

Received: 2 September 2024 Accepted: 11 November 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33182/agon.v18i2.3405>

## Nietzsche's Philosophy of Political Authenticity as the Key to "Real" Democracy

Zachary Schroeder<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*Despite several decades of attempts to interpret and articulate Nietzsche's political thought, especially its relationship with democracy, there seems to be no convergence in sight. While this might be easily written off as a consequence of that thinker's tendency for ambiguity and contradiction, I contend that there is in fact a central pillar of Nietzsche's political philosophy, authenticity. I extract this central emphasis on authenticity by offering a fresh methodological approach. This approach draws our focus to Nietzsche's technique of inversion as it applies to his critiques of democracy. Nietzsche's criticism draws us to the core of the tension between his own philosophical project and the reality of democracy in his time. This subsequently reveals what would make for an authentic democracy faithful to Nietzsche's core philosophical commitments. The gist of Nietzsche's criticism of democracy is that it is not, in fact, democracy. Yet, as I show, this is not simply critical, as Nietzsche offers an alternative in the wake of this characteristic inversion. This inversion complicates our understanding of the democratic citizen, their needs, and capabilities. As such, I venture to trace the roots of his criticism, how the problem he raises affects contemporary politics, and what his proposed solution in the form of a commitment to authenticity would look like. In the end, I argue that this focus on authenticity as a central pillar of Nietzsche's political thought will not only clarify his use for political philosophy but serve as a powerful resource for political theorists looking to use his work to think about democracy.*

**Keywords:** Nietzsche; Democracy; Political Philosophy; Authenticity

The debate concerning how to relate Nietzsche's thought to democracy is a protracted and disparate one. There are authors like Fredrick Appel, Bruce Detwiler, Don Dombowsky, Mark Warren, and others who have argued that Nietzsche's political thought is not just in disagreement with fundamental aspects of democracy, but actively hostile to it. On the other side there are those who have presented Nietzsche as a resource for reconstructing and improving democracy. These include William E. Connolly, David Owen, Keith Ansell-Pearson, Endre Kiss, and many others.<sup>2</sup> Even among these two distinct camps there is a sizeable variety of positions on how exactly Nietzsche might be helpful or detrimental to democracy. As such, a convergence concerning Nietzsche's relationship with democracy remains well out of reach.

There have been a number of attempts to contextualize and distill these varying positions, such as Herman Siemens and Vasti Roodt's edited volume *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought* and, more recently, Paul Patton's "Recent Work on Nietzsche's Social and Political Philosophy," which is itself a study of edited volumes comprising a number of authors and positions. Even so, efforts like this have not

---

<sup>1</sup> Zachary Schroeder, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles. E-mail: [zschro2@gmail.com](mailto:zschro2@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Patton, Paul. "Recent Work on Nietzsche's Social and Political Philosophy." *Nietzsche-Studien*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2021, 385. This is an open access article licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits use, distribution, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

© 2024 The Author. **The Agonist** is published by Transnational Press London.



succeeded in drawing out any fundamental commonality agreeable among Nietzsche scholars who otherwise align on the claim of his potential for democracy. I contend that instead of focusing on Nietzsche's disposition towards democracy or any existing political theory (as many authors have), we should instead explicate the implications of his core thought for democracy. I employ this alternative methodological approach in this paper, revealing a central pillar of Nietzsche's political thought which is essential to the possibility of an authentic democracy.<sup>3</sup> This insight is achieved by focusing on Nietzsche's technique of inversion as it is applied to his critiques of democratic politics.<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche takes aim at democracy on several occasions, such as in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On the New Idol," where he describes how the state manipulates its citizens. The common theme among these critiques is that democracy is not what it claims to be. In other words, democracy is not democracy. Nietzsche's target for this is not corrupt leaders, capitalism, nationalism, or any malicious actor, but the very people themselves. If the people comprising a democracy are not *what* they think they are, can they be the generative political force a democratic system is meant to embody and actualize? This is essentially an accusation of inauthenticity. This is not merely a critical activity, though, because with the Nietzschean inversion often comes a proposed alternative, and we see exactly this at *The Gay Science* §56.

