Rezension

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Parasites, Heroes, and Ordinary Souls: Nietzsche's Politics from the Nineteenth Century to Neoliberalism

1. Daniel Tutt, *How to Read Like a Parasite: Why the Left Got High on Nietzsche*. London: Repeater Books 2024, 356 pp., ISBN 978-1914420627.
2. Georg Brandes / Harald Høffding, *The Great Debate: Nietzsche, Culture, and the Scandinavian Welfare Society*. Ed. and trans. William Banks. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press 2024, 256 pp., ISBN 978-0299346102.

Abstract: Nietzsche's political reception appears at present to be undergoing a paradigm shift. Recent publications rightly call into question established readings which present Nietzsche as an apolitical, liberal, or leftist thinker, instead placing him on the rightward reaches of the political spectrum. Such reinterpretations often, as in the cases of Daniel Tutt and William Banks, stem from a Lukácsian perspective, which sees Nietzsche as both militantly opposed to socialism and implicitly affirmative of capitalism. Both authors under review suggest a particularly strong connection between Nietzsche and contemporary neoliberalism. I challenge this account, arguing that Nietzsche should be understood as an anti-capitalist thinker, a recognition which reaffirms rather than questioning his position on the nineteenth-century radical right. Yet we should also resist the temptation to group thinkers under overgeneralized labels. On further investigation, such banners as "aristocratic radicalism" are seen to blunt the specificities of individual theorists. Ultimately, if he and his politics are to be properly understood, Nietzsche should be read on his own terms, ensuring that our methodological choices or personal commitments do not distort his intentions.

Keywords: Capitalism, Socialism, Neoliberalism, Aristocratic radicalism, Liberalism

Introduction

In his afterword to a 1968 Suhrkamp edition of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Erkenntnistheoretische Schriften*, Jürgen Habermas reflected on the "eigentümliche Faszination" Nietzsche's philosophy had exerted on a range of right-wing intellectuals. From Oswald Spengler to Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger to Ernst Jünger, these "Revolutionäre von rechts" were entranced by Nietzsche's combination of vitalistic self-affirmation and cultural pessimism, with disastrous results. Yet all this, Habermas noted with relief, "liegt hinter uns und ist fast schon unverständlich geworden." Indeed, at least when it came to right-wing politics, he was prepared to admit that "Nietzsche hat

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nichts Ansteckendes mehr."[1] For a time, Habermas's diagnosis might have seemed justified. The story of how Nietzsche "came in from the cold" following World War II and was rehabilitated by (especially) liberal and leftist American and French philosophers is by now a familiar one.[2] There were, of course, dissenting voices. In his afterword, Habermas contrasted Walter Kaufmann's gentler yet highly influential *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950) with Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács's *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (1954), which sought to keep Nietzsche within the purgatory of "irrationalist," anti-democratic, and anti-socialist reactionary politics.[3]

Widely criticized at the time by readers across the political spectrum, Lukács's argument is nonetheless enjoying a revival of interest in the twenty-first century. As Philipp Felsch has noted, Nietzsche's reception appears headed for yet another paradigm shift, as "French left Nietzscheanism" relinquishes its interpretive hegemony.[4] One reason for this is the worldwide resurgence of the radical right in terms of both political success and intellectual influence – a faction which proudly counts Nietzsche amongst its most important lodestars.[5] Another is the growing perception, especially on the Marxist left, that "postmodern" politics of various forms, with which Nietzsche came to be loosely associated, have done little to tackle either this radical right-wing insurgency or the excesses of (neo)liberal capitalism, and may even have fueled them, whether directly or indirectly. If Nietzsche cannot be consigned to the past, he must be tackled head on, revealing his true face in the hope of blunting his influence. It is this which Daniel Tutt's *How to Read Like a Parasite: Why the Left Got High on Nietzsche* (2024, henceforth *Parasite*) takes as its mission. That this is not a new endeavor is made clear by *The Great Debate: Nietzsche, Culture, and the Scandinavian Welfare Society* (2024), a collection – edited and translated by William Banks – of the 1889/90 Danish debate over Nietzsche's philosophy between Georg Brandes and Harald Høffding. Both books represent important contributions to the literature on Nietzsche's philosophy and its reception as much as interventions in contemporary debates on politics, culture, and society in the twenty-first century.

1 Lukács Redux: Nietzsche, Class, and Capitalism

Just as Habermas spoke in terms of contagion, *Parasite* indicates that such metaphors have by no means outlived their usefulness. A professor at George Washington University, Tutt is also an active figure in the online left-wing media ecosystem, meaning that debates around his interpretation of Nietzsche have played out more on YouTube channels and podcasts than in seminar rooms. Repeater Books is, likewise, a non-academic publisher, and Tutt has noted that he tried his best to "make the book very accessible to non-academic readers," albeit whilst "keeping a foot within academic rigor."[6] This dual ambition is reflected in the blurbs with

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1 Jürgen Habermas, "Nachwort," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Erkenntnistheoretische Schriften*, ed. Jürgen Habermas, Frankfurt a.M. 1968, 237.

2 See Philipp Felsch, *Wie Nietzsche aus der Kälte kam: Geschichte einer Rettung*, Munich 2022, for a notable recent retelling.

3 Habermas, "Nachwort," 238.

4 Felsch, *Kälte*, 218–9.

5 See, e. g., Don Dombowsky, "Nietzsche's Dionysian Philosophy and the European New Right," *The European Legacy* 30/4 (2025), 428–45.

6 Daniel Tutt, "An Update On My Book" (2024): https://danieltutt.com/2024/05/10/update-on-book-new-interviews/.

which *Parasite* is adorned. On the front cover we find an endorsement by Slavoj Žižek, himself perhaps better known for public engagement than strictly academic service, but also, on the reverse, praise from Nietzsche specialist Don Dombowsky.[7] After all, the interpretive current Tutt is joining here – a leftist, usually Marxist, denunciation of Nietzsche as an arch-reactionary (if not proto-fascist), whose work has served to radicalize the capitalist bourgeoisie, suppress the proletarian masses, and undermine the emancipatory efforts of naïve readers – has always consisted of figures both within and without the university system. Early exponents included Kurt Eisner and Franz Mehring, both directly involved in revolutionary socialist politics.[8] More recently, the position has been represented by, amongst others and in varying terms, Geoff Waite, Malcolm Bull, Ishay Landa, Jan Rehmann, Matt McManus, and, most influentially, Domenico Losurdo.[9] A recent issue of the prominent Marxist journal *Historical Materialism*, composed largely of responses to Losurdo, attests to the increasing impact of such readings.[10]

If Tutt is making a familiar case, he nonetheless provides it with a uniquely polemical and far-reaching articulation. *Parasite*'s first chapter – *We Live in Nietzsche's World. So What?* – opens with Tutt imagining his reader's initial encounter with Nietzsche. “Perhaps it was an accident,” Tutt wonders, having “stumbled across him in a used bookstore in your hometown as you strolled by the philosophy and spirituality section” (1). An evocative image, but seemingly in need of correction, for it soon becomes clear that on Tutt's reading Nietzsche would belong far better on the politics shelves. Opposing the claim that politics is “merely a *part*” of Nietzsche's work, and the stronger suggestion that “there is no politics in Nietzsche” at all, Tutt argues that Nietzsche's philosophy bears a political agenda “at its very center” (2, 7). More specifically, he frames Nietzsche as “someone who concocts a series of strategies to prevent and block any changing of the world,” wearing a “Janus face” which allows his thought to give “ideological support to a social order where both joyful affirmation and anarchic celebration are experienced at the same time as a cruel and brutal defense of rank order” (5–6).

For Tutt, this makes Nietzsche a “reactionary,” though his use of the term is a little unusual; in implying at least a minimal satisfaction with the prevailing order – why else would one want to inhibit its transformation? – the more standard meaning of wishing to *return* by any means necessary to a past state of affairs is lost. That this is by no means a strictly backward-looking or traditionalist enterprise is made clear by studies like that of Jeffrey Herf.[11] Tutt's definition,

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7 See Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche's Machiavellian Politics*, Basingstoke 2004, and Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche and Napoleon: The Dionysian Conspiracy*, Cardiff 2014.

8 Kurt Eisner, *Psychopathia spiritualis*, Leipzig 1892. See the section titled *Bürgerliche Verfallsphilosophie nach der Revolution von 1848 in Deutschland: Von Schopenhauer bis Nietzsche* in the anthology Franz Mehring, *Aufsätze zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Dieter Bergner, Frankfurt a.M. 1975, 177–222, including the essays *Zur Philosophie des Kapitalismus*, *Über Nietzsche*, and *Nietzsche gegen den Sozialismus.*

9 Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e: Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, or, the Spectacular Technoculture of Everyday Life*, Durham, NC 1996; Malcolm Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche*, London 2014; Ishay Landa, *The Overman in the Marketplace*, Lanham, MD 2007; Ishay Landa, *Fascism and the Masses: The Revolt Against the Last Humans, 1848–1945*, New York 2018; Jan Rehmann, *Postmoderner Links-Nietzscheanismus*, Hamburg 2004; Matthew McManus (ed.), *Nietzsche and the Politics of Reaction: Essays on Liberalism, Socialism, and Aristocratic Radicalism*, Basingstoke 2022; and Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel: Intellectual Biography and Critical Balance-Sheet*, trans. Gregor Benton, Leiden 2020.

