

‘An old carriage with new horses’: Nietzsche’s critique of democracy¹

Abstract: Debates about Nietzsche’s political thought today revolve around his role in contemporary democratic theory: is he a thinker to be mined for stimulating resources in view of refounding democratic legitimacy on a radicalised, postmodern and agonistic footing, or is he the modern arch-critic of democracy budding democrats must hone their arguments against? Moving away from this dichotomy, this article asks first and foremost what democracy meant for Nietzsche in late nineteenth century Germany, and on that basis what we might learn from him now. To do so, it will pay particular attention to the political, intellectual and cultural contexts within which Nietzsche’s thought evolved, namely Bismarck’s relationship to the new German Reichstag, the philological discovery of an original Aryan race, and Nietzsche’s encounter with Gobineau’s racist thought through his frequentation of the Wagner circle. It argues that Nietzsche’s most lasting contribution to democratic thinking is not to be found in the different ways he may or may not be used to buttress certain contemporary ideological positions, but rather how his notions of ‘herd morality’, ‘misarchism’ and the genealogical method still provides us with the conceptual tools to better understand the political world we inhabit.

Keywords: Nietzsche, democracy, the agon, herd morality, misarchism, genealogy

A common refrain in the contemporary scholarship is that during his so-called ‘middle period’, commonly understood as spanning both books of *Human, all too human* (1878-1880), *Daybreak* (1881) and the first four books of *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche demonstrates a favourable disposition towards democracy.² *The Wanderer and his Shadow* 293 (1880, KSA 2 685), ‘End and means of democracy’ in particular is offered up by writers such as Connolly, Owen, Patton and Schrift as

¹ I would like to thank members of the Cambridge Political Thought Postdoctoral Forum and two anonymous reviewers for a helpful discussion and comments to the paper.

² On Nietzsche’s middle period, and how it differs to his earlier and later periods in this vein, see Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche’s Middle Period*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000 and Paul Franco, *Nietzsche’s Enlightenment: The Free-Spirit Trilogy of the Middle Period*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2011. Not everyone agrees with this periodisation. Brian Leiter, for instance, claims that Nietzsche’s mature work starts with *Daybreak* (*Nietzsche on Morality*, London, Routledge, 2003 p. 26).

typifying Nietzsche's allegedly pro-democratic sentiment.³ There Nietzsche explains that 'democracy wants to create and guarantee as much *independence* as possible: independence of opinion, of mode of life and of employment'. So far, one might be tempted to say, so good from a democratic point of view, although Nietzsche has yet to give reasons for desiring such independence in the first place. This is consistent with the view that in his middle period Nietzsche demonstrates a more 'neutral' or 'scientific' approach, adopting democracy's own point of view ('to that end') and trying to think through its logical consequences. But he has yet to endorse it.

The discussion surrounding *The Wanderer and his Shadow* 293 takes place within a broader debate about the role Nietzsche is to play in contemporary democratic theory. A number of different thinkers, such as Bonnie Honig, Wendy Brown, Dana Villa, William Connolly and Mark Warren amongst others, along with more specifically Nietzsche scholars such as Lawrence Hatab, Alan Schrift and David Owen, have seized upon Nietzsche's alleged decentring of the human being as a means of revitalising (American) democracy on a radicalised, postmodern basis, moving away from a conception of democracy too stuck, in their minds, in a religious and naturalistic vision of man now considered obsolete.⁴ Much of this literature has been articulated through the theme of 'agonistic' democracy, and finds as its springboard Nietzsche's writings on the *agon* in his early unpublished essay 'Homer's Contest' (1872, KSA 1 786).⁵ In this account, Nietzsche is often paired with Weber, Schmitt and Arendt amongst others – the latter offered as the whiggish democratic

³ See William Connolly 'Nietzsche, Democracy, Time', p. 118 and David Owen, 'Nietzsche, Ethical Agency and the Problem of Democracy', p. 159 in a recent collection *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought* (Berlin, de Gruyter, 2008), edited by Herman Siemens and Vasti Roodt. See also Alan Schrift, 'Nietzsche's Contest: Nietzsche and the Culture Wars', in Alan Schrift (ed), *Why Nietzsche Still? Reflections on Drama, Culture, and Politics*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2000, pp. 195-197 and Paul Patton 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and Justice' in Keith Ansell-Pearson ed., *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 16.

⁴ See variously Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993; William Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991; Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1991; Lawrence Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy: An Experiment in Postmodern Politics*, Chicago, Open Court, 1995; Alan Schrift ed., *Why Nietzsche Still? Reflections on Drama, Culture, and Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000; and David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity*, London, Sage, 1995.

⁵ Owen and Siemens have argued that the agonistic theme is pervasive in Nietzsche's later work. See David Owen, 'Nietzsche's Freedom; The Art of Agonic Perfectionism' in Keith Ansell-Pearson ed., *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 71.

end-point of a story to which the others often do not seem to immediately fit.⁶ For this group, many different ways in which Nietzsche's thinking could be made congenial to democracy have been suggested, including Connolly's idea of 'agonistic respect', Owen's concept of 'agonistic deliberation', with a view to 'ennobling democracy', Hatab's 'adversarial system', or even Arendt's 'robust public sphere', which has also been linked to Nietzsche's idea of the *agon*.⁷

Against this view other authors, such as Bruce Detwiler, Peter Berkowitz, Peter Bergmann, Fredrick Appel and Don Dombowsky have emphasised Nietzsche's aristocratic leanings.⁸ It is important to note here that as most – I think Hatab is alone in claiming that Nietzsche *should* have been a democrat – agree on the fundamentally aristocratic, that is to say hierarchical or slave-based, nature of Nietzsche's political thought, the question was always going to be whether Nietzsche's political thinking *could* be used for democratic purposes, or at least in what manner.⁹ Rejecting the former group's approach, this latter group have been more interested in portraying Nietzsche as the arch anti-democrat of our times, whose sole role is to serve as the main argumentative opponent against which budding democratic theorists need confront their ideas. The tell-tale sign of this approach is in the presentation of Nietzsche as an Emersonian 'provocateur', or again the attempt to link him to more liberal thinkers such as J. S. Mill and sometimes Tocqueville (in France Nietzsche is often depicted as '*un Tocquevillien enragé*').¹⁰ The aim here is to isolate Nietzsche's critique of democracy from his other more positive pronouncements about what

⁶ See Tracy Strong, *Politics Without Vision: Thinking without a Bannister in the Twentieth Century*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012, for an example of this view.