Neediness is needed! Hence the clamour of the politicians: hence the many false, fictitious, exaggerated 'emergencies' of all kinds and the blind readiness to believe in them... Were these distress-addicts to feel within themselves the power to do themselves good from within, to do something for themselves, they would know how to create their very own distress... They do not know what to do with themselves—and so they paint the unhappiness of others on the wall; they always need others! And continually others!—Pardon me, my friends, I have ventured to paint my happiness on the wall.

Here Nietzsche highlights that the average democratic citizen is plagued by a fundamental *need* to act that democracy does not acknowledge and thereby they are easily manipulated by politicians. This implicates the possibility for democracy to exist at all until such a problem is addressed. Yet Nietzsche also shows us an alternative, to paint our happiness on the wall.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, democracy is inauthentic because "the people" are inauthentic. To be authentic, then, would presumably be to embody what he means by painting our happiness on the wall, and if inauthenticity is what complicates the actualization of democracy, this would be where our solution can be found. As such, the remainder of this paper will be dedicated to tracing the roots of his criticism, how the problem he raises affects contemporary politics, and what his proposed solution in the form of a

---

<sup>3</sup> In brief, much of the Anglophone scholarship has attempted to understand Nietzsche's political thought by either reading him against existing political categories or showing how he supersedes them. The approach in this paper consists of drawing the political implications of Nietzsche's thought out of his fundamental philosophical project instead of reading him into existing political categories. Endre Kiss's "Friedrich Nietzsche – A Theoretician of modern Democracy" follows a similar line of thinking. Kiss concludes that Nietzsche's work is concerned with, and helpful to, many aspects of contemporary democracy. That said, Kiss does not draw attention to Nietzsche's inversion of many concepts embedded in his critiques of democracy and there are thus critical gaps in the conclusion of that paper.

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche's inversion of concepts is well known. For example, depicting the Christian God as the spirit of gravity aligns it with the Zoroastrian deity commonly associated with evil, Angra Mainyu.

<sup>5</sup> In this proclamation Nietzsche is also inverting a common German proverb, *Den Teufel nicht an die Wand malen*—don't paint the devil on the wall. The thought is that what is put out, or proclaimed, will inevitably lead to its actual manifestation. Thus to instead paint ones happiness would be to use the same prophetic movement selectively, indicating an underlying commitment to the generative capability of public discourse.



commitment to authenticity would look like. In the end, I contend that this focus on authenticity as a central pillar of Nietzsche's political thought will not only clarify his use for political philosophy, but serve as a powerful resource for political theorists looking to use his work to think about democracy.

### **Roots of Inauthenticity - The Metaphysical Promise and the Political Lie**

The inauthenticity of contemporary politics begins with a phenomenon Nietzsche targets on several occasions, what I call the metaphysical promise.<sup>6</sup> The metaphysical promise is the vehicle through which the desire for certainty is delivered. It promises to secure identity and the future through the adoption of a metaphysical world view. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes that it was the body which despaired of itself and wished to “break head first through these ultimate walls, and not only with its head, beyond to ‘the other world.’ But ‘the other world’ is well hidden from humans... And the belly of being does not speak at all to humans, unless as human” (Z, “On the Hinterworldly”). It was the body that sought, and from the body that this seeking arose, thus anything discovered by it is justified from this body and what it experiences of the *real* in the world. That said, the feeling attained through the belief in a metaphysical escape seems to us as evidence of its own truth.<sup>7</sup> Temporary feelings of certainty delivered through pagan gods and cultural folklore were, through metaphysics, taken to an altogether different level and delivered across all aspects of human life. The metaphysical promise provides moral clarity and alleviates fear, at least while it is believed. Whether through a political ideology or faith in an institutionalized God, when someone accepts this promise they acquire a maximized and temporally resilient sensation of certainty.

Nietzsche did not believe that Plato (or anyone) was honest about their use of metaphysics. According to Nietzsche, these pursuits were actually motivated by a need to satisfy the will to certainty (GS §355).<sup>8</sup> The desire for certainty is packaged into the metaphysical promise, but there is a further mechanism to deliver its various masked forms (stated motives) to a collective body of individuals. This mechanism is the political lie, which is equitable to the “clamour of the politicians... the many false, fictitious, exaggerated ‘emergencies’ of all kinds.”<sup>9</sup> Political ideologies and claims from the dawn of metaphysics (and its use in political theory) to the modern state thus represent the stated motive (what the political authority said) but carry out a hidden one (providing metaphysical identity through the political scheme).

