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# CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE ZARATHUSTRA'S POLITICS

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**FOR** 

SENIOR THESIS

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#### Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a work often understood to focus on individualistic philosophy and offer only ancillary insight into politics. The focus of this work is Zarathustra's mission of spreading the gospel of value creation to inspire the rise of the overman in order to overcome nihilism. While there are many different ways to interpret Zarathustra's seemingly external values (or lack thereof), none perfectly solves the incoherence of Zarathustra's teachings by itself; one must synthesize multiple interpretations to understand his message completely. By the end of Zarathustra, it is apparent Zarathustra has shunned politics but also failed in his quest to convert worthy and able men to the philosophy of value creation. To understand what Nietzsche, not Zarathustra, prescribes for society and the individual in Zarathustra, one must understand the relationship between Zarathustra's teachings on value theory and politics. The value theory allows one to understand Nietzsche's problems with modern society and how it values men, specifically the rise of the liberal state and the docile, domestic existence it fosters for a species that once fought for great things. The politics create the environment in which nihilism and the last man can be avoided and the overman can triumph. Far from being secondary, one must understand Nietzsche's political philosophy if he is concerned with bringing about a world governed by value creation and capable of creating overmen. Zarathustra's value theory may not be coherent, but it provides a description of the psychology of the overman, willing to fight for his values in Nietzsche's ideal political system, aristocracy. Thus Spoke Zarathustra does not just detail Zarathustra's journey and the internal struggle of the value-creating overman; it also focuses on the politics that are necessary to allow the overman to struggle and

overcome. Nietzsche's goal, then, is not to explain a coherent philosophy, but to describe a possible world of individual struggle, value creation, and aristocratic politics that can deliver mankind from the beastly malaise of modern society, the eternal recurrence, and nihilism.

My paper will argue in three sections that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* necessarily implies an aristocratic political system. In the section "Zarathustra's Value Theory," I first lay out Zarathustra's account of the history of valuing, his problems with that history's development, most importantly the rise of nihilism, and the theory he attempts to use to overcome nihilism, value creation. I then describe the two major problems with the theory: its incoherence and inability to overcome the eternal recurrence. In the second section, "Possible Interpretations of Value Creation," I describe three different perspectives that can be used to understand Zarathustra's value theory. By combining these perspectives, a coherent theory of value creation that overcomes nihilism and the eternal recurrence can be pieced together, though it only makes sense of value creation from an individual, internal level, not from a universal, external one. Using this theory of value creation and its adulation of the overman, in the third section, "Zarathustra and Politics" I provide a critique of modern liberalism and an alternative coherent with Nietzsche's philosophy, aristocracy. Through my thesis I not only intend to demonstrate the weakness of the foundations of modern liberalism using Nietzsche's philosophy, an easy task, but also to craft an argument based on Thus Spoke Zarathustra, in my opinion Nietzsche's most comprehensive work, that explains an alternative foundation for human values and a political system that reflects it.

### Zarathustra's Value Theory

#### **Value Creation and Nihilism**

Zarathustra is most concerned with value creation. A story is sewn throughout Thus Spoke Zarathustra that describes how values evolved over time and why value creation is necessary. According to Zarathustra, "...only man placed values in things to preserve himself – he alone created a meaning for things." Man sees the world through the lens of values, at first to determine what is good and bad for his survival. The meaning of values evolved along with society, and Zarathustra views the influence of institutions on the definition of "value" as a bad thing. He accuses the church and state of controlling the meaning of "good" and "evil," indoctrinating the rabble in accordance with their low desires. Religion (Zarathustra is focused mostly on Christianity) teaches men that their suffering is justified because they will be rewarded in Heaven.<sup>2</sup> The state is designed to keep the masses docile by feeding their petty desires; the state defines "good" and "evil" in such a way as to give their actions legitimacy. 3 Zarathustra does not like these definitions of "good" and "evil" and asserts that "the greatest evil is necessary for the overman's best." In order to become Zarathustra's ideal man, the value-creating overman, one must reject the values of the masses and embrace their evils, such as hard work and iconoclasm.

Zarathustra is especially worried about the problem of nihilism. God, according to Zarathustra, is killed by his love of man. He intends this to mean that man is so imperfect

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 288.

according to his own morality that man ultimately came to prefer another form of valuing. God is replaced with the state, whose pandering to man's lowest desires will, in Zarathustra's terms, make the soil from which the overman should spring too infertile to support him. Men will soon "no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man," because their happiness will become reactionary; man will satiate his basic desires for food, water, and shelter, and aspire to little else. Zarathustra wants to avoid this nihilistic fate for man, where values are nothing more than sheer instinct and man is little more than a docile beast. Zarathustra's companion and the embodiment of nihilism, his shadow, sums up the problem of nihilism effectively with the old adage, "Nothing is true, all is permitted;" Zarathustra's nightmare of nihilism is realized in a world without truth or value. More than anything, Zarathustra wants man to have a reason to live, to value something, making nihilism man's worst possible fate.

Zarathustra's story of values is intended to show that values are created and, if there is a standard for what is good and bad, that standard does not belong to any value system believed in or proposed in the past. Each system has been a step along the tightrope that is man, according to Zarathustra: "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman. A rope over an abyss." The beast is the man that naturally values out of self-interest; man is capable of more complex values but is trapped in dogmatism and internal conflict. Zarathustra believes man is something that must be overcome. Otherwise, he will fall in the abyss and become the last man, a creature like a domesticated animal that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 260.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 274.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 14.

cares only for basic comforts and is not even willing to fight to achieve its desires.

Unfortunately for Zarathustra, his metaphor is played out in front of his eyes: when he first returns to civilization, he witnesses a tightrope walker's death from a plunge off a tightrope because the aerialist is harassed by a jester, an event representing the value skepticism that leads to nihilism. Nietzsche uses this scene to first plant the idea in the reader that Zarathustra may not succeed in saving man from the abyss.

Zarathustra's vision for the transcendence of man is the overman. The overman is a radical conception of individualism (for a select, capable few) that rejects all value systems of the past and creates a new, personal system of values. This individualism does not mean that the overman has to be greedy or only care about himself, but that he is only capable of holding internal values that he wills (barring possible external values Zarathustra professes). "Whoever must be a creator always annihilates," Zarathustra says; to exercise one's freedom to create, the individual must make something new and, in doing so, reject the old. Creation is done through one's "will to truth," the effort to craft a unique view of the world that is completely understandable to the creator. Thus the will to truth becomes the "will to power," the overman's will to creation and domination. Truth, then, takes on a meaning that makes it contingent to individuals. Zarathustra argues that because of man's very nature as a creature that wills, his perception is irreparably clouded. He states, "This is what the will to truth should mean to you: that everything be changed into what is thinkable for man....And what you have

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 113.

called world, that shall be created only by you." <sup>12</sup> In other words, man can only "understand" the world from an individual perspective, and the world is created around that perspective. One's standard of truth, then, is wrapped up in his values.

The root of value creation comes from unique individual experiences, which generate virtue. Zarathustra advises that one should keep his virtue secret from all others so that he may be sure his values are unique; otherwise, his values become subject to the interpretation and influence of the values of others. This catalyst of value highlights the limit of reason; a degree of valuing must rest on formative experiences but not enough to leave one prone to others' belief systems. As Zarathustra puts it, one must have "faith in faith."

