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# BEYOND THE STATE: THE EARLY NIETZSCHE'S POST-POLITICAL RHETORIC

by

KEEGAN NICHOLS

Under the Direction of Jessica Berry, PhD

## ABSTRACT

A small subsection of the literature on Nietzsche's political philosophy focuses on a key passage that appears in the sixth section of "Schopenhauer as Educator." In this passage, Nietzsche claims that the individual's life attains its highest value by living for the benefit of humanity's rarest and most valuable specimens. Some philosophers, like John Rawls and Thomas Hurka, take this passage to be sufficient evidence of a larger commitment on Nietzsche's part to aristocracy. Others oppose Rawls' and Hurka's interpretations, claiming that this key passage is evidence of a commitment to democracy. However, both sides are incorrect. This particular section of "Schopenhauer as Educator" is actually evidence of Nietzsche's commitment to divorcing cultural institutions from the influence of states *in toto*. I explain why Nietzsche is committed neither to aristocracy nor to democracy, and how the passage from "Schopenhauer as Educator" commits Nietzsche to a post-political position.

INDEX WORDS: Nietzsche, Political theory, Culture, Aristocracy, Democracy, Anti-political

BEYOND THE STATE: THE EARLY NIETZSCHE'S POST-POLITICAL RHETORIC

by

KEEGAN NICHOLS

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BEYOND THE STATE: THE EARLY NIETZSCHE'S POST-POLITICAL RHETORIC

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# **DEDICATION**

To Courtney

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Nietzsche’s Notion of the Political .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 On Becoming What One Is .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4 The Dark Drive .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5 The Focal Passage as Evidence for a Political Theory .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>6 The Focal Passage as Having Political Implications.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>7 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>29</b>



## 1 Introduction

In the sixth section of “Schopenhauer as Educator,” Nietzsche says:

For surely the question is: How can your life, the life of the individual, obtain the highest value, the deepest significance? How is it least wasted? Surely only by living for the benefit of the rarest and most valuable specimens, not for the benefit of the majority, that is, for the benefit of those who, taken as individuals, are the least valuable specimens.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars with political interests often think of the above quote (hereafter called “the focal passage”) as evidence of Nietzsche’s political commitments.<sup>2</sup>

Some use the focal passage to paint Nietzsche as a political philosopher dedicated to aristocracy. We might call this Nietzsche the “Aristocratic Nietzsche.” John Rawls, for instance, thinks that the focal passage is part of Nietzsche’s “teleological theory directing society to arrange institutions and to define the duties and obligations of individuals so as to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture”;<sup>3</sup> a society where “mankind must continually strive to produce great individuals.”<sup>4</sup> Rather problematically, Rawls offers only a single piece of evidence for his interpretation. He directs readers to consult passages cited by G. A. Morgan in his *What Nietzsche Means*.<sup>5</sup> In particular, Rawls goes out of his way to draw the reader’s attention to the focal passage, saying: “Particularly striking is Nietzsche’s statement: ‘Mankind must work continually to produce individual great human beings—this and nothing else is the task...for the question is this: how can your life, the individual life, retain the highest value, the deepest significance?...Only by living for the good of the rarest and most valuable

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<sup>1</sup> UM III:6, 216.

<sup>2</sup> For a (by no means complete) selection of literature that deals with Nietzsche’s ties to aristocracy or democracy, see: Ansell-Pearson, 1994; Clark, 2015; Hurka, 1993; Cavell, 2004; Lemm, 2007; Conant, 2001; Russell, 1945; Rorty, 1989; and Conway, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Rawls 1971, 285-286.

<sup>4</sup> Rawls 1971, 286.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, 1941, 40-42 and 369-376.

specimens.’’<sup>6</sup> Rawls leans quite heavily—almost entirely—on the focal passage to make his case.

Thomas Hurka, building on Rawls’ discussion of Nietzsche, also believes that the focal passage is evidence of Nietzsche’s aristocratic commitments. He says, for instance, in his “Nietzsche: Perfectionist,” that

Nietzsche is famously antiegalitarian, favouring an aristocratic society and a strict ‘order of rank’ among individuals. And his antiegalitarianism rests on a distinctive view about social aggregation, whereby the value in a society depends not on the total or average perfection of all its members but on the excellence of its few most perfect members. This view is expressed repeatedly in Nietzsche’s writings, from the earliest to the latest.<sup>7</sup>

From there, Hurka too quotes the focal passage to defend his claims. Though Hurka presents more evidence than Rawls—which is to say, he presents more than *just* the focal passage as proof of his interpretation—his assessment of Nietzsche’s political views relies heavily on the focal passage, and on Rawls’ assessment of Nietzsche’s political views in *A Theory of Justice*.

Hurka’s reliance on Rawls becomes especially clear when he contrasts Nietzsche and Rawls:

Whereas Rawls wants society to maximize the well-being of its worst-off individuals, Nietzsche wants it to concentrate on the best, since only their perfection has value. Reflection on Rawls may suggest a ‘lexical maximax’ principle, according to which society should first maximize the excellence of its best individuals, then when nothing more can be done for them, the next-best individuals, and so on. But this lexical principle seems less true to Nietzsche’s view than simple maximax: he seems to find no value whatever in the achievements of lesser humans, so once the best have developed as far as they can it is a matter of indifference what other individuals do.<sup>8</sup>

Others use the focal passage to fashion Nietzsche into a champion of democracy. We might call this the “Democratic Nietzsche.” The aim of Stanley Cavell’s book, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, for instance, “is not simply to show that it [“Schopenhauer as Educator”] is tolerable to the life of justice in a constitutional democracy but to show how it is

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<sup>6</sup> Rawls 1971, 286, fn. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Hurka 2007, 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> Hurka 2007, 18.

essential to that life.”<sup>9</sup> Cavell, explicitly opposing Rawls’ reading of the focal passage, contends that the focal passage does not constitute a principle of political perfectionism, but rather, is a call to disdain what Cavell calls “official culture.” Disdain for official culture, Cavell says, “is itself an expression of democracy and commitment to it.”<sup>10</sup> The focal passage, according to Cavell, expresses a sentiment found in both Nietzsche and Emerson—a call to emphasize the life of genuine culture, which is itself inherently egalitarian. James Conant echoes, and further develops, Cavell’s arguments by identifying affinities between the sentiments expressed in the focal passage and conceptions of democracy developed by thinkers like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, who believed that democracy’s purpose was

not to overthrow the idea of a society ‘ruled by the best,’ but to exchange one form of aristocracy for another: to replace ‘an artificial aristocracy’ founded on the contingent precedents of ‘wealth and birth’ with ‘an unprecedented aristocracy’ from whose ranks ideally no one is, as a matter of contingent social circumstance, excluded.<sup>11</sup>

