democracy

In 1884, Nietzsche writes:

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference: 'Nietzsche, Culture and Society' (12-14 January 2006, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa). I am indebted to Rebecca Bamford and the reviewers of the SAJP for the suggestions they made to improve on the text.

2 Further literature on the question includes: Marti (1993: 881-894), McIntyre (1992: 184-210), Hatab (1995), Warren (1997: 37-57), Schrift (2000: 220-233), Siemens (2001: 509-526).

Monarchy *represents* the belief in someone who is completely superior, a leader, saviour, demigod. *Aristocracy* represents the belief in an elite-humanity and a higher caste. Democracy represents the *disbelief* in great human beings and an elite society: “everyone is equal to everyone else” “Finally we are all cattle and rabble, bent on self-interest” (1986: II, §224).³

The text is symptomatic, first because it reminds of the way in which the Greek philosophers wrote on democracy: i.e. by composing a comparative list of different constitutions. We find lists like these in texts by Plato and Aristotle, which Nietzsche knew very well. We are reminded of the fact that when Nietzsche speaks about democracy he very often thinks of more than only modern democracy and includes at least the Greek *polity*.

A second reason for calling this text ‘symptomatic’ is that Nietzsche characterises democracy as a *disbelief* (he underlines the word: *Un glauben*). This is symptomatic in two ways. First it characterizes democracy as negative and even as reactive. Democracy does not believe in something, it simply does *not* believe. The text may seem to end with two expressions of a typical democratic faith: the faith in equality, but even this turns out to be only disbelief: it is the denial of a belief in difference and hierarchy: there are no exceptional beings, nor shall there be any. Secondly, the criterion in terms of which which democracy is evaluated and compared with the other constitutions (the question of what belief it represents), shows a crucial feature of Nietzsche's interest in politics: politics is for Nietzsche only of interest in the framework of, as an instrument for, or a pointer towards something else: the creation or emergence of a particular type of people and culture. Here is an example of this view on politics:

You know with how much disgust I reject this delusion that the people or even the state would be an ‘end in itself’. But I also cannot stand the view that looks for the end of humanity in its future. Neither the state, nor the people, nor humanity exist for their own sake; the goal is in the peaks, in the great ‘individuals’, the saints and artists; it is therefore not in front of us nor behind us but outside of time. This goal points beyond humanity. (1980: 7.354)

How do these characteristics fit into the whole of Nietzsche's thoughts on democracy? Nietzsche of course did not write any systematic treatise on democracy. The term ‘democracy’, together with all its word-forms and compounds, occurs only 169 times in Nietzsche's writings, and these occurrences are more or less equally spread over the entire period of his writing; only during the time in which he writes *Beyond Good and Evil* do we find more frequent occurrences than average. As always, it is a tricky business to try to summarise and systematise these scattered remarks into a more or less coherent whole. There are, however, some characteristic features.

When Nietzsche uses the concept ‘democracy’ as a political concept (which he – at least after *Human All Too Human* – more often does *not* do), this may refer to different things. Sometimes he refers to the Greek *tyrannoi* such as Peisistratus (6th century BC), a benevolent dictator who protected the people against the nobility (cf. Nietzsche, 1980: 7.31); sometimes he refers to the Athenian constitution under Pericles (5th century BC) where precisely nobility played a crucial role (e.g. 1986: II, WS §289); sometimes he refers to modern, especially European, constitutional structures (e.g. 1986: I, §472); and sometimes it is not clear at all to which concept of democracy he

³ Translations from Nietzsche's unpublished notes (Volumes 7-13, 1980) are my own.

refers. He never elaborates on the political structure indicated with this concept. Roughly we can say that, as a political concept, 'democracy' in the modern sense of the word is identified by Nietzsche with 'sovereignty of the people' (1986: I, §472).