Evidence for the “derisive and ironic” moment in history where the political lie was created is found in perhaps the single most influential man in Western political philosophy, and a

---

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche invokes the metaphor of the web-weaving spider on several occasions to describe how the metaphysician within us all seeks to establish firm ground on which to articulate identity. The conceptual schemes subsequently developed thus contain the promise of having secured this, despite their inevitable collapse—here enters eternal return. See Z “On the Vison and the Riddle” and *On Truth and Lie*, 33.

<sup>7</sup> At GS §110 Nietzsche describes knowledge in terms of something that is essentially hardened over time. Following this line of thought, if one encounters something and it provides them with an unmistakable sensation, we can take this as an intrinsic quality of the thing itself. For Nietzsche, this is a mistake and is the phenomenon that justifies the need for genealogy.

<sup>8</sup> See also *Beyond Good and Evil* §17. Here Nietzsche goes into further detail concerning the mechanisms of will, consciousness, and the search for certainty.

<sup>9</sup> See GS §56. This articulates Nietzsche's conception of not only why people readily believe politicians, but more importantly the underlying reason politicians act this way in the first place.

frequent target of Nietzsche, Plato.<sup>10</sup> The consequences of the noble lie, as articulated in the *Republic*, are evident in the development of tyrannical tendencies in Western politics, but less well known is the underlying cause of its creation in the first place. Hannah Arendt, in her own investigation of the political lie, argued that “lies have always been regarded as necessary and justifiable tools not only of the politician’s or the demagogue’s but also of the statesman trade.”<sup>11</sup> While Arendt correctly illustrates the seemingly irreconcilable tension between truth and political power that inevitably results from Plato’s *Republic*, her claim that this has “always” been the case overlooks the mechanism behind the inauthentic nature of politics as we have come to know it. The origin of the contemporary political lie is found in a point of tension within Plato’s dialogues. Socrates’s desire for every man to show himself as he truly is, as expressed in *Charmides*, and the proposal of the noble lie in the *Republic*, reveal a tenuous double bind. In *Charmides*, Socrates proposes his theory of a state governed entirely by wisdom, one that would “prevent ignorance from intruding on us.” It is further claimed that it would provide, among other things, good health and safety in battle. Yet Socrates says of this theory that he is unsure whether it comes “through the horn or the ivory gate.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Socrates points out in the same conversation that such a state would take men showing themselves as they truly are—to be authentic. Despite this call for authenticity, in the *Republic* Plato writes that “if anyone at all is to have the privilege of lying, the rulers of the State should be the persons; and they, in their dealings either with enemies or with their own citizens, may be allowed to lie for the public good. But nobody else should meddle with anything of the kind.”<sup>13</sup>

In his desire to force every man to become authentic, Socrates (Plato) justifies the creation of an inauthentic state. For Nietzsche, Plato’s desire to search for a metaphysical explanation is driven by a subconscious motive to obtain certainty (GS §351). This is textual evidence of the underlying motive that leads to a direct contradiction within Plato’s thought. Plato’s desire for outward certainty turned in on itself, renounced the world, and identified an abstract justification for a lie in service of truth. With this development we have a political authority which delivers to its citizens a conceptual framework that contains their spiritual identity, role in society, moral guidance, and a promise that the future will proceed in the best possible way. It has also determined that it must lie to them in order to achieve this. In brief, if you can make people addicted to the promise of metaphysical identity, you can gain their support by providing that instead of by governing them well by any other metric. It is here, in these very dialogues, where the crystallization of the political lie as necessary truth begins.

In failing to see the origin of the hegemonic lie in not just Plato’s *Erfindung*, but what motivated it in the first place, Arendt’s investigation falls short. Nietzsche’s movement of the critical question from Kant’s “what may I know?” to “*What* in us really wants ‘truth?’,” prompts us to ask why Plato, and every human for that matter, is drawn to the promise of such conceptual schemes.<sup>14</sup> This move allows us to push the investigation further than

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” opposes the idea of progress and transcendence of ideas through history and instead describes Nietzsche’s genealogy as exposing these moments as a descension of forces that amount to a derivative and ironic event. This analysis of the political lie is following this genealogical mode of thinking.