⁷ See articles from the named authors in Herman Siemens and Vasti Roodt eds., *Nietzsche, Power and Politics*. For a critique the *agonistic* interpretation of Nietzsche, see other work.

⁸ Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990; Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1995; Peter Bergmann, *Nietzsche 'the last Antipolitical German'*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987; Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche contra Democracy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1999; and Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche's Machiavellian Politics*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

⁹ Here I follow Tracy Strong, 'In Defense of Rhetoric: Or How Hard It Is to Take a Writer Seriously: The Case of Nietzsche' in *Political Theory* 41, 4, 2013, pp. 507-532. Strong argues that Nietzsche's use of rhetoric gives his readers the impression that he is writing *for them*, which can help explain why he appears to be appropriated by so many diverging causes. Strong's point is that a close reading of Nietzsche's texts forces us to develop a self-critique of ourselves, which I will return to in conclusion.

¹⁰ This is very prominent in Appel, *Nietzsche contra Democracy*, p. 8; Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, p. 8; Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, p. 221; more recently Owen 'Nietzsche's Freedom', p. 80; and Keith Ansell-Pearson also approaches Nietzsche in this way (see epigram from Emerson in *Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also Alan Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis De Tocqueville*, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2001.

should be done about democracy – pronouncements that will be the subject of this paper. In this account Nietzsche’s critique of democracy as ‘herd morality’ is equated to Mill or Tocqueville’s ‘tyranny of the majority’.

Both schools of interpretations are thus guilty of wanting to ‘domesticate’ Nietzsche.¹¹ The ‘agonists’, by simply picking and choosing elements of Nietzsche’s thought that fit their project without seriously engaging with his fundamentally aristocratic thinking, have transformed Nietzsche into an unlikely cheerleader to their cause.¹² On the other hand the ‘anti-democrats’, by corralling Nietzsche’s critique of democracy from his broader vision, have made Nietzsche ‘safe for liberal-democracy’ by lining him up with less threatening liberal critiques of democracy such as Mill and Tocqueville who have already been tamed by contemporary democratic theory. By this is meant that whilst Mill and Tocqueville are thought to have offered a more ‘internal’ critique of democracy which aimed at ameliorating democratic politics within its own structure, Nietzsche might best be understood as offering an ‘external’ critique of democracy which had no particular truck in the preservation of democracy at all. Indeed, if in Nietzsche’s description of the irresistible democratisation of Europe in *The Wanderer and his Shadow* above we hear an echo of Tocqueville’s ‘providential fact’ of democracy, the latter’s aim was to reconcile what he took to be the virtues of the aristocratic system within a democratic context, whereas for Nietzsche the relation the two entertain with one another was thought of in a much more external manner. So Nietzsche must not solely be understood as a critique of democracy, as this line of interpretation suggests, but his theories of the future development of democracy must also be taken seriously.

In many ways this debate, therefore, represents two sides of the same coin. Both groups of thinkers take democracy as we now understand it as their starting point and then try to figure out what Nietzsche has to say to it, either positively in that Nietzsche offers stimulating resources with which to think through a refounding of democratic legitimacy, or negatively, as someone who offers the sharpest critique of democracy democratic theorists must endeavour to refute. The aim of this article is to move away from this dichotomy not with the goal of refuting it, but instead of

¹¹ See Ruth Abbey and Fredrick Appel, ‘Domesticating Nietzsche: A Response to Mark Warren’, *Political Theory*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Feb., 1999), pp. 121-125.

¹² Quentin Skinner nicely calls this ‘playing tricks on the dead’ (‘Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas’, in *Visions of Politics*, Vol 1, Regarding Method, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 65).

examining what uses can be made of Nietzsche for contemporary democratic theory, it wishes to ask first and foremost what Nietzsche himself understood by democracy *during his time*, and from that point trying to think about how his perspective can help us better conceptualise our understanding of democracy today. I thus posit two moments of interpretative work – first historical then contemporary – instead of immediately asking for Nietzsche’s contemporary relevance. This cuts to the heart of the methodological disagreement I have with much of the secondary literature on Nietzsche in general, and with this debate in particular: that instead of coming to Nietzsche with predetermined categories to commit an anachronism, we must *start* with the historical Nietzsche, to see how he thought about the topic at hand and what he had to say about it, before drawing conclusions (if any), about how it relates to our own world, over a century later.¹³

My goal is twofold: on the one hand to show that a more detailed engagement with Nietzsche’s writings on democracy can allow us to overcome the opposition between the so-called ‘gentle’ (proto-democratic) and ‘bloody’ (the politics of domination) Nietzsche,¹⁴ so as to better see the role both democracy and aristocracy play in his vision of the European future. To do so, this chapter will pay particular attention to the political, intellectual and cultural contexts within which Nietzsche’s thought evolved, namely Bismarck’s relationship to the new German *Reichstag*, the philological discovery of an original Aryan race, and Nietzsche’s encounter with Gobineau’s racist thought through his frequentation of the Wagner circle. It will reveal Nietzsche to be a particular astute guide to understanding the politics of his time. On the other I wish to argue that what should be Nietzsche’s most lasting contribution to democratic thinking is not to be found in the different ways he may or may not be used to buttress certain contemporary ideological positions, but rather to illustrate how his notions of ‘herd morality’, ‘misarchism’ and the genealogical method, alongside his critique of majoritarianism, provides us with the conceptual tools to better understand the political world we inhabit today. I do not mean to suggest that mining Nietzsche for thinking about contemporary democratic politics might not yield stimulating results, quite the contrary, or indeed that the hierarchical nature of Nietzsche’s thought is not something that needs to be re-emphasised,

¹³ I should say that in this I insert myself more in the line of Peter Bergmann’s work (*Nietzsche ‘the last Antipolitical German’*), which is very sensitive, and enlightening, of Nietzsche’s historical context.

¹⁴ See Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, p. 224. See also Crane Brinton, *Nietzsche*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1941, for the original discussion set in these terms.

something I wish to do too – mine is not, as such, a purely critical enterprise – but I do mean to suggest that the richest legacy Nietzsche provides us with in thinking about democracy is precisely those intellectual tools he fashioned for himself to understand democracy as he experienced it; tools which are as ever needful today.