But more important than the elaboration of democracy as a political structure, is for Nietzsche the diagnostic treatment of democracy as a symptom of a much broader cultural movement, which he calls 'Europe's *democratic* movement' (1966: §242). This *cultural* meaning of 'democracy' is prevalent in the writings after *Human All Too Human*, and almost all of his negative utterances on democracy use the word in this sense. The political democratic ideology is only one symptom of this much broader cultural movement, the founders of which he mentions to be 'Socrates[,] Christ[,] Luther[,] Rousseau' (1980: 12.348); apart from the last-mentioned, he does not refer to any politicians or political theorists. The qualifying roots of this movement are the idea of the equality of all human beings and the morality of pity. The idea of equality was first introduced with Socrates' dialectics and the dominion of logic that it founded, and then again reinforced by the Christian idea of human beings as created after the image of God and equal before God. This idea was repeated and underlined by Luther in his opposition against the hierarchy of the church, and then finally translated in secular terms by Rousseau. The morality of pity was also introduced by Christianity; it is – according to Nietzsche – a symptom of the incapacity to affirm suffering as a necessary element of life. As such it signals a weak or powerless form of life. We may conclude that, as a concept for a constitution, 'democracy' is the political translation of an ideology that is much older and broader:

Indeed, with the help of a religion which indulged and flattered the most sublime herd-animal desires, we have reached the point where we find *even in political and social institutions* an ever more visible expression of this morality: the democratic movement is the heir of the Christian movement (1966: §202, my italics).

This is the reason that we often find the concept of democracy applied to matters that we are not used to associate with it. Some examples may draw our attention to what for Nietzsche is the central focus in what he writes on democracy:

In the *Genealogy of Morals* he writes that '[T]he democratic idiosyncrasy' consists of a:

misarchism (to coin an ugly word for an ugly thing) [and] has permeated the realm of the spirit and disguised itself in the most spiritual forms to such a degree that today it has forced its way [...] into the strictest, apparently most objective sciences; indeed, it seems to me to have already taken charge of all physiology and theory of life (1969: II, §12).

That these sciences have become permeated and corrupted by democracy, can be recognized in their ideal of objective knowledge, which expels the person of the scientist and therefore the difference in vital quality among people, in order to make their research controllable and repeatable by everybody. It also affects scientific theories, as e.g. the theory that interprets the development of life in terms of adaptation,

that is to say, an activity of the second rank, a mere reactivity; indeed life itself has been defined a more and more efficient inner adaptation to external conditions (Herbert Spencer). Thus the essence of life, its will to power, is ignored;

one overlooks the essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive form-giving forces (1969: II, §12).

So much for the role of democracy in the sciences. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche asks:

whether the contempt for melody that is now spreading more and more and the atrophy of the melodic sense in Germany should be understood as democratic bad manners and an aftereffect of the Revolution. (1974: §103)

Melody refers to structure and order; things despised by democracy according to Nietzsche. In an unpublished note, he suggests that the techniques with which naturalistic authors try to stimulate their readers are characteristic of a democratic age (1980: 11.46). In music, as in literature artists are forced to use strong stimuli in order to touch their audience. Democracy is a name for a decadent age.

Several times Nietzsche speaks of a democratic 'taste', 'the softhearted and effeminate taste of a democratic century' (1966: §210). Nietzsche (1966: §239) mentions two features of this 'democratic inclination and basic taste', namely 'disrespectfulness for old age' and excessive esteem for women. This might sound contradictory ('disrespect' on the one hand and 'respect' on the other), but both are in fact symptomatic of one and the same thing: the denial of difference. Difference for Nietzsche is always a difference in rank. It is the same egalitarian instinct that downgrades old age and upgrades women while denying 'the most abysmal antagonism [...] and the necessity of an eternally hostile tension' (1966: §238).