10 See *Historical Materialism* 32/4 (2024), 73–368.

11 See Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge 1984.

by contrast, suggests something closer in character (if not content) to the patriarchalism of Sir Robert Filmer, who – Peter Laslett has argued – was “probably quite right in supposing that no change could possibly be of benefit to him,” and sought accordingly to impede it. Where Laslett draws from Filmer’s unique situation amongst the seventeenth-century Kentish gentry the lesson that “it is of the nature of political thinking that there should be almost no theorists of conservatism,” Tutt greatly expands the historical remit of this mode of thought.[12] Specifically, he wants to cast nineteenth-century liberalism as playing an essentially reactionary role, resisting any meaningful change to an exploitative and unequal (because not yet socialist) economic and political structure, and deeply entangled with illiberal or proto-fascist ideas (92). On this basis, he seeks to enlist Nietzsche as an indirect apologist for this reactionary liberalism, exerting a radicalizing but ultimately non-transformative influence. Like the works by Losurdo and Landa on which it builds, *Parasite* is, then, as much an intervention in contemporary debates around liberalism as those around Nietzsche.[13] Where McManus makes the case for a liberal socialism marrying John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, and John Rawls, and Samuel Moyn defends nineteenth-century liberalism against its Cold War variant, for Tutt the whole edifice goes rotten rather more quickly after the French Revolution.[14] Indeed, one could imagine Tutt agreeing with the “post-liberal” Patrick Deneen’s argument that liberalism “failed because it has succeeded,” albeit sketching an entirely different model for what should follow it.[15]

Beyond establishing the true nature of Nietzsche’s political philosophy, Tutt is also interested in why it has been “ignored and overlooked by scholars for many years.” The Janus face provides one reason for this. Having “attracted the left with its anti-capitalist romanticism and appealed to the right with its unabashed support for rank, order, and hierarchy,” the multifarious nature of Nietzsche’s philosophy and seductive directness of his style have inclined readers to pick and choose the elements they focus on (3). Yet there are also more pernicious errors and misrepresentations at play. Too often, Tutt argues, Nietzsche has been read as a “timeless philosopher” of transcendent insights, rather than someone “engaged in the class struggle of his time,” as brought to light only by reading him in his “wider historical materialist context” (7). Others – chiefly Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze – have misread Nietzsche as “being without a political center because they claim Nietzsche has no center” at all (39). Most objectionable is the academic “Nietzsche industry” (2), which Tutt sees as having undertaken a “concerted effort […] to brush over and minimise the significance of his reactionary agenda,” relying in particular upon Kaufmann’s “watered down” translations (28).

Leaving aside for the moment the plausibility of Tutt’s argument, what is its significance beyond the academy? Primarily, he is concerned with Nietzsche’s deleterious impact on the left. If his reactionary character is missed, Tutt argues, Nietzsche “performs a certain victory over the left that can and often does compromise any socialist or Marxist approach to changing the world” (6–7). Left Nietzscheanism is seen as variously flawed: in its tending to elitist conceptions of leadership; embrace of irrationalism in action and socio-historic understanding alike; and politicization of culture, inclining it to deemphasize political economy in favor of countercultural revolt (12, 54). Under these conditions, the left becomes indistinguishable from the

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12 Peter Laslett, “Sir Robert Filmer: The Man versus the Whig Myth,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 5/4 (1948), 523–46: 545, 523.

13 See Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter History*, London 2014, and Ishay Landa, *The Apprentice’s Sorcerer: Liberal Tradition and Fascism*, Leiden 2009.

14 See Matthew McManus, *The Political Theory of Liberal Socialism*, Oxford 2024, and Samuel Moyn, *Liberalism Against Itself: Cold War Intellectuals and the Making of Our Times*, New Haven, CT 2023.

15 Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, New Haven, CT 2019, 3.

world it is trying to change, which is likewise wholly animated by what Tutt calls, drawing on Waite, "Nietzscheanism."[16] This denotes the historical legacy and "cultural effect of Nietzsche's philosophy," the ways in which it produces a "set of ideologies that continues to interact with and shape our liberal, entrepreneurial, capitalist society" – even becoming its "common sense" (3, 5). Its functioning is ideological in the sense used by Žižek: as a "system of beliefs that works even when we don't believe in it," it guides our behavior no matter how strongly we may disavow it (44). Here again, Janus rears his head. On the one hand, Nietzscheanism is defined by an attitude of creative experimentation with and vitalistic optimization of the self, a point Tutt makes with the aid of Byung-Chul Han, Andreas Reckwitz, and Peter Sloterdijk (17–9).[17] On the other, these practices and attitudes feed into a punitive economic system producing a rigidly stratified hierarchy of winners and losers. The stakes, then, could not be higher; the Nietzscheanization of the left removes the last true opponent of the Nietzscheanization of the world. Ultimately, a recalibration is necessary, moving back toward a Marxism dominated by the hegemony of the working classes (and class in general), whose members ensure their readings of Nietzsche are strictly *parasitic*: that is, aimed not at "full abolition or cancellation" but "working through, […] dialectically retaining and preserving what he offers as we approach him head on, with clear eyes, and without illusions" (291).

Subsequent chapters flesh out these themes in greater depth and with unrelenting punchiness. Chapter two considers Nietzsche's style, which Tutt links with a "community-building project," (60) encapsulated by Lou Salomé's comment that Nietzsche "writes not to convince or to persuade, but to *convert* passionate followers" (2). Bolstered by the insights of Bull's *Anti-Nietzsche* (2014), Tutt notes how, for example, Nietzsche's suggestion that he "writes only for those whose lives have turned out well" immediately establishes a hierarchical divide and encourages the reader to place themselves on a certain side of it (60).[18] In such "proleptic" remarks, Tutt sees a stylistic enactment of the pathos of distance, inclining audiences to identify with the figure of the superhuman master (67). Chapter three continues Tutt's political interpretation of Nietzsche's central concepts, arguing that perspectivism is best understood as a rejection of the Enlightenment view of the rational universal subject. Denying the reality of universals so as to legitimize capitalism's failure to live up to enlightened ideals, it attempts to "tame and limit the masses' demands that the promises of the French Revolution be fulfilled" (85). In so doing, Nietzschean notions such as perspectivism aid the cause of liberalism, specifically a liberal order which, via Bonapartism, is able to retain reactionary elements.

Parasite's fourth chapter, titled *The Center of Nietzsche's Political Thought: A Continuous Polemic against Marxism and Socialism*, begins by enumerating the potential sources of Nietzsche's knowledge of socialism. This is an important task if we are to believe it is the *center* of his political philosophy, and indeed Tutt unearths Nietzsche's references to and reading of Mill, Ferdinand Lassalle, August Bebel, and Eugen Dühring (Friedrich Albert Lange is notably missing from Tutt's list). Of Marx himself the most that can be said is that Nietzsche knew of him, underlining his name in a book (124).[19] Tutt identifies and devotes careful attention to

16 See Waite, *Corps/e*, xi.

17 See Peter Sloterdijk, *Nietzsche Apostle*, Los Angeles, CA 2013; Andreas Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities*, trans. Valentine A. Pakis, Cambridge 2020; and Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, Stanford, CA 2015.

18 See Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche*, 33–6.

19 See Thomas H. Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Knowledge, Reading, and Critique of Political Economy," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 18 (1999), 56–70, and Thomas H. Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Knowledge of Marx and Marxism," *Nietzsche-Studien* 31 (2002), 298–313.

four of Nietzsche's strategies against socialism: (1) encouraging a "strategic ignorance of socialism" amongst the proletariat via a philosophy of austere living; (2) attempting to "culturalize" politics and accelerate the contradictions of bourgeois society; (3) inventing a new type of philosopher opposed to the socialist intellectual; and (4) disrupting the "promise of a world wherein leisure time is widely distributed across society" (116). So fundamental does Tutt deem Nietzsche's animosity toward socialism that it replaces Christianity as his ultimate *bête noire*, on the grounds that it was the "specific influences of egalitarian and socialist impulses that had infused Christianity that he felt had to be combated," not the religion in itself (130). Nietzsche's opposition to socialism is fairly uncontroversial, though the idea that it somehow conceptually preceded his hatred of Christianity is especially provocative; stunned scholars might appeal, amongst many other remarks, to his argument that "the democratic movement is the heir to Christianity" (BGE 202).[20] Similarly, whilst Nietzsche does indeed praise Christianity's potential as a means of social control and prophylactic against nihilism (UM III, SE 4; BGE 61; and GM III 18–9), this handful of statements would have to be considered alongside his far more extensive stream of virulent denunciations.

Having corrected the record on Nietzsche's philosophy, the second half of *Parasite* shifts to a discussion of the left's engagement with him and his concepts, both historically and theoretically. *Parasite*'s fifth chapter tells a critical history of left Nietzscheanism, running from Jack London and the Bolsheviks to Deleuze, Foucault, and Huey Newton of the Black Panthers. The upshot is that Nietzsche can only be tolerated on the left if tempered with a "healthy dose of Marxist class analysis," lest one put oneself at risk of "market instrumentalization or elitist individualism" (197). Thus, Newton and the Bolsheviks – whether Leon Trotsky, Vladimir Lenin, or Nikolai Bukharin – are praised for productively working through Nietzsche's influence, whilst Foucault and Deleuze are deemed unable to offer a coherent account of what one should be politically or socially resisting and how. Chapters six and seven likewise stress that no "elective affinity" between Marx and Nietzsche is possible, only a self-conscious enmity, for there are "serious, unresolvable bones of contention in any attempt to mix the two thinkers" (217). Tutt takes as exemplary studies their attitudes to religion and revolution, where any "*seeming* alignment" really "conceals a true diametrical opposition" (125). Similarly excoriated is Nietzsche's notion of *ressentiment*, a "completely problematic concept that must be abandoned entirely," since it functions only to "harden political difference, shut down possible solidarities, and make the status quo more rigid" (53, 235). Rather than, for example, tarring working-class white Trump voters with the brush of *ressentiment*, Tutt proposes to "cultivate political organisations capable of channelling resentments into opportunities for working-class solidarities" (286). An extended conclusion both reiterates Tutt's take on Nietzsche's philosophy and stresses the importance of a parasitic engagement with his work if its untoward political consequences are to be avoided.

Parasite is a stirring read and well worthy of engagement by those interested in Nietzsche, modern intellectual history, as well as leftist theory and politics. Its history of "left Nietzscheanism" is illuminating, and its treatment of Nietzsche and Marx on religion, revolution, and *ressentiment* strident. It will appeal to a wide audience beyond academia, who will find much to challenge themselves, especially in the book's latter half, which looks beyond exegesis of Nietzsche to a compelling intervention in contemporary political and socioeconomic dynamics. Those in the universities will also find themselves provoked. Albeit less than in their late twentieth-century heyday, the interpretive commonplaces at which Tutt takes aim still largely dominate. If reading Nietzsche as a political philosopher is increasingly uncontroversial, placing

20 All Nietzsche translations are my own.

a critique of socialism at the center of his thinking certainly is, let alone presenting him as an apologist, indirect or not, for the bourgeois, liberal, Christian *status quo*. Tutt will surely find many willing to defend Nietzsche's status as an apolitical thinker, or one far from the reactionary excesses with which Tutt associates him. In the second half of this review, I take a different approach. Agreeing with him that Nietzsche is an immensely political figure who belongs unambiguously on the right, I want to challenge the Lukácsian and Straussian methods Tutt employs in reaching this conclusion; reconsider certain aspects of his account, specifically the issue of Nietzsche's relation to class and capitalism; and question the utility and accuracy of the concept of "Nietzscheanism" as a bridge between Nietzsche's thought and our own time.