<sup>11</sup> Arendt, Hannah, and David Bromwich. *On Lying and Politics*. Library of America, 2022, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Charmides*, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Republic*, book III, 1464.

<sup>14</sup> See Schürmann, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, 20.



Arendt did, revealing a more genealogical origin tied to Plato's grappling with the human condition. This transmutes our understanding of the *Republic* from an ideal political model against which others can be measured to an ideal identity scheme that requires certain political conditions. As such, the discourse of political philosophies in the lineage of that model are implicated by this transmutation.

This political lie forces our modern political environment to funnel a litany of existing and emerging views into pre-set categories (GS §174). The authentic battle of timely cultural forces is then redirected into the positions of the few who hold political authority. What drives the possibility of this is a social contract underpinning the social contract notion that we are familiar with in modern political philosophy. Instead of an implicit agreement among individuals to give up certain freedoms in exchange for security or services, it is a subterranean contract where individuals will give up the entirety of their freedom to think in exchange for the ability to maintain the certitude and identity stability provided by the metaphysical promise hiding in the political lie. The political positions spoken of and argued over then amount to timely manifestations of this hidden contract.

In such a case, politics as we know it struggles to faithfully represent the forces of the time, and thus the battles that take place in it do not reflect the cultural or ideological opposites that need to be resolved through *conflict*. For Nietzsche, opposites must engage in order that anything new may emerge. This is opposed to political mediation and de-escalation by an outside party (GS §228). "To live is to kill" (GS §26) and deciding that neither side will *kill* the other does not eliminate the need for a *death*.<sup>15</sup> What is *killed*, then, is the possibility that could have emerged through authentic political engagement, a solution that represents the best that all sides have to offer. Emerging cultural narratives are converted into generic positions by authority of the subterranean social contract and the battle that is allowed to take place is then inauthentic. The political lie is thus the handshake deal behind closed doors of the official discourse and delivers on the citizens' *need to act* and identity requirements at the cost of the actual political task at hand.

The Western psyche has been inculcated with a metaphysically based identity through over a millennia of Church instituted identity, and after the historical event of the death of God this need for metaphysically grounded identity did not simply go away.<sup>16</sup> With this need comes a significant fear of the loss of this identity and the certainty it provides, but where is this identity now constructed? Nietzsche is drawing our attention to the fact that the addictions of our metaphysical past still haunt us in the political process of the democratic nation state. This complicates democracy because if we do not acknowledge that the average democratic citizen must contend with this fear, they will suffer at the hands of those that wish to manipulate it, and struggle to be the rational and unbiased voters we often demand them to be. Yet alongside this suspicion is a proposed alternative. As we saw in GS §56, he offered recourse to his criticism when he wrote "I have ventured to paint my happiness on the wall." This ecstatic alternative advocates a political citizen who communicates with vigor and honesty. That said, how would we reconceive politics in

---

<sup>15</sup> Risking "death" and "killing" are more often than not used by Nietzsche to represent risking the identity one has formed around an idea. This is imperative to our ability to form a proper group solution, but necessarily means the death of that individual perspective, which can often feel to us like the death of ourselves.

<sup>16</sup> In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" Foucault comments on this phenomenon when he points out how Europeans turned away from their diverse heritage toward a single origin. Following the line of thought in this paper, the metaphysical promise and metaphysical identity made this inevitable.

view of the problem of the metaphysical promise and the political lie? This requires an understanding of Nietzsche's own transformation of metaphysics and politics into activities comparable to the notions of arts and crafts.