Equality and weakness are the central concepts in what Nietzsche says about democracy. Their connection is founded in his 'theory' of the will to power. All living reality exists, according to Nietzsche, only by virtue of tension and struggle. Just like a book only survives and increases in significance thanks to the struggle of interpretations in which it is included, so too any living being and certainly a human being, can only develop and grow through antagonistic relations among groups, individuals, and finally even among different forces and capabilities within the individual (for the self is also formed in and through agonistic relations).⁴ Strength and health are for Nietzsche always connected with and conditioned by the affirmation of this struggle or *agon*, weakness is always signalled by its denial. Equality is in the interest of the weak. Therefore a weak being, a weak society, a weak era, will become democratic, will preach equality and will make efforts to expell any struggle, any tension, any difference:

'The will to power' is subject to hatred in a democratic age (1980: 13.273)

A society that definitely and instinctively refuses war and victory, is in decline: it is ready for democracy and a government of shop-keepers (1980: 13.379)

Democracy is thus, for Nietzsche, a way to erase differences among human beings. What he calls 'Europe's democratic movement' is a manifestation of 'a tremendous *physiological* process', in which the 'Europeans are becoming more similar to each other'; a process that will 'lead to the levelling and mediocritization of man – to a useful, industrious, handy, multi-purpose herd animal' (1966: §242).

Everywhere Nietzsche sees the same forces at work: the morality of pity, the Christian religion, the scientific ideal of objectivity, evolutionary theories, the granting of

⁴ This point is further elaborated in van Tongeren (2000: 154vv).

equal rights for men and women, the neutralisation of the distance between generations, the disappearance of melody in modern music. The same ‘democratic instincts’, the same ‘plebeian hostility towards⁵ everything privileged and autocratic’ (1966: §22) can be recognised in the democratisation of education and the denial that ‘[a]ll higher education belongs to the exceptions alone’ (1990a: V, §5); or – to give a final example – in the fact that people increasingly become actors. Nietzsche calls it typical for democratic ages that ‘[t]he individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything, and *can manage almost any role*’. In this way:

[t]he strength to build becomes paralyzed; the courage to make plans that encompass the distant future is discouraged [...] For what is dying out is the fundamental faith [...] that man has value and meaning only insofar as he is *a stone in a great edifice*; and to that end he must be *solid* first of all, a “stone” – and above all not an actor! (1974: §356)

This prevalent conviction, that there is nothing *beyond* the human being and its immediate well-being, connects democracy – for Nietzsche – with utilitarianism. The reference in the utilitarian principle to the greatest number, as well as the identification of happiness as a maximization of pleasure and a minimization of pain, show the democratic background of utilitarianism. One of the reasons for democratic egalitarianism and its refusal of struggle is the fear of suffering and the inability to affirm suffering. Democracy is the ideology of those who want to prevent any suffering, and therefore want to get rid of the antagonism between human beings. The democratic maxim reads: “everyone is equal to everyone else” “Finally we are all cattle and rabble, bent on self-interest” (1980: 11.224). In democracy, people are motivated by ‘prudence and self-interest’ (1986: I, §472). This is what allows Nietzsche to bring together in what sounds like a motley collection: ‘shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats’: what connects them is that they are all dreaming of the same ‘contemptible sort of well-being’ (1990a: IX, §38). I presume that this relation between democracy and utilitarianism is important.

2. Utilitarianism

In the new (1886) preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes that ‘practical and theoretical *utilitarianism*’ and ‘democracy [...] developed at the same time’ (1967: Preface, §4). The sense in which this may be true as a historical statement, is not discussed here. Nietzsche makes a symptomatological statement, or to be more precise, a symptomatological hypothesis: ‘Could it be possible that, [...] all have been symptoms of a decline of strength, of impending old age, and of physiological weariness?’ (1967: Preface, §4). Let’s observe in more detail what he writes about utilitarianism and see whether Nietzsche’s critique of utilitarianism might help us to better understand his critique of democracy.

The core concept of democracy is: equality. People for whom equality is the highest value will urgently need equalizing procedures, i.e.: procedures or other instruments that make equal what is unequal. One of the best instruments for this is quantification, or the reduction of qualitative differences to quantitative ones that can be calculated. Quantification presupposes that there is ‘something’, of which qualities are only different quantities. This something is found in the category of interest or preference.