Before engaging more substantively with *Parasite*'s method and argument, one factor must be noted which impedes any effective critical interaction: namely, the book's substandard (copy-)editing, especially in terms of referencing. One first encounters this upon consulting the endnotes and realizing that Nietzsche's works are generally cited by page rather than paragraph number, making it difficult to check or follow up on quotations. Yet the full extent of citational issues has been made clear by Devin Gouré, first in a series of posts on social media, then more fully in his article *How to Read Like a Parasite, Appendix on Citations*. In an assessment limited to *Parasite*'s second chapter, Gouré shows convincingly that 30 of 36 references contain errors of varying degree. These include citing the wrong book by Nietzsche; citing editions which do not (yet) exist or giving them the wrong name; claiming to quote Nietzsche when really quoting Deleuze, Losurdo, or Leo Strauss; listing books with the wrong author; listing the wrong year of publication; giving no page number where necessary; getting quotations wrong; giving the abbreviated form of a citation having not yet given the full version; and unacknowledged paraphrases.[21] One also encounters quotations in the text with no reference given at all. Tutt quotes Nietzsche, for example, as saying that he "smelled politics where it had never been smelled before," a remark I have been unable to trace (52). In Losurdo, we find Nietzsche described as an "author who, far from being unpolitical, has smelled political and social conflict even in areas previously considered neutral."[22] Is this another case of Tutt paraphrasing and misattributing? One would hope not, but the mass of other errors leads to doubt, and the confusion could easily have been avoided. Such absences and inaccuracies unavoidably cast doubt on the strength of Tutt's argument, and are particularly ironic given the scorn he pours on the supposed imprecision of Kaufmann's rendering of Nietzsche.

Tutt has a conflicted relationship with Nietzsche. Like other advocates of his interpretation, he evidently despises Nietzsche's political philosophy, yet he cannot earnestly recommend that the German's work should simply be left well alone; the stakes are too high and his interest too great. For this reason, he ends up formulating a hermeneutic strategy or "self-defense manual," giving *Parasite* the character of an exorcism or cathartic purgation based on the Hegelian hygiene "*not out but through*" (313, 318). Tutt invites an autobiographical analysis here, recalling how his discovery of Nietzsche as a young man was "profoundly inspirational" and seemed to offer him a "way to reinvent my life" (14–5). Only later did he discover the philosopher's "dark side" and extreme politics, yet clearly this youthful enthusiasm did not dissipate entirely, hence *Parasite* both retrospectively excusing his early passion and justifying his continued engagement (30). The project is immensely similar to that of Bull, though with a more pugilistic ethos. Where "reading like losers will make us feel powerless and vulnera-

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21 See Devin Gouré, "How to Read Like a Parasite, Appendix on Citations" (2024): https://devingour.substack.com/p/how-to-read-like-a-parasite-appendix. I have avoided listing individual examples here as Gouré's tabulated mode of presentation is far more effective.

22 Losurdo, *Nietzsche*, 917.

ble,"[23] in reading parasitically we "fight Nietzsche like fugitives," being "ready to run away at a moment's notice, but [...] not afraid of the lion's roar" (319). Nonetheless, the image of a smaller organism slowly and perhaps imperceptibly sucking the lifeforce from a larger – greater? – creature is hardly inspiring. As points of reference, the "loser" and the "parasite" evoke a leftist conscience melancholic in the awareness of its own comparative impotence, concerned more with knowing and critiquing its enemies than wielding power.

With this in mind, it is worth asking what reading like a parasite – and reading *Parasite* – could mean for someone other than Tutt himself. It is hard to escape the impression that the work is a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading inexorably to the precise variety of Lukács-inflected workerist Marxism expounded by Tutt. That he is a Marxist writing for other Marxists – or leftists, specifically those who have come under Nietzsche's malign influence – is in itself unproblematic. More objectionable is how, in his methodological assumptions and comments on the existing scholarship, Tutt stacks the deck in his favor, tending to force nuance and contingency into predetermined schemes. We have already noted, for example, his suggestion that Nietzsche's political thought was "systematically sidelined, censored, removed, and de-emphasized" by translators like Kaufmann and the workings of the "Nietzsche industry" more broadly (145–7). Building on Losurdo's identification of a "hermeneutics of innocence," Tutt laments a tradition of interpreters who "sought to defang" Nietzsche's "aristocratic radicalism" (28, 156). That a large range of scholarship exists which does not view Nietzsche's politics as the center of his philosophy or sees him as wholly apolitical is undeniable, and one may justifiably disagree with this body of work. But Tutt fails to provide the extraordinary evidence which would be needed to vindicate his extraordinary claim that thousands of academics around the world are either actively engaged in a conspiracy to misrepresent their object of study or totally hoodwinked by it, producing books and articles which, in view of their remove from the "real" Nietzsche, can be no more than simulacra.

Despite his vitriol toward Kaufmann, it is to the latter possibility that Tutt leans, deploying a Straussian reading to suggest that depoliticizing interpreters of Nietzsche are the victims of a deception. On Strauss's model, conditions of persecution can lead philosophers to encode secret or "esoteric" meanings beneath the "exoteric" surface of their works, to be properly understood only by the skilled reader.[24] Tutt argues that the true nature of Nietzsche's thought was "meant to be missed and overlooked by his readers," his esotericism functioning toward a "tacit suppression of the overt political agenda at work in his thought" (41, 72). Yet there is some confusion here. Tutt later notes that the political "right tends to read Nietzsche exoterically, that is, they read him as he intended," where the left "reads Nietzsche esoterically," either disregarding his reactionary politics or trying vainly to put it to alternate use (74). Tutt's earlier model is now inverted: the exoteric surface of Nietzsche's thought appears patently political, whilst the esoteric effort of the hermeneutics of innocence seeks to go beyond this, finding his secret teachings – why else would it be necessary? That Tutt himself marshals so many of Nietzsche's unmissably extreme comments on slavery, eugenics, or inequality, deeming them no "aberration or [...] significant divergence from many of the mainstream liberal intellectuals of his time," makes this latter option far more plausible, as does the fact that he was writing in a position of near total political and financial autonomy, hardly at risk of persecution (36). So are such comments, as scholars practicing the hermeneutics of innocence might surmise, largely peripheral bombast, designed merely to disarm a reader and make them more amenable to Nietzsche's more central epistemological and metaphysical arguments? Tutt thinks not;

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23 Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche*, 37.

24 See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chicago, IL 1988.

rather, his observation that Nietzsche "can make himself appear" – but only *appear* – "as a great critic of liberalism and Christianity" seems to render the Straussian "secret" of the philosopher's œuvre the somewhat deflating revelation that he is no aristocratic radical after all, but an advocate of the *status quo* (130). If this is the "monstrous basis of Nietzsche's thought," it is indeed "easy to miss in reading him," deceiving all but a tiny minority of readers (41). The wiser conclusion, perhaps, is that such Straussian approaches lead only to hopeless confusion and willful misreadings of texts for ideological ends.

Upon closer inspection, Tutt's diagnosis of collective blindness amongst academics is hard to substantiate. Take his dismissal of Hugo Drochon as a "liberal Nietzschean" who misses that Nietzsche "wrote in a time which resembles our own" and that "his thought has a direct connection to our modern political and cultural context" (36–7). This will be a surprising claim for anyone who has read Drochon's book *Nietzsche's Great Politics* (2016), which thoroughly explores the links between Nietzsche and the present moment, whether in terms of populism, European unity, or labor and competition, delivering – as Damian Valdez has noted – a "Nietzsche for [our] own time."[25] Such a misrepresentation is only explained when one realizes that Tutt is working with a distinctly limited definition of "political and cultural context," one essentially coterminous with class struggle. Drochon's work does not deploy this Marxist framing, ergo it must be ahistorical, timeless; a potentially justifiable disagreement about which contexts to privilege becomes a blanket denial. Gouré has similarly criticized the false dichotomy that Tutt constructs between his "contextual" interpretation and the "timeless" reading, reflecting that "our solution to this problem might fall anywhere on a spectrum that runs from Leo Strauss at one extreme to R. G. Collingwood at the other, but rarely will the matter be resolved by a decisive either/or."[26]

Where should we place Tutt on this scale? For most historians of ideas, the term "context" likely brings to mind Quentin Skinner and the so-called Cambridge School, who have recommended a focus on a text's discursive context as the proper way of reconstructing its author's original intention and the meaning of their ideas. *Parasite*'s approach, however, is more reminiscent of C. B. Macpherson, one of Skinner's targets in his seminal 1969 article. On the one hand, Skinner admitted that "knowledge of the social context of a given text" went a long way in escaping the "anachronistic mythologies" of a wholly textual history. On the other, he maintained the inadequacy of a vulgar epiphenomenalism which saw political thought as essentially resulting from one's attitude to the prevailing socioeconomic structure.[27] The limitations of this latter assumption come through especially in Tutt's treatment of liberal thinkers, whose motives are largely reduced to material self-interest. Even if we were to grant with Tutt (quoting Lukács) the overarching premise that "every philosophy's content and method are determined by the class struggles of its age," we would still end up with little idea of what these theorists *thought* they were doing in making their arguments, a decidedly impoverished account (125).

Parasite's appraisal of Nietzsche is similarly limited. Tutt makes extensive use of Lukács's notion of "romantic anti-capitalism," defined as a "form of critique of the capitalist system that proposes the return to a better version of capitalism, or to a more harmonious management of capitalism, in distinction to transformation or total revolution" (26). The intention of the

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25 Damian Valdez, "The Hammer of the Populists: Hugo Drochon's *Nietzsche's Great Politics*," *History of European Ideas* 47/4 (2021), 635–41: 640. See Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, Princeton, NJ 2016.

26 Devin Gouré, "How to Read Like a Parasite, Part I" (2024): https://devingour.substack.com/p/how-to-read-like-a-parasite-part.

