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THE FREE SPIRIT IN THE LIBERAL POLITICAL ORDER

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THE FREE SPIRIT IN THE LIBERAL POLITICAL ORDER

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The Free Spirit in the Liberal Political Order

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Abstract: How should we contemplate spiritual freedom in modern liberal societies? This dissertation explores spiritual freedom by presenting the figure of the free spirit, a figure modeled after Nietzsche's description of one. The free spirit exemplifies the possibilities for spiritual freedom, and his relation to political order uncovers important implications for our understanding of political freedom. The free spirit affirms life—he finds meaning and value in life—apart from politics and community. He does so by taking an aesthetic perspective. A certain type of spirit is necessary for such aesthetic perspective: a free spirit, a skeptic who liberates oneself from political community, religious traditions, and common values of his time. A deeper understanding of the free spirit also reveals a deeper understanding of individual autonomy. Individual autonomy is one of the bedrocks of liberal political order, a foundation that is threatened by criticisms from progressives and communitarians. Progressives attack the very possibility of employing individual autonomy as a justification for the founding of liberal government. In a similar vein, communitarians attack the possibility and the desirability of treating individuals as autonomous units, highlighting the social and communal basis of personhood and the dangers of individual "atomism". The attacks aimed at individual

autonomy are simultaneously attacks on liberal political order. The explication of the free spirit in this dissertation is an attempt to combat these critiques of liberal political order on the basis of individual autonomy. The free spirit presented here reminds us that a wholly liberal defense of individual rights must include the political space for aesthetic perspective. For a society to be truly free it must respect and protect each individual's liberty to treat existence as a spectacle, to detach themselves from popular worldly concerns, whether political, cultural, or social.

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Introduction

The general goal of this dissertation is to explore the possibilities for spiritual freedom in liberal societies. While many recent scholars have written on topics such as the role of religion in liberal democracies, the increase in secularization of liberal societies, or even the apparent reinvigoration of religion in the modern West, the topic of spiritual freedom is much less prevalent.[1] Perhaps a major reason for this is the difficulty in pinning down exactly what spiritual freedom amount to. Is it the same thing as freedom of religion? Or is it intellectual freedom? Some combination of both? Or is it intellectual freedom without any link to religion? The answers to these questions are not obvious, and perhaps a major reason that religion and religious freedom are written about with much greater frequency than spiritual freedom is because readers can identify with it more easily.

In this dissertation I will try to illuminate what is meant by spiritual freedom and explore how it relates to political freedom. I do not pretend to fully overcome the difficulty inherent in the task of defining spiritual freedom. Instead, I endeavor to probe spiritual freedom and its relation to political freedom through the analysis of a "free spirit". Once we have a figure of a free spirit, we can then examine how this figure relates to politics and political freedom. We will not be left with an apodictic

[1] Many examples could be given for these 3 topics, but here are just a few: on the first topic, see Judd Owen *Religion and the Demise of Liberal Rationalism: The Foundational Crisis of the Separation of Church and State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. On the second, see Charles Taylor *A Secular Age* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. On the third, see John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2009.

understanding of spiritual freedom, but my hope is that we will be left with a clearer view of spiritual freedom and its implications for politics, particularly for the liberal political orders prevalent in the West.

Placing the terms "spiritual" and "freedom" together is bound to conjure myriad, and often nebulous, ideas. Is the focus on spirituality, for example, or some sort of intellectual freedom? The fairly loose conception of spiritual freedom that is assumed in this dissertation is a combination of these two. It begins with intellectual freedom, but extends past it through a concern with spirituality as well. Intellectual freedom, it seems, is good for its own sake. If we are not intellectually free, then our thoughts are somehow not our own—we are prisoner to the thoughts of someone or something else. That we wish to be intellectually free is hardly controversial and the vast majority of people would affirm intellectual freedom as a human good. When I use the term spiritual freedom in this dissertation, I intend to include this sense of intellectual freedom within it.

Spiritual freedom, however, suggests more than intellectual freedom. There is an inherent concern for spirituality, as open-ended and opaque as that term can be. A crucial difference between spiritual freedom and intellectual freedom is that the former does not seem to be good only for its own sake. One seeks to be spiritually free in order to achieve something greater, some sort of positive spiritual state. To be spiritually free is not as attractive as being spiritually *full*. Spiritual seekers, we may say, are not seeking just to be spiritually free, but rather to achieve some sort of contented, full, spiritual state.

I will call this a state of "spiritual fullness", and what constitutes this state will be analyzed in the pages that follow.

To begin with, however, I want suggest a meaning for spiritual freedom that we can use going forwards. In short, to be concerned with spiritual freedom is to be concerned with intellectual freedom and to be concerned with a free pursuit of spiritual fullness. A "free spirit" will be someone who is both intellectual free and free to pursue spiritual fullness on his own terms. The "free spirit" will embody our concept of spiritual freedom, and through this concept we will later be able to probe the relation between spiritual freedom and political freedom. At this point, the reader is bound to find the concept of spiritual freedom, "free spirit", and even political freedom very abstract and ambiguous. My hope is that by the end of this work I will have made each concept fairly clear, at least as clear as such broad and complicated concepts can be.