5 Kaufmann translates ‘hostility towards’ as ‘antagonism to’.

When interests or preferences are calculated, the strongest will be those that are most frequent, i.e.: those shared by most people.

The interest that which is most common among human beings is the interest in self-preservation, and this is indeed considered to be the most basic natural good – in a certain sense—from antiquity on, but even more so since modernity. Nietzsche's position is a response to the naturalness with which this notion of self-preservation has become decisive. His response is a question: To what purpose should the self be preserved? Or to be more precise – because we should avoid pretending that all selves were equal – *which* self should be preserved?

Utilitarianism – in Nietzsche's view – identifies the self and its interests with the interests of the British utilitarians: they finally aimed at 'English happiness – I mean [...] comfort and fashion (and at best a seat in Parliament)' (1966: §228). They identified the self with the self of people who long for peace, rest and comfort, i.e. people who cannot endure the unrest and the dangers of the struggle, and in this manner give evidence of their weakness. The British utilitarians are for that matter only the late offspring of the Christians, who, from the beginning conceived of happiness as eternal peace. This is the ideal of the many (a term that invokes the same kind of contempt as with the Greek *hoi polloi*). To go from self-interest to public interest, as utilitarianism does when it refers to 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number', is therefore according to Nietzsche, not a very big step. The interest from which one started was – after all – already modelled after the interest of the many. Utilitarianism is just a new version of what he calls the slave revolt in morality. Through Christianity and utilitarianism, the interest of the majority has become the interest that is supposed to be common to all. The relation with democracy is implicit, but nonetheless clear: utilitarianism is one of the strategies through which the democratic denial of difference and antagonism has become victorious.

A few times Nietzsche suggests that a utilitarian will not be able to appreciate poetry; most probably he will especially have a hard time to understand the strict laws of rhyme and rhythm in poetry:

After all, this rhythmic speech does anything but promote the clarity of communication, and yet it has shot up all over the earth, and still does, as if it meant to mock expediency and utility. The wild and beautiful irrationality of poetry refutes your utilitarianism (1974: §84).

It is true that Nietzsche, in the continuation of this text seems to take sides with the utilitarians by referring to a higher use of this seemingly useless form, but he does so ironically ('moved by pity', as he says). 'In those times in which poetry came into existence' man still acknowledged the force of rhythm. Not only do we remember a text more easily thanks to its rhythm, not only are our feet and even our soul urged to 'follow the beat', but more importantly, 'a rhythmical prayer was supposed to get closer to the ears of the gods.' Through the force of rhythm, man was able to influence other people, to cleanse his own soul and even 'to force a god to appear, to be near and to listen'. Rhythm elevated man above his normal stance; 'without verse one was nothing; by means of verse one almost became a god.' (1974: §84) Using words that may sound oversized – but I do use them intentionally and with the question of democracy in mind – we could summarize this text as follows. In order to show the utility of poetry against the uselessness of which it is being suspected, Nietzsche replaces a

utilitarian use with a non-utilitarian one, or: an 'immanent use' by a 'transcendent use'.

Before explaining these terms and drawing the line from here to democracy, I first want to refer to another text. In an unpublished note, Nietzsche links Christianity to the modern ideologies of socialism and utilitarianism, and opposes these with his own conception. Christianity, according to Nietzsche, reduced the plurality of human beings to only one type. Every deviation from this one and only form was rejected:

For all souls there was only one perfection, only one ideal, only one road to salvation ... Most extreme form of *equal rights* (1980: 13.88)

Although this belief has disappeared in our age, its core element is maintained, and forms the summit of wisdom for 'our socialists' and the 'utilitarians'. This core element is then summarised by Nietzsche in three statements: 1) one believes it to be desirable that, as far as possible, only *one* type (*Typus*) is being realised; 2) one claims to know what type this is; and 3) one believes that every deviation from this type means a relapse, a hindrance or a loss of strength and power for man. Nietzsche then sums up his critique of this secularised version of Christianity as follows:

In summa: one has transferred the arrival of the "*Kingdom of God*" to the future, to the earth, to the human, – but ultimately one has stuck to the belief in the *old* ideal ... (1980: 13.88)

Socialism, utilitarianism, and without doubt we may add democracy, are secularised versions of Christianity. They have continued the monomaniac onesidedness of the Christian idea of what a human being is and should be, and they have even strengthened this monomania through its 'immanentisation'. In the next section I will show that this 'immanentisation' has crucial importance for Nietzsche's critique of democracy. At the same time this critique of democracy may suggest that Nietzsche's alternative for the disappeared Christian faith is not only a more radical rupture from the religious past, but also a re-interpretation or recreation of the notion of transcendence implied in that faith.

3. Transcendence after the death of God

In an unpublished note, Nietzsche writes, 'what is called "useful", is completely dependent on the *aim*, the whereto?' (1980: 12.372). Utilitarianism and democracy have made this 'aim' immanent. Christianity started this development, paradoxically by 'making the (human) individual transcendent'. Referring to its divine origin (its not only being created by God, but also in the image of God) and its immortal soul, Christianity eternalised and absolutised the human being and gave it 'an absurd importance' (1980: 13.424). But in Christianity, this importance of the human being still referred to a destination that transcended him: the aim being was after all God. In the secularised versions of Christianity such as utilitarianism and democracy, however, this transcendent destination has itself been made immanent. At the same time, the uniform identification of what a human being is and should be has been maintained. The final destination of the human being is from now on: the human being itself in this one and only interpretation of what a human being ideally is.

The death of God could have been a liberation and an emancipation from this uniformity. Precisely by taking away the divine vindication and sanctioning of this one ideal type, the horizon could have been widened and the endless sea of interpretations opened once again. If Nietzsche is sometimes rather positive about democracy, as in

Human All Too Human, it is because of this expectation. He expects the 'spreading democratization' to get rid of respectful recollections of former identifications, and to be 'thirst[ing] for innovations and [...] greedy for experiments' (1986: II, WS §292). Nietzsche (1986: II, WS §275) seems to be full of hope with regard to the 'irresistible' 'democratization of Europe'. He calls it 'a link in the chain of those tremendous prophylactic measures [...] through which we separate ourselves from the Middle Ages', a foundation on which a new future can safely be built, a 'collective preparation for the supreme artist of horticulture'. This clearly implies a future character who will 'apply himself to his real task only when these preparations [among which Europe's democratization] have been fully carried out!' This future is still far away, but it is opened up by these preparations. It is even so far away that we should not blame those who are not able to view beyond their horizon and interpret wrongly their preparation as if it were the actual creation:

To be sure, given the great length of time which lies between means and end [...], we must not hold it too much against those who are working on the present-day if they loudly decree that the wall and the trellis *are* the end and final goal; since no one, indeed, can yet see the gardener or the fruit-trees *for whose sake* the trellis exist (1986: II, WS §275).

When Nietzsche does not criticize democracy, he views it as only an intermezzo, an opening up of and a transition to new possibilities.

But ever more, he realizes what it means that this democratization does not view itself as an intermezzo. It rather considers itself the apotheosis of the whole development: 'the end of history'. In this framework, secularisation is an extra threat, because now the self-glorification of the human being has lost its relativising religious perspective. When Nietzsche, already in *Human All Too Human*, calls 'modern democracy [...] the historical form of the *decay of the state*' (1986: I, §472), it is for this reason: the state no longer points towards 'a divine order' and destination. In this early text, Nietzsche still considers the decay of the state as a possibility for the future ('The prospect presented by this certain decay is, however, not in every respect an unhappy one'). From 1881 on, however, it becomes ever more obvious for Nietzsche that democracy is in fact closing off this future. In modern democracy, the Christian interpretation of the human being is continued and concluded: there is nothing left by which it could be relativized. For this reason, in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche calls

the democratic movement [...] not only a form of the decay of political organization but a form of the decay, namely the diminution, of man, making him mediocre and lowering his value. (1966: §203)

Democracy for Nietzsche is one of those figures in which the human being, after the death of God canonizes itself, eternalizes its present form and makes it impossible for other forms to emerge.