27 Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8/1 (1969), 3–53: 40–2.

thinker in question thus pales into comparison beside what Lukács called the "social basis" or "decisive social content" of their movement. In the case of Romanticism, for example, despite its appeals for feudal renewal or attacks on industrialization, this was "bourgeois," grounded in a desire for "Germany to be transformed into a modern (and – what most of the representatives were not aware of at the time – into a capitalist) country."[28] One issue with this approach is that it reduces the history of right-wing or reactionary thought to a series of unwitting propulsions of precisely the bourgeois liberal capitalism it has often violently opposed, both misrepresenting the thinkers in question and making their work substantially flatter and more banal. Marxists are generally loath to admit that any meaningful non-Marxist critique of capitalism could exist, especially one decoupled from the immanent contradictions of political economy. An illuminating exception is provided by the work of Panagiotis Kondylis, who critiqued Lukács for associating "reactionary" Romantic thought with bourgeois capitalists rather than aristocratic landowners:

> Und wenn Lukács die Hegel'sche Kritik an der Mechanisierung der Arbeit unter dem Kapitalismus anführt, um die Verwandtschaft mit dem marxistischen Standpunkt hervorzuheben, dann vergisst er, dass derartige Kritik ein Hauptpunkt der romantischen „Reaktion" gegen den triumphierenden Kapitalismus war. Die damalige politische Ökonomie begrüßte ohne moralische Rücksichten die Arbeitsteilung, in der sie eine Garantie für die Vermehrung des Reichtums erblickte. Kritik an den katastrophalen Folgen der modernen Arbeitsteilung für das „Wesen des Menschen" übten allerdings nicht die Besitzer von Fabriken oder die Theoretiker des Bürgertums, sondern die Vertreter des Ancien Régime, deren Interessen nicht mit der Industrie, sondern mit dem Landbesitz verbunden waren.[29]

Although Kondylis still grants social class a central role in the history of ideas, he insists on a separation between the theorists of liberal capitalism and those of aristocratic counter-revolution, treating the latter especially with a non-reductive contextual precision. In so doing, he overrides the binary logic we find in Tutt and Losurdo, on which any thinker not adhering to a specific brand of Marxism – here too the bar is set high[30] – is cast into the all-dissolving cauldron of liberal reaction. (And with liberals like these, who needs conservatives?) By contrast, Kondylis's monumental history of *Konservativismus* (1986) reveals the extent to which the critique of capitalism originated amongst thinkers of the right before being taken up by socialists across the nineteenth century. The same period, he argues, saw the increasing dominance of the bourgeoisie as a class and an alliance of bourgeois and genuinely "conservative" interests, under which the latter were progressively marginalized and diluted.[31] Others, notably proponents of the German *Sonderweg* thesis, have observed a more substantial persistence of "feudal" or "aristocratic" elements at the expense of a proper bourgeois revolution, ultimately enabling the rise of fascism.[32] Tutt wades into these debates with a view to the twenty-first

28 Georg Lukács, "Die Romantik als Wendung in der deutschen Literatur," in *Fortschritt und Reaktion in der deutschen Literatur*, Berlin/East 1947, 51–73: 52–3. Translations are my own.

29 Panajotis Kondylis, "Die Hegelauffassung von Lukács und der marxistische Linkshegelianismus," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 48 (2000), 341–50: 348–9.

30 See Domenico Losurdo, *Western Marxism*, New York 2024, and Gabriel Rockhill, *Who Paid the Pipers of Western Marxism?*, New York 2025.

31 See Panajotis Kondylis, *Konservativismus*, Stuttgart 1986.

32 See Richard J. Evans, "The Myth of Germany's Missing Revolution," *New Left Review* I/149 (1985), 67–94. Such arguments are of course by no means limited to Germany: in the case of Britain, Tom Nairn

century, praising Jodi Dean's notion of neo-feudalism as an antidote to G. M. Tamás's suggestion that a time of "full capitalism" has arrived only very recently (304–5).[33]

Nietzsche is caught on the horns of this dilemma, his work providing both a call for aristocratic rank ordering and caste society almost unparalleled in its ferocity and an impetus for the imperialism and entrepreneurial individualism of an ascendent and radicalizing bourgeoisie. In terms of the contemporary function of his philosophy, it may not seem wholly wrong to suggest that something which could loosely be called "Nietzscheanism" turns the wheels of neoliberal capitalism. Then again, what would it take to demonstrate this claim? One approach might be to show how various prominent figures of the age – politicians, businessmen, public intellectuals – have engaged with Nietzsche's ideas. But Tutt maintains both that Nietzsche "does not have to be read or interpreted for his resounding influence to be absorbed" and that the present situation of the world is "not directly his fault," leaving us with an ambiguously miasmic model of inevitable corruption (4–5). As the (admittedly daunting) possibility of historical demonstration is discarded, Tutt instead seeks to show how Nietzsche's philosophy could potentially be used to justify the *status quo*, or seems to chime with its common sense. Again, the argument becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Just as for Lukács the capitalist character of Romanticism only becomes clear in retrospect, over and above the intentions of the Romantics themselves, so the present triumph of "Nietzscheanism" belatedly reveals Nietzsche's true identity as a liberal capitalist.

Intellectual history of this kind is indeed a pack of tricks played on the dead. If the contemporary left is unable to conceive of a world beyond liberal capitalism, past thinkers suffered under no such limitation. One need not agree with all of Tamás's value critical precepts to benefit from his reminder that European fascism amounted to a

> quite serious attempt to re-introduce caste society, that is, human groups with radically different entitlements and duties (against uniformizing and levelling, "mechanistic" conceptions of egalitarian liberalism and socialism *and* bourgeois individualism): the *Führerprinzip* in all occupations (witness Heidegger's infamous "Rektoratsrede," i. e., commencement address); vocational groups dissolving classes (e. g., steel-workers would have meant, in the future, Krupp and Thyssen *as well as* the steel-workers proper); untouchables (Jews and other condemned races), and so on. The fascists were quite serious in wanting to go back to before 1789, as they (or at least their predecessors) had been announcing loudly since the 1880s.[34]

The specifics of Tamás's account can surely be challenged, and whether the fascist effort to return to a pre-capitalist, pre-class world ever held any potential for success is an open question. Yet that it was articulated with an earnestness shared by its late nineteenth-century "predecessors" – and, for all he would have objected to fascism's populist vulgarity, one must think of Nietzsche here – cannot be denied. How might our appraisal of Nietzsche's political philosophy be modified if we took him at his word rather than placing him in a preordained interpretive scheme? A central passage for Tutt's interpretation of Nietzsche is that titled *My Utopia*, which proposes:

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and Perry Anderson have proposed that similar dynamics explain post-imperial decline, archaic institutions, and the continuing impossibility of an effective workers' movement.

33 See Jodi Dean, *Capital's Grave: Neofeudalism and the New Class Struggle*, London 2025, and G. M. Tamás, "Telling the Truth About Class," *Socialist Register* 42 (2006), 228–68: 252.

34 Tamás, "Truth," 251.

> A social order in which the hard work and misery of life will be allotted to the man who suffers least from it, that is, to the dullest man, and so on step by step upwards to the man who is most sensitive to the highest, most sublimated kind of suffering and therefore suffers even when life is most greatly eased (HH I 462).

Now, Tutt is surely correct that the above is no socialist idyll, but it does not follow from this that it is "not a vision of utopia that has overcome capitalist social relations." It might just as well describe a slave economy, as in Ancient Greece, or a feudal economy of serfs and landowners (8). Further indications that Nietzsche is thinking of caste rather than class relations are found in works from *The Greek State* (1871), which promotes the "division of the chaotic mass into military castes," erecting a "pyramid-like" society founded on the "lowest layer of slaves" (CV 3, KSA 1.775–6), to *The Antichrist* (1888), which praises the Law of Manu's "order of castes" as a "natural law of the first rank" (A 57; see HH I 439). This rigid structure, the "sanctioning of a natural distance between several physiological types," each "destined for different activity" (Nachlass 1888, 14[221], KSA 13.394–5), is not so much a horizontal market in which individuals compete as a fateful segmentation from above – an inegalitarian communitarianism more reminiscent, as Dmitri Safronov has argued, of the ancient Greek *oikos*.[35]

In Nietzsche's prelapsarian vision, this is a system of harmonious serenity, the heroic deeds and artistic exertions of a noble class enabled by a mass of contented slaves, who have "nothing difficult to answer for" and know "nothing past or future to value more highly than the present," happy in the "profound enclosure of [their] narrow existence" (BT 11, and CV 3, KSA 1.769). By the late nineteenth century, however, this appears ever untimelier. In a passage from *Twilight of the Idols* (1889) titled *The Workers' Question*, Nietzsche laments how the "instincts by means of which a working-class becomes possible, and tolerable even to its members themselves, have been destroyed," such that "there is now not the slightest hope that an unassuming and contented sort of man […] will come into being in this quarter" (TI, Skirmishes 40). Liberal capitalism and socialism alike – the two are birds of a feather – promise too much and deliver too little, pledging dignity and fulfilment through free labor and material self-advancement but providing only nihilistic alienation, *ressentiment*, and psychological suffering far worse than the physical pain of enslavement.[36] Modern, Alexandrian culture is thus seen to rest on a pernicious contradiction: it "needs a slave class to exist long-term, but denies, in its optimistic view of existence, the necessity of such a class" (BT 18).

Tutt, following Marx, also identifies a contradiction at the heart of nineteenth-century liberalism: its failure to extend the enlightened ideals of the French Revolution to the proletariat, inciting a struggle between labor and capital (85). Yet although he admits that Nietzsche seems to criticize liberalism at many points, he suggests that these comments are ultimately "meant to support the bourgeois standpoint, but by radicalizing it," aiming to "rescue and redeem bourgeois decadence" (88, 136). Nietzsche did indeed repeatedly expose the hypocrisy underwriting liberal ideals, sweeping the ideological flowers from man's chains not so as to break their links and cast them off, but in order to make their metallic glint yet clearer and more vicious.[37] Tutt himself admits that Nietzsche "abjured many of the conventional methods of liberal politics" and "strongly critiqued liberal establishment politicians throughout his career," though he is quieter about the latter's fundamental disregard for the *ideas* defended (however incon-

35 See Dmitri Safronov, *Nietzsche's Political Economy*, Berlin 2023, 158–60.

36 Consider his insistence that "slaves live more securely and happily than modern laborers," whilst "slave labor is very little work compared with that of the 'worker'" (HH I 457).

37 See Losurdo, *Nietzsche*, 431 for an excellent discussion of this.

sistently) by liberalism, from equality to rights, justice to legitimacy (92). There is simply no reason to think Nietzsche intended bourgeois liberalism to survive his attack. Indelibly marked as Socratic modernity was by hypocrisy, and subsisting on nothing but damaging falsehoods, Nietzsche's efforts should be seen as aspiring to its *overcoming* rather than radicalization. Instead of pinning him to one side of the class struggle, Nietzsche's considerations on decadence and slavery abolished – like, later, Max Weber's interpenetrative "spirit" or overarching "cage" – the fundamental duality of capital and labor on which the social question was generally seen to rest, and within which Tutt remains.