In short, the focal passage has been transformed by Hurka, Rawls, Cavell, and Conant, into a locus for demonstrations of Nietzsche’s commitments to aristocracy or democracy. On the one side, thinkers like Rawls and Hurka take the focal passage to be sufficient evidence of Nietzsche’s commitments to aristocratic political arrangements. On the other, Cavell and Conant, targeting Rawls’ interpretation of the focal passage, argue that the focal passage reveals a commitment to true culture, an attitude that harmonizes with particular forms of democracy.

In this paper, I will argue that those who take the focal passage as evidence of Nietzsche’s commitments to democracy or aristocracy are mistaken. The “Aristocratic Nietzsche” and “Democratic Nietzsche,” as personas fashioned out of a misuse of the focal passage, are fictions, so long as they rely on the focal passage as evidence of Nietzsche’s

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<sup>9</sup> Cavell 1980, 56.

<sup>10</sup> Cavell 1980, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Conant 2001, 228.

political commitments. At most, the focal passage commits Nietzsche to a very minimal political position, one that is neither democratic nor aristocratic.

## 2 Nietzsche's Notion of the Political

In his *Nietzsche on Morality*, Brian Leiter presents a helpful distinction between two different ways of attributing political thought to Nietzsche.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, one might argue that Nietzsche consciously attempted to engage in political theorizing. On the other hand, one might claim that Nietzsche's work has important political implications. In other words, (1) we can say that Nietzsche consciously attempted to produce a theoretical framework for his political philosophy, constructed out of the focal passage and other scattered remarks on politics, or (2) we can point to the focal passage and claim that it has real and important political implications, regardless of whether Nietzsche intended for it to have said implications.

In what follows, I argue that (1) is false and claim that while (2) is correct, it is not correct in the way that Cavell, Rawls, and others believe. (1) is false because, when read in context, the focal passage provides no solid evidence for some claim that Nietzsche was interested in developing a systematic political theory. With some qualifications to be introduced below, (2) is true, but we should not take the focal passage as committing Nietzsche to either aristocracy or democracy. Contrary, perhaps, to what Nietzsche believes, the focal passage has real and significant political implications, but those implications do not involve an implicit bias in favor of either democracy or aristocracy. That is, Nietzsche's principles commit him neither to democracy nor aristocracy. Rather, they commit him to what might be called a "post-political" position, i.e., to a position that demands that society move entirely beyond an emphasis on the political.

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<sup>12</sup> See Leiter 2015, 232-243.

To make the case that the focal passage does not provide evidence of a conscious political commitment on Nietzsche's part, and in order to claim that the focal passage commits Nietzsche to a post-political position, it is necessary to clarify what it means for something to be "political." What follows, then, is a discussion of what it means for something (an act, a philosophy, etc.) to be political.

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche says:

If you invest all your energy in economics, world commerce, parliamentarianism, military engagements, power and power politics – if you take the quantum of intelligence, seriousness, will, and self-overcoming that you embody and expend it all in this *one* direction, then there won't be any left for the other direction. Culture and the state – let us be honest with ourselves here – these are adversaries: 'Kultur-Staat' is just a modern idea. The one lives off the other, the one flourishes at the expense of the other. All the great ages of culture have been ages of political decline: anything great in the cultural sense is apolitical, even *anti-political*.<sup>13</sup>

He goes on to say that "in the history of European culture, the rise of the 'Reich' means one thing above all else: *a shift in emphasis*."<sup>14</sup> We find in this passage the clearest definition of the political, *via negativa*, in Nietzsche's corpus.<sup>15</sup> Here, Nietzsche explicitly ties the political to the concept of a state. That is, when Nietzsche discusses what it means for something to be political, that discussion occurs only in reference to some state. We might say that, according to Nietzsche,

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<sup>13</sup> TI Germans 4, 188.

<sup>14</sup> TI Germans 4, 188.

<sup>15</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, obviously, is a much later work than the *Unfashionable Observations*. As such, one might justifiably look upon my reliance on *Twilight* with skepticism. Fortunately, Nietzsche discusses the adversarial nature of culture and the state several times in his earlier writings. The quotes from *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* and from the *Unfashionable Observations* in subsequent paragraphs perform some justificatory work, but Nietzsche also says in *Human, All Too Human*, written four years after the publication of "Schopenhauer as Educator," "Perhaps the production of genius is reserved to only a limited period in the life of mankind.... Forces such as condition the production of art, for example, could simply die out.... Indeed, if life were ever to be ordered within the perfect state, there would no longer exist in the present any motive whatever for poetry and fiction..." (HH §235, 112). Immediately after, he claims that "if this state [the perfect state] is achieved mankind would have become too feeble still to be able to produce genius" (HH §235, 112). And again, in the third lecture from *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, Nietzsche discusses the state's subordination of culture towards its ends, describing culture "under the guiding star of the state" as a "pseudo-culture" (FEI III, 78). I simply use the section from *Twilight* because it provides the clearest definition of the political and a helpful discussion of the relationship between the political and the cultural.

anything that we would call “political” is such only by virtue of the fact that it takes a position on, or depends on, some aspect of a state. Further, anything engaged in an investment of energy into a state is political. In short, according to Nietzsche, something is political if and only if it references some state. Thus, economics, world commerce, parliamentarianism, military engagements, and so on are all “political” because each of these involves an investment of energy in the flourishing of a state. We might, thus, say that a revolutionary group’s work to overthrow a dictatorial government, and to establish a democracy, is “political” work, because the revolutionary group is investing its energy in opposing a tyrannical state, and working towards the establishment of a new democratic state.