The more specific goal of this dissertation is to present a certain human type, the free spirit, and to investigate the way in which this human type engages both the world and society. "World" and "society" are manifestly large and ambiguous concepts, but each will be unpacked and explained as we proceed. In these introductory pages, however, I endeavor only to offer a glimpse of the free spirit and present some questions that this human type poses for political philosophy. Once the free spirit has been characterized I intend to explore where a free spirit fits, both in society and in the theoretical tradition of political philosphy. How a free spirit relates to political order, and what questions this raises about political order itself, will be the major themes of this

work after we have come to know the free spirit. First, however, the free spirit in question will need to be introduced.

"Free spirit" is a bit of a hackneyed term in modern culture. It will become clear as we proceed that the free spirit expounded here is quite different than the popular "free spirit" one finds in novels, Hollywood movies, pop culture and the vernacular. Indeed, the latter "free spirit" tends to be portrayed as one who has chosen an alternative lifestyle, an escapist, one who refuses to follow the basic rules of social convention. Moreover, these popularized "free spirits" tend to be portrayed as persons that do not want to face "reality", they are disenfranchised by the "system", they cannot or will not work a "regular" job, and often they display a proclivity towards mysticism. This is not to suggest that the popular version of the "free spirit" is wholly negative, for free spirits are often portrayed as an important and seductive alternative to the overworked and overstressed bourgeois or middle class working man. The point I wish to highlight here, however, is the fact that the popularized "free spirit" is generally taken to shun the "real world", to choose to live instead in a world of dreams, illusions, and mystical intuitions.

The free spirit I discuss in this work, which takes Nietzsche's free spirit as its model, does not share the worldview of the typical popularized "free spirit". On the contrary, the free spirit at issue here is precisely concerned with ridding himself of dreams and illusions. His spirit is only considered free when he is facing reality head on,

without the comforts of religious or mystical beliefs in any form. Our free spirit is not an escapist; rather, she is concerned with avoiding the common pitfalls of escapism.[2]

I believe the orientation of the free spirit I am concerned with will become clear in the following chapters. It will be helpful, however, to have a provisional characterization of the free spirit before delving into more specific description. Here are some basic criteria for a free spirit: he is a skeptic who seeks above all to be free of illusions about the world. He is able to face reality—or, in Nietzschean terms, the "terrible truths" of existence—without falling to despair. This is possible because of his cheerful disposition, and also because of his ability to view a world without rational meaning as a cause for wonder rather than crushing doubt; as an invitation to create meaning rather than as a terrifying abyss.[3] The free spirit affirms life and creates value in it—that is, he achieves what I will call *spiritual fullness*—through an aesthetic perspective, as opposed to traditional moral perspectives such as communal or religious doctrines, or through belief in a teleological human progress of some sort. Consequently, a free spirit is likely to be detached, to a large degree, from the traditions, morals, and general ethos of the community in which he lives.

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[2] I will alternate between masculine and feminine pronouns throughout the work. But in each case, I am referring to both male and female free spirits.

[3] "Meaning", here and elsewhere in this work, is employed in the sense of meaning as significance, or importance. When an individual tries to find meaning in existence, he or she is trying to find the significance or importance that existence has for him or her. Thus, the use of the word "meaning" throughout should be contrasted with communicative meaning, i.e. utterances used to communicate with another person. I avoid use of the word "meaning" in cases of communicative meaning, employing other appropriate words instead. For a helpful discussion of the different senses of the word "mean", see A.P. Martinich "Four senses of 'Meaning' in the History of Ideas: Quentin Skinner's Theory of Historical Interpretation," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 3 (2009), 225-245.

Nietzsche's free spirit possesses many traits appropriately considered philosophic, but my argument here suggests that any person who possesses the characteristics mentioned above can be deemed a free spirit. Nietzsche's free spirit is the model and inspiration for the one investigated throughout this work, but I have modified the concept of free spirit to fit a broader description as well. As the work progresses, I will often distinguish between Nietzsche' specific picture of the free spirit and a broader conception of free spirit based on the general criteria above, which is general and abstract enough to allow for a wide spectrum of eligible individuals. However, when the term free spirit is used without qualification (as is often the case), the context in which it is used is compatible with both Nietzsche's specific understanding and the broader, more general one.

I will use the notion of spiritual fullness as a criterion of success, as a standard by which we can judge political philosophies, throughout this dissertation. First, I assert that one of the principal aims, whether explicitly or implicitly expressed, of many contemporary theorists of politics is that politics must be organized in such a way as to enable—if not to direct—citizens to achieve spiritual fulfillment. Put differently, I assert that many political theorists are concerned not exclusively with questions of justice, equality, distribution, political legitimacy, and the like; many are also concerned with the spiritual state of individual citizens and the political community as a whole. I believe this assertion is justified given the language some prominent political theorists today are wont to employ. They speak of the "malaise of modernity", the loss of "narrative unity" or

personal stories, and the loss of "identity".[4] These terms do not denote the traditional metrics for judging political regimes, e.g. justice, security, fairness, prosperity, and legitimacy. Rather, these terms denote an interest in the spiritual state of the citizens within political regimes, in this case the modern liberal regimes that dominate the West. On this basis I believe we are justified in using the notion of spiritual fullness as a standard.