I: Democracy in the *Kaiserreich*

Nietzsche's political coming-of-age coincided with the birth of the German Empire, the *Kaiserreich*. His productive life spanned the gradual democratisation of Germany, in which he retained a close, if critical, interest in. Notwithstanding his 'untimely' pose, Nietzsche kept very much abreast of politics, admitting in his older age that he was an avid reader of the *Journal de débats*, which reported on French parliamentary politics, along with the *Journal de Goncourt* and the *Revue des deux Mondes*.¹⁵ Indeed, for three years Nietzsche would have participated directly in a democratic election: in 1867 the first free elections were organised in Northern Germany, but the age threshold had been set at 25; Nietzsche was then 22. However there is every reason to believe that if he could have he would have voted, and he followed the elections closely with his friends.¹⁶

The next general election was held after unification, on the 3 March 1871, but by that time Nietzsche was already in Basel and had renounced German citizenship. There he became acquainted with Swiss democracy, which, whilst he commended it for its tolerance,¹⁷ he was ultimately very critical of.¹⁸ Jacob Burckhardt had entered his intellectual orbit by this time too, and Burckhardt, who had experienced first-hand revolutionary movements, served as a very reactionary influence on Nietzsche's view of democracy. In fact, in September 1869, four months after Nietzsche had given his

¹⁵ See letters to Bourdeau (17 December 1888) and Koeselitz (30 December 1888) KSB 8.

¹⁶ Thomas Brobjer, 'Critical Aspects of Nietzsche's Relation to Politics and Democracy' in Herman Siemens and Vasti Rood eds, *Nietzsche, Power and Politics*, pp. 214-15. See also more generally Bergmann, *Nietzsche 'the last Antipolitical German'*.

¹⁷ Letter to Rohde, 20-21 November 1872, KSB 4.

¹⁸ 'One can be cured of republicanism here' (letter to Ritschl, 10 May 1869, KSB 7).

inaugural lecture, the First International held its Fourth Congress in Basel. One of its attendants was Mikhail Bakunin.¹⁹

The view that Nietzsche had no experience of democracy, and that if he had had, he would have been much more sympathetic to it, must thus be accepted with considerable reserve.²⁰ It is certainly the case that nineteenth century German democracy looked very different to democracy as we know it today, but returned to its historical context, the German suffrage was actually one of the most extensive of its time: Margaret Anderson, a leading scholar of this period, describes Germany during this epoch as a ‘suffrage regime’.²¹ So Nietzsche did have an experience of certain democratic practices – and indeed perhaps one of the fullest one could have had at the time – however that experience is somewhat removed from what we would know today. But being present ‘at the birth’ of the rise of democracy in Germany, Nietzsche is a privileged witness to the general ‘transition to democracy’ which was taking place in Europe in the latter part of the nineteenth century. As such his commentary is especially valuable, as he was alive to the historical context of such a development. Moreover, the world he inhabited contained a much larger diversity of political systems, allowing him to compare and contrast lived experiences – we can think of his travels to Switzerland, Italy and France. Finally, he did not suffer from ‘hindsight bias’, in the sense that there was no pre-determined path to democracy, meaning that his political horizon remained clear.

Nietzsche appears to have an acute grasp of what democracy in his time amounted to (or not). In *The Wanderer and his Shadow* 293 – to return to our opening aphorism and the period we identified as Nietzsche’s first sustained engagement with the topic – Nietzsche concludes the passage in question with the line: ‘that which now calls itself democracy differs from the older forms of government solely in that it drives with *new horses*: the streets are still the same old streets, and the wheels likewise the same old wheels’. The implication is that whilst there is a new political institution – the *Reichstag* (the ‘new horses’) – politics has changed little in the new *Reich*: Bismarck and the Junkers still rule (‘same old wheels’ of power) behind the parliamentary façade, and continue to implement their nationalist *realpolitik* (‘same

¹⁹ Martin Ruehl, ‘*Politeia* 1871: Young Nietzsche on the Greek State’ in Paul Bishop ed, *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, Camden House, Rochester, 2004, pp. 79-97.

²⁰ See Brobjer, ‘Critical Aspects’ and more broadly Hatab, *A Nietzschean Defense of Democracy*.

²¹ Margaret Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 13.

old [policy] streets'). 'Have things really got less perilous because the wellbeing of nations now ride in *this* vehicle?', Nietzsche rhetorically asks, questioning the purported superiority and pacific nature of the new regime.²²

Moreover, Nietzsche was able to develop criticisms of democracy in his time which were to become staple critiques of modern democratic regimes. He was, for one, quite alive to the dangers of majoritarian rule. In 'The right of universal suffrage' he explains that 'a law that decrees that the majority shall have the decisive voice in determining the wellbeing of all cannot be erected upon a foundation which is first provided by that law itself' (WS 276, KSA 2 673). To secure its foundation it requires in the first place the unanimous consent of all: 'universal suffrage may not be an expression of the will merely of the majority, the whole country must desire it'. This it fails to achieve: 'as hardly two-thirds of those entitled to vote, perhaps indeed not even a majority of them, come to the ballot-box, this is a vote *against* the entire suffrage-system'. Democracy never founds itself, and continual non-participation implies a rejection of the regime as a whole: '*non-participation* in an election constitutes precisely such an objection and thus brings about the downfall of the entire voting-system'. As a significant minority²³ does not participate in voting then the system never succeeds in marshalling the foundation it needs, thereby simply becoming the un-assented, and undemocratic, rule of a majority.

Earlier in 'Permission to speak!' of *Human, all too human* (1878), Nietzsche had argued for minorities' right of secession. Accommodating himself – continuing in the 'realist' mode of his middle-period – to democracy as one 'accommodates oneself when an earthquake has displaced the former boundaries and contours of the ground and altered the value of one's property', Nietzsche accepts that if the majority want to rule themselves with their 'five or six ideas' through 'self-determination', then so be it; but on the same account those few who do not want 'all of politics' to be understood in this way should be able to 'step a little aside' (HH 438, KSA 2 286). Taken together with his exposure of democracy's failing to ground itself through the

²² We might note that the extension of the suffrage in Germany was Bismarck's way of extending his control and power: during the Schleswig-Holstein crisis he threatened the Austrians with being forced to extend the suffrage if they did not give in, and after they did, nonetheless extended the suffrage. I thank Tracy Strong for this observation.

