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A Simple Question: Does Friedrich Nietzsche have a Political Philosophy?

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to assess whether Friedrich Nietzsche has a political philosophy. Specifically, I will be concerned with whether Nietzsche would endorse a particular form of government. First, I will draw a distinction between a weak and strong interpretation of the question: “Does Nietzsche have a political philosophy?” This paper will focus on the weak interpretation; that is, “Does Nietzsche endorse a particular form of government?” From this, I will present a textually based argument that the answer is ‘No’, in regards to the question “Does Nietzsche endorse a particular form of government?” After drawing a distinction in the question, I will present an interpretation of Nietzsche’s famous claim, namely that: “God is dead.” I will show that Nietzsche is arguing that the belief in God has become unbelievable. Using this interpretation, I will apply it to Nietzsche’s view of the state. I will present the following argument: since the idea of God has become meaningless and unbelievable, the concept of the state will, in a similar way, become meaningless and unbelievable, and, therefore, die out. This argument shows that Nietzsche does not endorse a particular form of government. From this, one must conclude that Nietzsche is not interested with endorsing a particular form of government.

## **I. Introduction**

For many years, the philosophical community has been inundated with interpretations and reinterpretations of the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Much of the work has been done interpreting the critique of morality that runs through the whole of Nietzsche's corpus. The most pressing issue, from Nietzsche's perspective, is the poisonous morality found in Christianity, and how it relates to the enslaving of excellent individuals, or "higher men." For Nietzsche, it is simply the case that various individuals are born elevated above others, and Christian morality, and other similar universal moralities, stymies these individuals by bringing them in line with the masses. However, little work has been done in another area of Nietzsche's thought; that is, whether a political philosophy can be drawn out of his work. While Nietzsche cannot be seen as explicitly propounding a political philosophy, one may still be able to implicitly draw one out from his writings. It will be the purpose of this paper to analyze whether the endorsement of a political philosophy can be gleaned from Nietzsche's work. Further, it is my contention that such a claim cannot be made, and such attempts are misguided, and skew the overall philosophical project of Nietzsche. To state the purpose of this paper another way, Nietzsche is simply not concerned with the legitimacy, or formation, of the state in the face of what Nietzsche sees as the death of religion; that is, Nietzsche sees a close connection between the state and religion, and when we take this connection along with Nietzsche's belief that we are in an age of the death of religion, political questions become trivial.

In section II, I want to analyze the question that is under task in this paper; that is, "Does Nietzsche have a political philosophy?" In this section, I will identify two interpretations of the question. On the one hand, a strong interpretation of the question,

which focuses on specific requirements that political philosophers, for example Locke, Rousseau, and Hobbes, explain in great detail. On the other hand, the weak interpretation, which is less stringent, focuses on whether Nietzsche would *endorse* a particular political philosophy. It will be shown that the only answer to the strong interpretation is, 'No'. However, the weak interpretation does have significant textual evidence to answer the question in the affirmative. In what follows in the paper, I will be providing arguments against the weak interpretation of the question. From this, in section III, I will provide an interpretation of Nietzsche's famous claim that "God is dead." In this section, I will show that Nietzsche should be interpreted as saying that the belief in God has become unbelievable. In section IV, I will turn my attention to a specific argument against the weak interpretation of the question. The argument is not against an *endorsement* of a particular political philosophy, but covers all political philosophies that one might be inclined to attribute to Nietzsche. The argument runs as follows: Nietzsche believes there is a connection between the state and religion; that is, where a change in religion makes for a change in the state. Now, if we take this in hand with Nietzsche's claim that "God is dead," then there is no longer a foundation on which to ground the state. This provides an adequate explanation of why Nietzsche does not and would not endorse a particular political philosophy. Finally, in section V, I will make my concluding remarks, and bring the paper together as a cohesive whole.