Nietzsche claims that the cultural is “apolitical, even *anti-political*,” because, according to Nietzsche, genuine culture is possible only when it is not dependent upon some state. That is why he claims, in the third lecture of his *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, that

the modern state is accustomed in these things to take part in the discussion [regarding education] and is wont to accompany its demands with a blow in its defense...a ‘culture state’ [Kulturstaat], as one now says, is for the rest something young and has become a ‘matter of self-evidence’.... Precisely by the most powerful modern state, by Prussia, this right to the highest leadership in education and school has been taken so seriously, that, with the boldness that is characteristic of this political system, the dubious principle [the necessity of an excess of schools] adopted by it receives a significance understood as universally threatening and dangerous for the true German spirit....[The] state presents itself as a mystagogue of culture [Kultur] and while it advances its purposes, it compels each of its servants to appear before it only with the torch of universal state education in their hands.<sup>16</sup>

In short, the idea of a “culture state,” i.e., the idea that culture exists only at the behest of the modern state, is only a modern idea—an idea that threatens true German culture. It is for this reason that Goethe was, apparently, disappointed by the “Wars of Liberation,” when Germany liberated itself from French rule, establishing the German Confederation and ushering in a period

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<sup>16</sup> FEI III, 74-75.

of heightened German nationalism. It is also for this reason that Nietzsche claims that “France’s significance is changing to that of a *cultural power*,”<sup>17</sup> stating that “almost all psychological and artistic questions get taken up there [in Paris] with incomparably greater finesse and care than in Germany, — the Germans are altogether *incapable* of this type of seriousness.”<sup>18</sup> The German emphasis on the power of the state makes Germans incapable of dealing with cultural questions, specifically because the state and the political are opposed to culture and the cultural. An emphasis on the power of the state entails a reduced emphasis on cultural matters. The state presents itself as the guiding star of culture so that “the intellectual energies of a generation...can serve and be of use to the existing institutions.... This liberating is at the same time, and to a greater degree, a shackling.”<sup>19</sup> It is for these reasons that Nietzsche, rightly or wrongly, conceives of culture as anti-political.

To be clear, Nietzsche does not think that the state and culture have always existed in this parasitic relationship. In his essay “The Greek State,” written in 1871, Nietzsche tells us that the Greeks must be construed “in relation to the unique zenith of their art, as being *a priori* ‘political men *par excellence*’.”<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche believes that in Greece, culture and the state went hand-in-hand. Thus, he asks, “what does this naïve barbarism of the Greek state indicate, and what will be its excuse at the throne of eternal justice? The state appears before it proudly and calmly: leading the magnificently blossoming woman, Greek society, by the hand.”<sup>21</sup> In a lecture delivered the following year, Nietzsche continues to characterize the relationship of the Greek state to its culture. For the ancient Greeks, “the state was not a border guard, regulator, or

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<sup>17</sup> TI Germans 4, 188.

<sup>18</sup> TI Germans 4, 189.

<sup>19</sup> UM III:6, 220.

<sup>20</sup> G St, 169.

<sup>21</sup> G St, 169.

overseer for his culture; rather the robust, muscular comrade, ready for battle, and companion on the way, who gives the admired, nobler, and as it were, unearthly [überirdischen] friend safe conduct through the harsh realities and for that earns his thankfulness.”<sup>22</sup> The relationship between the state and culture in Ancient Greece was not parasitic, but was, rather, symbiotic.

So, when he says that culture is necessarily anti-political, or when he says that genuine culture can only exist independent of the state, he means *modern* culture and *modern* states, not culture and states generally speaking. Things change, and over time culture’s relationship to the state changed. Nietzsche sees the history of the relationship between the state and culture as a history of separation. The modern state, in contrast with the ancient Greek state, no longer has a symbiotic relationship with culture. The symbiotic relationship between state and culture, carries, so it would seem, only as far as the Middle Ages (perhaps as far as the Reformation), when “inimical forces were more or less held together and to some extent assimilated to one another by the church.”<sup>23</sup> Yet, “the Reformation declared many things to be *adiaphora*, to be the domain in which religion should not hold sway; this was the price at which it bought its own existence—just as Christianity, confronted with the far more religious world of antiquity, had to pay a similar price in order to guarantee its own existence.”<sup>24</sup> Christianity, however, eventually fell to the selfishness of the modern state:

Christianity is certainly one of the purest manifestations of that drive for culture, and especially of that drive for the ever-renewed production of the saint, but since it was used in a hundred ways to drive the mills of state power, it gradually became sick to the very marrow, hypocritical and dishonest, until it degenerated to the point of standing in contradiction to its original goal.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> FEI III, 77.

<sup>23</sup> UM III:4, 199.

<sup>24</sup> UM III:4, 199-200.

<sup>25</sup> UM III:6, 220.



In Nietzsche's day, "the state wants people to worship in it the very same idols they previously worshipped in the church,"<sup>26</sup> and as a result of that desire, "does indeed attempt...to organize everything anew out of itself and provide a bond that will hold these inimical forces in check."<sup>27</sup> The modern state, as Nietzsche sees it, is a parasite, promoting the health and development of culture only as much as is necessary to maximize its power. Thus, Nietzsche thinks that, contrary to the ancient Greek state, the modern state "presents itself as a mystagogue of culture,"<sup>28</sup> compelling culture to do its bidding.

In short, Nietzsche conceives of the relationship between culture and the state in two ways, the modern way and the ancient way. The ancient state's relationship to culture was symbiotic—the state acted as a companion and friend to culture, protecting cultural endeavors without expecting a return on its investment. At this time, culture was not anti-political, but rather, was explicitly political. The modern state's relationship to culture, however, is not unselfish, and thus, culture has necessarily become anti-political, for the sake of its existence. The modern state's relationship to culture is parasitic, seeking to profit "from the dissemination of cultivation among its citizens"<sup>29</sup> by "liberating the intellectual energies of a generation to the extent—but only to that extent—that they can serve and be of use to existing institutions."<sup>30</sup> As a direct result of the changes in the state's relationship to culture, culture has, in Nietzsche's mind, become necessarily anti-political.

The realization that culture was not always anti-political might lead one to believe that Nietzsche must surely affirm an aristocratic arrangement of political institutions. After all, if

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<sup>26</sup> UM III:4, 200.

<sup>27</sup> UM III:4, 200.

<sup>28</sup> FEI III, 75.

<sup>29</sup> UM III:6, 219.

<sup>30</sup> UM III:6, 220.