It is not enough just to create one's own values. Zarathustra states that "...the man of knowledge must not only love his enemies, he must also be able to hate his friends." The overman is always pushing himself to dominate and overcome greater challenges, to test the strength of his values and make them stronger. For this reason, the overman should love that which challenges him, his enemies, and hate that which makes life easier, his friends. It is unclear, however, if Zarathustra is an overman or a prophet of overmen; his narrative describes his journey as an attempt to conquer many great challenges to his values, but it is unclear if he succeeds or not.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 78.

#### **Paradox and Incoherence**

Zarathustra walks a fine line when he condemns all current forms of valuing while trying to establish a new form, value creation. It is unclear if he is able to overcome nihilism and save his value of noble (good) created values from his critique of other values. Zarathustra relishes the fact that common men hate "...the man who breaks their tablets of values, the breaker, the law breaker; yet he is the creator." The problem is that Zarathustra is attempting to create a new set of tablets through his speeches, tablets that must be as "permanent" as Christianity and the state attempt to be, so he may be prescribing his own destruction. Value creation necessitates the rejection of old values; how can Zarathustra prevent his values from being rejected and his value creation from ultimately being overcome? Zarathustra's gospel of value creation seems to be a paradox because it claims to be true but wills its own nullification.

It is also unclear how Zarathustra is able to make credible criticism of the rabble and praise of the overman if the truth of value statements encompasses no larger a sphere than individual experience. Zarathustra makes it clear, for instance, that he hates the last man. "Let me speak to them," he says, "of what is most contemptible: but that is the last man." The last man can only be contemptible if Zarathustra can make the argument that value creation is better than docile animalistic tranquility. If value and truth are relative to individuals because of nihilism, it will be difficult to make negative value judgments about the last man, the common man, religion, and the state that apply to all people (hold external validity). How can Zarathustra critique and advocate the destruction of other

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 17.

"false" value systems on the basis that nothing is externally valuable, and in turn argue for his own form of valuing?

#### **Eternal Recurrence**

The theory of the eternal recurrence poses serious problems for Zarathustra's values. This theory entails that "...we have existed an eternal number of times, and all things with us....we ourselves are alike in every great year, in what is greatest as in what is smallest." That is to say, history repeats itself and is deterministic in nature. Peter Berkowitz identifies the two areas of concern with Zarathustra's values, when placed in the context of this theory, as "the burdens of the past and the laws of causal necessity." The "burdens of the past" implies two problems. The first is that if everything has already happened and is destined to happen again, unique creativity (in the sense that it is original) is impossible. The less controversial problem is that man is influenced by the past and it (the past) forms the basis of man's beliefs and values, making it hard to overcome. The problem with causal necessity (or determinism) is that to be a free, creative individual, one must be in command of himself, not subject to the invisible equations of time and space. If the eternal recurrence exists, then, it seems to completely undermine Zarathustra's theory of value creation.

Zarathustra believes his greatest contribution to mankind is teaching them how to overcome the eternal recurrence and still value creatively. He says, "...to redeem what is past in man and to re-create all 'it was' until the will says, 'Thus I willed it! Thus I shall

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 220.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 208.

will it.'"<sup>20</sup> Zarathustra believes potential overmen must take charge of the eternal recurrence and believe they will all of its implications: determinism, the past's influence, and what they copy from the past. This seems to require willfully induced ignorance by the overman, however; it is illogical to think man can control the past. The eternal recurrence seems to strike a mortal blow to the ability to freely value create but will ultimately have little effect on the ends of the overman. The eternal recurrence has no direct implication on the ends of striving to fulfill difficult, unique values and unity of drives, or creating an honest illusion. Even if people cannot be in complete control of their will, utilizing one's will to power to do great things is an active pursuit from the individual's perspective, not passive or pre-determined like another's analysis would dictate under the terms of the eternal recurrence.

The solution to these problems posed to Zarathustra's theory of value creation lies in cobbling together different possible interpretations of his philosophy. Though this solution may not provide a prescription for a set of external values that should govern all human life, it will provide a sounder basis for political life than the axioms and assumptions political life has been and currently is founded upon.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 198.

## **Possible Interpretations of Value Creation**

#### **Forms**

One possible conception of Nietzschean values can be understood as similar to Platonic forms. Plato explains forms to be the essences of the objects and ideas that govern man's existence, such as beauty and good. According to Plato's Socrates, these essences have "the same simple, self-existent and unchanging forms, not admitting variation at all." Plato's Socrates explains how to seek knowledge of the forms in *The Republic*. He says that knowledge is the "most vigorous of all powers," and philosophers, as lovers of knowledge, should be kings. Using the light of the sun as a metaphor for knowledge, Socrates explains that in order to know what the form of the good is, philosophers must pursue knowledge. He also uses the famous cave metaphor to explain that the goal of his Republic utopia is for philosophers, the leaders of the Republic, to drag people from ignorance (the cave) into the light of the sun so that as many people as possible may also understand the form of the good.

The burden of proof for forms is high. Forms are the ideal versions of all things that epitomize them, both concepts like truth, beauty, and the good, as well as objects, in the external world, that are valuable in themselves. Socrates is careful to distinguish between what *is* and what we see in a way that precludes variation in individual

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), accessed March 23, 2012, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedo.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Allan Bloom, trans., *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), sec. 477 d.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Bloom, *Republic*, sec. 473 d.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Bloom, Republic, 188.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Bloom, *Republic*, sec. 517 b.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Bloom, *Republic*, sec. 516 a.

perception of forms, dismissing the latter as opinion. Understanding an absolute like the form of the good that exists externally seems impossible using reason alone for the very reasons Zarathustra is concerned with nihilism and tries to come up with a solution to it. Reason does not dictate value; humans emplace value upon the world. If things are valuable in themselves, even without the existence of man, people could not know it. The very process of human valuing precludes knowledge of external value, whether or not it exists. Nihilism, or humanity's inability to discover any external values, precludes knowledge of the forms.

Nietzsche's Zarathustra would denounce Platonic forms. As previously discussed, he believes truth is relative to the individual, and should be harnessed by those capable to create one's own unique world and values. <sup>9</sup> Zarathustra also explicitly expresses skepticism about immaculate perception, the goal of the theory of the forms. He likens men who try to be "pure perceivers" to the moon: they simply wish to look upon the earth in the dark, not shed the light of knowledge upon it like the sun. <sup>10</sup> Because man necessarily must will, Zarathustra also views the task of "pure perception" as impossible. Concerning the so-called "pure perceivers," he says, "Behind a god's mask you hide from yourselves, in your 'purity;' your revolting worm has crawled into a god's mask." <sup>11</sup> By not recognizing the existence of their own will, pure perceivers live a lie and, by willing to will nothing, they are at constant war with themselves. Zarathustra also worries that some of humanity's most important perceptions, like love and beauty, would not exist if

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Bloom, *Republic*, 158.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 122.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 123.

men had immaculate perception. His companion later in the work, intended to be a devotee to pure perception, covers himself with leeches; in trying to drain away his will's influence on his perception, he is slowly killing himself. <sup>12</sup> Zarathustra's opinions about Socrates' aspirations to discover the one form of good for all mankind can be summarized in one short statement: "For *the* way – that does not exist." <sup>13</sup>

The arguments may also make Zarathustra's quest incoherent. His intention is to shatter the old tablets of the values of the state and religion and replace them with the overmen's array of unique values which they created themselves. Zarathustra states, "...there are a thousand paths that have never yet been trodden – a thousand healths and hidden isles of life. Even now, man and man's earth are unexhausted and undiscovered." This seems incompatible with his earlier statement, "A thousand goals have there been so far....the one goal is lacking....if humanity still lacks a goal, is humanity itself not still lacking too?" The only way to reconcile these two statements is if Zarathustra's true intention is to create a new master tablet, one that values the creation of values and governs and validates all new tablets generated by overmen. To put it into Platonic terms, the form of the good would be value creation. Zarathustra would then be a sort of philosopher king, pulling man out of the cave and into the sunlight of value creation a la The Republic. But if one turns Zarathustra's own critique of valuing against him, it seems impossible for him to assert that his master tablet is a value that overcomes nihilism. Not only is Zarathustra's ability to teach value creation in question (which will

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 248.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 195.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 60.

be discussed later), but his theory requires the willful ignorance of the overman to his obedience to Zarathustra's master tablet and the overman's contentment with the mere individual ability to pass judgment on others' values based on one's own values.