## The Transmutation of Metaphysics and Politics

Following Nietzsche's line of thought, metaphysics and politics are transmuted into altogether different concepts, meaning we must understand this in order to discuss his political thought at all. In terms of metaphysics and how we should relate to it he writes that "We cannot look around our corner: it is hopeless curiosity to want to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there *might* be" (GS §374). For Nietzsche, perspective has a privileged place in our capacity to apprehend the immanently real, so using metaphysics to obtain principles for action is not just conceptually inept, it is unjust.<sup>17</sup> That said, Nietzsche acknowledges the existence of fundamental processes by which life is guided. At GS §279 he writes "That we had to become estranged is the law *above us*... There is probably a tremendous invisible curve and stellar orbit in which our different ways and goals may be *included* as small stretches." The metaphysical, then, is an "outside" which thrusts itself upon us, a complex web of force relations driven by the will to power. The eternal return, then, is the conceptual juncture on which we attempt to understand how to relate to this outside. As Nietzsche describes at GS §367, this understanding is not a rational apprehension but an artistic seizure. Through the form of monologic art, "the music of forgetting," we forget the world and apprehend novel possibility. In a political sense this would be the grasping of a solution, of *what to do* in the world in a way that escapes polemic pressures. As such, Nietzsche transmutes metaphysics from an arduous grasping of first principles in the hopes of constructing a system upon which to build and measure the human world into a way of being and relating, a mundane daily commitment to understand the phenomenon of life.

This solitary, monologic moment immediately gives way to a collective political endeavor because what has been apprehended must be given to the human world. As Nietzsche describes in the preface to *Dawn*, the lonely subterranean work of crafting thought into language is not to be taken lightly. This Hephaestean stage is critical for communicating ourselves to others, for giving the world what only we *have*. The night of this work is broken by dawn, and dawn brings the collective world back. For all of the prophetic language used this is a simple process of coming to understand what we think, to be free political actors. It is then imperative to bring this with hunger and enthusiasm to those around us, to enter the *agon* of the polis and merge with other freely formed perspectives. These different interpretations are then meant to "do battle," and an emerging group narrative can be developed. The political, as this process of shaping ourselves and our community, amounts to simple craft because it is no longer some elevated political realm

---

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that Nietzsche does not believe reality is one perspective, but can only be described as a narrative which properly expresses every person's perspective i.e. grasping of the locally *real* and proclamation of the *possible*. It is easy to see, from this view, how critical it would be to present one's perspective on reality authentically, for humanity, in a literal sense, has no idea where it is when they communicate states of being that are not their own. See GS §54.



but a *local shaping*. Craft, then, is politics without the political lie, and brings the political to the immediate and local of the citizen's life.<sup>18</sup>

The critical takeaway here is that Nietzsche has revealed politics and metaphysics are mundane, daily, and boiled into almost everything we do. This demystification of political power and metaphysical promises then opens up an opportunity, the chance to exercise authentic politics. It is important to keep in mind that we are now imagining political action under Nietzsche's ideal scenario, the authentic and enthusiastic engagement of opposing interpretations. This is not by necessity a battle of violence, but a clashing of ideas the moment they oppose each other and on a smaller scale. Wars waged in service of abstract principles are the result of converting people's *real* frustrations into predetermined and over-simplified positions. This robs us of the chance to engage in a way that we were meant to, in tangible small-scale conflict that ultimately gets resolved and builds collective identities.

According to Nietzsche, hate baked into historical narratives and artificial political positions can be unlearned. In fact, he expresses this explicitly in "On Tarantulas" when he writes "For *that mankind be redeemed from revenge*: that to me is the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after long thunderstorms." The metaphysical promise instituted through the political lie creates its own problems by generating the necessity of this hate through the need to adopt fixed positions. It identifies these fixed positions in an eternally changing reality and blocks authentic interpretation. This flips the traditional narrative on its head, namely the Platonic aversion to relativism and its dangers. Instead, it is the desire for certainty leading to the establishment of a political lie that brought the specter of tyranny and ideology to the door.