Nietzsche thinks of the symbiotic relationship between culture and the state as positive, he must desire a return to the way things were. Perhaps Nietzsche seeks a return to the ancient Greek way of conducting the affairs of state. Yet, the idea that Nietzsche seeks to return to the ancient way of relating the state to culture is certainly false, because he clearly conceives of the purpose of cultural institutions as moving *beyond* any relationship with the state generally speaking. One of the tasks of this essay is to demonstrate this point, and I will return to it in Section VI.

With a clear understanding of what it means for something to be “political” or “anti-political” now on the table, we can turn to what it would mean for the focal passage to provide evidence of Nietzsche’s “democratic” or “aristocratic” commitments. With these four terms—political, anti-political, democratic, and aristocratic—well defined, we should be positioned to assess what evidence the focal passage provides of Nietzsche’s political commitments. It seems that, for the focal passage to constitute evidence of some conscious or unconscious commitment to democracy or aristocracy, it would have to provide evidence of a commitment to an investment in, or to the creation of, a democratic or an aristocratic state.

On the one hand, if the focal passage is evidence of a consciously pro-democratic political philosophy, then it must be the case that the focal passage constitutes, in part, an explicit endorsement of efforts to bring about a democratic state. Likewise, if the focal passage is evidence of a consciously pro-aristocratic political philosophy, it must be the case that the focal passage constitutes part of an explicit effort on Nietzsche’s part to bring about an aristocratic state (this seems to be Rawls’ view in *A Theory of Justice*). On the other hand, if, despite Nietzsche’s intentions, the focal passage entails certain democratic commitments, it must be the case that the focal passage commits Nietzsche (unconsciously) to an investment in the well-being

of a democratic state. Likewise, if Nietzsche is committed (unconsciously) to aristocracy, it must be the case that the focal passage entails an investment in the creation of an aristocratic state.

If the focal passage provides evidence of political commitments, conscious or unconscious, it must be the case that it provides evidence of a commitment to the well-being of some state; for the political, by Nietzsche's definition, is such only insofar as it exists in relation to some state. In short, if the focal passage provides evidence for the "Democratic Nietzsche," it must provide evidence that Nietzsche is (consciously or unconsciously) committed to the well-being of a democratic state. If the focal passage provides evidence for the "Aristocratic Nietzsche," it must provide evidence that Nietzsche is (consciously or unconsciously) committed to the well-being of an aristocratic state.

### **3 On Becoming What One Is**

To understand whether the focal passage has political implications (whether intended or unintended by Nietzsche), we first must know what kinds of things we are, because this understanding is central to what Nietzsche calls "the circle of culture," which Nietzsche sets in opposition to the state and its forces. In this section, I address the important underlying concepts composing Nietzsche's notion of individual persons and introduce some key terms of art.

We find throughout Nietzsche's various works a portrait of human life according to which our possibilities are tightly circumscribed. That is to say, Nietzsche is a fatalist. Each life has an end-point that "is fixed in advance in virtue of an individual's nature, that is, the largely immutable physiological and psychological facts that make the person who he is."<sup>31</sup> Put another way, "each of us has an essential psycho-physical constitution – a set of type-facts that make us what we are."<sup>32</sup> In this respect, a person is like a tomato plant. A tomato plant grows tomatoes; it

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<sup>31</sup> Leiter 1998, 219.

<sup>32</sup> Leiter 2015, 76.

will never grow peaches or corn. The extent to which it flourishes successfully varies, depending on other important environmental factors that inhibit or promote the plant's flourishing. The plant may, for instance, grow in fertile or barren soil, it may get a lot of rain or very little, it may have exposure to full sunlight or none, etc.. Thus, "the natural facts about the tomato plant *circumscribe*, as it were, the possible trajectories, though they themselves do not uniquely determine which of these is realized."<sup>33</sup> A successful tomato plant, grown under optimal conditions, may produce tomatoes, but it could also grow in barren soil and die, it might exist in a cold climate and grow miniscule, cat-faced tomatoes, or it could get too little rain and become stunted, barely alive but producing no fruit.

Likewise, different types of human beings, depending on their constitutions and environments, will have varying ranges of possibilities. For instance, Nietzsche discusses a priestly type in *The Gay Science*. A priestly type of person possesses a particular set of type-facts—"prudent, cowlike serenity, piety and country parson meekness which lies in the meadow and earnestly and ruminantly *observes* life"<sup>34</sup>—that allow the priestly type to flourish under certain conditions. Yet, much like the tomato plant, the priestly type's possibilities are circumscribed by the environment in which she finds herself. Her society might not revere the particular sort of wisdom characteristic of priestly types, "the mild, serious/simple-minded and chaste priestly natures and whatever is related to them."<sup>35</sup> The priestly type's society might (however unlikely) venerate philosophers, who "have always felt the most remote"<sup>36</sup> from priestly types. These circumstances would limit her capacity to realize fully what she is. Depending on the conditions, these circumstances may even prevent her from ever becoming

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<sup>33</sup> Leiter 1998, 223.

<sup>34</sup> GS §351, 209.

<sup>35</sup> GS §351, 209.

<sup>36</sup> GS §351, 209.

what she is. That is to say, we might draw a distinction between an individual's identity as some type and that individual's capacity to become a successful instance of some type. The individual mentioned above may be a priestly type, but contingent circumstances affect her ability to lead a successful life as an instance of that type.

#### 4 The Dark Drive

In "Schopenhauer as Educator," Nietzsche states that we all have a "dark," which is to say an unconscious, "drive" that pushes us towards the production of genius. He says:

Every human being tends to discover in himself a limitation—of his talents as well as of his moral will—that fills him with longing and melancholy; and just as he longs to rise up out of his feeling of sinfulness to what is holy, so as an intellectual being he bears a profound yearning for the genius within himself. This is the root of all true culture.... Wherever we find talent without this longing, as we do in scholarly circles or also among so-called cultivated people, it arouses revulsion and disgust, for we sense that such human beings, with all their intelligence, do not further, but instead hinder an emerging culture and the production of genius—which is the aim of all culture.<sup>37</sup>

Most people hide from the discovery of their limitations, hide from their drive, because most are wont to "sink into a contemplative laziness and ultimately even forfeit out of laziness their ability to contemplate."<sup>38</sup> Such people view this drive towards the production of genius as

unpleasant memories [that] suddenly force themselves upon us and we make an effort to drive them out of our heads by means of violent gestures and sounds; but the gestures and sounds of common life indicate that all of us always find ourselves in such a state of fear of memory and of turning inward.... Ghostly things are occurring around us, every moment of life wants to tell us something, but we do not want to hear this ghostly voice. When we are quiet and alone we are afraid something will be whispered in our ear, and hence we despise quiet and drug ourselves with sociability.<sup>39</sup>

In short, the striving for culture is "universal [allgemein]," despite the fact that knowledge of the goal to produce culture is "*extraordinarily scant and rare.*"<sup>40</sup> We hide from our drive to produce

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<sup>37</sup> UM III:3, 190.

