



Animals Sick with Language: From Syntax to Socialism in Nietzsche

Elliot Murphy

Introduction

With the looming prospect of European self-annihilation and an increasing acceptance of the German philosopher's ideas across both sides of the political spectrum, in the early twentieth century John Cowper Powys opened an essay on Nietzsche with: 'It is not the hour in which to say much about Nietzsche'. I am tempted to concur, much for starkly similar reasons. Yet, quite like Powys, I will say something nonetheless. I will start at certain elementary positions in Nietzsche's metaphysics and philosophy of language, tracing out relations with his (mostly conservative) social thought. Even though it is sometimes said that Nietzsche simply had no view on the metaphysics of objects, recent scholarship

E. Murphy (✉)

Vivian L. Smith Department of Neurosurgery, McGovern Medical School,
University of Texas Health Science Center, Houston, TX, USA

e-mail: elliott.murphy@uth.tmc.edu

suggests otherwise,¹ and I explore how this can help us understand other areas of Nietzsche's politics, and perhaps provide something of a rejoinder to those who conclude that Nietzsche is simply an 'evil' man.²

While some have argued that a reappraisal of Nietzsche's politics needs to be anchored around his conception of social power and hierarchy,³ I will argue that a focus on Nietzsche's basic metaphysics can be fruitful. I will be exploring Nietzsche's 'identity metaphysics',⁴ his monism, his determinism, his dismissal of traditional cause-effect dichotomies, his anti-Aristotelian rejection of a fundamental distinction between objects and processes. It may appear peculiar to try and draw principled connections between Nietzsche's hatred of socialism and his view that tables and chairs are fundamentally indistinguishable from their qualities. However, many such relations can be drawn, largely by understanding Nietzsche's philosophy of language, potentially opening new avenues for understanding the origin of Nietzsche's seemingly variable, and often contradictory, positions about social relations and political hierarchies. For example, the more politically inflected readings of the will to power can be grounded in Nietzsche's assumptions about how objects intrinsically relate to their dispositions and qualities (their 'powers'). Nietzsche's belief that being is becoming, that persons or objects are not somehow independent of their constituent sub-processes, segues neatly into a number of direct action philosophies, and an intuition of David Graeber's: that anarchism is not an identity (something you 'are'), it is something you *do*.

I will begin below with a brief survey of Nietzsche's 'system', his philosophy of mind and language, before progressing to forms of ideological terrain that appear to be inter-related with his fundamental beliefs about the structure of reality. I will conclude in a standardly Nietzschean way—by not really concluding at all.

¹ J. Remhof. *Nietzsche's Constructivism: A Metaphysics of Material Objects* (New York: Routledge, 2017); G. Strawson. Nietzsche's metaphysics? *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature*, eds. M. Dries & P.J.E. Kail (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10–36.

² J. Smith. Review of *Dangerous Minds: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right* by Ronald Beiner. *Philosophy Now* 134: October/November (2019).

³ M. Warren. Nietzsche and political philosophy. *Political Theory* 13(2): 183–212 (1985).

⁴ Strawson, 2015.

Everything Everywhere All at Once: Or, 'All Things Are Enchained, Entwined, Enamored'

'I hated childhood
I hate adulthood
And I love being alive.'
Mary Ruefle, "Provenance", *Trances of the Blast*

Much of Nietzsche's thought approaches the notion that reality is a unitary entity. He is a monist in the tradition of Spinoza, Parmenides, Eddington and modern cosmology (space–time monism). Nietzsche was a clear metaphysical non-dualist.⁵ Reality is ultimately *relational*; a world without terms; to be is to be 'becoming', ever-evolving.

He holds that everything is *will to power*, but that, in a sense, everything is mental. Mentality for Nietzsche is closely identified with this will. As Abel⁶ discusses, instead of naturalizing the external world and spiritualizing the mental, Nietzsche provides a profound inversion: he spiritualizes the natural world but naturalizes mentality, leading to a form of panpsychism.⁷ If everything is will to power, then reality is suffused with mentality (in some form). He proposes the view that 'in all events a will to power is operating' over standard mechanical accounts of physics.⁸

Nietzsche can be read as a perspectivist, deeply sceptical of the concept of truth, and was famously sceptical about the whole project of metaphysics and traditional speculations about supra-sensible entities as Platonic forms, and Kantian things-in-themselves.⁹ While he was sceptical, the act of thinking about metaphysics demands an intense and stubborn focus on the nature of part-whole relations and events, and indeed there are few philosophers more stubborn than Nietzsche. His

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ G. Abel. Consciousness, language, and nature: Nietzsche's philosophy of mind and nature. *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature*, eds. M. Dries & P.J.E. Kail (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 37–56.

⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, II, 16.

⁸ Ibid., II, 12; see also III, 7.