Nietzsche places a heavy burden on the individual to shed the past and become a creative force that can generate novelty in the world. A world where we embrace metaphysics and politics as arts and crafts, as the integral and essentially mundane part of the human condition that he sees them to be. Additionally, this audacious individuality is explicitly transitory, a temporally specific experience of the period between a genealogical unbinding and the successful communication and dissolution of one's ontologically unique perspective to the world. The aim here is collective, with the individualistic component serving as a mechanism for the continuous reclamation of "free" action and thought. It is only under such conditions that Nietzsche envisions the possibility of joyful wisdom and the capability to participate in our political environment with authenticity. Until then, though, we are unwittingly under the wheel of tragedy, addicted to the metaphysical promise, and continuing to fracture this human dream into this and that moral scheme that some have a right to and others do not.<sup>19</sup> This diagnoses motivates Nietzsche's negative assessment of democracy, but a solution is offered in its wake. In order to

---

<sup>18</sup> In *The Will to Power* fragment 1016 Nietzsche discusses the discovery of the "smallest world" where "what was formerly most despised has been brought to the front." This inversion is critical to any discussion of the political in Nietzsche, especially the democratic citizen, because it points to the sphere of focus and attention relevant to the individual.

<sup>19</sup> At GS §54 Nietzsche details the dream-like fragility and malleability of the human world, implicating the consequences of setting forth ideals and undertaking action via a worldview purporting to possess absolute knowledge. Additionally, both GS §1 and GS §382 Nietzsche talks of the setting forth of tragedy in an overtly epochal tone, claiming that until a more collective worldview exists, one which understands the inevitable victory of laughter over seriousness, the hand of tragedy will always reset.

understand this solution, we must explicate more specifically how the hidden motive complicates the democratic process.

## The Hidden Motive and Implications for Democracy

At GS §44 Nietzsche writes, "For people's inner happiness and misery has come to them depending on their belief in this or that motive – not through the actual motives. The latter are of second-order interest." This actual motive is the desire for certainty (GS §354). This desire emerged from our tools of self-deception developed to temporarily make sense of an overwhelming amount of sense data. Nietzsche called it a long age of fear, where mankind was hunted by beasts and ravaged by nature, and the ability to construct an elaborate self-deception is, for him, a precursor to what we call truth (GS §355). We impose a plan or design onto a moment in order that it be executed successfully (GS §344). As this progressed from the hunter granting himself the confidence to throw his spear to the priest at the temple of Artemis assuring a commander of good weather and safe passage across the Aegean, the internal sensation associated with a feeling of certainty increased in its intensity and scope. In other words, as the size of our known world grew so did our need for more far-reaching self-deceptions.

Combine this with Nietzsche's definition of morality as a conditioning of behavior emerging from a cooperative group seeking to transform into something new (GS §354), which leads to a deeply rooted drive to preserve the group (GS §4), the hidden motive can then be defined as a desire to maintain a sense of certainty that ultimately preserves the species (or, contemporarily, one's ideological group), which can go as far as thinking that it is preserved through oneself (Platonic nihilism).<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, because it is "fear which enjoins upon us to know," we actively seek to deceive ourselves in order to articulate some kind of directionality concerning our lives and identity.<sup>21</sup> It is our *ego* that constructs these elaborate self-deceptions to satisfy the *self*. The *self*, for Nietzsche, is a subconscious multiplicity where our actual will is active, and the *ego* is an ultimately superfluous level of consciousness which is made to think and plan according to our underlying will (Z, "On the Despisers of the Body" and GS §355). Failing to understand this leaves us susceptible to ideologies that speak to this underlying will. For democracy to really represent the people it claims to, a solution that accounts for this hidden motive is required. The enlightenment concepts of predication which underpin our confidence in the capacity for democratic citizens to act and decide rationally has been complicated by Nietzsche. In redefining our predication as will to power, or pure *act*, Nietzsche indicates that the possibility of authentically participating in a democracy requires that our political system address this reality.

## A Call for Authenticity

This Nietzschean explication of the political lie has taken place on three essential levels. First, the hidden motive is what Nietzsche calls the will to certainty and it not only drives

---

<sup>20</sup> In *Twilight of the Idols*, "What I Owe to the Ancients," §3, Nietzsche calls Plato a "coward before reality." Furthermore, he describes Socrates's seeming self-overcoming as a psychologically motivated subjugation to constructed values that could overcome a world he essentially despised. While he acknowledges Socrates to be a creator of values, he points to this final turn as a failure to stay true to the earth. Seeking overarching meaning in such designs while condemning the real world is, for Nietzsche, a potent form of nihilism.