<sup>38</sup> UM III:5, 208.

<sup>39</sup> UM III:5, 211.

<sup>40</sup> UM III:6, 217.

genius, partially because we are lazy, and partly because we fear the difficulties that awakening towards that drive entails. It seems odd, however, that one would claim that we drive unconsciously towards producing genius. To understand why Nietzsche believes in this dark drive, we must know what genius is.

Nietzsche begins section six of “Schopenhauer as Educator” with a biological claim, an observation derived from

every single species of animal and plant life, namely, that the only thing that matters is the superior individual specimen, the more unusual, more powerful, more complex, more fruitful specimen...[It] is easy to understand that the goal of any species’ evolution is that point at which it reaches its limit and begins the transition to a higher species; its goal is not a large number of specimens and their well-being, nor is it those specimens that are the last to evolve. On the contrary, its goal is precisely those seemingly scattered and random existences that arise here and there under favorable conditions.<sup>41</sup>

Here we might detect some tension. Nietzsche seems, on my interpretation, to hold a strongly anti-teleological position. Becoming what we are, for instance, is not a matter of us realizing what we were *meant* to be, in the sense that there is some ultimate purpose towards which we strive. Yet in the above quotation, Nietzsche appears to claim that the evolution of each and every species has a *goal*.

We should be careful, however, about how we interpret the perspective from which Nietzsche speaks. There are two ways of understanding Nietzsche’s use of terms like “matters,” “favorable,” and “goal.” We could either understand Nietzsche as saying that, (1) from an objective perspective, i.e., from the standpoint of Nature itself, the purpose of evolution is to get a species to a point where it transitions into a higher species, or that, (2) from the perspective of human culture, the goal of *our* evolution is to get us to the point where we transition to a higher species.

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<sup>41</sup> UM III:6, 215.

In other words, the question we should ask ourselves is, “For whom does it matter that a species evolves?” If Nietzsche were saying (1), he would be attributing some agency or purposiveness to nature. Nature would (somehow) know and care whether or not we evolve. Nietzsche would be arguing for a bizarre interpretation of Darwinism, where Nature has a plan for humankind or has some mechanism by which it strives to produce some higher type of human being. As Nietzsche says only a year or so before writing “Schopenhauer as Educator,”

There is nothing so reprehensible or low in nature that it would not immediately be inflated like a balloon by a small breath of that power of knowledge; and just as every porter wants to have his admirer, so the proudest of men, the philosopher, believes that the eyes of the universe are trained on his actions and thoughts like telescopes from all sides.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, the idea that the universe cares about us enough to have a plan or a purpose for our development is nothing more than an artifact of the philosopher’s pride. Thus, I find it unlikely that Nietzsche attributes to Nature the agency necessary for (1) to be the case, for it would contradict his claim that the universe has no plan or purpose for us. Rather, I think it more likely that Nietzsche is saying (2)—that it matters *to us* that, from the perspective of human culture, human beings make the transition to a higher species; that what is important *to us* is the superior individual specimen. In other words, our goal, from the perspective of human culture, is to strive for the production of “those seemingly scattered and random existences that arise here and there under favorable conditions.”<sup>43</sup>

Geniuses are a higher *type*. That is, geniuses represent a transition to a higher sort of being. Nietzsche will later echo this claim in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* when Zarathustra says: “What is the ape to a human? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And that is precisely what the human shall be to the overman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment.”<sup>44</sup> That is

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<sup>42</sup> TL, 259.

<sup>43</sup> UM III:6, 215.

<sup>44</sup> Z P:3, 6.

to say, we regular human beings, individuals who are not geniuses, are to higher types what apes are to us—beings lower on the chain of evolution and a relic of some less advanced stage of their development; embarrassingly underdeveloped in comparison. We, as a species, evolve. Higher types represent the next step in an evolutionary process, and so we drive, albeit unconsciously, towards the production of higher types.

Nietzsche notes “*how extraordinarily scant and rare the knowledge of that goal [the production of higher types] is, how universal, by contrast, the striving for culture is, and how unspeakably large are the amounts of energy that are expended in its service.*”<sup>45</sup> Sometimes, “we ask ourselves in amazement: ‘Is such knowledge perhaps not necessary at all? Does nature achieve its goal even if the majority of people misconceive of the aim of their own exertions?’”<sup>46</sup> Yet, “there are moments *when we understand this*; then the clouds break and we perceive how we...are pressing onward toward the human being as toward something that stands high above us.”<sup>47</sup> That is, for some of us, there are moments when that dark drive becomes clearer, and we can see the goal towards which we, in our normal states of mind, unconsciously and unreflectively press—the production of a higher type.

Some individuals, upon realizing the goal towards which everything strives, might be inclined to say that it does not matter that the drive towards the production of genius remains dark for most of us. “Anyone who is accustomed to holding the unconscious purposiveness of nature in high regard will perhaps have no difficulty in answering: ‘Yes, indeed, that’s the way it is! Let human beings think and speak about their ultimate goal in any manner they wish; in their dark drive they are yet well aware of the proper path.’”<sup>48</sup> But Nietzsche thinks it necessary to

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<sup>45</sup> UM III:6, 217.

<sup>46</sup> UM III:6, 217.

<sup>47</sup> UM III 5, 210.