⁹ R. Bamford. Nietzsche, science, and philosophical nihilism. *South African Journal of Philosophy* 24(4): 241–259 (2015); J.N. Berry. The Pyrrhonian revival in Montaigne and Nietzsche. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65(3): 487–514 (2004).

ability to introspect into human psychology and our underlying, subconscious ‘core knowledge systems’¹⁰ that represent our sense of reality is perhaps unmatched amongst modern philosophers.

Nietzsche understood something that many contemporary cognitive scientists and linguists agree on; namely, that human language is woefully inadequate to capture the nature of experiential content, and is even inadequate to successfully communicate basic metaphysical intuitions. He observes: ‘That for which we find words is something already dead in our hearts. There is always a kind of contempt in the act of speaking’.¹¹ Indeed, the very design of the language faculty seems to be geared towards internal conceptual/computational efficiency, but not communicative efficiency.¹² For Nietzsche, human language provides fictional versions of reality, much akin to the modern notion that mental representations are *useful fictions*.¹³ Instead of a Kantian notion of freedom (i.e., free from impulse (*Neigung*) or free to legislate one’s own categorical imperative), we see Nietzsche constructing a conception of freedom as grounded in linguistic choices. Nietzsche understood that linguistic freedom (feeding into radical metaphysical revisions) brings with it emotional implications that pertain, very directly, to a new mode of political action: ‘We have to *learn to think differently* – in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*’.¹⁴

Nietzsche’s critique of science seems to emanate from an anxiety he had about the (then) lack of *a science of science*, or a type of what we would now consider cognitive science that explores our science-forming mental faculties (we hear him pause every once in a while to ponder the limits of the ‘theoretical man’; we also hear him praise ‘the English

¹⁰ E. Spelke. Innateness, choice, and language. *Chomsky Notebook*, eds. J. Bricmont & J. Franck (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 203–210.

¹¹ F. Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans. D. Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1889/1998). In citing Nietzsche, I provide the original publication date followed by the presently referenced edition.

¹² E. Murphy. Language design and communicative competence: the minimalist perspective. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics* 5(1): 2 (2020).

¹³ M.J.D. Ramstead, K.J. Friston, & I. Hipólito. Is the free-energy principle a formal theory of semantics? From variational density dynamics to neural and phenotypic representations. *Entropy* 22: 889. 1–30 (2020).

¹⁴ F. Nietzsche. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1881/1997), §103.

psychologists' in *On the Genealogy of Morals* for their commitment to uncomfortable epistemological truths). Nietzsche relented against 'a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations', that barred the way to conceptual clarity.¹⁵ His discussion of revenge in *Gay Science* is tinged with a kind of moral psychology, touching on the psychoemotional 'shameful origins' of moral judgements.¹⁶

Nietzsche's conservatism, his critique of egalitarianism, his elitism, seem to be partially related to these views on the limits and failures of language. He tells Franz Overbeck in a letter in 1885 that 'my philosophy is no longer communicable, at least not in print ... I often feel ashamed that I have said so much in public already'.¹⁷ He cites 'the metrical compulsion of rhyme and rhythm' as being components of 'every language', indeed how languages have 'achieved strength and freedom'—freedom achieved through *embracing* these constraints.¹⁸ One is tempted to derive much of Nietzsche's subsequent thought on artistic agency from these and other linguistic constraints, and in fact he goes quite far in this direction.¹⁹

G rard Wajcman provides an interlude here²⁰:

We are animals sick with language. And how sometimes we long for a cure. But just shutting up won't do it. You can't just wish your way into animality. So it is then, as a matter of consolation, that we watch the animal channels and marvel at a world untamed by language. The animals get us to hear a voice of pure silence. Nostalgia for the fish life [...] We record whales singing their whale songs capable of transmitting messages

¹⁵ F. Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy, and Other Writings*, eds. R. Geuss & R. Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1872/2019), 185.

¹⁶ F. Nietzsche. *The Gay Science with a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. J. Nauckhoff, eds. B. Arthur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887/2001), §49.

¹⁷ 2 July 1885; R. Bittner. Introduction. In F. Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, trans. K. Sturge, ed. E. Bittner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), x.

¹⁸ F. Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und B se)* (Leipzig: Naumann, 1886), §188.

¹⁹ A. Ridley. Nietzsche on art and freedom. *European Journal of Philosophy* 15(2): 204–224 (2007).

²⁰ G. Wajcman. The animals that treat us badly. *Lacanian Ink* 33: 126–145. 131 (Spring 2009).

to other whales thousands of kilometers away, but in truth, brandishing our microphones, we only aspire to one thing – that those whales would sing us a song.