²³ Whilst he toys with the idea of the "absolute veto" of the individual, Nietzsche is not facetious, and so as to not 'trivialise' the problem, concludes 'the veto of a few thousand hangs over this system as a requirement of justice'. This takes on its full importance when we consider that Nietzsche sees the Renaissance, a movement he would like to rekindle, as being 'raised on the shoulders of just a band of a hundred men' (HL 2, 10, KSA 1 264).

consent of all, Nietzsche here pinpoints one of the major criticisms of the ideal of popular sovereignty – its application to minorities, who are either subsumed within a larger majority that may deny their interests and values (as above), or else must be allowed, on the same basis of self-determination, to constitute smaller sovereign communities of their own.²⁴

II: Democracy and aristocracy

In *The Wanderer and his Shadow* 293, to return to the aphorism with which we opened, Nietzsche explains – and alarmingly so for those who want to see in him a positive disposition towards democracy – that the logic of democratic independence dictates that ‘it needs to deprive of the right to vote both those who possess no property and the genuinely rich...since they continually call its task into question’. Congruently, ‘it must prevent everything that seems to have for its objective the organisation of parties. For the three great enemies of independence in the above-named threefold sense are the indigent, the rich and the parties’. The poor are dependent upon others, and therefore likely to be swayed; the rich are simply too powerful; and political parties stifle independent thought in the name of the party line. Whilst Nietzsche qualifies such statements with the claim that he is speaking of democracy as ‘something yet to come’ – which might play into the hands of the postmodern democratic agenda – this is a rather inauspicious start for a modern understanding of democracy premised upon universal political equality and mediated through political parties.

What the authors who interest themselves in this passage are right to highlight is that this period represents one of Nietzsche’s first attempt to theoretically grapple with the rising tide of democracy in Europe. Yet it is not clear that this analysis issues in a defence of democracy instead of its critique. Indeed, in the aphorism with which he opens his reflexions on democracy in *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, ‘The age of cyclopean building’, Nietzsche ultimately conceives of it as a means to a new form of

²⁴ Whilst I think Nietzsche has more in mind his ‘cultural few’ than anyone else in particular, we might remind ourselves here of the context of the *Kulturkampf* against the German Catholics, whom, now cut off from Austria, had become a permanent minority in the new *Reich*, which gives a certain texture to his thoughts.

aristocracy: ‘the democratisation of Europe is a link in the chain of those tremendous *prophylactic measures*[...]only now is it the age of cyclopean building!’ (WS 275, KSA 2 671). Continuing to adopt his more neutral standpoint, Nietzsche in this passage also shows his realism, explaining that ‘the democratisation of Europe is irresistible: for whoever tries to halt it has to employ in that endeavour precisely the means which the democratic idea first placed in everyone’s hands’. The ‘means’ in question here are those Nietzsche associated with the aims of democracy he identified in the section above, namely those of independence. In Nietzsche’s eyes, the logic of democracy in creating and guaranteeing as much independence as possible is in the end to provide – involuntarily so – the foundations upon which a new aristocracy will come about. Moreover, the only way to oppose this democratisation is to create barriers to remain independent from it – barriers which democracy is precisely creating in the first place – hence speeding up the process even more.

Nietzsche expresses anxiety about those who engage in this democratic work of building protective stone dams and walls: they appear ‘a little purblind and stupid’, there is something ‘desolate and monotonous in their faces, and grey dust seems to have got even into their brain’. But posterity will judge them kindly, as it is thanks to their efforts in building the ‘stone dams’ and ‘protective walls’ that guarantee independence that the ‘orchards of culture’ will no longer be destroyed overnight by the ‘wild senseless mountain torrents’ of ‘barbarians’ and ‘plagues’. It is they who lay the foundations for the new ‘highest artist in horticulture, who can only apply himself to his real task when the other is fully accomplished!’. Because of the time that lies between ‘means and end’, those who build the walls and trellises think they themselves are the ends, but that is because ‘no one yet sees the gardener or the fruit-trees *for whose sake* the fence exists’.

The vision of democracy Nietzsche provides in *The Wanderer and his Shadow* – one in which democracy provides the building blocks for the appearance of a new aristocracy, the ‘highest artist in horticulture’, of the future – is strikingly similar to the one found in *Beyond Good and Evil* 242 (KSA 5 182), where Nietzsche explains that what he is ‘trying to say is: the democratisation of Europe is at the same time an involuntary exercise in the breeding of *tyrants* – understanding that word in every sense, including the most spiritual’. Whilst the logic of these passages is different – although complementary, as I will argue – the conclusion that Nietzsche draws of his study of democracy in both these periods is remarkably congruent: that it is a

stepping-stone towards a new form of aristocracy. This puts pressure on the idea of the exceptional nature of Nietzsche's middle period, which would render it more pliable to a positive democratic reading, and, consequently, on the notion that there are no strong continuities in Nietzsche's political reflexion, in this instance when it comes to democracy.

III: Misarchism, Christianity and herd morality

Beyond Good and Evil (1886), along with its 'annexe' *The Genealogy of Morality* (1887) and book V of *The Gay Science* (1887), also penned around this time, represents Nietzsche's second major moment of grappling with democracy after *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, with which it entertains strong links as we saw above. During this period Nietzsche makes three of his most famous claims about democracy: that the 'democratic movement is the heir to Christianity', which is itself linked to 'herd morality' (BGE 202, KSA 5 124); that it is a form of 'misarchism', the democratic mind-set that is opposed to all forms of authority (GM II 12, KSA 5 315); and that it represents a form of political and physiological degeneration (BGE 203, KSA 5 126). To these we now turn.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche declares: '*morality in Europe these days is herd morality*'. Later in the text Nietzsche will explain that there are two types of morality, a 'master' and a 'slave' morality, corresponding to a view of the world as either differentiated by 'good and bad' or 'good and evil' respectively, which he will go on to explore in a more systematic manner in the first essay of the *Genealogy*. There he explains that it is slave morality, through a 'Revaluation of all Values', which has come to rule over Europe. It is Christianity that brings herd morality into politics: 'this morality is increasingly apparent in even political and social institutions: the *democratic* movement is the heir to Christianity' (BGE 202, KSA 5 124).