<sup>48</sup> UM III:6, 217-218.



refute this opinion. For the promotion of the emergence of higher types requires that the dark drive become a conscious intention to produce higher types, because, so long as the drive to produce genius remains dark, culture will be misused and exploited by “powers that today most actively promote culture [for] ulterior motives.”<sup>49</sup>

## **5 The Focal Passage as Evidence for a Political Theory**

In this section, I address the issue of whether the focal passage is evidence of a conscious attempt on Nietzsche’s part to develop some political theory—i.e., whether the focal passage is part of some philosophical theory directing society to arrange the institutions of a state, and to define the duties and obligations of members of a state, in some particular way so as to promote higher culture. Rawls, as we have seen, believes that the focal passage indicates a full “teleological theory directing society to arrange institutions and to define the duties and obligations of individuals so as to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture.”<sup>50</sup> Here we must ask whether the focal passage does provide evidence for the position that Nietzsche conceived of himself as a political thinker (significant or not). Does it, for instance, support the claim that Nietzsche was trying to fashion a robust teleological political theory, built on some principle of perfection, which implores us to arrange institutions and duties to maximize cultural excellence? Does Nietzsche consciously argue for the creation of an aristocratic state? There are, I think, good reasons for thinking that Nietzsche did not intend the focal passage as either an explicit political claim or as a gesture towards some robust political theory.

We must attend to the fact that Nietzsche thinks of the focal passage as constituting a claim about how we might address a fundamentally existential problem—the problem of human

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<sup>49</sup> UM III:6, 218.

<sup>50</sup> Rawls 1971, 285-286.

significance. In its context, this passage addresses how an individual's life might attain the highest degree of significance. Nietzsche is very clear that he thinks that political changes are incapable of addressing the problem of human significance. In section four of "Schopenhauer as Educator," for instance, Nietzsche says:

any philosophy that believes that the problem of existence can be altered or solved by a political event is a sham and pseudophilosophy. Many states have been founded since the beginning of the world; this is an old story. How could a political innovation possibly be sufficient to make human beings once and for all into contented dwellers on this earth?<sup>51</sup>

In other words, if the focal passage were part of a larger political theory, encouraging the creation of some new state (aristocratic, democratic or otherwise), Nietzsche would be saying that the individual's life could attain its highest significance by means of some new political innovation. The focal passage would be, as Rawls seems to believe, a claim about how to rearrange the institutions of a state to benefit higher types. But, of course, that would mean that the focal passage is itself, by Nietzsche's own words, a sham and pseudophilosophy. As such, it cannot possibly be the case that the focal passage is part of a conscious effort on Nietzsche's part to develop a political philosophy—to say nothing about Nietzsche's being consciously pro-democracy or pro-aristocracy.

What is more, as Nietzsche says shortly thereafter:

the most extensive arrangements of our own lives are made only in order to flee from our true task; how we like to hide our heads somewhere, as though our hundred-eyed conscience would not find us there; how we hasten to sell our soul to the state, to moneymaking, to social life, or to scholarship just so that we will no longer possess it; how even in our daily work we slave away without reflection and more ardently than is necessary to make a living because it seems to us more necessary not to stop and reflect.<sup>52</sup>

In short, our preoccupation with political, social, and fiscal matters is not, in Nietzsche's opinion, the means by which we resolve the problem of human significance. Indeed, a significant amount

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<sup>51</sup> UM III:4, 197.

<sup>52</sup> UM III:5, 210.

of “Schopenhauer as Educator” is dedicated to highlighting just how much society—i.e., the realm of the political, social, and fiscal—stands in the way of addressing the problem of human significance. Rather, it is precisely our preoccupation with those matters that allows us to hide from, and to forget about, the problem of human significance. One’s personal investment in the well-being of the state serves only as a means of avoiding the problem Nietzsche articulates in “Schopenhauer as Educator.” Thus, it cannot be the case that the focal passage is an expressly political claim, for its being a political claim would be predicated upon its being a part of Nietzsche’s own investment in the well-being of some state, and thus a means for Nietzsche himself to hide from the problem of human significance.

Finally, we discover that Nietzsche, at least, believes that the focal passage is apolitical by attending to the audience to whom it is addressed. According to Nietzsche, this passage is a pedagogical tool, imparting a lesson to “be planted and cultivated in every young person.”<sup>53</sup> In this sense, it is addressed to society at large. Yet, the focal passage, as a seed to be planted and cultivated in everyone, does not always take. In fact, Nietzsche seems well aware that the message will “take” only in a select group of individuals—those *types* who are able (i.e., those whose type-facts enable them) to become aware of the goal towards which their dark drive pushes them. In short, we find that in a much more important sense, Nietzsche is not writing for everyone. The focal passage will do its work only in those few who are of the right types and thus, in some sense, is meant only for those few who will be able to react appropriately. This is a common enough theme throughout Nietzsche’s corpus. All of this is to say that, in the focal passage “what is called for is not a *political* transformation, but an *individual* one.”<sup>54</sup> For those who are the right types—those who possess the capacity to recognize the goal of their dark

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<sup>53</sup> UM III:6, 216.

<sup>54</sup> Leiter 2015, 242.

drives—the most significant life is one lived for the sake of the most valuable specimens. The types of persons capable of recognizing the goal of this drive are fairly rare.

I say *types* because it appears that Nietzsche speaks to *two* types of people. The first seems to be nascent geniuses themselves—those who *are*, in fact, the rare individuals towards which all of nature strives. The focal passage, in this case, calls for the production of nascent geniuses who alone are capable of somehow transforming the species or who are, at least, signs of such a transformation. These individuals are exceedingly rare. The second seems to be those who “are too weak to endure those moments of deepest communion very long”;<sup>55</sup> those who “are not those human beings toward which all of nature presses onward for its own salvation.”<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche says of this type: “We do not accomplish even this – this coming to the surface and awakening for a fleeting instant – by means of our own strength. We have to be lifted up....”<sup>57</sup> This type of person is not a genius, but is still consciously aware of the drive toward the production of genius. These people are rare, too, though less so.

In summary, the focal passage cannot be evidence of a *conscious* effort on Nietzsche’s part to develop a political theory of any kind. It seems that Nietzsche’s intent was, rather, to have the focal passage do some other kind of work, namely, to act as part of a solution to the problem of human significance. Thinking of the focal passage as part of an active effort on Nietzsche’s part to develop a political theory results in Nietzsche contradicting himself within the same work.

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<sup>55</sup> UM III:5, 211.

<sup>56</sup> UM III:5, 211.

<sup>57</sup> UM III:5, 211.