The terms used to approach the idea of spiritual fullness vary. "Spirit" itself is a term with many definitions and connotations. Generally, these various definitions include mention of the distinction between some non-corporeal substance—be it the soul, consciousness, personality, etc.—and the material body. "Spirit" can be defined as the "animating or vital principle in man or animals."[5] This "animating and vital principle" may, however, be considered to be a mystical soul, a God-given breath of life, or simply the human intellect or consciousness, which may or may not be an immaterial substance. The term "spiritual" is likewise open to several various definitions. For religious believers of different varieties, spirituality may refer to the connection the believers have with their God (or gods) or with their religious beliefs themselves. More recently, spirituality has focused more on subjective experience. On this view, any sort of

[4] See, respectively, Charles Taylor *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, Inc., 1991); Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue: A study in Moral Theory*. (Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1984); Michael J. Sandel *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996)

[5] From the entry "Spirit" in the Online Etymology Dictionary. Etymonline.com.

meaningful or blissful experience—whether connected to religious belief or not—may be considered spiritual.

The uses of spirit and spiritual in this work are meant to be inclusive. Any and all of the various meanings of the terms may be compatible with the idea of spiritual fullness presented here. Often our understanding of spiritual fullness is separate from that of bodily or physical pleasure. The meaningful or blissful experiences, whether viewed as secular or religious, that constitute spiritual fullness are distinguished from the various forms of physical pleasure. To say that one's spirit is full is something different than to say that one's body is satiated. Experiences that constitute spiritual fullness touch on ideas, beliefs, or feelings that help us to explain who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we relate to the world. Fullness of spirit is something that can endure in a way that the fleeting and ephemeral satisfactions stemming a hedonistic lifestyle cannot.

Nevertheless, spirituality should not be understood *only* as experience separated from physical pleasure. Many religious, blissful, or meaningful experiences may indeed travel through the physical senses. We can imagine, for example, an experience of awe or wonder brought on by sensing or conceiving the unity, or the mere factualness, of existence or reality. Likewise, we may experience the awe or wonder of the unity or reality, even as we experience the variety or intricacy of reality. We may "sense" the presence of God through the smell in the aroma of a field of flowers. Whatever the particular experience, we should bear in mind that many experiences that should count as spiritual are also experiences that are considered physical. Indeed, spirituality and

physicality are not mutually exclusive. Spiritual experiences can come in many forms, and spiritual experiences lead to the spiritual fullness we have set up as a criterion for success.

Where one achieves spiritual fullness varies as well. Some theorists speak of the fulfillment that comes from active political life and the pursuit of public honor, others of self-realization through community membership and a strong sense of identity, and others speak more generally of the pursuit of happiness. Political philosophy has something to say about all of these ends, and I think all of these ideas about ends can be understood to have a common goal of enabling spiritual fullness. With that in mind, let us begin to define spiritual fullness. Most broadly conceived, spiritual fullness is a state an individual has reached when he regards his life to be both desirable and full; a state in which life is not lacking in any significant way, and is therefore subjectively affirmed.[6] One can imagine numerous paths to achievement of such a spiritual state, but the goal remains the same for all.

Political philosopher Charles Taylor describes it accordingly: "We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness."[7] These activities or conditions "help us to situate a place of fullness, to which we orient ourselves morally or spiritually. They can orient us because they offer some sense of

[6] This is not to say, however, that such a state is permanent. Naturally life consists of periods of joy and suffering. Spiritual fullness is reached, we may say, when on the whole life is considered both desirable and full, i.e. not lacking in any significant way.

[7] Charles Taylor *A Secular Age* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 5.

what they are of: the presence of God, or the voice of nature, or the force which flows through everything, or the alignment in us of desire and the drive to form."[8] I agree with Taylor that all of us do or should seek out a sense of spiritual fullness, yet how a place of fullness will be described depends largely on the moral and spiritual outlook of the person doing the describing. The religious woman feels the presence of God, the mystic the energy of the universe, the naturalist the power of nature; but in each such a state they feel spiritually full.

Some examples may further illuminate the idea of spiritual fullness. For a religious perspective we can listen to St. Ignatius of Loyola, to whom Taylor refers when discussing spiritual fullness. In his *Spiritual Exercises,* St. Ignatius distinguishes between spiritual "consolation" and spiritual "desolation". Consolation, he writes, is when "the soul is aroused by an interior movement which causes it to be inflamed with love of its creator and Lord, and consequently can love no created thing on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of all things."[9] Desolation, on the other hand, is "darkness of the soul, turmoil of the mind, inclination to low and earthly things, restlessness resulting from many disturbances and temptations which lead to loss of faith, loss of hope, and loss of love. It is also desolation when a soul finds itself completely apathetic, tepid, sad, and separated as it were, from its Creator and Lord."[10] Thus, fullness of spirit is marked by gratitude and love for life—and, for Ignatius, the Creator

[8] Ibid., p. 6.
[9] Anthony Mottola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1964, p. 129
[10] Ibid., p. 130

of life—while emptiness of spirit is likened to separation from the Creator of life. We may understand this notion of spiritual fullness as requiring a strong attachment and love for our life; and if we are theists, for the Creator of this life.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau has some very similar ideas about the nature of spiritual fullness, albeit coming from a non-theistic perspective. I quote at length from the fifth walk of *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, where Rousseau describes "the sentiment of existence"; a sentiment that facilitates spiritual fullness as he understands it:

> In our most intense enjoyments, there is hardly an instant when the heart can truly say to us: *I would like this instant to last forever*…But if there is a state in which the soul finds a solid enough base to rest itself on entirely and to gather its whole being into…without any other sentiment of deprivation or of enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear, except that alone of our existence, and having this sentiment alone fill it completely; as long as this state lasts, he who finds himself in it can call himself happy, not with an imperfect, poor, and relative happiness such as one finds in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient, perfect, and full happiness which leaves in the soul no emptiness it might feel a need to feel…What do we enjoy in such a situation? Nothing external to ourselves, nothing if not ourselves and our own existence…The sentiment of existence, stripped of any other emotion, is in itself a precious sentiment of contentment and of peace which alone would suffice to make this existence dear and sweet to anyone able to spurn all the sensual and earthly impressions which incessantly come to distract us from it and to trouble its sweetness here-below.[11]

Despite the fact that Rousseau invokes "existence"—whereas St. Ignatius invokes the "Lord and Creator"—we can see the similarities between what these two thinkers consider spiritual fullness to be. Consequently, we can infer that spiritual fullness is not exclusively a religious, theistic concept or exclusively an atheistic or agnostic concept of

[11] Jean-Jacques Rousseau *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* Trans. Charles E. Buttersworth. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1992) pp. 68-69.

spirituality. Believer and unbeliever alike may share in the pursuit and experience of spiritual fullness.

Of the shared ideas between St. Ignatius and Rousseau, there is one I wish to emphasize: what distinguishes consolation and desolation—or spiritual fullness and spiritual emptiness—is a feeling of gratitude and love for life as well as an attachment to something other than sensual or biological things. Emptiness of spirit is likened to separation from the Creator for Ignatius, and disconnectedness from one's own "existence" in Rousseau. One may argue that Rousseau does not indicate "attachment to existence" in the passage above. He does, after all, implore "What do we enjoy in such a situation? Nothing external to ourselves…". Nevertheless, it is clear in this passage, and elsewhere in Rousseau's works, that the notion of "existence" is a source of meaning that can facilitate peace and contentment, and that one should seek it out. Existence is the place, or thing, that we are able to connect with when we have stripped ourselves of the earthly things that distract us from it. We may peel off the layers of socialization, as it were, to return to our natural state with existence, the state in which we lived before our spirits were corrupted by socialization.

"Creator" or "existence" might be replaced with some other idea that Taylor mentions, be it "the voice of nature, or the force which flows through everything, or the alignment in us of desire and the drive to form." I would add the concepts "life" and "world" to the same list. The descriptions of spiritual fullness given by Ignatius and Rousseau enrich our understanding of Taylor's conception of fullness. Taylor further

describes spiritual fullness as requiring an idea that provides an attachment to something other than oneself, to some source of greater meaning. The implications of where one seeks attachment—i.e. how and to where one is oriented spiritually—will be a major theme of this work, and will be discussed later. For now, however, we can say that spiritual fullness is a spiritual state an individual has achieved when he regards his life to be both desirable and full; a state in which life and existence are affirmed, and that achieving this state requires an attachment to some source of meaning.

Now that we have begun to hone in on what spiritual fullness means, we may also gain clarity by identifying what it is not. Human flourishing conceived in the classical Greek sense, as the individual's achievement of the highest possible human virtue, may be thought by many to be the achievement of spiritual fullness. Yet as we proceed we will see the universal standards of virtue or excellence that Aristotle and other classical thinkers advocate may preclude certain possibilities for the spiritual fulfillment described above. In today's liberal democratic societies, we may find that the ground is particularly infertile for the cultivation of classical virtue, which requires state involvement in the process of inculcating proper virtues. As Charles Larmore points out, Greek and medieval thinkers

> entertained very sanguine prospects about the possibility of reasonable agreement about the good life. For them, it was axiomatic that here, too, reason tends naturally toward single solutions. The result was that, in their different ways, Greek and medieval thinkers usually assigned to the state the task of protecting and fostering the good life.[12]

[12] Charles Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

A defining characteristic of liberal societies, by contrast, is that the state ought to be neutral towards controversial views of the good life. In the classical view, a well-ordered society directs citizens towards virtue and flourishing, which requires widespread agreement about what these are. Such agreement on what counts as virtue and the political will to legislate accordingly is elusive in liberal democracies. It would therefore be very risky, if not futile, to define spiritual fullness as Aristotelian flourishing in a political and historical age that is not suited to its pursuit.

Yet there is a second, and I believe more important, reason for spiritual fullness to resist definition in terms of Aristotelian flourishing. It is possible that even a great or exemplary man of Aristotelian virtue will not have meaningful attachments nor be in a position to affirm life. For instance, we can imagine a person who dutifully follows the Aristotelian prescriptions for a life of virtue without an attachment to a greater source of meaning, a meaning that is required for our notion of spiritual fullness.

Nietzsche repeatedly suggests that free spirits must be free even from their own virtues. A free spirit must know "how to escape from his own virtues occasionally,"[13] in order to gain knowledge and to maintain the strength of his autonomy. Indeed, honing and practicing Aristotelian virtue is not enough, for someone who possesses and practices the virtues deemed necessary for human flourishing may be merely going through the

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[13] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak* Trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Sec. 510. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science (GS)*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Random House, Inc. 1974), sections 5, 214, 266, and 305.

motions of living well.[14] According to the argument here, unless a person has an attachment to some source of meaning that leads to life affirmation, he or she will not be spiritually full. Conversely, we can also easily imagine a spiritual full person who is not a paragon of Aristotelian virtue. For example, Rousseau's "noble savage", who lives naturally without concern for the cultivation of virtue, could still be considered spiritually full in the sense we are using, provided he or she possessed an attachment to life. Therefore, human flourishing is not a necessary or a sufficient condition for spiritual fulfillment.[15]