Nietzsche, too, was fond of speaking of ‘the animal nature of human beings’,²¹ being a committed naturalist in the ‘broad sense’. Nietzsche’s critiques of science did not undermine his firm *methodological naturalism* in the sense of, for example, Leiter—‘philosophical inquiry [...] should be continuous with empirical inquiry in the sciences’—or Strawson.²² He read Feuerbach, Lange’s monumental *History of Materialism* (he confessed in 1866 that he ‘didn’t need anything else’, except Kant and Schopenhauer²³), and major science journals. He confesses in *Ecce Homo* that even into the late 1870s he ‘really pursued *nothing* more than physiology, medicine and natural sciences’.²⁴

How best, then, to evaluate Nietzsche’s metaphysics? Contemporary physics has abandoned the notion that processes or events require some substance (‘thing’) that is separate from them. The general categories of objects, events, processes and qualities are by contemporary standards a woefully insufficient account of the world. Nietzsche’s belief that there is no fundamental distinction (only a *conceptual* distinction) between objects and their properties pushes away from Aristotelian thought, and towards early twentieth century physics and a clearer ratiocinative metaphysics. Schelling and Hegel can be seen as part of this tradition. Matter is, now, intrinsically interwoven with temporality. Nietzsche held that ‘the thing is its qualities’. He maintained that ‘all things are enchained, entwined, enamored’; if we say Yes to joy, we say Yes to ‘all pain’,²⁵ or *amor fati*. The venerable Subject of late nineteenth century philosophy

²¹ C. Janaway. *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche’s Genealogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34.

²² B. Leiter. *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3; G. Strawson. *Real Materialism and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²³ C.P. Janz. *Friedrich Nietzsche: Biographie*. III volumes (Munich: Hanser, 1978), I, 198.

²⁴ See also M. Clark. *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁵ F. Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, eds. A. Del Caro & R.B. Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1885/2006), 263.

can then, eventually, lose its own identity by acknowledging its equivalence with its qualities. Nietzsche thus departs strongly from the Thomist view of subjects and their added secondary ('accidental') forms emerging from a combination of a being and an essence distinct from it.

We arrive soon after at Nietzsche's conception of the Eternal Recurrence²⁶, We are asked to accept our life precisely as we have lived it and to experience it as a forever recurring cycle, and yet to affirm it.²⁷ Perhaps the supreme commandment is to take control over one's life.²⁸ This provides a perspective on Nietzsche's intense sensitivity to suffering, and his insistence on acknowledging (eternally) that all joy arises from pain. He rejected 'the fundamental belief of the metaphysicians, *the belief in the opposition of values*'.²⁹ What comes out of this is part of his conservative hesitancy about a radical equalizing of the sociopolitical landscape.

As Nietzsche understood, human language imposes its own biases to categorize events and objects, but objects under contemporary physics are simply 'rips in space-time',³⁰ leading Strawson to postulate the single term 'spacetime-matter'.³¹ Natural language syntax forces us to categorize phrases as 'headed' by a particular feature out of which the phrase is composed: for example, a 'red boat' is a Noun Phrase, a boat that is red; it is not a red quality that is being secondarily attributed boat-like features. The phrase 'John ran' is a Verb Phrase, not a Noun Phrase: it means that there was an event in which John was its agent; it does not mean that there is some special kind of John who is exhibiting running-related properties.³² Indeed, there even appear to be portions of the human brain

²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §285, §341.

²⁷ J. Remhof. Nietzsche on loneliness, self-transformation, and the eternal recurrence. *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 49(2): 194–213 (2008).

²⁸ C. Olney. A new metaphysics: Eternal recurrence and the univocity of difference. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 34(2): 179–200 (2020).

²⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*.

³⁰ S. Weinberg. Before the big bang. *New York Review of Books* 44/10, 20 (1997).

³¹ Strawson, 2015.

³² E. Murphy. Labels, cognomes, and cyclic computation: an ethological perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology* 6: 715 (2015); E. Murphy. Reference, phases and individuation: Topics at the labeling-interpretive interface. *Opticon1826* 17(5): 1–13 (2015); E. Murphy. Phasal eliminativism, anti-lexicalism, and the status of the unarticulated. *Biolinguistics* 10: 21–50 (2016); E. Murphy. *The Oscillatory Nature of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); E.

that code for this specific type of hierarchical structure-generation, which is so pervasive in human thought and action.³³

Nietzsche was not swayed by the categorizations imposed by the German language, and rightly came to essentially monist conclusions about mind and nature (perhaps a good definition of a philosopher is someone who doesn't fall for the tricks of human language). Material objects are *constitutively dependent* for their existence on our conceptual capacities, for Nietzsche.³⁴ When Nietzsche looked at ordinary, medium-sized, earth-bound objects in his study, he had no real problems with them. He understood that an object's way or manner of existence simply is its being-in-itself. Yet his calm, epic detachment also provided Nietzsche with uniquely acute insights into the apparent (psychoemotional) forces rendering classical object-property notions, which previous philosophers had succumbed to. I suspect that, as with figures such as the later John Cowper Powys, and the later David Foster Wallace, the objects in Nietzsche's study appeared to him as the battered remnants of some unspoken apocalypse from far beyond the outreaches of the universe and before the origin of everything, as if cobbled quickly together for the needs and expectations of his vision, his touch, by an eternally troubled and anxious force, propelling towards him discarded matter from this unseen and unheard doomsday. Those documents, chairs, paintings and blankets would suddenly all appear to his eyes as somewhat *infantile*, and strangely afraid—not of him, but of something else, beyond the limits of his gaze and imagination. Afraid, perhaps, of this troubled force; this searcher. Nietzsche ultimately concludes that this force is *will to power*; for Powys, it was the mystical properties of human perception; for Wallace, it was too much acid and black-tar heroin.