Crucially, for Nietzsche the category of slavery expanded far beyond the proletariat. He suggests that "all mankind is divided [...] into slaves and freemen," on the grounds that "whoever has not two-thirds of his day for himself is a slave, be he otherwise whatever he likes, statesman, merchant, official, or scholar" (HH I 283). Similarly, he counts "princes, merchants, officials, farmers, soldiers" amongst those who "work with an eternal necessity not for themselves," offering their "excess labor" in service of a superior "class of leisured Olympians" (Nachlass 1881/82, 16[23], KSA 9.664–5, and Nachlass 1876, 19[27], KSA 8.337). From this high vantage point, socioeconomic distinctions levelled out, eviscerating bourgeois liberal claims regarding the desirability of or greater freedom granted by self-improvement and material abundance. Such rejoinders proved especially important against a historical backdrop of embourgeoisement, a growing "similarity between the working class and the bourgeoisie" in mentality if not prosperity, identified by Robert Holub as an increasingly important vector in Nietzsche's work.[38] Take his warning to the proletarian against believing that a "banker lives with more enjoyment or dignity than he" (Nachlass 1876, 19[21], KSA 8.335). Similarly, the prospect of contentment severed the false temptations of capitalist freedom: "The middle classes strive ardently to bring the workers into their position: but will this make them happier?" (Nachlass 1881, 12[115], KSA 9.596). Nietzsche's answer was an unambiguous no. Whilst also highlighting the degrading nature of mechanized production, as contrasted with an ideal of artisanal craftmanship (HH I 585; HH II, WS 218, 220, 280; and Nachlass 1879, 40[4], KSA 8.578), Nietzsche's critique of capitalism is chiefly articulated as an analysis of the class which dominates it: the bourgeoisie.

It is easy to anticipate Tutt's objection: that this is merely a cynical attempt to inculcate subservience in the proletariat, make the bourgeoisie yet crueler and more ruthless in advancing their interests, and further entrench exploitative class relations. But let us for the moment take Nietzsche at his word, bearing particularly in mind Tutt's association of "Nietzscheanism" with the neoliberal ideology animating a now vastly expanded global middle class. Nietzsche's consideration of the bourgeoisie offers a study of how the slave, ostensibly liberated, suffers from their formal emancipation. Having achieved the minimum needed to survive, modern man proves incapable of the leisure of the ancient *vita contemplativa*, fleeing into the internalized thralldom of "raucous, time-thieving, conceited, stupidly proud industriousness" (BGE 58; see HH I 210, 282–85; HH II, WS 170; D 178; and GS 329). For the majority, it remains "necessary not to be in a position to think," leading them to invent "work that is only intended to appease the general necessity for work" (UM III, SE 5, and HH I 611; see Nachlass 1876, 19[21], KSA 8.335). As Nietzsche argues, the "commercial spirit" brings with it a contradiction: in providing "people who are incapable of elevation" with passion, ambition, and financial freedom, it necessarily "consumes them in such a way as to flatten all individuality," reducing them to automata (Nachlass 1880, 6[200], KSA 9.248; see HH II, VM 317). Commercial prosperity gener-

38 Robert C. Holub, *Nietzsche in the Nineteenth Century: Social Questions and Philosophical Interventions*, Philadelphia, PA 2018, 150.

ated an individual unable to cope with their raised station, one who would ultimately be better off as a menial worker: a slave in the literal, unabstracted sense of the word. Their inability to accept this rendered these "worm-eaten physiological casualties" who wish to be "some other person" especially dangerous, as they may succeed in "shoving their own misery […] on to the conscience of the happy: so that the latter eventually start to be ashamed of their happiness" (GM III 4).

Whilst (petty) bourgeois strivers of various stripes have found ample resources in Nietzsche's work to justify their hyper-productive ethos, it hardly seems the philosopher himself would have approved, seeing in their endless creation of fake work not genuine distinction but robotic sameness, not fulfilment but deep psychological suffering. From this perspective, today's near-total universalization of the bourgeois subjectivity and economic model, rightly lamented by Tutt, would be for him no less than dystopian, a world of mediocre last men convinced of their superhuman status. Early on in *Parasite*, Tutt notes that "any real lover of Nietzsche will likely be aghast at the mere suggestion that [his] thought has been victorious," since this would "mean there is nothing new in his thought," nothing "subversive or fresh" (4). Now, I am no "lover" of Nietzsche. But recognizing that, rather than endorsing the present malaise, he was seeking at all costs to avoid it, hardly means we must endorse his solutions. Indeed, it is by being too eager to follow Nietzsche's teachings that we have arrived at our current predicament.

Like capitalism, Nietzsche was too persuasive for his own good. As we saw above, Tutt observes how Nietzsche's style encourages an identification on behalf of the reader with the textual *Übermensch* or "philosopher of the future" – "reading for victory," as Bull has it.[39] When we read in the *Antichrist*, for example, that "this book belongs to the rarest of men," we automatically count ourselves amongst this number (A, Preface). Given, however, the extent to which the slave mass must outnumber the leisured aristocracy, such an assumption goes squarely against the run of probability. Nietzsche's system was an unambiguously minoritarian one, and – as Alan Kahan reminds us – "if the preferred minority could become the majority one day, then it wasn't an aristocratic vision."[40] In this sense, the notion of "Nietzscheanism" as an all-encompassing societal logic is flawed, a prime example of the universalization of values he so often railed against. The term designates at most a misreading, one replicating the error of democratic or egalitarian perfectionist interpretations of Nietzsche which take his recommendations for the *Übermensch* as potentially applying to *everyone*.[41] For Nietzsche, the matter is clear: "My philosophy aims at rank-ordering, not at an individualistic morality" (Nachlass 1886, 7[6], KSA 12.280).

Nietzsche fell into madness before his explosion in popularity across Europe and America, so we cannot know how he would have responded to his status as a mass author. Those in his intellectual wake were not always positive: his admiration for Nietzsche notwithstanding, the novelist and painter Wyndham Lewis pointedly reflected that the former's works had "made an Over-man of every vulgarly energetic grocer in Europe," stimulating an excitable but distinctly ignoble petty bourgeoisie.[42] Nietzsche perhaps hoped that the limitation of higher edu-

39 Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche*, 33–6.

40 Alan Kahan, "Arnold, Nietzsche and the Aristocratic Vision," *History of Political Thought* 33/1 (2012), 125–43: 125.

41 See, e. g., Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, Ithaca, NY 1993, and James Conant, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of *Schopenhauer as Educator*," in Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism*, Cambridge 2001, 181–257.

42 Quoted in John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880–1939*, London 1992, 184. See also Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche*, 31.

cation to an elite few could have prevented his writings from falling into the wrong hands (Nachlass 1877, 25[1], KSA 8.481–3). Otherwise, the prerequisite for the survival of his minoritarian ethos in a context of mass readership appears wholly unrealistic: that the proletarian or petty bourgeois stumbling across *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–85) or *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) would prove immune to its stylistic overtures and promises of greatness, opting instead for an unquestioning embrace of slavery and mediocrity, and setting the book down, never to think of it again. Rather, a populace diagnosed by Nietzsche as alienated, resentful, and devoid of meaning, fundamentally dissatisfied with itself and the world, found in his philosophy the most tempting cure for its predicament, taking a mentality meant for the few and making it one of the many – with notable modifications, not least the inversion of Nietzsche's anti-work outlook into a capitalistic frenzy.

The question, then, is how one appraises this irony of history. If on Tutt's account Nietzsche would be essentially happy with the reception and impact of his philosophy, and on my telling above he would be aghast, the truth perhaps lies somewhere in the middle. Much as he would have welcomed an instantaneous return to the world of ancient Greece, Nietzsche knew that "time does not run backward" – rather, one must go "forward […] step by step further into decadence" (Z II, Redemption, and TI, Skirmishes 43). Not only this: as Daniel Conway has shown, Nietzsche acknowledged his own complicity in the crisis, giving his critique of modernity a "self-referential context."[43] He reminded his readers: "Need I say after all this that in questions of *decadence* I am *experienced*?" (EH, Wise 1). His disciples have been equally impotent in escaping the malaise of modernity. Yet if he has, to quote Conway, "attracted all the wrong readers," inspiring "for every Stefan George or Thomas Mann […] a legion of graffiti artists, hack playwrights, and adolescent songwriters," Nietzsche may yet have managed to view this with the wry consciousness of an unfortunate – but hopefully temporary – necessity.[44] Perhaps the heralded "philosophers of the future," to whom the task of legislation is deferred, are simply yet to arrive, the activation energy for the reaction of transvaluation having not yet been reached (BGE 42–4). In this respect, Tutt is right to note the "accelerationist" elements of Nietzsche's philosophy (135–43).

Where we differ is on the question of whether this drive into decadence seeks a genuine exit from the prevailing bourgeois capitalist order – its palingenetic overcoming – or merely the preservation of existing contradictions in radicalized form; whether Nietzsche is, as Tutt has it, a reactionary, or, to return to Habermas, a *Revolutionär von rechts*.[45] This is an important disagreement, and I have aimed here to make a (necessarily partial) case for the latter position, focusing on how Tutt's methodological strictures ultimately overdetermine and narrow his reading of Nietzsche's political philosophy. The examples of Kondylis and Tamás suggest that Tutt need by no means give up his Marxism to escape the limitations of an approach which tends to blur the boundaries between Nietzsche's intention and his reception, between what he *meant* by his statements and his historical *meaning*. At the same time, this rejoinder should not obscure that my agreements with *Parasite* outweigh the divergences treated above: Tutt's

43 Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols*, Cambridge 2010, 1–2.

44 Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game*, 253.

45 See Martin Ruehl, "Nietzsche's New Order: The Political after the Death of God," in Martin Ruehl / Corinna Schubert (eds.), *Nietzsches Perspektiven des Politischen*, Berlin 2023, 17–32: 27. Ruehl argues that "Losurdo […] and other left-wing critics are wrong to call Nietzsche 'reactionary.' Nietzsche's palingenetic program is highly progressive, utopian even: to overcome the modern political world absolutely it first has to become absolutely modern."

book provides an important, if sometimes oversimplistic, reiteration of the political character of Nietzsche's thought, and his placement on the rightward reaches of the political spectrum. Whether it will convince his colleagues in academia or comrades on the organized left remains to be seen.