Zarathustra's master value of value creation is unable to reach the height of a Platonic form.

It is possible that Zarathustra's teachings are compatible with an individualized conception of forms. Zarathustra states that he longs to fulfill "...my most hidden will: a bow lusting for its arrow, an arrow lusting for its star...a sun itself and an inexorable solar will, ready to annihilate in victory." His greatest wish is to destroy the tablets of old, like suns whose light induces the masses to view the world through their perspective on truth and values, and to generate overmen who cannot only destroy these suns, but who generate new ones to evade the abyss of darkness, nihilism. Zarathustra himself recognizes that he must be his own sun if he is to avoid this darkness when he states, "...many suns revolve in the void: to all that is dark they speak with their light – to me they are silent." If one is to create a world that is completely thinkable for himself as an individual, with coherent theories of value and truth, these concepts would be forms to him within his world. It is possible the unity of drives theory may offer a better theory of value that can apply to all mankind than the Platonic form interpretation of Zarathustra's teachings.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 215.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 105.

#### **Unity of Drives**

It is possible to avoid the difficulties of external values through the "unity of drives" argument; this argument asserts that value is found through internal coherence. Alexander Nehamas provides a good overview of this position in his article, "How One Becomes What One Is." Nehamas explains that Nietzsche is concerned with a unity of self: all things, and people, are the "sum of all its effects and features." He further explains that man's drives and desires are often at war with each other, so recognizing a single organism from a collection of these effects and features would be impossible without also factoring in the victor of the competition of drives, known by the choice the man ultimately makes. According to Nehamas, most people's drives constantly fight amongst each other in an attempt to dominate all other desires and "...become the subject that, at least for a time, says 'I.'" Zarathustra also expresses this sentiment. He worries that religion teaches men to despise their bodies and embrace death and suffering in order to enjoy utopia in the afterlife. <sup>20</sup> This prevents men from realizing their creative capacities here on Earth; men must embrace their bodies, not the concept of the soul, and master it. The body, according to Zarathustra, is "one sense, a war and peace, a herd and a shepherd."<sup>21</sup> The body's desires fight amongst themselves for power, and the self attempts to coherently organize the drives towards one goal, to shepherd these conflicting drives into an internally peaceful, but powerful, force.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Alexander Nehamas, "How One Becomes What One Is," *The Philosophical Review* XCII, No. 3 (July 1983): 398.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Nehamas, "One Is," 400.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Nietzsche. *Zarathustra*. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 34.

In his discussion, Nehamas identifies the two key forces that lead to internal conflict: akrasia and self-deception. 22 "Akrasia" is defined as acting against one's better judgment, commonly practiced by men who choose what is easy over what they consider right. Men who deceive themselves tell themselves that they have internal coherence towards a certain value set, say, chastity, but lie to themselves and sublimate their desire for sex instead of successfully willing it away. Zarathustra's disdain of "pure perceivers" is another prime example of self-deception. It follows then that a man's major drive that motivates his creativity, whatever it may be, cannot just ignore other contradictory drives (self-deception), or ever submit to another desire (akrasia). 23 The master drive must command, or otherwise obey; it must, as Zarathustra puts it, "...become the judge, the avenger, and the victim of its own law."<sup>24</sup> In order to do this, it must confront any desires that would render the unity of self, the "I," incoherent, that would conquer it and bring it back into the flock. Zarathustra recognizes the best way to do this: "Whatever I create and however much I love it – soon I must oppose it and my love."<sup>25</sup> The will to power dictates that creators constantly challenge their master drive, so that it may overcome anything that challenges it, and constantly strengthen its creation.

Because of this process of conquering higher and higher mountains (overcoming and assimilating more and more difficult desires/values), Nehamas continues, success and the end of unity become less important than this means to them. "One must still have

Nehamas, "One Is," 400.
 Nehamas, "One Is," 402.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 115.

chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star,"<sup>26</sup> Zarathustra says; if one actually achieves coherence, it is more likely one has given in to self-deception, or akrasia, than actually achieved a unity of drives. Still, "evil that-grows out of the fight among your virtues;"<sup>27</sup> unity of drives remains the ultimate goal, for war against oneself takes energy away from creation. Nehamas likens this process to literary creation: one designs himself as an aesthetic, unified character representing some major human drive, but also serves as that character's author.<sup>28</sup> To extol the great virtue he has chosen as his main drive, he must conquer great challenges, internal and external, using it.

It is unclear if the unity of drives theory can weather the many criticisms against it. The means/ends issue, that the goal of coherence may not be possible, is the first problem. The overman, a coherent individual, is a goal, but it is hard to conceptualize a creative actor who has co-opted not only all of man's desires, but ideas contrary to his own, under his master desire. If creation is the ultimate good, perhaps this end is not desirable at all; if an overman finds a value so powerful that it unifies all other values, then truly meaningful creativity that shatters the old tablets would be impossible. It seems at times that Zarathustra flirts with the notion of value creation as a master tablet, but the incoherence of that notion poses a serious problem. The criteria for unity of drives also pose a problem. A normal man would have intense difficulty achieving unity of drive because his complexity of desires would lead to a great deal of akrasia and self-deception. But the last man, a simple, docile, animalistic man, could hypothetically achieve a great deal of unity toward a master drive of simple contentment. Zarathustra's

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Nehamas, "One Is," 416.

language makes it clear he has nothing but ire for the last man, but under the unity of drives theory, there is no way to make a value judgment against the last man. Zarathustra claims, "The higher its type, the more rarely a thing succeeds," and the rarer, more difficult thing to achieve is the better thing. The lowest man, however, is internally coherent, and though he lacks complexity, a desire to create, and the will to higher things, his world makes perfect sense to him.

The political implications of the unity of drives theory are also unclear. One could interpret the theory to mean that the overman should strive to bring all aspects of his life under his command. This would mean not only submitting all of his lesser internal desires to his master drive, but bringing all people and the world under the fold of his values and perspective. This seems to be Zarathustra's goal at times as he spreads the gospel of value creation, but, as previously discussed, the goal is incoherent. Individual coherence could be the sole goal, but this is also unsatisfactory. Zarathustra seems to suggest that those attempting to establish the greatness of their drive need to seek out and overcome contrary ideas. Unless Zarathustra thinks that man can reason through all contrary values to his own alone (which, evidenced by his trips down from his secluded mountain, he personally cannot), some interactions with other noble types is necessary. (The political conclusions of Zarathustra's teachings will be discussed later.)