## **II. A simple question: 'Does Nietzsche have a political philosophy?'**

The purpose of this paper is to answer what seems to be a simple question: 'Does Nietzsche have a political philosophy.' Yet, this question does not lend itself to a simple answer; that is, we can interpret the question in two respects. On the one hand, we can take a

strong interpretation of the question. On the strong interpretation, following Martha Nussbaum, we can ask if Nietzsche provides an account of specific political conditions that political philosophers such as Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau provide.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, we can take a weak interpretation. On the weak interpretation we can ask, given Nietzsche's account of the "higher man," is there a political philosophy, or form of social structuring, that Nietzsche would *endorse*. In this section, I will give an analysis of both interpretations of the question. To start, we will look at the strong interpretation of the question; specifically, the strong interpretation provided by Nussbaum. From this, it will be shown that Nietzsche does not provide any evidence for his having a political philosophy on this interpretation. Next, we will look at the weak interpretation, and provide an account of how Nietzsche seems to provide textual support for interpreting the question in this respect.

In the paper *Is Nietzsche a Political Thinker?*, Martha Nussbaum provides seven criteria that are addressed by "serious" political thinkers. According to Nussbaum, the seven criteria are as follows:

1. *Material need*. He must show an understanding of the needs human beings have for food, drink, shelter, and other resources, including the role of these resources in supporting the development of higher human capacities, intellectual and moral. He must make some proposals for the distribution or redistribution of resources in the light of these needs. Usually this will involve an account of distributive justice, including an account of the institutional structures required by justice.
2. *Procedural justification*. Closely connected with this, he must give an account of the procedures through which a political structure is determined, procedures that legitimate and/or justify the resulting proposals. (I am thinking, for example, of the role played by the Original Position in Rawls's theory of justice.)
3. *Liberty and its worth*. He must give an account of the various types of human liberty that are relevant to political planning, assess their worth, and give an account of the

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the only way in which we could cash out the strong interpretation. However, a strong interpretation will be concerned with specific questions like those provided by Nussbaum, and will look for specific textual evidence to support these claims. In this section, I will present Nussbaum's line of argument and show why Nussbaum believes Nietzsche does not have any answer to the strong interpretation of the question. As such, I believe Nussbaum is right in her conclusion that Nietzsche does not provide an answer to the strong interpretation.

relationship between the political sphere and the most important types of liberty. Usually this will include an account of the limits of state intervention with personal choice, and preferably also an account of the role of the political in creating the capacity for choice. More broadly, it will usually be connected to an account of the worth of the human being, and of the attitudes of respect and concern we owe to human beings as such.

4. *Racial, ethnic, and religious difference.* He must show an understanding of the role played in political life by differences of race, ethnicity, and religion, and make some proposal for dealing politically with these differences.

5. *Gender and the family.* He must show an understanding of the different ways in which society has structured the family, and of the ways in which differences of gender have been and can be regarded by political institutions. He must make some proposal for the appropriate structuring of these relations.

6. *Justice between nations.* He must show awareness of the fact that nations share a world of resources with other nations, and make some proposal concerning the obligations nations owe to one another, both with respect to the morality of international relations and with respect to economic obligation.

7. *Moral psychology.* He must have an account of human psychology motivation, emotion, reaction as this pertains to our interactions in the political sphere, either fostering or impeding them.<sup>2</sup>

As we can see, the strong interpretation of the question takes there to be a stringent list of features that a political philosopher addresses. This is not to say that every philosopher we identify as a political philosopher provides an account of all seven of these features, but a political philosopher will address the majority of these questions. The strong interpretation of the question that I have in mind consists of criteria along these same lines. Now, I want to turn my attention to the criteria, according to Nussbaum, which Nietzsche does not provide an account. This will not be a well-defined account of why, according to Nussbaum, Nietzsche does not address these criteria, but, rather, a surface account of the seven criteria.

For Nussbaum, the only criterion that Nietzsche actually provides an account of is (7). I will not provide an account of (7), but rather focus on (1)-(6). In regards to (1), Nietzsche endorses a view that suffering is intrinsically valuable. As such, Nietzsche provides a view

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<sup>2</sup> Nussbaum, Martha (1997). Is Nietzsche a political thinker? *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 5 (1): 2-3. This is Nussbaum's exact formulation of the criteria necessary for serious political thought. From here on out, I will be referring to these criteria by their number as they appear in this formulation.