2. Aristocratic Radicalism across Europe

"This book is for fellow ordinary souls" – with this staunchly anti-Nietzschean dedication Banks opens his edition of *The Great Debate*, a clash between literary critic Georg Brandes and philosopher Harald Høffding over the nature of Nietzsche's philosophy and its import for late nineteenth-century Scandinavia, or "Norden." Blurbs from Landa and Corey Robin rightly lead the reader to expect a similar set of concerns to those found in *Parasite*, expounded by Banks in an introductory essay of almost Hontian proportions, yet the work's chief – and invaluable – utility is its reproduction of the polemical encounter which, beginning with Brandes's August 1889 essay *Aristocratic Radicalism*, "formally inaugurated the long vogue of Nietzsche, with all its consequences" (3). All six of the essays, three each by Brandes and Høffding, appeared in the Danish journal *Tilskueren* (*The Spectator*), a highbrow but not overtly academic venue, in 1889/90. Whilst Brandes's opening salvo was translated into German as early as April 1890, and subsequently into English, none of the others have yet been published in a language other than the original.

The proximate origins of the altercation are found in August 1886, when Nietzsche requested his publisher to send a copy of the newly released *Beyond Good and Evil* to Brandes, who – after initially not responding – ultimately began a correspondence with the German thinker in November 1887. Popular lectures by Brandes on Nietzsche followed in the spring of 1888, before the appearance of his first article the next year.[46] The November/December issue included Høffding's *Democratic Radicalism: An Objection*, answered by Brandes's *The Great Man: The Source of Culture* in January 1890, before Høffding struck back with his February/March *Response to Dr. Brandes* and the exchange concluded with Brandes's *Rejoinder* in April and Høffding's May *Epilogue*. I cannot, unfortunately, fully appraise the quality of Banks's translation from the Danish *Urtext*, beyond noting that it reads with a compelling mix of fluidity and energy. Even more impressive is the work's presentation and referencing, augmenting the rather lacking citational practices of Brandes and Høffding by tracing and correcting their quotations and allusions where required. Very occasional typographical errors (see, e. g., 182, 190, 193) by no means take away from this achievement. Here, after considering Banks's stated aims with the volume and tracing the broad contours of the debate, I will focus in particular on two aspects: firstly, the historical tradition of "aristocratic radicalism" and "aristocratic reaction" in which he seeks to place Nietzsche; and secondly, Brandes and Høffding's central disagreement over the role of "great men" vis-à-vis history.

Banks sees *The Great Debate* as appealing to a tripartite audience: a constituency of Nietzsche scholars, one of scholars of Scandinavian studies, and "many young people around the world" expressing a growing interest in Nordic social democracy and welfare systems (4–5). The interest of the former group in this foundational stone of Nietzsche's public reception and popularization is self-evident, but Banks also has more specific intentions. In particular, he

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46 The publication date of *Aristocratic Radicalism* is variously given as being in August (xi, 61) or October (3) 1889 – the former appears to be correct.

hopes to work against both the view that Brandes's "aristocratic radicalism" was but a misguided first attempt in the interpretation of Nietzsche's work, and an "anti-foundationalist school" of postmodern scholarship which grants readers the "most far-reaching – indeed virtually infinite – license" (5, 207). By contrast, Banks appeals to Nietzsche's own comment, in a letter to Brandes of December 1887, that "the expression aristocratic radicalism, which you employ, is very good. It is, permit me to say, the cleverest thing I have yet read about myself" (quoted on 5). Noting that, despite their differences, Brandes and Høffding alike view Nietzsche as a "deeply reactionary thinker," Banks – mirroring Tutt – consciously rejoins this early tradition of reception, which avoided the errors of today's "Kaufmannized" reading (7, 38, see 42). At the same time, however, he urges nuance, pointing out that Losurdo tends to present Brandes and Nietzsche as speaking with one voice, a drastic misinterpretation when viewing the six essays as a whole (9).

Banks is equally keen to stress the political dimensions of the debate to scholars of Scandinavian studies. He regrets that, insofar as the debate is remembered in Scandinavia, it concerns a disagreement over how a culture's worthiness should be measured – by the cultivation of its elites or its masses – and over the relation between masses and elites, whether agonistic (Brandes) or dialectical (Høffding). What goes missing here is the question of how, as a result of this relation, resources and liberty should be distributed, particularly under the aegis of the welfare society or welfare principle, a concept Høffding had introduced in his 1887 *Ethics*. *The Great Debate* thus proposes the encounter as a vital step in the development of Nordic "solidarism" and the welfare state more broadly. Nor is this purely a historical intervention: Banks also appeals to a "growing collective of young idealists" aiming to make the world more equal, just, and habitable, raising the banner of democratic socialism as part of what Adolph Reed Jr. has called the "New Old Left" (17). The great enemy here is neoliberalism, conceived – as in *Parasite* – as a more or less direct continuation of Nietzsche's aristocratic radicalism, the "complete displacement of culture by economy" having left a "spiritual vacuum" filled by the figure of the Promethean entrepreneur, the *Übermensch* in new clothes (15). Banks's critique of our contemporary mythologization of the CEO or entrepreneur is forceful, though he equivocates a little over other forms of greatness and the role of the academic left in fomenting the present situation.[47] Nor, as we will touch on later, is Nietzsche's role in this development fully worked out.

The Great Debate's immense contribution to Nietzsche studies is found in its masterful edition of the Brandes-Høffding debate, which forms the bulk of the volume. This was not the first time the two had sparred, having also clashed in the *Tro og Viden* ("Faith and Knowledge") debate of the 1860s, and the 1880s' "Nordic Debate over Sexual Morality." Banks emphasizes

47 On the one hand, Banks endorses the project of cultural studies, with its destabilizations of the canon, as a "necessary and vital enterprise," such that the "world we inhabit today is much better off by it." On the other, he maintains that this shift was largely limited to the universities, having not "dealt a blow to the concept of individual greatness" more broadly, but rather "in effect squandered away a Henrik Ibsen for a Bill Gates, an August Strindberg for an Elon Musk." Banks maintains that this is merely an "ironic turn of the wheel of fate," but one senses the temptation to make a more pointed claim. Illustrative here is the case of Catherine Liu, quoted to the effect that post-68 the academic left engaged in the "elevation of ordinary tastes, popular culture, and a critique of all forms of cultural elitism and exclusivity" (16–7). Yet for readers of Liu's more recent *Virtue Hoarders*, Minneapolis, MN 2021, this sounds almost inverted: there, we hear how the "professional managerial class," in academia as elsewhere, persistently *denigrated* normality, instead instantiating new forms of cultural and moral elitism and exclusivity which proved incapable of tackling material inequality. Banks's reticence is perhaps understandable, but it is not as though he holds back from essentially activistic proclamations at other points in the introduction.

their divergent career paths, which are likewise thematized across the six essays: Brandes the iconoclastic rebel subverting academic pieties from a position of autonomy, Høffding every inch the respectable mandarin, steadily establishing his professorial position. Toward the end of the debate, heights of learned pettiness are reached which, albeit entertaining, are of little help in elucidating their divergent views of Nietzsche. One comes to identify with Høffding's reflection in his *Epilogue* that "the reader is evidently tired of the whole conflict, which in reality had been fought to a conclusion from both sides in our first two articles" (197). Indeed, with certain exceptions, the substantive clashes – above all regarding the role of great men, specifically whether they should be understood as ends or means, and the rightness of the welfare principle – are largely concluded by Høffding's *Response to Dr. Brandes*. The dynamic is one of disentanglement, as Høffding tries to force Brandes to extricate his own views from those of Nietzsche, an understandable request given Brandes's previous support for such causes as women's emancipation and the triumph of enlightenment over reaction, and one in which Høffding thoroughly succeeds. As Banks points out, Brandes's apparent support for some form of aristocratic radicalism sits yet more uneasily with his subsequent transformation into anticolonial defender of oppressed peoples, motivated by a recognition of Denmark's vulnerability in light of great power politics. A faith in great individuals does remain, but it is hard to think of a less Nietzschean title than the 1905 essay *The Rights and Duties of the Weaker* (49). Høffding, for his part, subsequently appears to milden his view of Nietzsche, seeing more affirmative possibility in the vitalist, "Dionysiac" dimensions of his thought (51).

Brandes's opening article, *Aristocratic Radicalism*, rolls somewhat languidly through a broad sweep of Nietzschean themes. After a biographic sketch repeating some falsehoods of the German's own invention, Brandes recounts Nietzsche's views on German and French culture; cultural philistinism, especially as generated by the educational system, and how it might be overcome; Arthur Schopenhauer; Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant, and their respective ethics; master and slave morality; *ressentiment*; the use and abuse of history; justice and punishment; and a final lengthy section on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Brandes situates Nietzsche in his time, another appealing feature of this early reception, comparing him with Ernest Renan, Hippolyte Taine, and Gustave Flaubert in France, as well as Eduard von Hartmann and Eugen Dühring in Germany (100). The Dane is evidently impressed by Nietzsche, whom he dubs the "most interesting writer in recent German literature," and hopes that his ideas might exert a positive effect upon the "corroded" culture of Scandinavia, inciting the development of "distinctive personalities" in literature and politics (61, 103–4). Nonetheless, it is hard to see in the article a total affirmation. At the outset, Brandes stresses that Nietzsche is a mind to be "studied, debated, contested, and appropriated," later observing *Zarathustra*'s "certain monotony" (61, 94). More damning is the argument that "as much as Nietzsche wants to be what […] he is, a Polish Szlachic [sic], a European man of the world, and cosmopolitan thinker, he is and remains also a German professor," which comes through not merely in his attitude toward women, but also his hatred of socialists and anarchists and his warlike overtures, reflecting the "dominate militarism of the new German Reich" (101–2). Whilst Høffding may be correct that on the level of the text "it is by no means easy to determine whether it is Nietzsche or Brandes who is the author of the individual utterances," one must also agree with Banks's argument elsewhere that there was "from the very beginning, significant distance" between the two (106).[48] Alongside Brandes's withholding of judgement in the essay itself, the prior influence of

48 William Banks, "Brandes after Nietzsche: Aristocratic Radicalism vs. Human Rights," in Jens Bjerring-Hansen / Anders Engberg-Pedersen / Lasse Horne Kjældgaard (eds.), *Georg Brandes: A Pioneer of Comparative Literature and a Global Public Intellectual*, Leiden 2024, 318–34: 320.

figures like French literary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve makes it difficult to speak of a strictly post-Nietzschean turn.[49]

Høffding's response is rather less ambiguous, beginning with a proclamation that, despite his respect for Brandes, the article has "both in what it attacks and what it asserts, transgressed so forcefully against what for me is true and right [...] that I must do what I can to oppose it" (105). Høffding is concerned to defend the essentially utilitarian welfare morality against Nietzschean objections regarding the intermingling of pain and pleasure, the supposed need for constant self-sacrifice, or the necessity of inequality, none of which are seen as incompatible with it. Nor indeed is a specific focus on the happiness of great men, provided we see those as functioning primarily for the improvement of the masses – though it is this question which forms the primary disagreement between Brandes and Høffding, to be explored in greater depth shortly. Høffding likewise tackles Nietzsche's views on the scientific method and the historical origins of morality, objecting more broadly that the German has no "measuring stick," no way of objectively deciding on value, and thus is merely "building castles in the air" (120). In this sense, and in view of his propensity for unsystematic contradiction, he is for Høffding a "poet, a rhetorician" of "rare gifts" – perhaps, like Brandes, an "aesthetician," but certainly not a philosopher. Far from rigor and critical distance, Nietzsche is a symptom of the malaise he describes; behind his work lies a "measure of the sickly and distorted" (125).