The Platonism and unity of drives theories both highlight the difficulty of coherently defending the external value judgments found in Zarathustra's teachings. The mind independent virtues they support (coherence, unity, creation) do not necessarily entail the vision and values Zarathustra espouses. Having individual forms, values, and

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 292.

master drives can be coherent, but they can only dictate moral absolutes to that particular individual. Zarathustra pines for something greater; he wants to be able to critique other common value sets (religion and the state) in a meaningful way greater than solipsism. His efforts to draw mankind towards the gospel of the overman highlight his aspiration to transcend his own mind, an effort that may be impossible by his own standard. Unity of drives does not necessitate creativity or difficulty but accommodates the overman. If one incorporates the unity of drives theory into the form of creativity as the good, it is possible to justify Nietzsche's criticisms of religion and the common man as bad and low. This is because both are self-deceptive, susceptible to taking the easiest path, and at war internally as well as critical of the last man for not being a creative force. This unfortunately does not take us far enough: to satisfy Zarathustra, it is necessary to hold value and accept nihilism. In the absence of external absolutes, there seems to be little to keep man from plunging into the abyss of nihilism. Even if there was a form of the good or if the ultimate value was unity of drives, by Nietzsche's own admission, overcoming nihilism seems to require at least a little faith.

#### **Honest Illusion**

It is possible that there is an indirect way to overcome nihilism. On his travels, Zarathustra encounters a soothsayer who asserts, "All is the same, nothing is worthwhile, the world is without meaning, knowledge strangles." Zarathustra invites this man, intended to represent nihilism, into his group of companions/disciples, who individually are flawed but who, together, represent the traits of the overman. The overman, therefore, must have some realization that any values he creates have no external relevance to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 240.

valueless status of the world. The contradiction of the overman is apparent: how can one create an absolute value set for himself when absolute values do not exist? Nadeem Hussain's "honest illusion" may be the only hope for a contingency in belief that will allow these two ideas, the overman and nihilism, to be compatible.

Hussein draws a connection between art, overcoming nihilism, and the creation of new values.<sup>31</sup> Artists are capable of generating "honest illusions," which Hussein describes as "a form of make-believe, pretending." The talented artist is able to open a door to another reality, often his reality, and lure one into understanding his version of the truth with the power of his medium. Unlike other forms of self-deception that Zarathustra despises, art itself is something fake that reveals the truth. Shakespeare's Macbeth, for instance, is not true, nor does it claim to be, but it does offer deep insight into possible negative consequences of ambition, arguably more effectively than any reallife event. Though fake, it represents something true. When dealing with great works of art, man has the capability of understanding and feeling attachment to the values espoused by the work while realizing that the values are derived from a false reality. If this is possible, then it should also be possible to live like a character from a book, according to Nehamas, and author one's own destiny. This is not enough for Zarathustra, however; he wants the assurance that the artist can truly overcome. He writes, "...poets lie too much," and they are failures because they do not have deep enough thoughts, so

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Nadeem J. Z. Hussain. "Honest Illusion: Valuing for Nietzsche's Free Spirits," in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). 164.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Hussain, "Honest Illusion," 166.

they write about the overman in a superficial way.<sup>33</sup> Zarathustra does not want the value creator to not truly believe in what he says; this is the meaning behind Zarathustra's companion, the magician, an actor.<sup>34</sup> The magician is an ascetic and not one who truly values because the values he acts out are not honest illusions; instead, they are simple illusions that only fool others. Hussein's theory strikes the proper balance between belief and illusion. The major difference between Hussein and Nehamas is that, according to Hussein's theory, while the values that define one's aesthetic pursuit are seductively convincing, the overman must also recognize and accept nihilism and the external meaninglessness of his beautiful, internal values; his values are contingent on the honest illusion that there is value. Zarathustra recognizes this ability, expressed as dancing and laughter, as the overman recognizing, embracing, and enjoying his contradictory nature.<sup>35</sup>

A close reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* reveals two more instances of opposing concepts that the overman is capable of holding simultaneously. The first is the incoherence of Zarathustra's ultimate value of value creation. Zarathustra recognizes his theory's possible incoherence when he states, "Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you." The only way to identify value creation as the ultimate good while creating a value set that thinks it is absolute is to forget the former and embrace the latter. One must forget Zarathustra's teachings on value creation or destroy the concept of value creation if that person is to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 256.

<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 294.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 78.

design his own value. All the while, this person must recognize that he owes ultimate allegiance, not to his own theory of value, but to the ultimate good, value creation.

The second contradiction is the most important: reconciling the eternal recurrence with the overman. Zarathustra states in reference to the eternal recurrence that peak and abyss are joined together, and "It is out of the deepest depth that the highest must come to its height."<sup>37</sup> The eternal recurrence is the epitome of nihilism: though his will's ability to choose makes it seem untrue, man can come to understand that he is bound to a past he does not control, helplessly traveling down the path of his destiny, not able to truly express his will to power, with creation and holding values seemingly impossible. Bernard Yack recognizes that "Willing the eternal return is the supreme will to power because it is the greatest contradiction that man has yet been asked to bear." According to Yack, willing the eternal return "describes two different states of mind: the joyous affirmation of all life as if it had all the value that we ordinarily ascribe to permanence and the strength of will that constantly recognizes and suppresses knowledge of the world's valuelessness." The overman becomes, as far as mankind knows, a mythical creature: he embraces the truth of the eternal recurrence and nihilism but, at the same time, has just as powerful a belief in his values. He is even capable of willing the past in accordance with his own truth; Zarathustra states, "...to redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it' – that alone should I call

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 154.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 353.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Yack, Total Revolution, 353.

redemption."<sup>40</sup> To accomplish this monumental task of uniting the past, nihilism, and the eternal recurrence with one's will to power, the overman must, in Zarathustra's terms, unite the highest mountain and the abyss.

The honest illusion theory has allure, but it suffers from the basic contradiction it embraces. One cannot be a nihilist and believe in values. "Values = x" and "Values = {}" are not compatible. Saying that one holds value "x" contingent on the reality of nihilism also makes little sense; delusion and willful ignorance will not win a traditional philosophical debate. But perhaps if a man is able to invent his own world in which faith in the honest illusion can become truth, and if that will to truth can become his will to power, then the overman can have the power to live the contradiction of nihilism and value creation. Like a child at play, the overman is the author of his value and story; he fully believes in and plays his chosen role but is still able to laugh at himself and the world around him (because the internal values that govern his world are externally false), an attribute Zarathustra describes as a "prankish" spirit. This kind of drastic measure is necessary if nihilism is to be overcome.

All of these theories have serious problems and are not able to overcome nihilism on logic alone. It is possible that Nietzsche wanted to use *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a manual to describe the problems of modernity and the extreme difficulty they posed.

Zarathustra himself seems to be a failure. Zarathustra leaves the solitude of his cave to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 139.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 47.