<sup>21</sup> See GS §355.





the search for stable principles but represents the non-discursive normativity that underlies political discourse. Second, the metaphysical promise, in its ability to transform the plurality of the world and its beings into *one*, promises that all future circumstances, no matter how painful or problematic, can be explained away. Third, the political lie is the delivery vehicle, the syringe whose discursive surface speaks of rational grounds, divine right, justice, moral correctness, or, contemporarily, of historical origins and identity. Its fundamental nature, the non-discursive, is always the same, the promise of bringing everything into *one*, of “oneing” the world.<sup>22</sup> This is the true demand we place on the political leader. As a result, politicians are incapable of being outwardly honest with us. In fact, it is not only in their own personal interest to lie, but they are often better understood and more broadly supported by us when they do – a strange phenomenon indeed. It is a problem of authenticity, or lack thereof, in the actual language, actions, and operations of everyday citizens that gives life to the political lie. This lack of authenticity is due to the fact that many people obtain their metaphysical identity through their political affiliations, and thus the pluralities of the world become adversarial not simply because of the methods of the politician but because of the unacknowledged desires of the democratic population to which the entire democratic system is forced to adhere.

Authenticity as the solution to this problem requires that we be honest about the existence of the hidden motive and cultivate a way of being that accounts for it. In one sense it is similar to its use by Martin Heidegger as a shifting out of the concepts that we fall into in the day-to-day and instead, by embracing our own mortality, reclaim ourselves and present this without inhibition.<sup>23</sup> In Nietzsche, though, there are additional requirements to take note of. Part of being authentic is to seek our opposites hungrily and enthusiastically. The authenticity not only of ourselves but of our community rests on this very behavior. Nietzsche explains that becoming someone who is hungry to expand themselves in life does not lead them to become incompatible with the world. On the contrary, if we consider most morally committed individuals, they often suffer from limitations concerning how much of the world and its people they are willing to endure and understand (GS §364).

Furthermore, if we are to remain authentic through such a *battle*, we must “dance even on the verge of abysses” (GS §347). Risking “death” should not be taken, at least primarily, in a literal sense. A core element of Nietzsche’s philosophy is the separation of identity from metaphysics.<sup>24</sup> As such, the identity we create can meet its demise in the face of a superior idea, or more specifically in its synthesis with an opposing ideal, but this does not in any way indicate a physical death. With the specter of metaphysical identity looming over the politics of today, the challenge to one’s political position can feel like a challenge to one’s life because our identity is bound up in the political positions we hold. Nietzsche’s transformation of metaphysics and politics into endeavors comparable to arts and crafts introduces the possibility to participate without the hostility and fear generating the rigid

---

<sup>22</sup> Describing the *act* of putting the world into a single story here is meant to display the synthetic functions of metaphysics and ideology. These conceptual schemes force a single picture onto the world, thus denying its inherent plurality.

<sup>23</sup> See Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. 1927. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York, Harperperennial/Modern Thought, 2008, 341-349.

<sup>24</sup> See Schroeder, “Review of Reiner Schürmann’s *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*.” Here I detail Schürmann’s explication of Nietzsche’s radicalization of Kant and draw out the additional consequences for identity. In essence, Nietzsche’s concept of identity offers us the chance to think about our political positions without having our identity so firmly bound up in them. This would, theoretically, reduce polemic tendencies.

polemics of our time. Authenticity is not a mere suggestion, it is a requirement of *nature* itself, a political principle rooted in the deepest core of Nietzsche's thought. To be an authentic person, then, is to know what one believes and why, have this be in accordance with what is (the immanently real), and to proclaim it without shame and with hunger for *battle* and growth all while risking and eventually letting go of the identity one has built through this process. In essence, this is a commitment to the eternal return as it plays out in the political, a cyclical process of beginnings and ends, births and deaths, the creation and recreation of new identities through continuous participation in the world. It is that same plea uttered by Socrates in *Charmides* that every man presents himself as he truly is. Plato simply failed to retain "the innocence of the senses" counseled by Zarathustra (Z "On Chastity"). In doing so, he condemned humanity to millennia of searching for certainty in conceptual schemes that became increasingly hostile to the pluralities of human life. As such, our corrective course in view of Nietzsche's thinking would be guided by a non-negotiable commitment to authenticity as the foundation of *thinking* and *being* in the political.