contra to (1); in that, we do not need to distribute material needs because to not have these needs is intrinsically valuable to human existence. Speaking on what Nietzsche has given to criteria (1) Nussbaum argues, “Nothing, I think, that is not puerile. Again and again we find a superficial Romantic notion asserted, the same one we found in the discussion of women's education - namely that hunger and bodily suffering improve, or at the very least test and confirm, the quality of one's mind and character.”<sup>3</sup> On criteria (2), Nietzsche does not provide any textual evidence to support a justification of the state. As an example, when we look at the political philosophy of John Rawls, his Original Position provides the justification for the political proceedings that follow. However, Nietzsche does not provide any justification like this, instead, “[Nietzsche] himself continually makes normative assessments of political institutions, and obviously does not hold the view that whatever has happened is justified, far less equally justified. He rails against socialism and egalitarian democracy, he warns against the dangers of the German State.” For these reasons, Nietzsche does not provide an account of (2). To argue that Nietzsche is not concerned with (3), Nussbaum argues, “Nietzsche has nothing useful to say about the *politics* of liberty: about how political institutions either do or do not extend liberties equally to all citizens; about the extent to which they *should* guarantee certain basic liberties to all citizens, and which liberties these are; about the limits of state intervention into individual choices, in matters of property, religion, and personal self-expression.”<sup>4</sup> On criteria (4), Nietzsche clearly has views that oppose this criterion. Nietzsche believes that individuals are not born equal, and that there is a natural order of rank between individuals.<sup>5</sup> Speaking on (5), Nussbaum provides the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>5</sup> This is to say that Nietzsche believes certain individuals are born inherently *greater* than others. Nietzsche's conception of the “higher man” is the prime example of this line of thought.



following account of Nietzsche, “What I want to say here is that Nietzsche has no such account, right or wrong. There is nothing in Nietzsche on the topic of women and the family a topic to which he devotes a good deal of space, and concerning which he is inordinately proud of his insights that is any more than the silly posturings of an inexperienced vain adolescent male.”<sup>6</sup> While Nietzsche talks about (5), he does not provide any arguments that one can analyze. Rather, like many topics Nietzsche covers, they are pointless ramblings that do not amount to anything. Lastly, Nussbaum quickly dismisses any truth to (6). According to Nussbaum, “We may quickly dispose of *Justice Between Nations*... Nietzsche has no response to the detailed proposals of this work for the containment of aggression, the guarantee of hospitality rights, the morality of conduct during war, and other related matters topics on which Kant is not alone in pronouncing, but which were central in the political discourse of his time.”<sup>7</sup> I believe that Nussbaum is correct in her conclusion that Nietzsche does not and cannot answer the strong interpretation in the affirmative. The fact of the matter is that Nietzsche does not provide any support to answer the strong interpretation.

The purpose of using Nussbaum’s seven criteria for “serious” political thought has been to illustrate the strong interpretation of the question that is under scrutiny in this section. While this has been a crude representation of the strong interpretation, I believe it has adequately been shown that Nietzsche does not provide any support to interpret the question in the strong sense, or if we do take the strong interpretation of the question, the answer is obviously ‘No’. As such, the rest of this paper will focus on the weak interpretation of the question.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 3.

The weak interpretation does not make the requirements to have a political philosophy as stringent. Rather, on this interpretation, one does not look for a well-defined political philosophy, like the strong interpretation seeks to find, but rather pieces one together from the work of Nietzsche as a whole. The best way to view this interpretation is an *endorsement* of a particular political philosophy. So, we would ask, from Nietzsche's writing, is there a political philosophy he would *endorse*. For clarity, I want to flush out the concept of *endorse* I am using with the weak interpretation. When I say *endorse*, I am focusing on a specific political structuring that fits with Nietzsche's views on the "higher man" and critique of morality. As such, I am talking about a specific form of government, i.e. democracy, aristocracy, communism. On this interpretation, many philosophers have answered the question in the affirmative. For example, Bruce Detwiler has argued that Nietzsche should be interpreted as *endorsing* an aristocratic political philosophy.<sup>8</sup> This interpretation of the question seems to show the most promise; that is, while reading Nietzsche, we are confronted by passages like the following:

Every enhancement of the type "man" has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in value between man and man, and that needs slavery in some sense or other. Without that *pathos of distance* which grows out of the ingrained difference between strata—when the ruling caste constantly looks afar and looks down upon subjects and instruments and just as constantly practices obedience and command, keeping down and keeping at a distance—that other, more mysterious pathos could not have grown up either—the craving for an ever new widening of distances within the soul itself, the development of ever higher, rarer, more remote, further-stretching, more comprehensive states—in brief, simply the enhancement of the type "man," the continual "self-overcoming of man," to use a moral formula in a supra-moral sense.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). It is not my intention to present an account of Detwiler's view. Rather, it will suffice for the purposes of this paper to present a philosopher who answers the weak interpretation in the affirmative, and points to a specific form of government that Nietzsche would endorse.

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House Inc., 1966), 201.

Here Nietzsche seems explicit that aristocracy has been responsible for the enhancement of “man.” Nietzsche also endorses the stronger claim that any enhancement of “man” has been because of an aristocratic society. Passages from Nietzsche, like this one, seem to suggest that Nietzsche *is* endorsing some sort of political philosophy. Further, the works of Nietzsche contain various passages along these same lines. Similarly, given Nietzsche’s conception of individual action embodied in the excellences of the “higher man,” do these actions bubble up into an endorsement of a political philosophy?<sup>10</sup> From this, the question takes on a new shape: ‘Do Nietzsche’s passages that have political implications and his conception of individual action add up to an endorsement of a specific political philosophy?’ This is the specific interpretation that I will be working with in the rest of this paper. This question, unlike the strong interpretation, lends itself to an answer in the affirmative and negative.<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of this section has been to analyze the question that is at task in this paper. It was necessary to come to a precise formulation of the question to avoid vagueness. As was shown, we can identify two interpretations of the question. According to the strong sense, a political philosopher has a well-defined system of thought. For example, we considered seven criteria that Martha Nussbaum argues “serious” political philosophers provide a detailed account of. From Nussbaum’s account, the answer to the strong interpretation is ‘No’. However, this is not the interpretation that will be the focus this paper. Rather, I identified another interpretation; that is, the weak interpretation. On this

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<sup>10</sup> It is not necessary for the purposes of this paper to give a detailed account of Nietzsche’s “higher man.” Rather, it should be noted that Nietzsche, in numerous works, gives an account of the actions of the “higher man.” From this, one could ask whether these actions add-up into an account of how a society that benefits the “higher man” will act.

<sup>11</sup> A related question one could ask is: ‘Does Nietzsche endorse a view about what the state should aim to do.’ While this is a different question from the one I am addressing in this paper, it is related, in that, an endorsement of a particular government will be an endorsement of the aim of that state. However, the arguments presented in section III and IV can be used to answer this question as well.

interpretation, we are trying to identify whether Nietzsche would endorse a particular form of government. This interpretation hinges on showing that Nietzsche is concerned with politics in an indirect manner. We can piece together passages by Nietzsche that implicate Nietzsche as endorsing a particular form of government. While there may be several ways we could cash out which political structure Nietzsche would endorse, in what follows, I will provide an argument that shows that the answer to the weak interpretation is ‘No’. Since we have an exact formulation of the question we are seeking to answer in this paper, let us turn our attention to Nietzsche’s belief that religion has died.

### **III. Nietzsche on the death of religion**

Most readers of Nietzsche are familiar with the famous statement from *The Gay Science*, namely that: “God is dead.” However, interpretations vary on what Nietzsche meant by this statement. In this section, I will present an interpretation of this statement drawing from the context in which the passage appears in *The Gay Science* and Nietzsche’s other usages in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The interpretation that has the most support is that Nietzsche views the belief in God to have died; that is, we are living in an age when the belief in God is now unbelievable. For example, consider the following passage where Nietzsche argues that, “in former times, one sought to prove that there is no God—today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could *arise* and how this belief acquired its weight and importance: a counter-proof that there is no God thereby becomes superfluous.”<sup>12</sup> This passage suggests that when we want to prove that God does not exist, what we should

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<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, ed. Maudmarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 93. Cambridge University Press, 1997), 93.

do is look at the belief, not a logical proof for or against the existence of God.<sup>13</sup> This is the sort of interpretation of “God is dead” that I will be considering in this section. That is, one can take Nietzsche’s famous statement to be doing just what this passage suggests; this is to say, Nietzsche is tracing the belief in God and using that as evidence that “God is dead.” This passage sets up the interpretation of “God is dead” that we will arrive at in this section very nicely. Yet, let us look at the passages themselves that invoke the rhetoric of “God is dead.”