The problem is not herd morality as such, but its belief that it is the *only* morality possible, and that this morality should be imposed on everyone else. However herd morality 'stubbornly and ruthlessly declares "I am morality itself and

nothing else is moral!”²⁵ In the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche describes dogmatism as one of the ‘worst, most prolonged, and most dangerous of errors’ that philosophy has ever made (BGE P, KSA 5 1). This is evident in herd’s morality’s dogmatic claim that it is the only morality possible, and thus its view should be imposed upon the rest of the population. More specifically, Nietzsche associates this dogmatism with Plato’s ‘the Good in itself’, but unlike modern herd morality, Plato only believed these pure forms were accessible to an initiated few. What makes modern Europeans believe they now know the answer to Socrates’ question of what ‘good and evil’ is, is Christianity (BGE 202, KSA 5 124), which democratises Plato’s teaching: ‘Christianity is Platonism for the “people” (BGE P, KSA 5 1).

Against this, Nietzsche writes that ‘as we understand things’, herd morality is ‘only one type of human morality beside which, before which, and after which many other (and especially *higher*) moralities are or should be possible’ (BGE 202, KSA 5 124). But herd morality fights ‘tooth and nail’ against such a ‘possibility’. Indeed, already in *Human, all too human* Nietzsche had explained that he had nothing to object to those of the herd, with their ‘five or six ideas’, who want to ‘forge for themselves their own fortunes and misfortunes’, although he warns they should be prepared to bear the ‘calamitous consequences of their own narrow-mindedness’ (HH 438, KSA 2 286). The problem is that, believing they and only they are and can be right, they desire to impose their ideas about ruling on everyone else, whereas Nietzsche demands that those who do not share these ideals be allowed to ‘step a little aside’.²⁶ So Nietzsche wants a space within which those who desire to pursue their cultural calling can do so according to the morality that befits such a situation, which herd morality, in claiming it is the only type or morality possible, violently opposes.²⁷

In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche coins the term ‘misarchism’ to describe democracy, to ‘coin a bard word for a bad thing’, as he puts it (GM II 12, KSA 5 315). Misarchism is the ‘democratic idiosyncrasy of being against everything that dominates and wants to dominate’.²⁸ The democratic mind-set is thus against all

²⁵ On herd morality’s universalising claims, see further: Raymond Geuss, ‘Nietzsche and Morality’ in *Morality, Culture and History: Essays on German Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 167-197

²⁶ See previous section for minorities right of secession.

²⁷ Brian Leiter, in his *Nietzsche on Morality*, explores this idea well.

²⁸ We can discern the germs of this thought already in GSt p. 171 (KSA 1 786), where Nietzsche explains that the aim of the ‘liberal-optimistic world view’, which has its roots in in French Revolution,

types of authority. This relates back to how herd morality came to power in the first place – the ‘slave revolt in morality’ (GM II 7, KSA 5 305) – which came through opposing the institutions of master morality. Indeed, ‘slave morality from the start says No to what is “outside”, “other”, “a non-self”’ (GM I 10, KSA 5 271).

There is a strong link here to the question of independence that Nietzsche identified as one of the hallmarks of democracy in *Human, all too human*, which aimed to promote ‘independence of opinion, mode of life and employment’. In terms of ‘misarchism’, it is the democratic mind-set of refusing any type of intellectual authority that is most prominent, and consequently a desire to be able to form one’s own opinion. But the element of independence of mode of life and employment also comes to the fore. In the past men felt predestined to their line of work, and this led to the establishment of the ‘broad-based social pyramids’ that are medieval ‘estates, guilds and inherited trade privileges’. In democratic societies, however, where people have unlearned this faith, ‘the individual is convinced he can do just about anything *and is up to playing any role*’ (GS 356, KSA 3 595). This means that anyone feels they can exercise certain professions – namely those relating to culture and education – that were not open to them before, and to which Nietzsche does not believe they are up to.²⁹ ‘Upon deeper consideration’, Nietzsche concludes, ‘the role has actually *become* character; and artifice, nature’: men actually end up becoming the role they gave themselves.

The predominance of the actor comes at the price of the ‘great “architects”’, those who have the ‘strength to build’, the ‘courage to make far-reaching plans’, who dare to undertake works that would require ‘millennia to complete’ (GS 356, KSA 3 595). Modern man’s ever-shifting nature means that

what is dying out is that fundamental faith on the basis of which someone could calculate, promise, anticipate the future in a plan on that grand scale...the basic faith that man has worth and sense only insofar as he is a *stone in a great edifice*; to this end he must be *firm* above all, a ‘stone’...above all not an actor!

is to ‘dissolve the monarchical instincts of the people’ through the spread of universal suffrage. On Nietzsche’s hierarchical understanding of Greek politics, see my forthcoming article ‘Nietzsche theorist of the state?’ in *History of Political Thought*.

²⁹ See TI Germans 5 (KSA 6 107): “‘Higher education’ and *horde* – that are in contradiction from the outset. Any higher education is only for the exception: you have to be privileged to have the right to such a high privilege’.

‘From now on will never again be built, *can* never again be built’, Nietzsche concludes, ‘is – a society in the old sense of the term’. ‘To build that, everything is lacking, mainly the material’.

This passage as a whole has given rise to much debate. On the one hand are those who submit this section as an example of how Nietzsche does not have a positive political vision (no possibility of a new society being built), and on the other those who offer Nietzsche’s reflexions on the democratic figure of the actor as an example of his pro-democratic views.³⁰ Both are, to my mind, mistaken. In terms of this section, what is most important to emphasise is how it is a society in the ‘old sense’ of the word – i.e. a medieval guild one – which can no longer be built. But, *pace* those who do not see a positive political programme in Nietzsche, the democratisation of Europe offers the opportunity of building a society in a ‘new sense’ of the word, and this society, *contra* those who want to construe Nietzsche as a proto-democrat, will not be egalitarian, as we will now see.

IV: Degeneration and the ‘Good European’

A strong theme within Nietzsche’s discussion of democracy is its association with physical degeneration.³¹ In *Beyond Good and Evil* 203, Nietzsche explains that for him the ‘democratic movement is not merely an abased form of political organisation, but rather an abased (more specifically diminished) form of humanity, a mediocritisation and depreciation of humanity in value’. Democracy finds its social and anthropological origin in the ‘democratic mixing of classes and races’ (BGE 224, KSA 5 160), the ‘mixing of blood between masters and slaves’ (BGE 261, KSA 5 212). This mixing of ‘master’ and ‘slave’ morality occurs through intermarriage between different castes, and the resulting conflict between the two value systems – without either getting the upper hand – that is incarnated in their offspring results in a general indecision and slowness in the population at large:

The different standards and values, as it were, get passed down through the bloodline to the next generation where everything is in a state of restlessness,

³⁰ See Owen, ‘Nietzsche, Ethical Agency and the Problem of Democracy’ and William Connolly, ‘Debate: Reworking the Democratic Imagination’ in *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol 5 (2), 1997, p. 201.