When some post-structuralists and post-modernists read into Nietzsche's relativistic notions of truth—or some notorious *truth is power*

Murphy & J.-Y. Shim. Copy invisibility and (non-)categorical labeling. *Linguistic Research* 37(2): 187–215 (2020).

³³ E. Murphy, O. Woolnough, P.S. Rollo, Z. Roccaforte, K. Segaert, P. Hagoort & N. Tandon. Minimal phrase composition revealed by intracranial recordings. *Journal of Neuroscience* 42(15): 3216–3227 (2022).

³⁴ Remhof, 2017.

negotiation, *à la* Foucault³⁵ in his Nietzschean phase—this is really only gesturing towards Nietzsche’s scepticism that *linguistic truth* (i.e., syntactic, Complementizer Phrase-bounded truth-evaluability) is not approximate to metaphysical reality. The idea that truth, as expressed linguistically, can relate to empirical reality is ‘not at all desirable’.³⁶

Nietzsche’s suspicion of metaphysics and language extends further, and seems to influence his social thought. Whitehead’s process philosophy (like Heraclitus) is akin to Nietzsche’s things-as-becomings framework. Richardson summarizes that ‘Nietzsche’s beings are becomings’.³⁷ And it seems precisely because Nietzsche views matter and processes and events as indistinguishable that his sense of political agency, of the will to power, is grounded. What constitutes one’s categorical and basal properties, for Nietzsche, *simply is* one’s dispositional properties and powers. One cannot get much clearer than the statement that ‘a thing = its qualities’, and Nietzsche even adds (much like contemporary internalist philosophy of language) that ‘these equal everything which *matters* to us about that thing; a unity under which we collect the relations that *may be of some account* to us’³⁸; and indeed Nietzsche seems to mean this in both its epistemological and metaphysical sense.³⁹ Objecthood relates very clearly here to human interests and social concerns. He believed that an entity’s basal being is strictly identical with its power/dispositional being; hence, all being is power. This, as Strawson notes, is sympathetic to Plato’s position, where Plato’s ‘power’ can be read also as ‘capacity’: ‘I hold that the definition of being is simply power (*dunamis*)’.⁴⁰

One final issue of metaphysics remains, before we progress to Nietzsche’s politics: causation. Nietzsche explicitly maintains that the

³⁵ M. Foucault. *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*. Trans. R.J. Goldstein & J. Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991).

³⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 144.

³⁷ J. Richardson. *Nietzsche’s System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 104.

³⁸ F. Nietzsche. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, trans. K. Sturje, ed. R. Bittner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1885–8/2003), 73.

³⁹ P. Gori. The usefulness of substances. Knowledge, science and metaphysics in Nietzsche and Mach. *Nietzsche Studien* 38: 111–155 (2009).

⁴⁰ Strawson, 2015; Plato. *The Sophist*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, c360 BCE/1875), Vol. 4, 247e.

subject :: *predicate* distinction is the most fundamental representational aspect of human thought, and even causation itself was thought by him to arise out of the subject-predicate distinction. The noun-verb syntactic configuration has chiefly caused havoc for theoretical linguistics, but it also seems to have caused a considerable degree of mischief for metaphysicians and classical physicists. I have discussed elsewhere how there seem to be close alignments between the configurations of natural language grammars and general conceptual, ontological relations that feed into intuitive metaphysics, essentially grounded in Nietzsche's initial critique. For example, certain grammatical structures and Neo-Davidsonian event representations align: the Complementiser domain corresponds to the point of existential closure; 'little verbs' (*v*) to internal/external thematic role assignment; 'little prepositions' (*p*) to adjunct insertion.⁴¹ In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche says that cause and effect constitute only a couple of pieces of an underlying continuum that the fabric of the world is based on. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, we read that 'one should use "cause" and "effect" only as pure concepts'.⁴² *Twilight of the Idols* bemoans the 'error of imaginary causes' common to religious and moral thinking.⁴³

It is an old lesson, but one that seems to require reiteration: not to confuse language with the world.

Given this metaphysics, it is perhaps unsurprising that much of Nietzsche's political thought is imbued with regressive, deterministic stereotypes: *you are what you are*, to put the matter bluntly.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, his metaphysical observations about cause-effect make it somewhat more difficult for Nietzsche to provide a sympathetic account of proletarian oppression, of the kind that came natural to Marxian doctrine and its intricate, multi-dimensional account of causation. Despite his occasional

⁴¹ Murphy, *The Oscillatory Nature of Language*.

⁴² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 21.