"go under" because he loves man. 42 This is to say, Zarathustra's weakness is his love of man, and going under, meaning returning to civilization and all of its problems, is a mistake he makes. It certainly is not clear that Zarathustra should be trying to teach mankind the doctrine of the overman at all; most of his teachings are rejected, except that of the last man, which people embrace. Zarathustra is at least a failure in his corruption; he converts and guides no real, possible overmen from his interaction with the masses nor from his sacrifice of his internal serenity for external goals like saving mankind from nihilism. Towards the end of his documented travels, Zarathustra discovers that many of his original companions have turned to religious faith. 43 In Part IV of the book, he finds new, unsatisfactory companions. Though each possesses a different quality of the overman, collectively they still are foolish; they worship an ass because they can only hold values ironically. 44 Ultimately, one finds that Zarathustra's weakness of loving man changes the tone of his language from praising solitude, individualistic value creation, and the hardship required to do so, to striving, not for the happiness of overcoming but for the joy and distraction of companionship and for the possibility of teaching something to his new, eccentric entourage, no matter how shallow or meaningless that teaching might be.

All of this drives home the most important issue when considering Nietzsche's political philosophy. Modernity has revealed the many contradictions with which man lives, opposing forces so crippling they possibly undermine the coherence of any external value theory, leaving man to the abyss of nihilism. The proper response to this issue is to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 315.

focus on internal truth for one's own salvation from nihilism, not undertake the Herculean task of attempting to save others from the abyss (which appears to be an impossible task in Thus Spoke Zarathustra). If mankind cannot have a coherent external theory of value, then man needs to learn to overcome the contradictions of modern existence and make the faith required to do so his truth. It is unclear whether Nietzsche would agree completely with the forms, unity of drives, or honest illusion conceptions of his theory, but together a coherent internal theory of value can be crafted. Creative forms based on individual virtue challenge the overman to foster his own unique values, the goal of unity motivates the overman to continue to challenge himself to make his world reflect his values, and the overman must be capable of honest illusion in order to perceive his internal values with external validity despite nihilism and the eternal recurrence. Few men are capable of this lofty self-mastery, and it is clear Nietzsche and Zarathustra do not want men capable of this to be dragged down by the common man's desires and politics. With its foundations in the individual values of a select few, Nietzsche's political ideal will serve as a stark contrast to any modern society founded on unjustified assumptions and axioms of external value.

#### **Zarathustra and Politics**

#### **Democracy and the Common Man**

The political system that follows from Zarathustra's value theory is bound to be complex because he is never explicit about the government that would be most conducive to the overman. There is, however, one political point in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that is perfectly clear: democracy is bad. Any form of government that empowers "the rabble," the common man who is easily persuaded and indoctrinated by weak values or the values of others, is a bad government that could stifle the overman. Zarathustra finds it is impossible to communicate with most people because his teachings reject the common herd-morality of the time. He also finds that his perspective, derived from long periods of isolated contemplation, prevents him from effectively communicating with those so different from himself.<sup>2</sup> Any form of reason is most likely lost on the masses as well; Zarathustra observes, "What the mob learned to believe without reasons – who could overthrow that with reasons?" Ethos and pathos, as he sees it, are the means of coercing the masses to one's will; reasoned values will not triumph over what the masses want to hear. The mob believes that "there are no higher men, we are all equal, man is man; before God we are all equal." These last men are only concerned with reducing their suffering and preserving themselves for the longest period of time comfortably, to no difficult or beautiful end.<sup>5</sup> According to Zarathustra, the masses reject the overman because his value creation and strength destroy their otherwise blissful contentment and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 290.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 286.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 289.

ignorance of their own weakness.<sup>6</sup> The false egalitarian principles of the rabble and their desire to enforce it on those that strive to higher ends makes democracy, the government that lends the most power to the masses, dangerous indeed. Men of the egalitarian fold only wish to drag under, not raise up; Zarathustra writes that their "...most secret ambitions to be tyrants thus shroud themselves in words of virtue." All men desire power, and the weaker wish to punish the powerful and become the new masters.<sup>8</sup> Zarathustra further purports that the desire of all men to be the best, whether it be individually greatest, or equal, best, and worst among all men, is brought about by man's Hobbesian realization that he must have as much power as possible if he is to be capable of trumpeting his will above all other men's wills.<sup>9</sup> Everyone, according to Zarathustra, desires to be the master.

Zarathustra continues his commentary on overmen by arguing that they do not lead democracies because the herd is incapable of understanding their greatness. Further, the overman does not desire the praise or scorn of the common man, for his opinion means nothing; the masses are but flies, swarming the smelliest, largest pile of dung they can find. In Zarathustra's eyes, the men who lead democracies are actors and sophists, capable of feeding the masses exactly what they want to hear. The marketplace of ideas is nothing more than a place for men who want power to make the loudest noise to get the most attention. The potential leaders in the marketplace frame the truth and value as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 115.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 51.

"yes" or "no" answers, simple external absolutes, something any man striving to overcome nihilism would know is silly. <sup>12</sup> Zarathustra states, "I turned my back on those who rule when I saw what they now call ruling: haggling and haggling for power – with the rabble." <sup>13</sup> Great men, in his view, should not lower themselves to representing the herd's will; this is no true shepherd's task.

#### **Modern Liberalism**

Modern justifications of liberalism argued by men such as John Rawls and Richard Rorty fail to meet Zarathustra's standards. John Rawls argues in *A Theory of Justice* that because there is no agreement on value theory, liberalism balances people's interests as free actors as a part of a larger community. Rawls' conception of justice as fairness goes against everything Zarathustra stands for. His basis for the definition of fairness in society is founded in the "original position" thought experiment that if, under a veil of ignorance in which people did not know their future and they were forced to decide what was fair based on self-interest, all people would choose the maxi-min principle. This principle dictates that it is rational to be risk adverse in order to guarantee access to primary goods (food, water, shelter). Further, people would prefer to live in a society in which they had as many primary goods as they needed instead of one in which they had a small chance of being very powerful and a large chance of being poor and starving. 16

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Rawls, *Justice*, 136.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Rawls, Justice, 152.

The original position establishes the definition of "justice" as fairness, according to Rawls. This "fairness," he explains, is meant as the amount of liberty one can be afforded in a situation where all people are regarded as equals. <sup>17</sup> From this definition, two principles of justice are derived. The first is that each person has the right to as much liberty as is consistent with the liberty of others. In other words, no one can have less liberty than anyone else. The second principle is that social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they can be reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage and attached to positions and offices available to all. <sup>18</sup> This can also be called the Difference Principle: inequalities of primary goods are only allowed insofar as they benefit the worst-off. From these principles one can make the following determination: Rawls thinks that because people are risk adverse, in the original position they would rather guarantee that they had access to the primary goods they needed than allow for the possibility of using natural or social endowments to procure goods for themselves alone. These two principles are the basis of Rawls' just egalitarian liberal democracy.

Rawls' egalitarian liberal democracy provides no distinction between the great and the mediocre nor between the great man and the common man that Zarathustra demands; everyone who follows a rational life plan is equal in value. According to Rawls, men of high quality deserve just as much liberty as the man who, in his ignorance, lacks the freedom to think about difficult concepts and art because of his lazy and weak faculties. These shortcomings limit the excellent man's freedom, which he must use to benefit the worst men who, in their inability to understand great things, limit the excellent

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Rawls, *Justice*, 112.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Rawls, *Justice*, 60.

man to furnishing them (the worst men) with self-respect, food, and money. While "excellence" and "greatness" are difficult words for Zarathustra to define outside of the overman's pursuit of his own values, it is apparent that Rawls' lack of any explicit end man should pursue leads to an unsatisfactory conclusion. This exclusion is meant to suggest that all men, genius or foolish, should posses equal rights to attain their goals as long as they obey Rawls' principles of justice. Because no goal is better than another (within Rawls' constraints), society should provide all men with "equal" opportunity to achieve their ends, rather than aiding, or getting rid of constraints, on those who are more excellent than the common man.