What could be the counterpart of such a critique, for which the loss of religion functions at the same time as a condition of possibility for opening up new possibilities and closing off these very new openings? The remedy can only be as paradoxical as the diagnosis⁶. Of course Nietzsche does not advocate the return of religion. But more than anything, he does criticize the definite self-determination, self-identification or self-

⁶ Although Young (2006) is probably right in suggesting that Nietzsche is not as firmly opposed to organized religion as has been supposed.

fixation of the human being. On the one hand, the proclamation of the death of God heralds the end of every 'beyond'; there is nothing left but the here and now of immanence, and Zarathustra preaches unconditional loyalty to the earth. On the other hand Nietzsche is a philosopher of continuous self-overcoming, i.e. of continuous transcending of every immanence.

I will conclude by suggesting four closely related ways in which we may view a glimpse of Nietzsche's alternative for democracy; four figures of this unreligious, or at least non-Christian transcendence, a transcendence that may be only negative, and certainly one that remains immanent without losing its transcendence.

The first two might be found in the style of his writing. I mention two features that characterise his style in general, which we also find with regard to democracy. First the hyperbolic, polemical, sometimes irritating, but always challenging wording he chooses. When he calls 'Europe's *democratic* movement [...] a tremendous *physiological process*' in which the 'Europeans are becoming more similar to each other' (1966: §242), Nietzsche replaces equality with similarity and turns the conceited self-consciousness of the democrats upside down: 'the apostles of "modern ideas"', who deem themselves emancipated and emancipating, are gradually developing themselves and their masses into 'useful, industrious, handy, multi-purpose herd animal[s]': 'the democratization of Europe leads to the production of a type that is prepared for *slavery*' (ibid.). This turning upside down of widely spread opinions is a way to challenge the common sense and attack petrified interpretations. What we think we do, could indeed be different, even the opposite of what we think it is. The same happens when he predicts completely unexpected consequences of this '*democratic* movement': 'the democratization of Europe is [...] an involuntary arrangement for the cultivation of *tyrants*' (1966: §242). I read texts like these not primarily as a prediction of what will happen, but rather as undermining a commonly accepted belief, that is: as an effort to open up the interpretative nature of what threatens to become the final truth.

A second feature of his style gives an extra reason for this way of reading Nietzsche's polemical exaggerations. If we look for texts in which Nietzsche formulates his alternative, we very often find extremely 'open' formulations. He does not really replace the criticized (e.g. democratic) ideology with a well-defined alternative, or better: his alternative has no other characteristics than its being 'other', different. Over against the criticized situation he places 'other possibilities'; over against the current apostles of democracy, these '*levelers* – these falsely so-called "free spirits" – [...] eloquent and prolifically scribbling slaves of the democratic taste' (1966: §44), Nietzsche poses more authentically free ('*very free*') spirits. But the only way in which he characterizes them is by opposition to the criticized: 'we opposite men', are 'antipodes'. And moreover: these so vaguely indicated people turn out to be only pointers to further futures. These 'we' are people that 'hope' for 'new philosophers' who might be able to 'make a start' with a 'revaluation of values'. Even when he makes the impression of replacing democracy with some kind of tyranny (as we saw before: 'the democratization of Europe is [...] an involuntary arrangement for the cultivation of *tyrants*' (1966: §242)), it turns out to be only a pointer to an open future: in Nietzsche (1966: §126) we find an aphoristic echo of this former text: 'A people is a detour of nature to get to six or seven great men. – Yes, and then to get around them.'