First, let us address the prominent passage from section 125 of *The Gay Science*. In this section Nietzsche writes that:

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. “Whither is God?” he cried; “I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of the empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.<sup>14</sup>

First, this passage conveys that we have played an active part in the death of God. It was *us* who killed God. Yet, Nietzsche is by no means trying to say that we have killed an actual existing entity. Rather, drawing from the passage in the previous paragraph, Nietzsche is speaking in terms of the belief in God. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche argues that, “for the old gods, after all, things came to an end long ago; and verily, they had a good gay godlike end. They did not end in the ‘twilight’, though this lie is told. Instead: one day they

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that here Nietzsche seems to be committing the genetic fallacy. He is looking to the origins of the belief in God and making a claim about the truth or falsity of the belief from this. However, in this paper, not much will turn on Nietzsche committing this fallacy. Rather, I am not interested in the truth or falsity of Nietzsche’s claims themselves, but whether Nietzsche believes these views he is purporting. Further, this is the view he does hold, whether or not he is committing a fallacy.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 181.

*laughed* themselves to death. That happened when the most godless word issued from one of the gods themselves—the word: ‘There is one god. Thou shalt have no other god before me.’<sup>15</sup> What Nietzsche is saying in this passage is that we came to realize that the belief in one God was ridiculous. It is this belief in God that mankind has come to find ridiculous; that is, the belief in God is unbelievable. Again, we see this same thought by Nietzsche when he states, “what does all the world know today? Asked Zarathustra. ‘Perhaps this, that the old god in whom all the world once believed no longer lives.’”<sup>16</sup> So, Nietzsche’s purpose in invoking this rhetoric seems clear. The world today has come to realize that the belief in God is ludicrous, and we have given up this belief. These passages, as we can see, suggest that when Nietzsche states “God is dead” he is talking about the belief in God being dead.

The clearest indication that this is the correct interpretation comes from section 343 of *The Gay Science*. According to Nietzsche, “the greatest recent event—that ‘God is dead,’ that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable—is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe. For the few at least, whose eyes—the *suspicion* in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some sun seems to have set and some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt; to them our old world must appear daily more like evening, more mistrustful, stranger, ‘older’.”<sup>17</sup> Here we get the clearest indication that when Nietzsche speaks about the death of God he is talking about the belief in the existence of God. Further on this same point, Nietzsche talks about the death of God as an event. According to Nietzsche, “At last he threw his lantern to the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. ‘I have come too early,’ he said then; ‘my time is not yet. This tremendous

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<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1954), 294.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 371.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 279.

event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men’.”<sup>18</sup> From this, Nietzsche claims the death of God is an event; more accurate might be historic event, which, if not already, will be seen by everyone.<sup>19</sup> Further on this same point, even if this event has occurred, the affects of this belief will continue to linger. It is now our duty, more precisely the “higher man’s” duty, to rid the world of such a belief. For example, Nietzsche argues that, “after Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow too.”<sup>20</sup> Using Plato’s cave imagery, Nietzsche believes that some individuals will remain shackled to this false belief, taking it to be the truth, and the way in which reality is truly constituted. Yet, this is a lie and it is now our duty to rid the world of this false belief.