Rawls' ideal political system actually appears to be Zarathustra's dystopia.

Zarathustra's last man desires a safe, complacent life fulfilling his basic desires. Rawls' devotion to equality and fairness does not lead man to his peak, to strive to overcome great challenges in creating his own values. Instead, great men are forced to service the paltry desires of the masses if they obey Rawls' principles of justice, or wreak havoc on his society with little consequence otherwise. If an uncommonly skilled man's pursuits are too abstract for the general populace to understand or benefit from, according to Rawls' principles of justice, the man must find a different pursuit that exercises his skills in such a way that they benefit the worst-off. While it is a great task indeed to provide nourishment for the indigent, it is unacceptable that all men must tackle the Herculean task of providing all people with primary goods, including those whose greatest skill lies in areas other than fields related to primary goods like agricultural science and economics. Even Rawls' assumption inherent to the maxi-min theory is offensive to excellence and the human condition; rather than take great risks and strive for greatness,

Rawls thinks men will be content with little more than primary goods, like animals. His *Theory of Justice* does not create a society that rewards and promotes greatness; instead, it provides the masses, now Nietzsche's last man, with basic comfort and subsistence in his apathetic existence. Allan Bloom frames the situation well in his paper, "John Rawls Vs. the Tradition of Political Philosophy," when he writes, "The community desired is one...without great sacrifices or great risks, one made for men's idle wishes and for the sake of which man has been remade...,[the society] supports our easygoing self-satisfaction....Nietzsche might provide a more appropriate title for this book: *A First Philosophy for the Last Man*." Indeed, Bloom recognizes that Rawls' idealistic and impractical egalitarian liberal democracy narrows the scope of man's liberty, debases him via the relativity of the good, and limits him to the lowly pursuit of primary goods to provide simple happiness if he chooses to abide by Rawls' doctrine of justice.

Richard Rorty is a liberal who embraces Zarathustra's teachings by turning the "honest illusion" conception of his value theory on its head. In his book, *Contingency*, *irony*, *and solidarity*, Rorty accepts the individually relative nature of truth and argues that men attempt to convert each other to their conceptions of truth and value perspectives through language. <sup>20</sup> He believes the world itself cannot be true or false; instead, man judges its validity through language descriptions. Language also is neither true nor false, but rather is contingent on the values of the particular era in which it is found. Rorty talks about the progression of language through history in the context of the

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Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Allan Bloom, "John Rawls Vs. The Tradition of Political Philosophy," review of *A Theory of Justice*, by John Rawls, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 69, No 2 (June 1975): 662, accessed April 4, 2012. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1959094.
<sup>20</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University

Enlightenment. He believes that the liberal culture he advocates "needs an improved selfdescription rather than a set of foundations" because foundations are a product of the Enlightenment perspective that ends must have nonhuman authority, preferably science to religion.<sup>21</sup>The language of the Enlightenment, he contends, is no longer valuable in this era of Nietzschean relativism, because terms like "objective" and "foundation" have lost much of their Enlightenment-era meaning. Even the results of science, viewed by many Enlightenment-era thinkers as truth, have, in the postmodern era, been corralled with all other human endeavors in the category of "value." Thus, Rorty believes that because the relativists are currently winning the language game, liberal culture's justification requires the standard for this era, an appealing description, rather than the standard for the Enlightenment era, objective foundations. It is from this basis of changes in language, Rorty argues, that the track of human history winds and turns. Further, advocates of various ideologies must play the language game and attempt to either promote their views using the language of the time, or design and implement a new vocabulary to create a new era favorable to their viewpoint if they wish to successfully proliferate their ideals.

It is in this context that Rorty suggests his utopia of liberal ironists. He defines an "ironist" as "the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her most central beliefs and desires," and a "liberal" as one who finds cruelty abhorrent. <sup>22</sup> The ironist has no reason to be liberal and no reason not to hurt others beyond what his individual feelings and opinions dictate; fascism, for instance, would be acceptable in a relativistic world. If it is possible for such an individual as the liberal ironist to exist, Rorty would

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Rorty, *Contingency*, 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Rorty, *Contingency*, xv.

populate his utopia with them. He believes that in this post-metaphysical society people will live in tolerance of each other because they do not desire to oppress others nor force their views on them. They neither hunger for dominance over others nor want to proliferate some absolute belief because of their kind and relativistic beliefs. Thus, the presence of sympathy and lack of extremism would breed solidarity into society and would allow the most possible languages to be realized due to stability and tolerance. This belief would be the foundation of Rorty's utopia: a world that proliferates freedom constrained only by a lack of human suffering and in which the only universal principle is the contingency of all values.

Zarathustra would reject Rorty's liberal utopia just as he would reject Rawls'. Rorty's position that value justification is descriptive would be akin to Zarathustra's beliefs that individual values are rooted in the virtue found through personal struggle. Rorty's conception of irony as the interaction between values and nihilism is similar to the contradiction Zarathustra embraces, to some degree, as discussed in the honest illusion conception of Zarathustra's value theory. Zarathustra would have no reason to rule out cruelty, for it is this exact aversion to suffering and causing pain that leads to the docile last man. If Rorty's utopia, in which there would still be great philosophical and aesthetic expression, is to be achieved, struggle and competition, possibly violent, could not be ruled out. Zarathustra affords no respect for the rights of all mankind except through his enemies who challenge him to transcend to new heights. The docile acceptance of relativism and the moderating effect it has on one's values also diverges from the honest illusion conception of Zarathustra's value theory. Zarathustra would want men to fight for their values as if they were 100% true while accepting the contradictory

theory of nihilism to also be true; Rorty, on the other hand, simply tries to find pragmatic, peaceful reconciliation between these two theories. Because Rorty rules out some means to express one's will to power, espouses an acceptance of docile pacifism, and allows for a diluted belief in one's own values, Zarathustra would criticize Rorty's philosophy as little better than Rawls.

#### **Political Skepticism**

Zarathustra's critique of politics cannot be limited to democracy. Any government founded on some conception of a social contract (understood to be an agreement between the government and the people in which the people give up some autonomy for the protection of at least their life and limb) is vulnerable to Zarathustra's skepticism about government. In his view, paying heed to the masses' desires in any way is a form of corruption. Educating the entirety of the population, not just those capable of deep understanding, is undesirable because it drags down the status of art and literature. He further argues that writers do not only transcribe the values of the rabble of their time into their stories, but they dumb-down their work to appeal to a broader literate audience.<sup>23</sup> This is also true of the state: it deceives to get what it wants and dilutes deep concepts that it steals from individual creators and dresses them up to gain broad appeal.<sup>24</sup> The state replaces religion for Zarathustra as the "new idol" that the herd worships; nationalism becomes the battle cry of the era without God – good is sacrifice for the state and evil is working against its authority. The leaders of the modern state sit upon thrones of mud; their power is not derived from their will to power but from public approval,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 49

deceit, and a lack of personal integrity. <sup>25</sup> Powerful ideas cease to be valuable; material wealth as a means to power becomes the state's all-consuming goal to keep its people content and submissive. On this subject Zarathustra states, "Only where the state ends, there begins the human being who is not superfluous: there begins the song of necessity, the unique and inimitable tune." <sup>26</sup> Freedom to create values is derived from the destruction of the state and its value tablets, glorifying the petty appetites of the masses. Finding a government structure that does not have to pander to the common man's needs poses a difficult goal.