Both features of Nietzsche's style realise a kind of transcendence that liberates us from a threatening new imprisonment. After having been liberated from the subservience to a transcendent God (1986: II, WS §84), we have become (or at least run the

risk of becoming) the prisoners of ourselves, locked into the immanence of our present interests. Democracy is one of the forms of this imprisonment, which Nietzsche attacks in its different forms and with ever-different weapons.

One of these forms (my third suggestion) is the figure of the *Übermensch*, the Overman. Although the term *Übermensch* is never used in texts in which we find the concept of democracy, it is obvious that the overman is the opposite of the man of 'democratic inclination and basic taste' (1966: §239). The values of the overman are directly opposite to those of democratic man:

"Men are not equal." Nor shall they become equal! What would my love of the overman be if I spoke otherwise? ('On the Tarantulas', 1959: II.)

Against the democratic inclination to level differences, the overman represents the capacity to maintain distance; against their weakness: his strength, against their weariness: his health, against their mutual dependence: his sovereign solitude, against their reactivity: his affirmation, against their misanthropy: his commanding creativity, etcetera. These opposite features may seduce the reader to view in the overman a new ideal, another identification of what the human being is or should be. That this would be wrong, can be shown in two ways.

First, we should acknowledge that the overman is not a well-defined character. According to Zarathustra there has never yet been an overman ('On the Priests', 1959: II). When Nietzsche seems to give examples, it turns out that these are only indications or intimations: Napoleon is a 'synthesis of inhuman and overhuman' (1969: I, §16), Cesare Borgia is only 'a kind of overman' (1990a: IX, §37); these indications are, as often, relative: they refer to someone who is 'in relation to collective mankind a sort of overman' (1990b: §4). Every indication of the overman remains a pointer to something or someone beyond ('over') the human, something which transcends the human all too human. It rather names the transcending than the transcendent. And if it refers to a beyond at all, it should be kept in mind that this beyond, this someone or something, does not itself obtain a fixed identity, not even for him who preaches the overman: 'I know the word and the sign (*Zeichen*) of the overman. But I do not show it, I even do not show it to myself' (1980: 10.377).

Second: the overman is not only not a well-defined, let alone a real existing character, but it might even be wrong to suggest that 'he' *replaces* man. I refer to an intriguing note in which Nietzsche presents the overman as the opposite of the last man, the man of the democratic movement, without replacing him. Nietzsche describes two 'movements':

The *one* movement is absolute: the levelling of humanity [...] The *other* movement: my movement: is opposite[,] the intensification of all oppositions and clefts, removal of equality, the creativity of over-powerful. The first movement produces the last man. My movement produces the overman (1980: 10.244).

But then the text continues:

The aim is *absolutely not* to conceive of the latter [the overmen] as the rulers of the former [the last men]: on the contrary: there should be two kinds next to each other – as apart from each other as possible (1980: 10.244).

The overman is a fictional character that serves to indicate and to personify an intensification of all oppositions and clefts. It would be self-refuting for this character to

absolutize itself and replace its own counter-image, with whom it forms a tension-full opposition.

This brings me to my final suggestion: what Nietzsche fights in democracy is the monomania with which it brings forward *one* type of human being. What he opposes 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. As I said before: According to Nietzsche, all living reality exists only by virtue of tension and struggle. This struggle cannot be instrumentalised, it is a struggle for the sake of the struggle itself (cf. 1980: 11.222), which transcends every party *in* the struggle, as well as every provisional outcome of it: 'even in peace [it] honors the opportunity for new wars' (1980: 11.589). We have seen why this struggle or *agon* is in Nietzsche's opinion what is threatened most by democratic structures.

If this is true, we do not have to become anti-democrats in every sense of the word, when we recognize some of our own unease with democracy in Nietzsche's critique. On the contrary, we have to use the opportunities that precisely democracy gives for the cultivation of conflict. We will have to look critically at the ways in which actual democratic structures tend to eliminate conflict in favour of consensus. Instead we will have to be creative in finding ways of cultivating dissensus. In this sense, there certainly is a possibility for a Nietzschean defense of democracy, or better: for a Nietzschean re-evaluation of democracy.

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