The purpose of this section has been to give an interpretation of Nietzsche’s claim that “God is dead.” By looking at the seminal section from *The Gay Science* and passages from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it is apparent that what Nietzsche intends to say in these sections is that the belief in God is dead. For the purposes of this paper, this is an important point. I am not concerned with whether this claim is in fact true or false, but whether Nietzsche holds the view that the belief in God is dead. As we have seen, Nietzsche does hold this view. Further, since the belief in God is dead, religion has lost its foundation, and entails that the belief in religion is dead. In regards to what follows, I will apply this

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 182

<sup>19</sup> It is not my intention to give a full account of what Nietzsche means by the death of God as an event. Rather, it will suffice to show that Nietzsche views the death of God as an event that will happen. Whether it has happened already or has yet to come is not the purpose of this paper. Instead, the important thing is that Nietzsche believes this event will happen, and is committed to this view. That Nietzsche believes this will happen is enough to get the arguments in section IV off the ground.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 167.

conclusion that God (religion) is dead to Nietzsche's views of the state. The argument in the next section will provide an account of why the weak interpretation can only be answered negatively; that is, there is an intimate connection between the state and religion and with the death of religion, there is a resulting death of the state.

#### **IV. Nietzsche on the death of the state**

In the previous section, we looked at an interpretation of Nietzsche's famous claim that "God is dead." As was shown, Nietzsche believes the idea of God is a concept that has now become unbelievable. In this section, I will take the conclusion reached in section III, and apply it to Nietzsche's conception of the state. For Nietzsche, religion and the state share an intimate connection; that is, the foundation and legitimacy of the state *is* religion. Without religion, the state will wither and become meaningless. Consequently, as will be shown, one should interpret Nietzsche to endorse the following line of argument. Since the idea of God has become meaningless and unbelievable, the concept of the state will, in a similar way, become meaningless and unbelievable, and, therefore, die out. For this reason, it is not Nietzsche's intention to endorse any particular form of government. Rather, it would be trivial and meaningless to endorse some conception of government when the idea of the state is growing ever meaningless. These trivial political matters are not the concern of the "higher man."<sup>21</sup> According to Nietzsche, "political and economic affairs are not worthy of being the enforced concern of society's most gifted spirits: such a wasteful use of the spirit is at bottom worse than having none at all. They are and remain domains for lesser heads, and others than lesser heads ought not to be in the service of these workshops: better for the machinery to fall

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that Nietzsche does consider himself to be one of these "higher men."



to pieces again!”<sup>22</sup> From this passage, we get the idea that matters of the state should not be the concern of the “higher men.” To engage in these activities would be a waste of the “higher man’s” talents. Now, let us map out the connection Nietzsche sees between the state and religion by, first, looking at the concept of faith.

One respect in which the state and religion are similar is that both depend on the concept of faith. According to Nietzsche, “acquired habituation to spiritual principles without reasons is called faith.”<sup>23</sup> For Nietzsche, the state, in a similar way as religion, gains force through the faith that individuals have in them. The faith in the state is an engrained dogma that is resistant to reason. Speaking on faith being contra to reason, Nietzsche argues that, “the fettered spirits are unwilling to admit this: they recognize that it constitutes a *pudendum* Christianity, which was very innocent in its intellectual notions, noticed nothing of this *pudendum*, demanded faith and nothing but faith and passionately repulsed the desire for reasons... The state in fact does the same thing, and every father raises his son in the same fashion: only regard this as true.”<sup>24</sup> As we can see, the state and religion depend on this engrained habituation that is contra to reason. This faith seems to be a matter of happenstance, and the beliefs of the “higher man” are dangerous to this faith. On this point, Nietzsche writes, “they assume that the principles of the free spirit are dangerous to them; they say, or sense: he must not be right, for he is harmful to us.”<sup>25</sup> In a similar way as religion, one should note that the state views the “higher man” as dangerous. Like agents

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<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, ed. Maudmarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 108.

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, trans. RJ Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 109.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 109.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 109.

born into Christian societies, agents born in the state are dogmatically taught that the principles of the state are the best for the individual.

To better understand the connection between religion and the state, let us flush out the idea that the “higher man” is incompatible with religion and the state. For Nietzsche, the “higher man” should do his best to escape from the hold of society. Society is detrimental to the flourishing of the “higher man.” As such, the “higher man” will do best to escape into a degree of solitude. For solitude is where the “higher man” can escape from the detrimental control of religion and the state. To put the point more succinctly, “if you feel yourself great and fruitful in solitude, a life in society will diminish you and make you empty: and *vice versa*.”<sup>26</sup> This is a point that seems to continually run through Nietzsche’s work. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche is more elegant about this point stating that, “State I call it where all drink poison, the good and the wicked; state, where all lose themselves the good and the wicked; state, where the slow suicide of all is called ‘life’.”<sup>27</sup> The state is constituted in such a way that it will rob the “higher man” of that which he needs to flourish. Similarly, the “higher man” should not acquiesce to the state, but find a home in his solitude. According to Nietzsche, “that is why I go into solitude—so as not to drink out of everybody’s cistern. When I am among the many I live as the many do, and I do not think as I really think; after a time it always seems as though they want to banish me from myself and rob me of my soul—and I grow angry with everybody and fear everybody. I then require the desert, so as to grow good again.”<sup>28</sup> From the passages considered here, it should be apparent that the “higher