³¹ Not be confused with its cultural counterpart, decadence.

disorder, doubt, experimentation. The best forces have inhibitory effects, the virtues themselves do not let each other strengthen and grow, both body and soul lack a centre of balance, a centre of gravity and the assurance of a pendulum (BGE 208, KSA 5 137).

‘What is most profoundly sick and degenerate about such hybrids is the will’, Nietzsche continues, ‘they no longer have any sense of independence in decision-making, or the bold feeling of pleasure in willing’.³² Democracy is the political manifestation of this enfeeblement.

This ethnographic study of democracy’s origins takes a seemingly unsavoury turn in *The Genealogy of Morality*, when Nietzsche equates master morality with an ‘Aryan conquering race’ and slave morality with the ‘dark-skinned and especially the dark-haired man’ (GM I 5, KSA 5 264). Whilst in *Beyond* Nietzsche saw democracy as emanating from an unresolved and detrimental conflict between master and slave morality, in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche appears to suggest it is not solely the moral but also the physiological victory of the slaves over the masters. There he asks:

to all intents and purposes the subject race has ended up by regaining the upper hand in skin colour, shortness of forehead and perhaps even in intellectual and social instincts: who can give any guarantee that modern democracy...[is] not in essence a huge *throw-back* – and that the conquering *master race*, that of the Aryans, is not physiologically being defeated as well? (ibid).

If from our perspective this makes for uncomfortable reading, during Nietzsche’s own time this language was common currency, and the theories he expresses acceptable scientific ones. Andreas Retzius had classified Europeans into two categories: ‘dolichocephalic’, i.e. ‘long-headed’ Nordic Europeans who were meant to be blond and blue-eyed; and ‘brachycephalic’, i.e. ‘round-headed’ Mediterraneans whom Nietzsche is referring to here.³³ Antiquarians had just discovered that Sanskrit was related to all European languages, and this gave rise to the myth of an original *Ur-Volk*, whom Schlegel christened the Aryans, who had emigrated from India and conquered Europe in prehistoric times³⁴ – hence Nietzsche’s view of the Aryan conquering master race. It was philologists who had

³² For Paul Bourget and Charles Féré’s influence on Nietzsche idea of the degeneration of the will see Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 126.

³³ J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000, p. 105.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 106.

lead the way in the discovery of the Indo-European link, and this explains why Nietzsche, himself trained as a philologist, takes an etymological perspective when it comes to explaining the origins of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in the *Genealogy* (GM I 4, KSA 5 262), and why he deduces that the Celts were blond: ‘the word *fin* (for example, in the name *Fin-Gal*), the term designating nobility and finally the good, noble and pure, originally referred to the blond-headed man’ (GM I 5, KSA 5 264).

Nietzsche thus accepts this theory of the Aryan race as historical fact and builds his own theory of master and slave morality on it. Indeed, Nietzsche appears to be more interested in delineating the different moralities than the exact physical attributes these moralities manifest themselves through: he is more interested in *values* than he is in *race*. He lists ‘Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, Homeric heroes, Scandinavian Vikings’ as examples of these ‘blond beasts of prey’ (GM I 11, KSA 5 274), of which one at minimum – depending on where one places the Arabs (Berbers?) – could never have been fair-headed. In this sense then the ‘blond beast’ is a metaphor for a lion, the noble king of the jungle, and the Aryan and Celtic races just so happen to be the historical conquering races of Europe, but may take on other non-Aryan attributes in other circumstances (Arabian, Japanese). There is therefore both a literal and figurative aspect to Nietzsche’s account of the blond beasts of prey: whilst historically the European conquerors were blond (literal), Nietzsche then uses this theory and applies it to the rest of the world (figurative).³⁵

One of the key figures in the development of these ideas is the self-styled Count Arthur de Gobineau, who was an intellectual companion to Wagner when Nietzsche frequented his circle in the late 1860’s and early 1870’s.³⁶ In the event Gobineau’s successor, the Englishman Houston Stewart Chamberlain, became Wagner’s son-in-law, and his *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1899, added the anti-Semitic dimension to Gobineau’s thought which had not been particularly prevalent in the latter’s. Gobineau’s theory, as expressed in *On the*

³⁵ Both Gregory Moore and Nicholas Martin emphasise the figurative aspect of the blond beasts, that it mainly refers to being ‘noble’. I agree that it is the value in question which is key, but here want to underline that this value first finds its roots, at least in the European setting, in a direct physical appearance. See Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor*, p. 157 and Nicholas Martin, ‘Breeding Greeks: Nietzsche, Gobineau and Classical Theories of Race’ in Paul Bishop (ed.), *Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition*, Rochester, Camden House, 2004, p. 43.

³⁶ The extent of Gobineau’s influence on Nietzsche is subject to debate, but it certainly seems to be the case that Nietzsche would have encountered his thought through his frequentation of the Wagner circle, for which there was some enthusiasm. See Martin, ‘Breeding Greeks’, p. 42 and Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor*, p. 124.

Inequality of the Human Races, published between 1853-1855, and only translated in German a decade later, attributed to the French aristocracy a purer German – that is to say Frankish and ultimately Aryan – stock.³⁷ The view at the time was that the purer the line the closer one was to the original Aryan conquering races, and all the benefits that went with that: the Teutons, Goths and Celts were thought to be the closest. But the decline and elimination of the French aristocracy, so Gobineau thought, which was brought about through interbreeding, led to a generally mongrelised and plebeian levelling, of which democracy was the political expression. For Gobineau racial purity was the key to all civilisation and human history, leaving him desperately pessimistic about the future prospects of France and Europe.³⁸

Many of Gobineau's theories find an echo in Nietzsche's view of democracy: that it is the political manifestation of a general decline in human physiology, brought about through the interbreeding of different classes. But already Nietzsche distinguishes himself by placing the emphasis on morality, whilst Gobineau underlined race. Indeed, if Nietzsche often seems to conceive of the world in racialised terms, this is habitually in a rather vague or generic manner, instead of the more precise meaning it might have today, or the word is used as a stand-in for other terms: Nietzsche speaks of the 'French' or 'English' race (instead of nation/people), or again of a 'master' or 'slave' race (instead of class/caste).³⁹ It is part of the language people used at the time to express themselves: what is important to see is what use Nietzsche himself made of it. In the end, Nietzsche would not fall for Gobineau's ultimately darkly pessimistic view of where this was all leading us. Instead, he would draw the exact opposite, and as optimistic as Gobineau's was pessimistic, conclusion: that the levelling of the modern European would lead to a new, interracial, European aristocracy.