Tamsin Shaw frames Zarathustra's problems with politics well in her book, *Nietzsche's Political Skepticism*. Shaw writes that, in the case that Nietzsche does believe in external value, "...the demands of normative authority and political authority cannot be reconciled." This is to say that Zarathustra's absolute good, whether it is the aesthetics, unity, and/or freedom linked to value creation, will always be constrained by traditional political entities. The stance that values cannot be mind-independent (moral anti-realism) faces a similar problem, Shaw argues: "For the antirealist cannot coherently recommend that others arrive at value judgments independently and at the same time recommend the imposition of political values that would require ideological subordination." In other words, individual value creation would be stifled by the state's desire to impose its own values, which is necessary to preserve itself. Both of these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Tamsin Shaw, *Nietzsche's Political Skepticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007),

<sup>112.</sup> 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Shaw, *Skepticism*, 108.

outlooks share the same basic problem when it comes to government: political systems are by nature coercive and attempt to limit value creation with social conditioning and brute force. All government types constrain value creation in some way: political regimes of the people, democracy and communism, require obedience to the people; theocracy, to a specific religion; and fascism, totalitarianism, and monarchy, to a specific man or state ideology. Anarchy seems like an unlikely option if for no other reason than Nietzsche implicitly accepts the natural existence of government through his observation that the common men stick together like a herd under a shepherd-sophist whose crook is his values. Zarathustra accepts that the state must exist as a crutch for the weak, but any sort of authority that the state attempts to impress over individual normative authority of potential overmen is problematic. There are two possible solutions to this conflict between the overman and state authority: the overman can live like a hermit in the mountains, completely absorbed in his own world, or he can rule nations, make them bow to his values and will, and attempt to submit others to his vision of the world as a form of overcoming other's ideologies and power.

#### **Individual vs. Community**

Nietzsche's account of Zarathustra's travels makes it unclear whether the overman should be a hermit or a conqueror. Whenever Zarathustra leaves his mountain, Nietzsche implies that he taints himself: Zarathustra must "go down" and "go under to the masses" because he loves them too much. <sup>29</sup> Zarathustra is compelled, however to spread his message; this need/desire may be part of the nature of the overman or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 10.

Zarathustra's greatest flaw. He exclaims, "...you great star, what would your happiness be had you not those for whom you shine?....Behold I am weary of wisdom, like a bee that has gathered too much honey; I need hands outstretched to receive it." Zarathustra needs an outlet to share his knowledge, his perspective, and his message of value creation. His value set is a little worthless, after all, if he keeps it to himself. It would be a lowly struggle for Zarathustra to create the value of value creation, and then not inspire other men to create value.

Zarathustra quickly comes to the conclusion, after witnessing the common townsfolks' positive response to his description of the last man, that he needs to find companions, not convert the masses. <sup>31</sup> It is possible that most men lack the mental capacity to comprehend Zarathustra's teachings, but it is also possible Zarathustra is a terrible teacher; few men in their right mind would trust a prophet bellowing in the middle of town. Zarathustra also fails to find companions. He observes, "Companions the creator once sought, and children of his hope; and behold, it turned out that he could not find them, unless he first created them himself:" As observed earlier, Zarathustra's original disciples turn to religion or turn to faith because holding an absolute belief one creates is very difficult. Zarathustra, unable to create companions, indeed finds unsatisfactory ones who distract him from his goal of creating the overman. In losing his pity for the higher man, Zarathustra abandons preaching the doctrine of the overman and value creation, content with his foolish companions at his mountain retreat. <sup>33</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 9-10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 161.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 327.

Zarathustra makes it clear that any traditional close friendships or meaningful connections are out of the question for the overman. Zarathustra writes, "In a friend one should have one's best enemy. You should be closest to him with your heart when you resist him."<sup>34</sup> The person the overman respects most is his rival, who does not make his road easier or, worst of all, who pities him in times of weakness instead of challenging him to be strong. A great rival is a great obstacle to overcome and a true test of the overman's will to power. The overman would have to dumb himself down to connect with the masses, and companions provide unnecessary aid. Only Zarathustra requires companions, for if he is to be successful in espousing the tablets of value creation, he must generate the overmen to generate the new values he glorifies. The extreme individualism in Zarathustra is found throughout the book. Instead of debating sophists in the marketplace, making loud noises to please the crowds, Zarathustra recommends, "Flee, my friend, into your solitude!" He observes that "In the end, one experiences only oneself;" it is impossible to ever understand the perspective of another individual or completely convert them to one's will.<sup>36</sup> This is completely fine with Zarathustra, who is adamant that one should keep the virtue that is the root of one's value creation secret at all costs.<sup>37</sup> All of this describes a solipsistic conception of politics, that one should remain confined to one's own mind in pursuit of becoming the overman and creating values.

This does not mean that the overman can have a superficial relation to the state.

Like a philosopher king, the overman must rule over his domain since he is highest; the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 36.

life of a mountain recluse provides one few opponents to overcome and little to master besides the philosophical ideas one generates. Zarathustra observes a hierarchy in society that, though it is unclear whether he can claim mastery is better than slavery in the face of nihilism, holds basic truths that would resound with most men. He claims one should "...will nothing beyond your capacity;" there is an order to the ability to will, and attempting to cross one's threshold will lead to a life of self-deception and disappointment. Earathustra expands on this concept when he observes that most men are not capable of being the overman, and they throw away their last value when they throw away their servitude. He holds that there are natural roles men have in the pursuit of individual values and how they relate to each other; the slavish should serve the more gifted noble types capable of value creation, not give obedience to others' values.

Zarathustra believes that there is a hierarchy among men, and it follows that man's politics should reflect their varied capacities. Though all men desire to rule, the best should lead, and the weak should follow. Zarathustra states, "He who cannot obey himself is commanded. That is the nature of the living." The people of the rabble obey the value of others. Sophists, priests, and statesmen believe in nothing and will say anything to gain power, and can only obey their will to the extent that the masses empower them; their will is determined by what the rabble values and desires. The only people left who truly command themselves, Zarathustra argues, are the overmen. This statement is crucial to understanding the political philosophy that flows from Zarathustra's teachings and journey. Man should be in a political hierarchy, according to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 289.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 113.

Zarathustra, in which the strong should serve the weak and the smaller should yield to the greater. <sup>41</sup> Those that obey the overman can never truly have his values, for his values are trapped within his mind, but they can still follow him based on whatever lowly set of values they are able to glean from their subordination to his will. Still, Zarathustra observes, "Commanding is harder than obeying; and not only because he who commands must carry the burden of all who obey."42 The overman, Zarathustra is saying, must not only be responsible for his domain, but for himself. His kingdom is only governed by his values, without friends or companions, and his followers' importance ranges from incidental to pawns in conflict with other overmen. The will of the overman is like the master drive of the unity of desires theory: it regulates itself and the subordinate desires that serve it. Zarathustra continues that the necessity of politics is a consequence of the existence of common men who need noble men to provide them with values. One comes to understand the overman as a creature capable of believing in his own values like forms of the good, striving to unite his world, the people that reside in it and in his own mind, under his theory of values, while effectively grappling with and overcoming antithetical ideas to his will to power, nihilism, and the eternal recurrence. In becoming the overman, Zarathustra says, "he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world." He strives to overcome any institution that wishes to subordinate his will, whether it is other individuals, religion, or the state, with his own kingdom.