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<sup>26</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, ed. Maudmarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 470.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1954), 162.

<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, ed. Maudmarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 494.

man” does better away from society. Yet, let us take a further look at this assumption, but, instead, considering Nietzsche’s views on the creation of an “ideal state.”

Nietzsche views that the aim of government is to protect individuals, and an “ideal” state would perfect this protection of individuals. Yet, as was just shown about a non-ideal conception of the state, an “ideal” conception of the state would harm the individual in much the same way. As Nietzsche argues, “if the enduring homeland of this comfortable life, the perfect state, were really to be attained, then this comfortable life would destroy the soil out of which great intellect and the powerful individual in general grows: by which I mean great energy. If this state is achieved mankind would have become too feeble still to be able to produce the genius.”<sup>29</sup> The “ideal” state obstructs the genius that marks off the “higher man.” From Nietzsche’s perspective, the “ideal” state, and non-ideal forms of government as well, rest on an inherent contradiction; that is, government aims to protect individuals, but government does not protect the “higher man,” rather, they are detrimental to the “higher man.” To sum up the point, according to Nietzsche, “the state is a prudent institution for the protection of individuals against one another: if it is completed and perfected too far it will in the end enfeeble the individual and, indeed, dissolve him—that is to say, thwart the original purpose of the state in the most thorough way possible.”<sup>30</sup> So, if the purpose of the state is to protect individuals, it necessarily contradicts this purpose by enfeebling the “higher man.”

Thus far, we have considered the faith that religion and the state rely on, and Nietzsche’s view that the “higher man” is incompatible with the state. However, this does not provide enough to show that the answer to the weak interpretation in question is, ‘No’. As such, I will provide an argument that should convince us that Nietzsche does not endorse a

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<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, trans. RJ Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 112.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

particular form of government. To start, Nietzsche believes there is an intimate connection between religion and the state. In *Human, All Too Human*, he writes:

As long as the state, or, more clearly, the government knows itself appointed as guardian for the benefit of the masses not yet of age, and on their behalf considers the question whether religion is to be preserved or abolished, it is very highly probable that it will always decide for the preservation of religion. For religion quietsens the heart of the individuals in times of loss, deprivation, fear, distrust, in those instances, that is to say, in which the government feels unable to do anything towards alleviating the physical sufferings of the private person: even in the case of universal, unavoidable and in the immediate prospect inevitable evils (famines, financial crises, wars), indeed, religion guarantees a calm, patient, trusting disposition among the masses.<sup>31</sup>

As we can see from this passage, Nietzsche believes that the state necessarily needs religion to fulfill the needs of individuals that the state fails to fulfill. Later in the same section of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche takes the connection further and argues that religion is necessary to legitimize state rule, “as a rule the state will know how to win the priests over to itself because it needs their concealed and intimate education of souls and knows how to value servants who appear outwardly to represent quite different interest. Without the assistance of the priests even now no power can become ‘legitimate’: as Napoleon grasped:—Thus absolute tutelary government and the careful preservation of religion necessarily go together.”<sup>32</sup> From these passages, one can see the intimate connection between religion and the state that Nietzsche has in mind. The simple point here is that the state needs religion to become legitimate.