Previously in *The Wanderer and his Shadow* we saw how for Nietzsche the independence-inducing institutions of democracy laid the foundation upon which a

³⁷ This idea of the German roots of the French aristocracy can be traced back to Montesquieu, with his idea in *The Spirit of the Laws* of liberty emerging from the 'German woods'.

³⁸ We can note that for Nietzsche, there are 'no pure races but only races that have become pure, even these being extremely rare... The Greeks offer us the model of a race and culture that has become pure: and hopefully we shall one day achieve a pure European race and culture' (D 272). For a commentary on this aphorism see Martin, 'Breeding Greeks', p. 40. See also John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 199.

³⁹ See Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor*, p. 125 on how Nietzsche uses *Rasse* ('race') and *Stand* ('estate, class, caste') interchangeably, underlining the more ambiguous use of the term. Richardson (*Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, p. 199) also writes that when Nietzsche says race, he means a large human group.

new aristocracy could come into being. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he adds the more physiological aspect to this development:

behind all the moral and political foregrounds that are indicated by formulas like [Europe's *democratic* movement], an immense *physiological* process is taking place and constantly gaining ground – the process of increasing similarity between Europeans, their growing detachment from the conditions under which climate or class-bound races originate, their increasing independence from that *determinate* milieu where for centuries the same demands would be inscribed on the soul and the body – and so the slow approach of an essentially supra-national and nomadic type of person who, physiologically speaking, is typified by a maximal degree of the art and force of adaptation (BGE 242, KSA 5 182).

What Nietzsche is talking about here is the '*European in becoming*', namely the 'Good Europeans' (BGE 241, KSA 5 180), who will arise through multinational unions and will become the new European nobility. Indeed Nietzsche, somewhat ironically given the uses he was subsequently put to, actively encourages the union of Jews and Junkers for the breeding of his new ruling caste, explaining that it would be extremely interesting to see whether the genius for money, patience and intellect (the latter especially missing in the Junkers), could be productively married to the 'hereditary art of commanding and obeying' (BGE 251, KSA 5 192).

We can add that there are institutional, economic and cultural facets to this European coming together. Already in the discussion of democracy in *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, and specifically the aphorism on 'The victory of democracy', Nietzsche describes there that once the people are able to gain power through 'great majorities in parliament', they will 'attack with progressive taxation the whole dominant system of capitalists, merchants and financiers, and will in fact create a middle class' (WS 292, KSA 2 683). So through universal suffrage and the *Reichstag* a middle class will be developed on the basis of redistributive taxation. 'The practical result of this increasing democratisation', Nietzsche continues, will be a 'European league of nations, in which each individual nation, delimited by the proper geographical frontiers, has the position of a canton with its separate rights'. Because of the democratic 'craze for novelty and experiment', echoing the discussion we had above, Nietzsche thinks that 'small account will be taken of the historical memories of previously existing nations', but that instead the 'correction of frontiers' will be carried out to serve the '*interest* of the great cantons and at the same time of the whole federation'. These corrections will be the task of future diplomats, who will not be

backed by armies but ‘motives and utilities’, of who will be students of ‘civilisation, agriculturists and commercial experts’.

Along with this institutional move towards unity, Nietzsche, in his notes at the time of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1885), sees an economic reason for this Europeanisation. There he explains that what he is concerned with, and what he sees preparing itself slowly and hesitatingly, is a ‘United Europe’:

the need of a new unity there comes a great explanatory economic fact: the small states of Europe, I refer to all our present kingdoms and ‘empires’, will in a short time become economically untenable, owing to the mad, uncontrolled struggle for the possession of local and international trade. (Money is even now compelling European nations to amalgamate into one power) (KSA 11 37[9]).

Finally, in the work of Napoleon, Goethe, Beethoven, Stendhal, Heinrich Heine, Schopenhauer and even Wagner, Nietzsche discerns in *Beyond* the preparation for a new cultural synthesis and the groundwork for the European of the future. ‘*Europe wishes to be one*’, he concludes (BGE 256, KSA 5 201).

These passages shed light on a section discussed above, namely that a general enfeeblement that manifests itself through democracy ensues from intermixing. Whilst it might be the case that such an intermixing results in a general enfeeblement of the population at large, those who are able to master their conflicting natures are able to transform themselves into something more: ‘then arise those marvellously incomprehensible and inexplicable beings, those enigmatic men, predestined for conquering and circumventing others’, of which Nietzsche gives Alcibiades, Caesar and those he considers to be the first Europeans, Friedrich II and Leonardo da Vinci, as examples (BGE 200, KSA 5 120). It is in this double-movement – towards enfeeblement and strength – which gives rise to two different types that we must understand how the new European master race is due to come about. As Nietzsche puts it:

future Europeans will be exceedingly garrulous, impotent and eminently employable workers who will feel the *need* for masters and commanders like they need their daily bread. The democratisation of Europe in effect amounts to the creation of a type prepared for *slavery* in the most subtle sense: the strong man will need to be stronger and richer than he has perhaps ever been before – thanks to the lack of prejudice in his schooling, to an enormous diversity in practice, art and masks. What I’m trying to say is: the democratisation of Europe is at the same time an involuntary exercise in the breeding of *tyrants* – understanding that in every sense of the word, including its most spiritual’ (BGE 242, KSA 5 182).