⁴³ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 30; see also J.A. Fodor. Special sciences (or: the disunity of science as a working hypothesis). *Synthese* 28: 97–115 (1974); L.N. Ross. Multiple realizability from a causal perspective. *Philosophy of Science* 87(4): 640–662 (2020).

⁴⁴ J. Čeika. *How to Philosophize with a Hammer and Sickle: Nietzsche and Marx for the 21st-Century Left* (London: Repeater, 2021).

empathetic insight into cultural conventions and mores, Nietzsche's reflections on women and sex are, mostly, rather cringe, and often much worse (in *Zarathustra*, he reminds his reader to 'not forget thy whip' when approaching women).⁴⁵ His views on egalitarianism are, notoriously, problematic. This leads us at last away from the safety of metaphysical speculation and towards the dreaded external world.

The Multiverse of Madness: Political Philosophy via Mind and Language

Not by wrath does one kill, but by laughing.⁴⁶

Nietzsche often tells us that it is essentially aristocratic institutional structures that have provided the most robust and valiant forms of human progress. As Drochon is careful to argue, Nietzsche's Bismarckian belief in an integrated Europe (to be directed by an interbred, cultivated European elite reviving classical Greek culture) was largely directed not at absolute totalitarianism, but rather at the desire to act as a counterbalance to British and Russian imperial might to the north and east. This was also accompanied by his pointedly *anti*-Bismarckian scepticism towards nationalism, and his anarchist intuition in *Zarathustra* that the state is 'the coldest of all cold monsters'. In contrast to Bertrand Russell's fairly aggressive exposition of Nietzsche (involving a mis-reading of the will to power along intrinsically racial lines, foregoing a number of less sinister configurations involving power over oneself), Drochon convincingly shows that the form of political philosophy Nietzsche developed over his life was far from suited to being appropriated by the Nazis, perhaps being more relevant to liberal technocrats who mix class snobbery with intellectual superiority.⁴⁷ Nietzsche's *Übermensch* may not have been a

⁴⁵ But see also C. Verhoeven. "Do not forget the whip". *Eros and Eris*, eds. P. van Tongeren, P. Sars, C. Bremmers & K. Boey. *Phaenomenologica*, vol. 127 (Springer, Dordrecht, 1992).

⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 29.

⁴⁷ B. Russell. *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945); H. Drochon. *Nietzsche's Great Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016); see also

Loachian working class hero, but he also was far from a fascistic figure, certainly not worthy of the scorn that post-war philosophy departments showed him, refusing as many did to teach his work.

Nietzsche was able to negotiate being and disposition, as we have seen, but he found difficulty in dismantling another duality: being and *value*. This metaethical concern resulted in him proposing a type of value monism: there is only one value (termed ‘good’) but it happens to be ‘scalar’.⁴⁸ All entities may be good, but some are more good than others. Interestingly, he also at times discusses how self-interest seems not to be the base motive of human beings, and he assesses whether moral virtues have a value for the individual who possesses them, or rather for the group. Nietzsche’s critique of forms of moral reductionism (including, one might say, neoliberal reductionism to versions of *Homo economicus*) opens the way to more psychologically and sociologically plausible models of political agency.⁴⁹

We arrive again at Nietzsche’s conclusion that all being is power; all categorical aspects are identical to an entity’s properties and powers. In this sense—and I speak here as a left-libertarian and anarchist thinker⁵⁰—perhaps Nietzsche was onto something when he despised the masses; at least, under his particular conception of what the masses actually are: those who are unable to move through successful self-transformation or develop their own values independent of ‘the herd’, those who hold back artistic progress, who deny their own will to power

B. Burgis. Marx was a (philosophical) liberal and you should be too. *Liberalism and Socialism*, ed. M. McManus. Palgrave Studies in Classical Liberalism (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 139–152.

⁴⁸ J. Richardson. Nietzsche’s value monism: saying Yes to everything. *Nietzsche on Mind and Nature*, eds. M. Dries & P.J.E. Kail (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). 89–119. 108.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §3, §57.

⁵⁰ E. Murphy. *Unmaking Merlin: Anarchist Tendencies in English Literature* (London: Zero Books, 2014); E. Murphy. Always a lighthouse: Video games and radical politics. *Los Angeles Review of Books*. 9 August 2015; E. Murphy. The politics of sorrow. *openDemocracy*. 31 August 2015; E. Murphy. Anarchy and identity: On power and loneliness in the works of John Cowper Powys. *The Powys Journal* 28: 120–139 (2018); E. Murphy. Anarchism and science. *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*. Eds. C. Levy & M.S. Adams (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 193–209 (2019); E. Murphy. Review of *Protest: Stories of Resistance*, ed. Ra Page. *Anarchist Studies* 27(1): 106–108 (2019); E. Murphy. This UK general election is a choice between imperialism and internationalism. *Jacobin*. 6 December 2019; E. Murphy. *Arms in Academia: The Political Economy of the Modern UK Defence Industry* (London: Routledge, 2020).