## 6 The Focal Passage as Having Political Implications

While it may be the case that Nietzsche did not *intend* for the focal passage to have political implications, it may nevertheless be the case that it does. That is to say, despite the fact that Nietzsche refuses to think of himself as a political thinker—“The conditions required to understand me, and which in return *require* me to be understood...you need to be used to living on mountains – to seeing the miserable, ephemeral little gossip of politics and national self-interest *beneath* you”<sup>58</sup>—the focal passage may nevertheless have real and important political implications.

Here, I suggest that it is, in fact, true that the focal passage has politically significant implications. However, contrary to what Cavell, Rawls, and others think, the focal passage does not suggest that Nietzsche is implicitly committed to democracy or aristocracy. Rather, it suggests that Nietzsche is committed to what might be called a “post-political” position. That is, despite some of Nietzsche’s claims, the focal passage commits him to the necessity of some political principles, adopted in order eventually to move beyond the political.

As mentioned in the previous section, Nietzsche claims that the focal passage should serve as a lesson taught to young people. As a reminder, here is the focal passage again:

For surely the question is: How can your life, the life of the individual, obtain the highest value, the deepest significance? How is it least wasted? Surely only by living for the benefit of the rarest and most valuable specimens, not for the benefit of the majority, that is, for the benefit of those who, taken as individuals, are the least valuable specimens.<sup>59</sup>

The result of this lesson may be that the young person

comes to understand himself as a miscarried work of nature, as it were, but simultaneously as testimony to the greatest and most amazing intentions of this artist. ‘In my case nature did a bad job’ he should tell himself, ‘but I shall pay tribute to its great intention by being at its service so that it might someday be more successful.’<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> A Preface, 3.

<sup>59</sup> UM III:6, 216.

<sup>60</sup> UM III:6, 216.

This is the second type of person addressed by the focal passage—the type who are not geniuses but are capable of attaining awareness of their “dark drive.” These individuals recognize the goal of evolution as the production of higher types, and in doing so, one “places himself within the circle of *culture*,”<sup>61</sup> “a powerful community, one that, to be sure, is not held together by external forms and laws, but by a fundamental idea. This is the fundamental idea of *culture*.”<sup>62</sup> This type recognizes the value of genius, and:

In effect says: ‘I see something beyond myself that is loftier and more human than I am; help me, all of you, to achieve it, just as I will help each of you who makes the same recognition and suffers from it, so that finally that human being might once again come into being who senses himself to be full and infinite in knowledge and love, in perception and ability, and who in his entire being is bound to and bound up with nature, as judge and measure of all things.’<sup>63</sup>

This is what Nietzsche calls “the first sacrament [Weihe] of culture,” part one of a multi-stage process that concludes with the formulation of his ideal educational institution. The first sacrament is characterized by a complex of feelings:

being ashamed of oneself without distress, hatred of one's own shriveled narrowness, sympathy with the genius that always raised itself above this our dullness and barrenness, presentience for all that is in the process of becoming and is struggling, and the innermost conviction of encountering almost everywhere nature in its need, in the way it presses onward toward the human being, how it painfully senses that its work has once again miscarried, and how it is everywhere nonetheless successful in producing the most amazing outlines, features, and forms, so that the human beings among whom we live are like a field strewn with the most precious fragments of sculptures, everything calling out: ‘Come! Help us! Complete us! Put together what belongs together! We have an immeasurable longing to become whole!’<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> UM III:6, 216.

<sup>62</sup> UM III:5, 213.

<sup>63</sup> UM III:6, 216.

<sup>64</sup> UM III:5, 217.

The second sacrament follows. The individual is given the second sacrament of culture when he or she takes those experiences characteristic of the first sacrament and turns his or her gaze outward, assessing the world in light of those experiences.

Our gaze must turn outward in order to rediscover in the great, turbulent world that desire for culture with which it is familiar from these former, inner experiences; the individual is supposed to use his own struggles and longing as the alphabet with which he can now spell out the aspirations of human beings.<sup>65</sup>

In other words, the second type of person—who is not a genius herself, but is conscious of the drive to produce genius—now recognizing her dark drive for what it is, looks at events happening in the world and sees “out there,” so to speak, expressions of the same underlying drive towards the production of genius. In raising oneself up to this second stage, one sees “how universal...the striving for culture is, and how unspeakably large are the amounts of energy that are expended in its service.”<sup>66</sup> Yet, most of the energy expended in the service of culture is energy expended without awareness of the purpose or goal of culture—the production of genius. In the second stage, when one looks out at the world, one discovers “a kind of *misused and exploited culture*—just take a look around you! And precisely those powers that today most actively promote culture have ulterior motives, and they do not engage in intercourse with it for pure and unselfish reasons.”<sup>67</sup> That is, certain groups—moneymakers, cultivated philistines, scholars, and most importantly, the state—make use of the universal striving for culture to pursue their own ends.

The realization of the use and abuse of the universal striving for culture results in the second type of person receiving the third sacrament of culture. Here, “culture demands of him not only those inner experiences, not only the assessment of the external world that surrounds

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<sup>65</sup> UM III:5, 217.

<sup>66</sup> UM III:5, 217.

<sup>67</sup> UM III:5, 218.

him, but ultimately and primarily action; that is, it demands that he fight for culture and oppose those influences, habits, laws, and institutions in which he does not recognize his goal: the production of genius.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, the type of person who has dedicated herself with awareness to the production of genius now realizes that she must actively oppose those people and institutions that actively misuse culture for their own ends.<sup>69</sup>

To recap: The focal passage is presented to young people as an educational lesson. What happens, in some rare cases, is that a young person becomes aware of the universal striving towards culture, affirming the production of genius as the goal of human evolution, thus marking his or her entrance into the circle of culture. From this point, the young person accepts the two following sacraments of culture, assessing the world around himself or herself in light of his or her experiences and acting to oppose those laws and institutions that stand in the way of the production of genius. In short, the circle of culture, as conceived of by Nietzsche, is a cultural group, and as such, acts to separate itself from the influence of the state.

While Nietzsche thinks of culture as non-political (he uses the word ‘anti-political’), we must ask whether the work of the circle of culture really is non-political. That is, is it possible for the circle of culture to move beyond the influence of the state without engaging in political action? Nietzsche seems to think so, insofar as he seems to think that the purpose of the focal passage is antithetical to political events. But is he correct? Our answer must be “no.” For the circle of culture to work against institutions and laws that stand in the way of its ultimate task—the production of genius and an emphasis on cultural endeavors—it must first actively engage in

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<sup>68</sup> UM III:6, 217.