## Conclusion

Nietzsche's political philosophy is inherently prophetic. It beckons for a time when conditions allow for a certain way of being in the world, a day when the world itself provides the resources to grant access to everyone and at all times to their fundamental equality in the eyes of nature i.e. the will to power.<sup>25</sup> This does not bear the mark of an individual carving out the world in their own image. Nietzsche believes that in a universe that is "to all eternity chaos" there is of course no chance to escape the reality we are bound up with (GS §109). However, this then means that in a world of human designs there is chance in the absolute sense. This is not a relativistic impulse or a method for the few to gain power, it is the one and only truth in Nietzsche's eyes. It is the truth that dismantles all human claims to perpetually authoritative truth and opens the door to absolute creativity in any given moment. This is the "law of ebb and flood" (GS 1), and it is possessed by no person or state, it is the gift of the earth itself. This cannot be seized or taken, merely redeemed.<sup>26</sup> The first imperative in such a case is to overcome the metaphysical promise and the political lie by authentically engaging with the earth and humankind. As such, Nietzsche's political philosophy can be described as a politics of authenticity.

I have ventured to offer a fresh approach to interpreting Nietzsche's political thought as it relates to democracy. This explication of authenticity as a central pillar of Nietzsche's political philosophy is not set forth in opposition to or support of any existing position (not explicitly, at least), but rather as a requisite for any political thought to be considered faithfully Nietzschean. It is my hope that this opens dialogue about a possible convergence concerning Nietzsche's political thought and use for democracy. In taking Nietzsche's challenge seriously we can turn the critical eye towards ourselves and how we give life to

---

<sup>25</sup> GS §1. In setting forth tragic wisdom as something that must be accessible by all Nietzsche commits himself to a certain picture of equality, one that, in a generative sense, is compatible with the central concerns of democracy.

<sup>26</sup> See GS § 109, Nietzsche writes "When shall we be permitted to *naturalize* ourselves by means of the pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?" Put bluntly, our political subjectivity is given by our ontological reality i.e. our relationship with the earth, and thus is *discovered* and not *theorized* or *constructed*.



the political circumstances we inhabit and thereby discover our capacity to change those very conditions.

## Works Cited

- Abbey, Ruth, and Fredrick Appel. "Nietzsche and the Will to Politics." *The Review of Politics*, vol. 60, no. 1, 1998, pp. 83–114. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1408331>.
- Arendt, Hannah, and David Bromwich. *On Lying and Politics*. Library of America, 2022.
- Plato. *Plato's Dialogues*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett, 2018. *Internet Archive*, <http://archive.org/details/PlatoDialogues>.
- Foucault, Michel, and James D. Faubion. *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. New York: New Press, 2006.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. 1927. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York, Harperperennial/Modern Thought, 2008.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Judith Norman. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* [1886]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Keith Ansell-Pearson, Carol Diethe. *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887], Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, Williams, B., & Nauckhoff, J., *The Gay Science* [1882, 1887]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, et al. *The Anti-Christ ; Ecce Homo ; Twilight of the Idols : And Other Writings*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich and Del Caro, Adrian. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* [1883-1885]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Patton, Paul. "Recent Work on Nietzsche's Social and Political Philosophy." *Nietzsche-Studien*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2021, pp. 382–95, <https://doi.org/10.1515/nietzstu-2021-500122>.
- Schürmann, Reiner, and Francesco Guercio. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche: Lecture Notes for courses at the New School for Social Research (Summer 1975/fall1977/spring 1984/spring 1988)*. Zurich: Diaphanes, 2020.
- Siemens, Herman W., and Vasti Roodt, editors. *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*. Walter de Gruyter, 2008.
- Schroeder, Zachary. "Review of Reiner Schürmann's *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*," *Phenomenological Reviews*, 25 Sept. 2023, [reviews.ophen.org/2023/09/25/a-review-of-reiner-schurmanns-the-philosophy-of-nietzsche/](https://reviews.ophen.org/2023/09/25/a-review-of-reiner-schurmanns-the-philosophy-of-nietzsche/). Accessed 1 Sept. 2024.