The exploration of the free spirit and spiritual fullness will constitute the first two chapters of the dissertation, during which the connections to political theory may not be obvious. The question of what these have to do with political philosophy remains. Why should someone concerned with political theory care about these things? The answer, I will argue, is that free spirits at once illuminate our understanding of, and respond to some challenges to, individual autonomy. The concept of an autonomous individual is often attacked from two angles. From one angle, individual autonomy is alleged to be impossible; from the other, it is alleged to be undesirable. The nature of these attacks

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[14] We might think, for example, of Hermann Hesse's character Joseph Knecht in *The Glass Bead Game (Magister Ludi)* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943). Knecht is an exceptionally virtuous man, achieving the highest position in his professional order, becoming a moral leader and authority. Despite his excellence in matters intellectual and moral, Knecht finds himself spiritually empty. At the conclusion of the novel, Knecht leaves his "virtuous life", so to speak, in order to seek out spiritual fulfillment.

[15] It bears noting that some scholars illuminate the compatibility of Aristotelian and Nietzschean ethics (usually under the rubric of "virtue ethics"), and it is possible that one who seeks to flourish through Aristotelian moral virtue may also find spiritual fulfillment along the way. In addition, Nietzsche himself was concerned with living well and had recommendations of his own about how to do this. Nevertheless, Nietzsche maintained that existence can ultimately only be justified aesthetically, while for Aristotle "living well", or "flourishing", was the ultimate goal.

will be explored shortly, but first we must understand the importance of individual autonomy to the most prominent political philosophy in the West, liberalism.

Liberalism is a complex idea in itself, with a long history and various permutations. Nonetheless, any version of liberalism takes individual autonomy as its bedrock. The very idea of liberal government requires autonomous individuals, individuals capable of contracting with each other to found a government and to subsequently govern themselves to a large degree. Therefore, attacks on the idea of individual autonomy—both on its possibility and desirability—are, by extension, attacks on the political philosophy of liberalism. I believe my discussion of the free spirit throughout this work will provide a basis for a counter-argument to some of the charges against individual autonomy. Moreover, it will provide a basis for thinking about spiritual autonomy. Specifically, the free spirit demonstrates that individual spiritual autonomy is possible and can be desirable. The idea of the free spirit can also lend support to the basic claim of liberalism, the idea that the individual can and ought to be treated as the foundational unit of a political theory.

A first challenge to individual autonomy surrounds the question of its possibility. Many political theorists have doubted the notion that the individual is a discrete unit of analysis. In other words, many theorists have asserted that the individual is but a part of the social whole, a social whole that is prior–and therefore irreducible—to individuals. Alternatively, some theorists claim that a social whole that is the natural and necessary end of the individual. Indeed, if one canvasses the history of Western political thought, a

view that society—or the state—is of greater import than the individual will emerge in various forms. To greatly simplify some well-known examples: society is prior to the individual (Aristotle); the individual reaches his highest potential and fulfillment in the state (Plato); the individual realizes the full expression of the ethical life only as a member of the state (Hegel); and the individual experiences true freedom only when he dissolves his particular will into the general will of the state (Rousseau). Notwithstanding important differences, these various theories assert that, for the purposes of political theory, separating the individual from society is impossible. It is unnecessary to recount the arguments of these intellectual giants here, but it is important to acknowledge the influence they have had on progressives and communitarians, both of the recent past and of today.

The arguments of contemporary political theorists, those that fall into the loosely defined camps of progressivism and communitarianism, will be our focus here. Their challenges to the possibility of individual autonomy converge around the claim that the state is a "social organism." The notion of the state as a social organism starts with the premise that individuals cannot be separated from society. John Dewey explains the "social organism" in *The Ethics of Democracy.*

> …that theory that men are not isolated non-social atoms, but are men only when in intrinsic relations to men…Society in its unified and structural character is the fact of the case…Society, as a real whole, is the normal order, and the mass as an aggregate of isolated units is the fiction. If this be the case, and if democracy be a form of society, it not only does have, but must have, a common will; for it is this unity of will which makes it an organism. A state represents men so far as they

> have become organically related to one another, or are possessed of unity or purpose and interest…[16]

In words that echo Hegel and Rousseau, Dewey asserts the idea that men "are men only when in intrinsic relations to men." Hence, the very possibility of individual autonomy is attacked by the idea of the state as a social organism. Naturally, humans are born and raised in society and rely on other humans for an assortment of basic needs, but the idea that individuals are an irremovable part of a social organism with a common will is a much bolder claim, a claim that will be challenged here. As we proceed, my hope is that the idea of the free spirit will challenge the idea that individuals have no role outside of the social organism, or are not truly "men", as Dewey and others suggest.

The importance of refuting the idea that there are no individuals, only parts of the social organism, becomes clear when we recall that liberal government requires individual consent for its legitimacy. Only autonomous individuals can enter into something consensual, e.g. a social contract, thus by rejecting them as a possibility one also rejects the idea of individual consent. Liberalism cannot exist without some form of individual consent, hence if the idea of the free spirit bolsters the case for autonomous individuality it provides a basis for liberal government legitimated by consent as well. This discussion of the free spirit, then, is meant to provide an alternative method by which to legitimate liberalism through a "proof" of individual autonomy.

