

Nietzsche: Political or Apolitical Philosopher? - Postliterate - Medium

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Preliminary Notes on Losurdo — (Some informal ramblings)

The current and ongoing consensus on Nietzsche's philosophy vis-à-vis its political implications have long been that it offers many positive insights for those on the political Left. This was made possible by the depoliticization of Nietzsche's work — which also allowed his name to be decoupled from alleged Nazism — followed by a reevaluation of his philosophy in this new light as something anti-capitalist, anti-totalitarian, and anti-antisemitic. It was once Nietzsche was officially considered non-political (or apolitical, or anti-political, it is all the same here) that his remarks on modernity, history, truth, nationalism, and antisemitism were able to be appropriated by a political Left. Some now go as far as to draw comparisons between Nietzsche and Marx or Marxism.

The first issue that emerges when attempting to engage in a such an exegetical game (a game which, as we will see, is a tightrope walk), is the realization that Nietzsche believed strongly and explicitly in a sort of aristocracy. The ideal to which Nietzsche yearned for was not intended for all people because it was not expected that all people could ever hope to reach it. Rather, certain special individuals rise to his conceived nobility by virtue

of their exceptional character, and realize a state of power far above and beyond the poisonous “rabble.” Nietzsche believed in a nobility consisting only of truly the strongest individuals who could set the example for all others.

Those who defend Nietzsche from the Left interject here — Nietzsche, they may point out, never indicated *who specifically* belonged to the nobility. Anyone who embodied his ideal could become a member, and this ideal does not exclude anyone *a priori*. Therefore, anyone could become a member and there is no way to know from the outset. This is the argument Walter Kaufmann pursues in his presentation of Nietzsche; Kaufmann admits to Nietzsche’s desire for hierarchy, but asserts that Nietzsche’s conception of power as a state of being and not as any physical or biological characteristic of a person allows for a sort of generally *assumed* nobility to take root. Anyone could become a member of the nobility, and therefore each is understood as such and treated accordingly. Consequently, the attempt to correlate Nietzsche with anarchism and anarchist philosophy has a history.

This argument holds well enough simply because we are still on the grounds of Nietzsche as a non-political thinker. Thus, all of the problems Nietzsche discusses can be dealt with at the level of thought and abstracted reasoning rather than concrete political demands. Nietzsche’s philosophy is “primordial” this way — it generates a system of action so innocent it cannot even make concrete social demands; it lacks a reality in particularity, and is therefore not fully formed.

What is needed to show that Nietzsche is incompatible with the values of the political Left is an exegetical project which could reveal Nietzsche’s political side (if there is one), and then reveal it to be antithetical to Leftism. Such a project does indeed exist, and it was the project of Domenico Losurdo — in an over 1000-page book analyzing and conceptualizing Nietzsche’s anti-Leftist political thought.

The true marvel of Losurdo's work lies in his attempt to place Nietzsche's politics at the *center* of his philosophy, rather than outside of it. This is significant because even if we analyzed Nietzsche's writings in which he defended slavery, demeaned women, expressed shock and horror at the events of the Paris Commune, and consistently denounced all the variants of socialism he knew, excuses could still be made for them. We know this to be true because it has already been done many times before. Indeed, everything except perhaps the first fact has already been known for quite some time — yet the attempts to liaise Nietzsche with some variant of Leftist thought have not ceased. To restate, even if Nietzsche expresses concrete political demands, they would still be placed on the margins of his philosophy, because the attempt to call his work non-political is so ingrained in our approach to him. Nietzsche is called a victim of his times, or he is called ignorant in places, or whatever. But as a non-political thinker he is still considered capable of being compatible with Leftist politics, *regardless of what he actually says*.

For this reason, Losurdo's attempt to understand Nietzsche's reactionary politics as the *core* of his whole way of thinking is both groundbreaking and perhaps the only way to eradicate naive readings of Nietzsche *in toto*. Nietzsche's doctrines and ideas can in this way always related back to his reactionary ideals, because the latter is the *cause* of the former.