For Brandes, all this is evidence of cultural philistinism, and he spends much time at the outset of his reply *The Great Man: The Source of Culture* painting himself and Høffding as divergent intellectual temperaments. Høffding, he argues, is offering merely an "ethics for the liberal electorate," addressing the "world of books, not [...] the realities of life" (129). Nonetheless, Brandes is also steadily forced to admit more explicitly his distance from Nietzsche, culminating in the later *Rejoinder*, where he pointedly distances himself from the young author Arnold Rohde, whose *Aristokratisk Radikalisme kontra Velfærdsmoral* (1889) had taken the Nietzschean position to its more extreme conclusions (191). Having achieved this admission, Høffding declares victory, though this is less a case of his arguments triumphing than the similarity of their positions becoming manifest; the excessive emphasis by both authors on what we might now call intellectual *habitus* works in this sense to mask their agreements.

Such disagreements as do persevere concern above all the "great man" or hero, and the relation of this construct to the masses and to history. This is surely the heart of "aristocratic radicalism," which Banks wishes to extend beyond Brandes's essay into a broader current of European intellectual history, that of "aristocratic reaction," a tradition supposedly "inaugurated by [Edmund] Burke at the conclusion of the eighteenth century." For Banks, it is defined by the identification of the "central problem of modernity as the rising – and risible – restiveness of the 'popular classes'," the belief that "hierarchies of status are woven into the very fabric of nature itself," and a specific concern for the protection of culture (6). Stressing, like Tutt on Nietzscheanism, that aristocratic reaction can be either conservative or liberal, Banks elects to focus on three representative British thinkers: Burke, Thomas Carlyle, and Mill. Is this a coherent or meaningful designation given both the distinct features of the thinkers at hand and those of Nietzsche? There are of course limits to what one can undertake in the introductory essay to a scholarly edition, but approaching each figure in turn may give us pause from so liberally summoning intellectual traditions into being. Doing so will also help us to appreci-

49 Banks, "Brandes after Nietzsche," 323. See also 329 for a letter of December 1887 from Brandes to Paul Heyse, where the former admits that he finds Nietzsche's "attitude toward socialism and anarchism too dismissive and lacking in nuance."

ate the distinctive features of Nietzsche's own account of greatness and history, which, as the conflict between Brandes and Høffding rages, slips somewhat into the background.

We begin with Burke, deemed alongside other critics of the French Revolution one of "history's first conservatives in the modern sense of the term." Banks's treatment of Burke – brief and rather dismissive – stresses his opposition to the "Jacobin Madness" of levelling and his defense of the aristocracy as a necessary class, the Few (as opposed to the One) staving off tyranny and mediocrity (28–9). The view here, of both modern conservatism as a coherent tradition understood in relation to 1789 and Burke's status as its founding father, is a familiar one. Yet this interpretation has its own history and was by no means obvious to Burke's contemporaries. Emily Jones, for example, has demonstrated that Burke's entrenchment as the C/conservative foundation stone in Britain should be dated to the c. 1880s, whilst Richard Bourke has focused in the American context on interest in Burke during the Cold War.[50] His early German reception, as Jonathan Green has indicated, was substantially more diverse than the overarching term "conservatism" can account for, and indeed Bourke questions the very notion of a tradition with that name, further adducing various ways in which Burke hardly corresponds to the stereotypical conservative profile.[51] In view of such work we may begin to wonder whether it is not too easy and ahistorical to enlist Burke as the founder of the additional tradition of aristocratic reaction.

Banks's account of Carlyle can likewise be complicated. Here, the latter is credited with originating the "'great man' theory of history," such that it is "in him that the aristocratic reaction begins its deification of specifically *individual* greatness." Not only this, Banks argues that since the publication of Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841), it is "conservatives [who] have maintained a virtual monopoly on greatness" (29). This latter comment in particular may raise eyebrows, and indeed Banks himself notes shortly afterwards that Mill's "abiding faith in the singular power of the great personality" would enjoy a "long afterlife in social thought, liberal as well as conservative" (32). The complexities of Carlyle's reception equally belie such a one-dimensional reading. Joshua Bennett concludes, for example, that German reasons for being interested in Carlyle during his lifetime were "seldom consciously anti-liberal," and that the received view of him as a Prussophile hero-worshipper lamenting a degraded present was chiefly the product of *kulturprotestantische* writers in the 1890s and early 1900s.[52]

Then there are the specifics of Banks's account of Carlyle, notably his rejection of the idea that the latter's valorization of individual talent might represent a meaningful difference to Burke's more hereditarian view. Banks appeals here to Carlyle's desire for a restoration of "slave-like permanent servitude" for certain individuals as opposed to the cash nexus of laissez-faire capitalism (31). Yet this need not necessarily conflict with a particularly harsh form of meritocracy on which those least possessed of talent are accordingly condemned to a mode of life befitting this status. Moreover, Carlyle's opposition to hereditary monarchy, up to the point of justifying revolution, is well evidenced. Regarding the events of 1789 and onwards, his complaint was not that Louis XVI – described as "King Donothing," "semi-animate phlegm" –

50 Emily Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830–1914: An Intellectual History*, Oxford 2017, and Richard Bourke, "What Is Conservatism? History, Ideology and Party," *European Journal of Political Theory* 17/4 (2018), 449–75: 457–67.

51 Bourke, "What Is Conservatism?", 452–7, and Jonathan Green, *Edmund Burke's German Readers at the End of Enlightenment, 1790–1815*, Cambridge 2018.

52 Joshua Bennett, "*Kulturprotestantismus* and the Creation of a Prophet: Thomas Carlyle's Place in German Intellectual History, 1830–1939," *Carlyle Studies Annual* 35 (2024), 235–70: 238.

had been executed, for this was the necessary course of history, but that a capable replacement had not been found, a role for which he proposed the Comte de Mirabeau.[53] In *On Heroes*, we likewise read that "revolt against *false* sovereigns" is the "painful but indispensable first preparative for *true* sovereigns getting place among us," whether Napoleon Bonaparte or Oliver Cromwell.[54] By recognizing this elevation of the "fittest, [...] wisest, bravest, best"[55] we need not follow Alexander Jordan all the way in rejecting the "received view of [Carlyle] as a 'Tory,' 'reactionary,' and 'conservative'," but it does offer good reason to distance him from Burke, raising questions for the expansiveness of the tradition of aristocratic reaction.[56]

Similar queries, especially in relation to Nietzsche, emerge from the work of Jens Nordalm, who has argued with regard to Carlyle and Heinrich von Treitschke, another notorious proponent of "great man history," that for both would-be heroes must meet a "Vielzahl von Kriterien" and "ihre Verehrung nie bedingungslos, vielmehr höchst bedingt ist."[57] Treitschke, who repeatedly emphasizes how far heroism supervenes on the *Volksgeist*, *Staat*, *Idee*, or *Geist der Geschichte*, is more obviously influenced by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, whom Banks mentions rather rarely given the Idealist's equally substantial impact on Brandes and the whole nineteenth-century discourse of heroism and historical greatness.[58] But Carlyle also speaks of history as a "universal Divine Scripture" and, more overtly, suggests that the genius is but a "'creature of the Time' [...], the Time called him forth, the Time did everything, he nothing," being possessed chiefly of the "wisdom to discern truly what the Time wanted."[59] Such comments both moderate the supposedly unfettered individualism of these figures' thought and increase their distance from Nietzsche, for whom the individual exerts their will on time and to speak of anything so coherent as a "universal Divine Scripture" would be utterly anathema.

Banks's treatment of Mill is more extensive and approving. Despite being a "consummate liberal," Mill bore a "profound ambivalence toward ordinary people that would certainly be familiar to Burke," concerned less with their revolutionary tempers than their stolid passivity and conformism, which the eccentric intellectual aims to disrupt.[60] Banks, however, views more positively Mill's limitation of greatness to the sphere of culture or learning, his suspicion

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53 Quoted in Alexander Jordan, "Thomas Carlyle and Kingship," *History of European Ideas* (2024), 1–22: 3 (online only; pagination liable to change in print).

54 Quoted in Jordan, "Thomas Carlyle and Kingship," 5.

55 Quoted in Jordan, "Thomas Carlyle and Kingship," 7.

56 Jordan, "Thomas Carlyle and Kingship," 2.

57 Jens Nordalm, "Der gegängelte Held: 'Heroenkult' im 19. Jahrhundert am Beispiel Thomas Carlyles und Heinrich von Treitschkes," *Historische Zeitschrift* 276/3 (2003), 647–75: 648.

58 See Jack Graveney, "Made by History: Heinrich von Treitschke's Hero and the Anxieties of Nineteenth-Century German Historiography," *German Life and Letters* 76/2 (2023), 245–68.