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[16] John Dewey "The Ethics of Democracy" in *The Early Works of John Dewey: 1882-1888* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1969, pp. 231-32.

The second challenge to individual autonomy surrounds the question of whether it is, or can be, desirable. Many of the critics of liberalism discussed in this dissertation will attempt to uncover—explicitly and implicitly—the spiritual emptiness of liberal society. Indeed, many scholars insist that it is liberal political order that disconnects us from the things that might bring us spiritual fullness, things like religion, politics, community, and traditional values. The idea of these communitarians—thinkers such as Charles Taylor, Alasdair Macintyre, and Michael Sandel—seems to be that liberalism disconnects individuals from sources of meaning, sources that offer a place for our attachments and provide a sense of identity. The communitarian challenge focuses on the absence of attachments. Recall the definition of spiritual fullness; it requires some sort of attachment. Thus, *prima facie*, it appears that this challenge may have some merit. If liberalism precludes meaningful attachments, it thereby precludes spiritual fullness. Communitarians, however, have very specific ideas of where this attachment should be located; meaningful attachments, they emphasize, come from engagement with political and communal life. The nature of these attachments will be described in detail later on.

The above thinkers find the liberal individual in a state of spiritual emptiness. They identify a need to transcend what they see as an "atomized" self through attachment to something greater than the individual, and the choices they give are politics, the broader community, and tradition (which includes religion). These are the very things liberalism devalues, at least according to the communitarian critique. What follows from

this is a rejection of liberalism as a political philosophy.[17] The communitarian need not criticize the liberal political regime from a macroscopic perspective if its microscopic and foundational unit, the liberal self, is found to be spiritually damaged.

Whatever the wide-reaching political benefits of a liberal regime might be—increased prosperity, rule of law based on the equality of persons, decreased global conflict especially amongst liberal democracies, etc.—liberalism as a whole cannot be adequately defended if the individuals that follow its teachings are spiritually empty. The arguments of the aforementioned thinkers call for a return to republicanism or a more communitarian form of democracy rest on their belief that these forms of government can cultivate spiritually fulfilled citizens, while a liberal regime cannot. The individual autonomy intrinsic to liberalism is deemed to be something like a spiritual disease. Clearly, communitarians allege, even if it is possible to separate from the "social organism" it is dangerous to do so. Thus, the second challenge to individual autonomy is based on the conclusion that even if it is possible, it is not to be desired.

The idea of the free spirit will challenge the claim that liberal citizens are ineluctably spiritually desolate. Indeed, taking seriously the premise that liberal political order allows for, perhaps even encourages, individualism and detachment from politics and community, there are still possibilities for spiritual fulfillment. I will show a type of individual we find in liberal societies, the free spirit, and show that he is—as these communitarian thinkers lament—largely detached from political life and the broader

[17] To avoid confusion I will use the term "liberalism" to denote liberal political philosophy and will use "liberal regime" or "liberal democracy" to refer to an actual liberal political order.

community. Despite this detachment, however, we will see that free spirits achieve spiritual fullness. We will also see that liberalism does not hinder this spiritual pursuit. Liberalism, instead, provides the individual with the freedom to seek spiritual fullness on one's own terms. This means, *ipso facto*, that liberalism allows for affective attachment[18] to something, as affective attachment is required by our definition of spiritual fullness. Liberalism does not, however, assume that politics, community, and tradition are the only, or even the central, locations where such attachment may be found.

The free spirit does not seek attachment in these locations, but creates an affective attachment to existence and life through taking an aesthetic perspective. Moreover, liberalism does not, as a strong republicanism or a communitarian democracy does, place obligations on individuals that may in fact preclude or hinder a free spirit's pursuit of spiritual fullness, obligations that may preclude the freedom of thought necessary to achieve an aesthetic perspective. I will defend, then, both a weaker and a stronger thesis: the weaker is that progressive and communitarian theory is not capacious enough to include the free spirit; the stronger is that progressive and communitarian theory places obligations on individual free spirits that threaten their pursuit of spiritual fullness. The demonstration of these theses will urge us to consider that the state should not attempt to facilitate spiritual fullness, but rather avoid coercive demands that restrict the possibility

[18] The notion of affective attachment, found in psychological literature, will be explained in greater detail later. For our purposes here, however, one should note that affective attachment is a concept used in social psychology to explain the emotional bonds we make with other entities, whether concrete (other humans or groups) or abstract (political ideas or religious beliefs).

of free spirits to behave as such. Indeed, we should think more about what the state should not do rather than what it should do.

I will argue that the free spirit is an autonomous individual who is at the same time capable of achieving spiritual fullness. I believe this argument mitigates the criticisms levied at the individual autonomy and the social contract that are so important for liberal political order. At the same time, the dissertation presents a possibility for affective attachment and spiritual fulfillment in liberal societies that resides outside of both the spheres of politics and of the broader notion of community: a life of aesthetic appreciation. Once this possibility is presented we will see that a liberal political order also provides possibilities for the individual to pursue spiritual fullness apart from politics and community. In short, the free spirit will show that individual autonomy is possible and that it can be desirable as well. While thorough analysis of other critiques of autonomy, such as those of the Foucaultian variety, is outside the purview of this dissertation, the conception of autonomy offered by the free spirit may have implications for pyschoanalytic critiques of autonomy and for the idea of the subject as a social construction.[19] This will be an avenue of research that will likely be pursued as the project continues to develop.