<sup>69</sup> “Everywhere where culture now seems to be promoted most energetically the goal of culture remains unknown. No matter how loudly the state proclaims all that it has done for culture, it promotes culture only in order to promote itself and is incapable of comprehending any goal that stands higher than its own welfare and existence” (UM III:6, 230-231).



political action. Because political action is understood as action in reference to some state, the rejection of a current state is also, in some sense political. That is to say, there is a sense in which revolutionary action could be called “anti-political,” insofar as revolutionary action against, say, a dictatorship is principally a rejection of that state, yet there is another sense in which revolutionary action is “political” insofar as it acts in reference to a current state when it works against that state, to undermine it.

The circle of culture must begin by working to reject the influence of the state. The call to act against the state is explicit in the third sacrament of culture. As such, the focal passage, which produces a circle of culture, does, in fact, have *some* political implications, insofar as it results in the creation of a group dedicated, initially, to the rejection of the state. Yet, it does not have the implications that some scholars (Rawls or Cavell) believe it to have. That is, the focal passage does not result in a circle of culture dedicated to expending energy towards the ultimate end of producing a democratic or aristocratic state, and thus, is neither implicitly democratic nor aristocratic.

Recall that the focal passage is meant to serve as a lesson to young people. After receiving the lesson of the focal passage, some young people will receive the first sacrament of culture, marking their entrance into the circle of culture, a group of individuals committed to the production of genius. To claim that the focal passage is evidence of implicit democratic or aristocratic commitments on Nietzsche’s part would require that the circle of culture ultimately work towards the end of establishing a democratic or aristocratic state, for the circle of culture can only be democratic or aristocratic insofar as it works towards the creation of a democratic or aristocratic state. This is obviously not the case.

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche says: “In the history of European culture, the rise of the ‘*Reich*’ means one thing above all else: *a shift in emphasis*,”<sup>70</sup> namely, a shift in emphasis away from culture. In short, the rise of powerful states, as in the case of the rise of the Prussian state and the establishment of the German Empire under its protection, represents a shift from the emphasis on cultural growth to an emphasis on political and economic domination. In particular, Nietzsche believes that the rise in the power of the Prussian government has a particularly pernicious effect on the form of educational institutions.<sup>71</sup> The purpose of the circle of culture would be to shift society’s efforts back towards an emphasis on culture. In short, the job of the circle of culture would be to oppose the power of all states, including both democratic and aristocratic states, for “all the great ages of culture have been ages of political decline.”<sup>72</sup> That is, all great ages of culture have been periods when states possessed little power, regardless of the organization of those states.

To paraphrase Leiter, Nietzsche has an almost anarchistic hostility towards political institutions.<sup>73</sup> Nietzsche’s circle of culture is no less hostile towards political institutions. Rawls is correct in thinking that Nietzsche is implicitly committed to a society where, at the very least, the circle of culture works towards the production of culture and genius. However, he is incorrect to think that the focal passage commits Nietzsche to an endorsement of aristocratic states. To think of the circle of culture as an aristocratic group would be to claim that the goal of the circle of culture is to work towards the creation of aristocratic states, where, in fact, the circle of culture’s work is to reject the influence of states wholesale.

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<sup>70</sup> TI VIII:4, 189.

<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, TI Germans 5, TI Germans 1, UM III:6, 219-220, or FEI III.

<sup>72</sup> TI Germans 4, 188.

<sup>73</sup> Leiter 2015, 236-237.

In short, the goal of the circle of culture is to move beyond the political. That is why Nietzsche says that he is concerned with those who direct themselves “beyond the well-being of a state, that is, with philosophers, and with these only in respect to a world that, for its part, is quite independent of the well-being of the state: the world of culture.”<sup>74</sup> Yet, in order to move beyond the well-being of the state, one must first actively oppose the state. As such, the circle of culture must, at first, be a politically-motivated group, actively opposing the influence of the state in order eventually to divorce itself from the state’s influence. It is only through an active rejection of the state’s influence, by fighting for culture and opposing “those influences, habits, laws, and institutions in which he does not recognize his goal: the production of genius”<sup>75</sup> that the circle of culture can move past the political. The circle of culture must first become anti-political before it can become post-political.

While it is certainly true that Nietzsche’s circle of culture is implicitly committed to action against the state, it is not the case that it is committed to the creation of a democratic or aristocratic state. Thus, it is also not the case that the circle of culture is, strictly speaking, anti-political. Rather, it is post-political, because it ultimately aims to move beyond the stage where it must actively reject the state as a means to achieving the ultimate end of divorcing itself from the influence of all states.

## 7 Conclusion

This paper began with two questions. First, whether the focal passage provides evidence of a conscious effort on Nietzsche’s part to form a political philosophy that is either pro-democratic or pro-aristocratic, and second, whether the focal passage implies (regardless of Nietzsche’s intentions), an endorsement of democracy or aristocracy. Nietzsche’s general

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<sup>74</sup> UM III:4, 197.

<sup>75</sup> UM III:6, 217.

hostility towards the political in “Schopenhauer as Educator,” in addition to the fact that Nietzsche believes that the political and cultural are antagonistic forces, seems to indicate that Nietzsche had no intentions of developing any sort of political philosophy, meaning that he, at the very least, did not intend to endorse the creation of a democratic or aristocratic state. And, while the focal passage does, indeed, have politically significant implications they are not of the sort mentioned by Rawls, Cavell and others. The focal passage leads to the formation of a group, dedicated to rejecting the influence of all states, in an effort eventually to divorce itself from the influence of the state. Toward that end, the circle of culture would reject both an aristocratic state and a democratic state, for states of any sort would exert an unacceptable influence on the circle of culture. In short, the ideas of an “Aristocratic Nietzsche” and a “Democratic Nietzsche” are both unsupported by the focal passage. Politicizing readings of Nietzsche’s work that rely on the focal passage are mistaken, specifically because the focal passage neither explicitly nor implicitly endorses the creation of an aristocratic or a democratic state. At best, it commits Nietzsche to post-political position, wherein the circle of culture must initially engage in politically revolutionary activity, towards the ultimate end of liberating itself from the influence of the state.

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