59 Quoted in Nordalm, "Der gegängelte Held," 656, 663.

60 It is interesting to note the extent to which Banks's leftist reading of Mill as a liberal elitist is shared by interpreters on the right, notably Deneen, mentioned above, and the conservative British historian Maurice Cowling, who lament Mill's "progressive" disdain for the masses and his attempt to subject Christendom to a liberal regime change. See Patrick Deneen, "JS Mill and the Despotism of Progress," *Unherd* (2023): https://unherd.com/2023/05/js-mill-and-the-despotism-of-progress/, and Maurice Cowling, *Mill and Liberalism*, Cambridge 1990. After all, the celebration of normality is found just as much on the contemporary populist or historically aristocratic right as the post-1968 left, a point which might also complicate Banks's framing. Nietzsche himself, along with his celebration of the natural slave's unthinking happiness, reflected in a note that "hatred of mediocrity is unworthy of a philosopher: it is almost a question mark on his right to 'philosophy.' Precisely because he is the exception, he has to protect the

of economic excesses, and his soteriological hope for a “stationary state” in which growth might plateau and all enjoy comparative prosperity and cultural development, led in this edification by great individuals (30–3). Banks could take this emphasis on Mill’s uniqueness yet further. Peter Ghosh has, in a recent article, comprehensively tackled the idea that Mill might be meaningfully referred to as a liberal, let alone a “consummate” one, seeing this tradition as primarily a Cold War construction.[61] He agrees that Mill is engaged in an “exaltation of secular intellect,” but, far from nesting this within a broader current, argues that it has “no parallel in European theory after 1789.” For Ghosh, Mill’s is a specific concern with intellect rather than a more expansive greatness, one totally separate from the state, “society,” any Coleridgian “clerisy,” or class formations like the “middle rank.”[62] Likewise, Mill opposed any form of “‘hero worship’ which applauds the strong man of genius for forcibly seizing the government of the world and making it do his bidding […]. All he [the genius] can claim is, freedom to point out the way.”[63] Again, the differences from Burke or Carlyle – let alone Nietzsche – appear so substantial that we must ask whether they can be gathered under the same banner.

This effort at grouping becomes more tenuous when Banks, mirroring Tutt, brings twentieth-century neoliberalism – as represented by, for example, Friedrich von Hayek – into the picture. Whilst admitting that the “distinction between aristocratic radicalism and neoliberalism is indeed significant,” he stresses “profound threads of continuity between the two movements,” drawing especially on the work of Robin.[64] Both are seen as part of the counter-revolutionary tradition, as “manifestations of *class struggle*,” and as articulating a “peculiar *theory of value*,” grounded in the creative production of great individuals. To his credit, Banks does explicitly pose the all-important question of whether the “aristocratic radicals” would “find any satisfaction in this outcome,” noting that Robin answers this in the negative, but his own conclusion is unclear. Banks admits that “at least on the surface,” it is hard to see Nietzsche approving of the contemporary capitalist economy, but hints that the relation here is “rather more complex” than it may first appear, and that Robin’s contention “remains subject to debate” (13–5). Here, however, he breaks off, depriving the reader of an important discussion, some starting points of which I have hinted at above. One would be interested to hear Banks’s comments on, for instance, the relation between Hayek and Foucault, whose interest in Nietzsche is clearer and whose relation to neoliberalism as an ideology has also been hotly contested of late (53).[65] And what of Høffding, who shares much of Brandes’s faith in the need for great men but also seeks, via a “progressive individualization” based in the division of labor, a universalization of their ethos, such that “harmony must be established between power and multifacetedness in as many individuals as possible” (111–2)?

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rule” (Nachlass 1887, 10[175], KSA 12.559–60). Parallel sentiments are found from Schopenhauer to Roger Scruton and beyond, generally grounded in an antagonistic attitude toward the bourgeoisie.

61 Peter Ghosh, “Mill before Liberalism (Parts I and II),” *History of European Ideas* 50/5 (2024), 785–836: 785–7.

62 Ghosh, “Mill before Liberalism (Parts I and II),” 817–20.

63 Quoted in Ghosh, “Mill before Liberalism (Parts I and II),” 819.

64 See Corey Robin, “Nietzsche’s Marginal Children: On Friedrich Hayek,” *The Atlantic* (2013): https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/nietzsches-marginal-children-friedrich-hayek/, and Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, Oxford 2018.

65 See, e. g., Mitchell Dean / Daniel Zamora, *The Last Man Takes LSD: Foucault and the End of Revolution*, London 2013, and Daniel Zamora / Michael C. Behrent (eds.), *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, Cambridge 2015.

It is on this question of the great individual that the debate turns. Here the figure of Hegel looms large; Brandes himself moved from a broadly Hegelian scheme in the initial volumes of his *Main Currents in European Literature* (1872–90) to a later insistence, expressed in a letter of April 1888, that:

> I am becoming more radical, less historical, and constantly more aristocratic regarding aesthetic and historical points of view. I no longer believe the nonsense about great men being concentrations of the masses, formed from below, an expression of the herd etc. Everything comes from the great ones, everything filters down from them (quoted on 47).[66]

In the *Aristocratic Radicalism* essay, Brandes associates his earlier understanding with Taine, summarizing the Frenchman's "idea that the great man is the child of his age, that through and through he is determined by it, that he unconsciously summarizes it and consciously gives it expression." Opposing it he enlists Schopenhauer's proposal that the great man is not child but "stepchild," taking an antagonistic posture toward his epoch and aiming to overcome rather than sublate it (68). In this sense, Brandes's point seems to be the rejection of any regulative or necessary historical principle – any Hegelian *Idee* or *Geist*, whether grounded in the state, masses (*Volk*), or age – which would curtail the free formation and activity of the heroic individual. The hero is not, as in Hegel or Treitschke, made by history, a concatenation of other energies, but can genuinely be said to *make history*, pursuing and achieving whatever artistic, political, or salvific purpose they set their mind to. Nietzsche stresses that the task of the "philosophers of the future" is to "teach humanity its future as its *will*, as dependent on a human will" – for man, after all, is the "not yet determined animal" (BGE 203, 62). Indeed, "these people are the purpose of history," for history in and of itself has *no purpose*, no immanent dynamic, hence why Nietzsche, as Banks notes and Brandes underemphasizes, speaks more often in a biological register, appealing to nature as the ultimate grounding (69, see 36–7, 187).

On this understanding of Brandes or Nietzsche's intervention, Høffding's rejoinder – that great men cannot be ultimate ends if they are also "redeemers in service of a more comprehensive goal" – seems to somewhat miss the point (108). Neither Brandes nor Nietzsche suggests that heroic figures will have no positive impact on the world, quite the contrary; how or why else would they be great? Høffding's rather binary framing of his argument implies that, as soon as greatness benefits a broader population than its possessor alone, it should be understood above all as a means, such that aristocratic radicalism could be upheld only if the great confined themselves to their rooms, never sparing a thought for solving the crisis of modernity. The original inversion of Hegel, however, concerned moreso the autonomy and originality or creativity of the great man than his effect in the world, so it is no wonder that Brandes is unwilling to accept Høffding's terms, accusing him of making a "crude, undialectical distinction […] between the great men as ends and as means" (137). On this holistic account of personhood, which itself slips back into a quasi-Hegelian register, Leonardo da Vinci can as little be separated from his paintings as a star from its gleam. Brandes's objection is, as he reiterates, to the notion that "the desires of the masses are the principal motor of history and the great man is only the clearest expression of such," a follower or servant rather than commander (141). Nonetheless, he is repeatedly drawn into the semantic thicket of ends and means, and here his differences from Nietzsche become increasingly apparent, insofar as he is ultimately wedded to a much broader form of welfare than his German subject. Both Brandes and Høffding come

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66 See also note 13 on 217, where Brandes attempts to argue that, rather than expounding it, he has in fact "resisted" this view since at least 1870.

to agree on the importance of "providing the great personalities with the possibilities for development and influence they are due," albeit that the former calls for a rejection of the baleful process of standardization whilst the latter demands a more socially equal meritocracy (194–5). By Brandes's final *Rejoinder*, the true voice of Nietzsche pierces through only infrequently.

Conclusion

It is the major achievement of *The Great Debate* to allow disagreements like these to be fleshed out and explored, providing a vivid picture of Nietzsche's early reception and cultural and sociopolitical debates in late nineteenth-century Denmark. The rigor and precision with which Banks has approached the task will surely make the volume an indispensable resource for scholars in years to come. Equally praiseworthy is his decision to go beyond a sober summary of the clash between Brandes and Høffding in his introduction, instead bringing the encounter and the issues it raised into the present, where its undiminished vitality becomes clear. Some may find Banks's comments too polemical, but they are surely in the spirit of Brandes, Høffding, and above all Nietzsche. The same is true of Tutt's *Parasite*, whose full-blooded attack on liberalism, much of the contemporary left, and Nietzsche himself is just as explosive. Both books demonstrate that the question of what is living and what is dead in Nietzsche's political philosophy must be answered with substantial weight to the former.

Nonetheless, it is on this issue of contemporary resonance – are we living in Nietzsche's world? – that I have sought, as a historian, to intervene. Bennett reflects that Carlyle's "writings, in common with the Germany in which they were read, contained a chiaroscuro of good and ill whose effects resulted from the voluntary choices which individuals made."[67] That Joseph Goebbels, entrapped in 1945 with Adolf Hitler in the *Führerbunker*, chose Carlyle's *History of Friedrich II. of Prussia, Called Frederick the Great* (1858–65) to read aloud does not retroactively determine the character of the Scotsman's œuvre nor its interpretation by others.[68] The same is true of Nietzsche. J. P. Stern, in *The Dear Purchase* (1995), used Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblances" to explore a range of manifestations of an ideal of moral strenuousness and sacrifice between Nietzsche and Nazism – to which we might now add neoliberalism.[69] If at times generality threatened, so too was Stern aware of the dangers of misreading. In meticulous detail, he shows how Adrian Leverkühn, the hero of Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1947), misconstrues the motto "wer schwere Dinge sucht, dem wird es schwer," which he takes as an affirmative ethos for life. Yet consulting Mann's source for this phrase, a 1530 letter of Martin Luther to Philipp Melanchthon, reveals that the words, originally from Proverbs 25:27, were meant as admonition, condemning spiritual pride in favor of subservience to God's will. As Stern observes, Mann's personal "belief in the saving power of 'the hard things,' of strenuousness, has interposed itself, like a distorting lens, between him and the text of Luther's letter."[70] As we approach Nietzsche, in his time and ours, let us remain wary of such distortions and interpositions, taking him always as we find him, on his own terms.

67 Bennett, "*Kulturprotestantismus*," 263.

68 See Bennett, "*Kulturprotestantismus*," 235, for this image.

69 J. P. Stern, *The Dear Purchase: A Theme in German Modernism*, Cambridge 1995, 18–9.

70 Stern, *The Dear Purchase*, 378–9.

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