The dissertation will proceed as follows: Chapter one will introduce the free spirit and the role of an aesthetic perspective in a free spirit's life. Chapter two considers the free spirits relationship to politics, employing some empirical examples of free spirits to

[19] There are many critiques of autonomy—and the very idea of an independent subject—that may need to be addressed in light of the free spirit presented in this work. A few notable critiques that will be addressed are those of Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, William Connolly, and Mark Bevir.

demonstrate how they navigate the political sphere of life. Chapter three will discuss the ideas surrounding individual autonomy and the free spirit's place in them. Chapter four will discuss the importance of individual autonomy to the origins of liberal government. Chapter five will contemplate the relationship between liberalism, individual autonomy, and spiritual fullness and address the criticisms of liberalism by communitarians and progressives over these topics. Taken together, the arguments in these chapters will illuminate the question of what it means to be spiritually free and how this knowledge may affect the way we look at politics and political philosophy.

1. The Free Spirit and Aesthetic Perspective

The characteristics of a free spirit will be further described in what follows, but prior to engaging in that task a few words about the relevance of the argument are in order. First, the idea of the free spirit presented here is likely to be attractive to individuals who consider themselves spiritual, yet have not found a home in any religious organization. The scientific atheist may find the idea of spiritual fullness to be empty and unnecessary[20]; many religious believers will likely conclude that the free spirit is, at best, incapable of achieving true spiritual fullness, which only comes through a relationship with God; at worst, the free spirit will be considered a heathen or pagan. Therefore, the human type presented here will likely appeal to those who are neither religious believers nor materialistic atheists. Moreover, it will likely appeal to those whose pursuit of spiritual fullness will not come in the arena of politics or membership in the broader community. The reasons that religion, politics, and community are eliminated as principal sources of spiritual fullness will become clearer as the dissertation progresses. I think that there are many people in the West today who fit into the category of free spirit, and my hope is that the argument here may illuminate our understanding of them. Finally, I think the arguments here will be of interest to anyone seeking greater understanding of spiritual freedom and its relationship to political freedom.

[20] I do not mean to suggest here that all atheists who adopt a materialistic metaphysics are unconcerned with spirituality, but it is fair to say that those who adopt a theory of physical hedonism are unlikely to be concerned with the notion of spiritual fullness expounded here.

In the following two chapters, I will be exploring the idea of the free spirit, primarily through Nietzsche's description of this human type. I will be interested in the free spirit not merely as a component of Nietzsche's character nor as a "hat" he sometimes wears—as a side of himself—but rather as a human type. I do not mean to suggest that exploring the free spirit as a sort of archetype renders the free spirit solely theoretical. I think free spirits can and do exist—Nietzsche's naming of certain historical men as free spirits seems to suggest that he also saw free spirits as potentially "real"—and that these humans urge us to revisit what it means to achieve spiritual fullness and to rethink the relationship between individual and political society. While I will be presenting the free spirit as an ideal type, there are degrees of free spiritedness. We may expect to find the traits and proclivities of the free spirit in various individuals to various extents. Likewise, we may expect to find the free spiritedness of an individual to vary, to be more or less evident at given times.

By treating the free spirit as a human type, I mean to suggest that for one to be a free spirit one must meet certain criteria. There may be a fairly diverse spectrum of people that meet these criteria; a free spirit may manifest in a myriad of social roles. Nietzsche offers one portrayal of the free spirit, and from this portrait we will gather basic characteristics of one. But we will also extend past Nietzsche's description at times, and we will be more inclusive while determining who may be a free spirit than Nietzsche was as he portrays the free spirit as a sort of solitary philosopher. I will argue that while free spirits come in various shapes, certain traits, virtues, and orientations may

be seen in all of them. Therefore, exploring these traits, virtues, and orientations—i.e. exploring the free spirit as a human type—will be the focus of this chapter. Once the mold of the free spirit becomes clear it will be possible to see which persons might fit into it.

The best way to introduce ourselves to the free spirit is through Nietzsche's descriptions of one. The free spirit is prefigured in section 34 of *Human, all too Human*. It will be helpful to provide some context for his emergence. Section 34 follows three others that ask whether humans can face the truth that what is essential to our acceptance of life is 1. What is illogical; 2. What is unjust, and 3. The errors we have regarding life.[21] Nietzsche wonders whether humankind, coming face to face with these truths, may in fact turn its back on life; would "death not be preferable?"[22] Nietzsche's first claim is that much of what is good in life is or proceeds from what is illogical. Secondly, as illogical beings we are also bound to be unjust, as we have no "fixed standard to be able justly to assess the relation between ourselves and anything else whatever."[23] Finally, Nietzsche contends that if man allows himself to see truly humankind as it is, "if in all he does he has before him the ultimate goallessness of man, his actions acquire in his own eyes the character of useless squandering," and he will be led to despair.[24] Our "error" is refusing to acknowledge the "goallessness of man" preferring instead to believe in metaphysical illusions or belief in human "progress".