and give in to common forms of psychological and domestic resistance, who live in decadence and embrace an ethics of material envy. In *Twilight*, we encounter the chapter ‘What the Germans Lack’, where German intelligence is said to be coarser and shallower than it used to be, with members of other European states lacking good spirits and self-respect.⁵¹ Many anarchists have appropriately drawn inspiration from Nietzsche (Salvador Seguí, Federica Montseny, Rudolf Ricker, Murray Bookchin; Emma Goldman considered Nietzsche an honorary anarchist, and John Cowper Powys considered him a ‘spiritual anarchist’), with his hatred of the state and herd mentality, and his suspicion of the influence of the market on cultural production.⁵² For Goldman, Nietzsche’s ‘aristocracy was neither of birth nor of purse; it was of the spirit. In that respect, Nietzsche was an anarchist, and all true anarchists were aristocrats’.⁵³

Concurrently, Nietzsche’s apparent conservatism is emboldened by his views about the sensitivity of most ordinary people to deep metaphysical truths: ‘The whole of human life is deeply involved in *untruth*’, he says, believing the masses (for him, ‘the rabble’, the ‘bungled and botched’) highly susceptible to self-delusion.⁵⁴ In *Human, All Too Human*, he claims that there is no relation between the furthering of truth, and the well-being of humanity. For Nietzsche, science can paradoxically serve as a form of self-defence against truth, a form of moral cowardice, self-involved cunning and aggrandizement.⁵⁵ Or, more accurately, this critique is mostly directed at *scientism*, given his clear commitment to naturalism in works like *Beyond Good and Evil* and his regular critique of teleological notions sneaking their way into modern science. The late Nietzsche ‘exhibit[ed] a uniform and unambiguous respect for facts, the

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 37; see also F. Nietzsche. *Thoughts Out of Season*, trans. A. Collins, ed. O. Levy (1874/2016). Accessed at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38226/38226-h/38226-h.htm>.

⁵² S. Sunshine. Nietzsche and the anarchists. *Fifth Estate* 367. Winter 2004–2005.

⁵³ E. Goldman. *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931).

⁵⁴ F. Nietzsche. *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. A. Harvey (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1880/1908), 64.

⁵⁵ B.E. Babich. *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Art and Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); T. Sorell. *Scientism* (London: Routledge, 1991).

senses, and science'.⁵⁶ One might also respond that this serves to undermine the moral and social value of modern scientific progress, and is akin to certain critiques emanating from modern conservative circles.⁵⁷

Nietzsche's various claims about self-deception,⁵⁸ which for him is essential for survival, conspire into an image of the uneducated man as too unreflective, too delusional to engage in the serious business of metaphysics, let alone self-government. His conviction in the prevalence of self-delusion contributes to the following claim: The mutual psychological distance between the rich and the poor man renders the poor man's hatred of the rich man (who takes possessions from the poor man) effectively moot, since both possess false beliefs about the other's needs, desires and so forth. Indeed, since the psychological distance between rich and poor is so vast, Nietzsche concludes that the oppressed masses often exaggerate the wickedness of their masters: 'The iniquities of the mighty which bulk most largely in history are not nearly so monstrous as they seem'.⁵⁹ And although Nietzsche is trying to use this framework to highlight how evil can be done in the absence of any particular malice (i.e., the rich man thinks so little of the poor man that he oppresses him almost absentmindedly), it is nevertheless notable that when discussing supposedly binary camps, Nietzsche will typically direct a sympathetic light onto the powerful, not the meek. In *Twilight of the Idols*, the very notion of equality (at least, equality of outcome) was for Nietzsche directly opposed to justice. In *Human, All Too Human* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche puts forward the position that justice is characterized by the decisions of equally powerful groups, serving to reach some kind of mutual accord, while the less powerful must accept this equalization.⁶⁰ While Nietzsche is surely right (and arguably prescient) in highlighting how *ressentiment* and morality have

⁵⁶ Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, 105; see also P. Poellner. *Nietzsche and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁵⁷ B. Leiter. Nietzsche's naturalism reconsidered. *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, eds. K. Gemes & J. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 576–598.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 28–29, 89–90, 95, 107.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁰ V. Jelkić. Nietzsche on justice and democracy. *Synthesis Philosophica* 21(2): 395–403 (2006).

an ‘actual physiological cause [*Ursache*]’,⁶¹ the absence of much socio-economic framing has naturally helped many detect a sense of (physico-) economic determinism.

The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent: Nietzsche’s Self-Reflections

A man as he *ought* to be: that sounds to us as insipid as ‘a tree as it ought to be’.⁶²

Nietzsche held that ‘every great philosophy so far has been [...] the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir’.⁶³ His reflections on free will and power, in particular, seem to emanate from his own sense of resentment and personal misfortune, as has been speculated. He claimed that Christ himself was the only figure worthy of his competition.⁶⁴

By denying free will, and instead emphasizing power as the root of our personal sense of freedom, Nietzsche may have undermined the centrality of defining freedom by overcoming resistance, naturally a crucial theme in progressive circles. It still seems reasonable to concur with Foucault⁶⁵ that the notion of a Nietzschean socialist is ‘a bit ridiculous, perhaps’, but so too is the notion of a Nietzschean fascist.