Conclusion

Bernard Crick has offered three ways of thinking about democracy: democracy as a ‘principle or doctrine of government’, democracy as a ‘set of institutional arrangements or constitutional devices’, and democracy as a ‘type of behaviour’, which he helpfully defines as ‘the antithesis of both deference and of unsociability’.⁴⁰ In sum: Nietzsche is opposed to democracy as a principle or doctrine of government, as he understands it as the coming to power of herd morality. But he is more ambiguous when it comes to democratic mores and behaviour: he is opposed to ‘misarchism’, the democratic mind-set of being against all forms of authority, and sees physiological degeneration behind the rising tide of democratisation, but he also perceives in this movement the germs of a new multiracial European nobility. Finally, Nietzsche views the institutional aspect of democracy in a generally positive light, as it mounts bulwarks to defend culture, and ultimately provides the foundations upon which this new aristocracy can come into being.

I have highlighted in this article the privileged position Nietzsche occupied as a commentator of the rise of democracy in Germany due to his historical location, and how he was quick to identify problems with democracy which would become staples of political theory in the subsequent century.⁴¹ Indeed, his analysis of democracy maps itself particularly well onto Margaret Anderson’s *Practicing Democracy*, one of the leading historical studies of the period. Anderson’s main thesis is that it is through the very *practice* of democracy that the people were gradually able to acquire more rights and liberties from what was originally intended simply as a ratification of the powers that be. The logic of party competition meant citizens were afforded more and more political rights – secret ballots, voting booths etc. – and this chimes well with Nietzsche’s view that democracy’s aim is to foster independence; independence of opinion, mode of life and employment. In fact, in his ‘The victory of democracy’

⁴⁰ Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 5.

⁴¹ To these latter we can add that Nietzsche saw the links between democracy and fragmentation (‘establish large bodies of *equal importance* with mutual safeguards’, GSt, p. 171, KSA 1 786); how democratic politics is extremely short-termist and unstable (the monkeys scrambling over a throne of mud in Z I Idol); and how in democracies politics becomes an increasingly disingenuous game (the ‘moral hypocrisy of the commanding class’, BGE 199, KSA 5 119).

aphorism of *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, Nietzsche explains that in their desire to combat socialism, the German political parties are forced to appeal more and more to the masses: ‘in the long run democracy alone gains the advantage, for *all* parties are now compelled to flatter the “people” and grant them facilities and liberties of all kinds, with the result that the people finally become omnipotent’ (WS 292, KSA 2 683). Part of the process of claiming these new rights was challenging established authority itself, and Anderson is alive to the fact that ‘it was the nature of the imperial franchise to turn every contest into a challenge to authority’.⁴² Or, in other words: misarchism.

When Nietzsche’s conceptualising of democracy as herd morality is paired with Plato’s view of democracy as mob rule in *The Republic*, we can see how Nietzsche offers a very interesting link between ancient and modern critiques of democracy. In this sense Nietzsche may indeed be one of the most acute commentators of democracy we have, although we cannot conceive of him simply as its opponent, as the anti-democratic reading of Nietzsche has tended to do, but need also investigate where he thought such a development would lead, as I have tried to do over the course of this paper. Aside from his discussion of degeneration – though as I have argued he ultimately transforms this into a question of morality, which is where his novelty lies – Nietzsche’s view of the increasing mixing of Europeans, aided and abated by cultural, intellectual, institutional and economic factors, leading to a unified Europe seems rather prescient in terms of the Europe we know today.

Nietzsche, therefore, on the one hand serves as a good guide to the democratisation of late nineteenth century Germany and Europe, aspects of which – political parties, secret voting – we would recognise as features of our own political system. On the other he remains one of the sharpest critics of the birth of democracy he experienced first-hand, due to his pinpointing of key criticisms – problems of majoritarianism and democratic legitimacy – which were to become staples of democratic debates in the subsequent century, alongside connecting with a long arc of anti-democratic thought stretching back to Plato. But his main contribution to democratic thought, I argue, is in the conceptual tools he affords us in trying to understand democracy through his notions of ‘herd morality’, ‘misarchism’ and the genealogical links it entertains with Christianity, which still provide us with powerful

⁴² Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*, p. 415.

prisms through which to analyse democracy today. For instance, the term ‘misarchism’, in revealing the anti-authority foundations of the democratic mind-set, might allow us to better understanding the continuing – and from this perspective irreversible – erosion of trust in public institutions. Such a mind-set is part-and-parcel of democracy, and to see this allows us to better understand what can and cannot be done about it.

Nietzsche is quite singular in the nineteenth century in denouncing democracy and Christianity as one – we can easily think of examples of thinkers rejecting one but not the other – in particular the absolutist claims both make. Whilst there do exist some studies of the relationship Christianity entertains with democracy, none, to my knowledge, have approached it from the genealogical perspective Nietzsche is advocating here, and such an approach would undoubtedly shed light on our contemporary political system.⁴³ Indeed, for non-Christians the strong link Nietzsche posits between democracy and Christianity might prove a little unsettling, or at least might force a rethink of the basis of their commitment to democracy. If God is dead, then the question is whether democracy is part of the ‘shadows of God’ Nietzsche decried (GS 125, KSA 3 180): that whilst we no longer believe in its religious underpinning, we still adhere to the same worldview. We are no longer Christians, but we still live according to its values. Can one be a democrat if one is no longer a Christian? Does the realisation of the Christian origins of democracy, if Nietzsche is right, compel a rethink of one’s commitment to democracy?⁴⁴

The force of Nietzsche’s analysis was to expose how such a worldview is ultimately grounded in some sort of herd-morality: that the secularised lives we live today have their roots not simply in Christianity, but in slave morality too. And herd-morality still captures something fundamental about how we do live our lives today: we no longer appeal to a divine transcendence to orient our lives, but, lacking another point of reference, we model ourselves on the behaviour of the people around us. What Nietzsche shows us is how that reflex was the foundation upon which Christianity took root in the first place, and how we have yet – against our best

⁴³ See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge [MA], Harvard University Press, 2007 and Emile Perreau-Saussine, *Catholicism and Democracy: An Essay in the History of Political Thought*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2012. With its idea of Christianity as the ‘religion of the end of religion’, the closest might be Marcel Gauchet’s *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997.

⁴⁴ In this I agree with Strong (‘In Defense of Rhetoric’, pp. 522-524) that reading Nietzsche forces us to formulate a self-critique of ourselves.

atheistic protestations – to overcome it, to found new values and live our lives beyond good and evil. Do we want our political system, and how we live our lives, to be rooted in herd-morality? These are some of the insights and challenges Nietzsche's critique of democracy offers us.