Religion and the state share an intimate connection, where a change in religion makes for a change in the foundation of the state. At this point it is crucial to remember the conclusion reached in section III. In section III, we came to the conclusion that the belief in God has become unbelievable. With this in hand, it was argued that God has become a

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 171.

meaningless concept. Now, consider the following passage, “the interests of tutelary government and the interests of religion go hand in hand together, so that when the latter begins to die out the foundations of the state too are undermined. The belief in a divine order in the realm of politics, in a sacred mystery in the existence of the state, is of religious origin: if religion disappears the state will unavoidably lose its ancient Isis veil and cease to excite reverence.”<sup>33</sup> From this passage, it is apparent the dependency the state has in religion. Also, Nietzsche’s use of the veil of Isis brings this point out. If the state is Isis, and religion is the veil that conceals the truth of the state, then when religion is removed one can view the state as it really is. As such, the state will become meaningless without the veil of religion. From this, one can conclude that religion must be present to legitimize the state. Further, Nietzsche believes that religion is dead, and the concept of state will eventually die out and become meaningless.

Further, Nietzsche believes that we have already seen several organizational powers die out, such as the family. This being the case, the state will inevitably die out in a similar respect. While there may be those that postpone this decline, the decline will inevitably lead to the death of the state. To use Nietzsche’s own words:

We ourselves have seen the idea of familia rights and power which once ruled as far as the Roman world extended grow even paler and more impotent. Thus a later generation will see the state too shrink to insignificance in various parts of the earth—a notion many people of the present can hardly contemplate without fear and revulsion... Let us therefore put our trust in ‘the prudence and self-interest of men’ to preserve the existence of the state for some time yet and to repulse the destructive experiments of the precipitate and the over-zealous!<sup>34</sup>

Again, in this passage, we see that Nietzsche does envision the end of the state, and that some may be able to put off the death of the state, but will not stop the decline of the state. The

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 172-3.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 173.

passages considered in this section are meant to illustrate that Nietzsche see an intimate connection between religion and state legitimacy. Further, that this connection has been shaken with the death of God. Similarly, Nietzsche sees the end of the state to be a process that is currently occurring.

The purpose of this section has been to provide an argument against the view that Nietzsche has a political philosophy on the weak interpretation laid out in section II. First, we considered the ways in which the state and religion share certain similarities; that is, both are based on Nietzsche's conception of faith. From this, we looked at how the "higher man" is enfeebled by the state. Instead, the "higher man" should seek to withdraw from society into solitude. Also, a conception of the "ideal" state also enfeebles the "higher man." However, the strongest argument in this section comes from the connection between the state and religion. This is to say, a change in religion makes for a change in the foundation of the state. Since we have seen that Nietzsche believes that religion is dead, then the state has lost its foundation. What all this amounts to is an answer to the weak interpretation in the negative. Nietzsche does not endorse a particular form of government because an endorsement of a particular government is trivial; that is, governments are becoming more and more obsolete, such that, soon we will see the end of government all together. For these reasons, political question are not the concern for Nietzsche, and Nietzsche has no intention of providing any answer to the ideal political structuring.

## **V. Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper has been to answer what seems to be a simple question: "Does Nietzsche have a political philosophy. However, this question is not as simple as it appears. In section II, I undertook an analysis of the question. From this, I made a distinction

between a weak and strong interpretation of the question. On the strong account, I followed the work of Martha Nussbaum who identifies seven criteria for “serious” political thought. The strong account is stringent; in that, it sets out particular criteria that one must address to have a political philosophy. On the weak interpretation, the interpretation that was under task in this paper, the requirements to have a political philosophy are less stringent. The weak interpretation that we came to involved an endorsement of a particular government, or political structuring. In what followed in sections III and IV, I presented an argument that lead to the weak interpretation being answered in the negative. This is to say, Nietzsche does not endorse a particular form of government. Specifically, I looked at Nietzsche’s claim that “God is dead.” From this, I applied this claim to Nietzsche claims about the connection between the state and religion. The state and religion supervene on each other, and a change in religion makes for a change in the state. As such, since the idea of God has become meaningless and unbelievable, the concept of the state will, in a similar way, become meaningless and unbelievable, and, therefore, die out. This was the conclusion reached in section IV, and it shows why Nietzsche does not endorse a particular form of government. The reason why one must struggle to find answers to political question in Nietzsche’s work is that Nietzsche is simply not concerned with such questions. The arguments of this paper, I believe, have adequately shown that Nietzsche does not endorse a particular form of government.

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