### Aristocracy

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 27.

Zarathustra's ideal world political order would be a number of aristocratic nations in a constant state of war. All-out war, utilizing all resources, not just the overman's mind but also his surroundings, is necessary if a struggle among noble types is truly an all-out test of each other's wills to power. Zarathustra recognizes that there are many paths to the future, and life overcomes itself again and again through the constant war of values in eternal recurrence. 44 He proclaims, "The godlike strivers – with such assurance and beauty, let us be enemies too, my friends! Let us strive against one another like gods."45 A noble, in Zarathustra's eyes, should only "love peace as a means to new wars – and the short peace more than the long."46 He should never fight for peace to appease the common man's docility, but should fight for victory, to conquer other's wills and bring them under his own. A state of true peace would be tragic for the overman, because it would mean only he possessed the will to fight and the weapons to conquer, and there would be no more great mountains to conquer.<sup>47</sup> It is important to recognize that Zarathustra thinks wars of ideas and values are far more potent than the flair and glamour of battlefield combat. Zarathustra states that "The greatest events – they are not our loudest but our stillest hours. Not around the inventors of new noise, but around the inventors of new values does the world revolve."48 Physical war is an option that should never be precluded by the overman in the pursuit of great feats, but it is not of the same caliber of worth as intellectual combat. Zarathustra further proclaims, "War and courage

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 131.

have accomplished more great things than love of the neighbor."<sup>49</sup> To him, it is not love of others but love of one's own values and the great suffering and struggle involved with realizing those values and their implied truths upon the world that leads to man's greatest political and aesthetic triumphs.

Understanding the nature of the nobles fighting Zarathustra's perpetual war of value is the key to understanding the overman. The noble man wants to create something new from his virtue and does not live for brief pleasures, Zarathustra explains. 50 The noble man does not define himself by his father's or man's past achievements, like Zarathustra's two king companions, but creates his own success. 51 Zarathustra continues that nobles never resist their master drive; recalcitrance is the "nobility of slaves," he says. 52 Nobles must submit to their chosen value set and loyally fight for it. Nobles recognize that "Men are not equal. Nor shall they become equal!" There can be no nobles, no overman, no higher and lower, in the truly egalitarian world. The noble has a lust to rule and, with his strong virtues, he crushes uncertain ones.<sup>54</sup> To rule, one must descend, like Zarathustra, from the mountain to the valley of man, and though this lowers the noble, his greatest triumph may be bringing the men of the valley onto his mountain. This is what Zarathustra labels the "gift-giving virtue" any great leader must have: the ability to bestow value on lesser men and to deliver them from nihilism. 55 The noble still does this for selfish reasons, however. Zarathustra proclaims the virtue of "...the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 247.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 101.

Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 101. <sup>54</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 189.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 190.

wholesome, healthy selfishness that wells from a powerful soul – from a powerful soul to which the high body, beautiful, triumphant, refreshing, around which everything become a mirror."<sup>56</sup> The noble's world must reflect his excellence, his high truth, his ambitious values, and can only do so if he raises it up to his level.

Through this description of the noble, one comes to know the overman's ultimate end. Zarathustra claims that "Human society is a trial: thus I teach it, and what it tries to find is the commander."57 He also contends that "The best should rule, and the best also want to rule."58 The overman is, in fact, not a creation locked within his own psychology, waging an internal war of philosophy, but must be understood as a political animal. There is an external world, a seemingly meaningless one, for which the overman must not only find values to interpret it from within, but for which he must also use his will to power to bring this world to kneel before his values. Because of this, Zarathustra states, "A new nobility is needed to be the adversary of all rabble and all that is despotic and to write anew upon new tablets the word 'noble.'"59 Tyrants try to destroy and discard the past for their own benefit and the rabble do not care to remember the past. Nobles, however, as potential overmen capable of embracing the contradiction of the eternal recurrence, also embrace the past, and in turn strive to not just will the past and the present but also their future, both their individual fate and the fate of their world. Complete victory should never be achieved, however, for the sake of value creation. Zarathustra says, "For many who are noble are needed, and noble men of many kinds, that there may be a nobility. Or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 190.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 212.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 210.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 202.

as I once said in a parable: 'precisely this is godlike that there are gods, but no God.'"60 The noble fights for victory but is defined by his struggle to that end; the overman could not exist if he achieved victory, for then there would only be one set of values, and, like nihilism, this would crush man's individual will and the creativity that makes him great. Bernard Yack sums up Zarathustra's view of political life best when he writes, "Through the imposition of physical suffering and discipline, the great politics of ideological war will restore the taste and self-discipline that modern individuals have lost."61 Great struggle and great suffering are the salvation of mankind, for they force mankind to abandon the complacency of the last man and the spiritual abyss of nihilism to rise to something higher in order to survive: a belief in something worth fighting for.

<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, Zarathustra, 203.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Yack, Total Revolution, 260.

## Conclusion

The Nietzschean world is one of great individuals waging ideological conflict with Zarathustra as its doomed prophet. For Zarathustra to succeed he must be rejected; the overman believes not in value creation but in his own created values. The overman heeds Zarathustra's words: to be great his will to power must pursue his values as if they were the form of the good, embrace the condition that contradiction between his values and nihilism is only overcome by his will's ability to embrace contradiction itself, and unify himself towards the faith he has in his own truth and the master drive it dictates he should have. While understanding that the internal dynamics of the overman is important, however, it is also impossible to understand him without factoring in the external, the political. One has not conquered oneself until he conquers the world he perceives. If the world does not reflect the overman's truth and values, it is his job as the best man to make it so. The overman, supreme over his domain, is not the best through others' recognition, but because he has unified the world, along with his mind, toward one end – his own. It does not matter if the common men ruled by an overman understand his vision and the values that drive him, because he does not derive authority from them; all that matters is that their actions serve that overman's value system and do not work against it. In this way, the internal absorbs the external; political life is an extension and reflection of warring overmen's values and wills.

Nietzsche does not desire a utopia of one overman with all of life's questions answered. The overman is defined by his struggle, his perpetual self-overcoming through the eternal recurrence. He lives for struggle against fellow overmen so that he may prove his greatness in overcoming other great enemies. An overman who has conquered all has

no other way to prove his greatness. This is Zarathustra's folly: he wishes to make a new tablet, an unbreakable tablet, to rule all overmen. Though his teaching may be the rope that spans the abyss of nihilism so that worthy men may become the overmen, the message of value creation has no external standard for judging other's values, nor is it able to defend its own worth. Zarathustra's desire to found the master drive of master drives, to transcend the war of values with his all encompassing philosophy, is a futile task indeed. This is why Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a book for all and yet for none: not only is Nietzsche skeptical that the overman can exist, he also believes that no one should imitate Zarathustra's own struggle but that all should learn from his mistakes. Through Zarathustra's journey in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche delivers a powerful critique of modern society, a path to the future, and exposes the folly of a man trying to be the conqueror of the overmen on the battlefield of contingent values over the precipice of nihilism. Only through simultaneously struggling against and embracing the internal and political value conflicts embodied by the eternal recurrence can man find salvation from nihilism and the complacency of the egalitarian liberalism that embraces it. The only form of politics that allows for this all-out noble struggle is aristocracy.

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