Nietzsche’s Dionysian project was an existential and cultural one—but not a heavily *political* one. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs summarize: ‘The Dionysiac is the drive towards the transgression of limits, the dissolution of boundaries, the destruction of individuality, and excess’⁶⁶; quite the project to undertake. Nevertheless, Nietzsche abstained from

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I, 15.

⁶² *The Will to Power*, §332; Notebook W II 3. November 1887–March 1888, KGW VIII, 2.304, KSA 13.62.

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §6.

⁶⁴ M. McManus. On left and right Nietzscheanism. *Areo*. 19 August 2020.

⁶⁵ Foucault, 1991, 51.

⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, xi.

commenting on the will to power and its relation to these and other philosophies when he evaluated his own work in *Ecce Homo*, leaving it unclear how to properly integrate this concept within his politics.⁶⁷ His considerable intellectual talent instead left him pondering topics that he gave to sardonic chapter titles in *Ecce Homo*, such as ‘Why I Am So Clever’ and ‘Why I Write Such Good Books’. Overall, while we can conclude that Nietzsche was indeed hostile to the notions of a free society and equal rights,⁶⁸ we need to qualify that his interest in directly applying his philosophy to material reality was much more limited than many of his contemporaries.⁶⁹ It seems likely that his ideas about social relations owe less to some underlying fascistic tendencies than to his admiration and love of the classical world. Addressing the problems of industrialism, imperialism and capitalism using only the language of ancient Rome that Nietzsche so often adopted will lead to undeniable limitations and misinterpretations.

It may also be possible that Nietzsche despised the ‘Last Man’ (in *Zarathustra*) not simply because he ‘would be satisfied with everything he has done’ and ‘be stagnant, incapable of growth, part of an easily manipulated crowd’, and would ‘confuse cynicism with knowledge’⁷⁰—but also because the Last Man effectively rejects Nietzsche’s metaphysics: a being who is *not* becoming, not developing, the remarkably unadventurous and self-satisfied, the man who foolishly *believes himself to be a physical object*, rather than a continual process. More generally, Nietzsche’s narrowing of the space of admissible ‘just’ agents brings with it a narrow apportioning of political privilege and power—a quintessentially modern conservative ideology.⁷¹

⁶⁷ F. Nietzsche, *F. Nietzsche, Ecce Homo*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and other Writings*, trans. J. Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1888/2005).

⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §377.

⁶⁹ S.E. Ascheim. *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); B. Derwiler. *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁷⁰ C. Hedges. *I Don't Believe in Atheists* (London: Continuum, 2008), 84.

⁷¹ R. Beiner. *Dangerous Minds: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); see also M. McManus. *The Rise of Post-Modern Conservatism: Neoliberalism, Post-Modern Culture, and Reactionary Politics*. Palgrave Studies in Classical Liberalism (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); M. McManus. *Liberal*

Anarchists, socialists and Christians were all united—according to Nietzsche—in seeking ‘equality of rights’, a thoroughly odious notion: ‘United in a fierce insurrection against any particular demand, right and privilege (which means against all rights, for when everyone is equal, no one needs any “rights” any more)’.⁷² Nietzsche dismisses the concerns of anarchists who object to ‘submitting abjectly to capricious laws’, discussing this ironically.⁷³ One might defend Nietzsche here and stress how he is concerned with how true creative freedom can only take place within the context of certain constraints, yet the ethical grounding and implications of his forays into free will seem clear. When Nietzsche proclaims that the notion of subjective experience is essentially a *grammatical fiction* (a core thesis underlying his metaphysics: ‘there is no “being” behind the doing, the acting, the becoming: “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the doing’⁷⁴), so too wither away any lingering potential to centre individual rights in his system.

While progressive thinkers can concur that personal power, and self-improvement, is to be lauded, a natural addendum is that we must not confuse this with institutional power. In *Porius*, when a young boy asks the wizard Merlin ‘what turns a god into a devil, Master?’, he responds⁷⁵:

Power, my son. Nobody in the world, nobody beyond the world, can be trusted with power, unless perhaps it be our mother the earth; but I doubt whether even she can. The Golden Age can never come again till governments and rulers and kings and emperors and priests and druids and gods and devils learn to unmake themselves as I did, and leave men and women to themselves!

and democratic egalitarian rights: a critical legal conception. *Law, Culture and the Humanities* <https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872120930565> (2020).

⁷² F. Nietzsche. *Werke IV*, ed. K. Schlechta (Ullstein Materialien, Frankfurt, 1980), 288.

⁷³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §188.

⁷⁴ F. Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufman & R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1887/1989), 45; see also P. Katsafanas. *The Nietzschean Self: Moral Psychology, Agency, and the Unconscious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); M. Lackey. Killing God, liberating the “subject”: Nietzsche and post-God freedom. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60(4): 737–754 (1999).

⁷⁵ J.C. Powys. *Porius*, eds. J. Bond & M. Krisdóttir (London: Overlook Duckworth, 2007), 260–261.

I'm Thinking of Ending Things: Qualifications and Conclusions

We are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar.⁷⁶

I have claimed that understanding Nietzsche's metaphysics can contribute to the broader project of understanding his social thought. Nietzsche's system—his critique of metaphysics—provides points of major insight here.⁷⁷ There is insufficient space for me to elaborate fully on Nietzsche's free will arguments, which stand somewhat in-between these concerns of metaphysics and ideology, but I will here conclude with some brief comments.

First, as excellent points of departure from Nietzschean determinism, consider Chomsky's comments on Newton's demolition of the notion of 'body': the mind–body distinction cannot be formulated, so we cannot conclude that free will or mentality is incompatible with 'body'/matter.⁷⁸ Locke, Lange, Chomsky and Nietzsche all concur that, as the latter puts it, the idea that 'substance is experienceless is only a hypothesis! Not based on experience!'.⁷⁹ Yet, Nietzsche does not take the final step required here to conclude that freedom of the will is also not incompatible with known physics.

Second, consider Conway and Kochen's free will theorem, which proves that if humans are free to make an experimental observation of the squared components of spin of a particle, then so must the particle be 'free' to provide an answer on the fly.⁸⁰ Conway and Kochen prove that Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason is in fact false: particles behave

⁷⁶ *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin), 483.

⁷⁷ S. Houlgate. *Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Criticism of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁷⁸ N. Chomsky. *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁷⁹ F. Nietzsche. *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1882–1884* (Sämtliche Werke 10) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1882–84), 648–649.

⁸⁰ J. Conway & S. Kochen, S. The free will theorem. *Foundations of Physics* 36(10): 1441–1473 (2006); J.H. Conway & S. Kochen. The strong free will theorem. *Notices of the AMS* 56(2): 226–232 (2009).

independent of past history, and indeed so do humans. Nietzsche's 'iron hand of necessity' shaking the 'dice-box of chance' (*Dawn*) turns out to be an irrelevant framework for free will, as Conway and Kochen demonstrate: It makes no difference whether God plays dice with the universe (*contra* Einstein), random events are effectively the same as pre-loaded configurations, and so the opposite of determinism is not randomness—it is *free*.

Nietzsche holds that there is no free will, in its ordinary sense, and that nothing ever happens other than it does (no *causa sui*); although there are some conflicting statements about this in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Strictly speaking, there are times when Nietzsche is open to free will, but when we turn to his examples of individuals who are said to possess some degree of freedom (Nietzsche offers none other than Julius Caesar himself), we see that there is a clear component of power and hierarchy being injected into a more traditional conception.⁸¹

Since Nietzsche believed being is becoming, and that nothing can ever happen other than the way in which it does, he positions himself as a determinist. This also helps us return to his ideas about will to power; what occurs and what *necessarily* occurs are tautological, and so 'one and the same happening is not another happening as well'.⁸² This seems part of the foundation for Nietzsche's scepticism of socially progressive thinkers who believe in universal projects of emancipation, if only because this would attempt to alter one's dispositional/power properties under the then-dominant metaphysical framework that one could achieve this without fundamentally altering one's categorical being⁸³; a rejection of socialism from metaphysics, rather than from any totalitarian impulse; a replacement, too, of the worker with the artist as the primary model of revolutionary subjectivity (muddled somewhat by Nietzsche's joint discussion of the 'artist-tyrant').

Despite his reactionary tendencies, the kaleidoscopic nature of Nietzsche's thought has inspired a number of progressive thinkers to integrate

⁸¹ L.N. Oaklander. Nietzsche on freedom. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 22(2): 211–222 (1984); Ridley, 2007.

⁸² Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 154; see Strawson, 2015.

⁸³ G. Bataille. *On Nietzsche*, trans. B. Boone (New York: Paragon House, 1992); B. Magnus. Deconstruction site. *Philosophical Topics* 19(2): 215–243 (1991).

major aspects of his philosophy into their politics, as I briefly reviewed. Upon hearing Zarathustra's familiar voice, one often sees why: 'I love the one whose soul is overfull, so that he forgets himself, and all things are in him'.⁸⁴

Another lesson lingers in the background, most vividly presented in Nietzsche's late period (1886–88). Following Nietzsche's insights into negotiating self-delusions, we might think that if a more egalitarian and just world emerges we will become quite unlike Nietzsche's 'Wanderer'⁸⁵ and those 'philosophers of the future' who are 'friends of solitude',⁸⁶ and we will at last overcome the feelings of our 'loneliest loneliness [*einsamste Einsamkeit*]'.⁸⁷ But we will not.

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⁸⁴ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 8.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, III.

⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*.

⁸⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 194.

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