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[21] Sections 31-33, respectively.
[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, all too Human (HH)*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Sec. 34, P. 29.
[23] Ibid., Sec. 32, p. 28
[24] Ibid., Sec. 33, p. 29

After showing us what he believes is a clear-sighted view of life and existence, Nietzsche proceeds to imagine a person who could face all of these truths—i.e. resist the temptation to lie to himself about the nature of man or the value and meaning of human actions—and still contentedly accept life as it is. This person is the free spirit, and Nietzsche emphasizes that, above all, the free spirit's positive reaction to the reality of existence is due to the person's temperament. For Nietzsche, temperament means something closer to disposition, a distinction that I will clarify later. For now, let us quote Nietzsche at length, for this initial image of the free spirit will guide my further discussion of this human type. When confronted with the true knowledge of reality, reality free of illogic and error, Nietzsche asks:

> Is it true, is all that remains a mode of thought whose outcome on a personal level is despair and on a theoretical level a philosophy of destruction? I believe that the nature of the after-effect of knowledge is determined by a man's *temperament*: in addition to the after-effect described I could just as easily imagine a different one, quite possible in individual instances, by virtue of which a life could arise much simpler and emotionally cleaner than our present life is: so that, though the old motives of violent desire produced by inherited habit would still possess their strength, they would gradually grow weaker under the influence of purifying knowledge. In the end one would live among men and with oneself as in *nature*, without praising, blaming, contending, gazing contentedly, as though at a spectacle, upon many things for which formerly one felt only fear. One would be free of emphasis, and no longer prodded by the idea that one is only nature or more than nature. For this to happen one would, to be sure, have to possess the requisite temperament, as has already been said: a firm, mild and at bottom cheerful soul…A man from whom the ordinary fetters of life have fallen to such an extent that he continues to live only so as to know better must, rather, without envy or vexation be able to forgo much, indeed almost everything upon which other men place value; that free, fearless hovering over men, customs, laws and the traditional evaluations of things must *suffice* him as the condition he considers most desirable.[25]

[25] Ibid., Sec. 34, p. 30

There is much to analyze in this section, and it will be unpacked in what follows. It is helpful to break the section into parts by asking three questions: 1. How is this free spirit able to face the "terrible truths" that what is good in life comes from illogic, injustice, and error? 2. In the absence of belief in any of these "untruths", how is the free spirit to evade despair and find a way to value and affirm life? How does the free spirit achieve spiritual fullness? 3. What does this section intimate about the free spirit's relationship to the traditions of his historical and political community? Of these three questions I will be focusing on 1 and 2 in this chapter. Question 3 will be more appropriately answered throughout the remaining chapters.

In attempting to answer the first question let us begin by delving further into Nietzsche's "terrible truths" about human existence. In the section "Why I am a Destiny" in *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche claims that the truth is terrible. We must bear in mind Nietzsche's epistemological standpoint when we approach the term "truth" here.[26] Nietzsche did not believe in metaphysical, unitary, universal truth; he does not believe in truth with a capital "T". When he speaks of "terrible truth" he is therefore employing a more casual definition of truth, yet also with an implication that if one wants to see the reality of existence and human life as clearly as possible, one is going to come to some terrible and difficult conclusions. What might these conclusions be, exactly? Brian Leiter provides a helpful map for this question, dividing Nietzschean "terrible truths" into

[26] Nietzsche does not mean enduring or eternal truth when he employs the term "truth". He does not mean to suggest that there are no logical truths about the world—put differently, he takes Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction for granted—but rather that all transcendental, metaphysical, disembodied, disinterested, categorical, or eternal moral truths are in fact illusions.

three basic categories. According to Leiter, there are three kinds of "terrible" truths: existential, moral, and epistemic.[27] These truths align quite well with Nietzsche's claim, whilst introducing the free spirit, that much in life comes from "illogic, injustice, and error."

Let us address each in turn, starting with the terrible existential truths. For Nietzsche, it is the fear of accepting the existential truths that leads us to prefer "error". Especially in his youth, Nietzsche was heavily influenced by the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, and the existential truths enumerated here borrow much from him. First, Leiter states that it is a terrible fact of life that we will all die. The notion of the immortal soul is an illusion, the existential truth being that we will literally vanish from the world, "our sentience and sapience will be extinguished for eternity."[28] A second existential truth is that we are all vulnerable to suffering throughout our lives, and are sure to be close to others—family members, friends, coworkers—who suffer as well, perhaps greatly. Worse yet, much of this suffering does not appear to us to have any clear cause, reason or purpose.[29] Finally, we are all stuck in a state of constant desire, or in Schopenhaueran terms, we are imprisoned by our will. We cannot will what we want and always receive it, according to Schopenhauer, but we must *will*; we have no choice about what desires we have, they are imposed upon us and we can't help but will them. What this means, as Leiter points out, is that "[w]e are cursed, as it were, to reenact this

[27] Brian Leiter, "The Truth is Terrible" *Draft from July 2, 2012*. bleiter@uchicago.edu. Cited here with the author's permission. A final version is forthcoming in Daniel Came (ed.), *Nietzsche on Morality and the Affirmation of Life* (Oxford University Press).
[28] Leiter, p. 1
[29] Ibid., p. 2

pointless routine of striving and disappointment again and again for as long as we remain sentient, constituting the final perverse pointlessness of our existence in Schopenhauer's view."[30]

Now we must ask, how does the free spirit face these truths? Central to the argument made in this dissertation is the fact that the free spirit does not find these existential truths to be so "terrible". The defining, and redeeming, characteristic of the free spirit is his capacity for affirming life in the face of these truths. The "terrible" existential truth is overcome by the free spirit by his temperament; the free spirit does not find the existential truths to be terrible. Instead, mortality is a cause for passion and enthusiasm rather than depression and despair. The brevity of life renders it more precious, thrilling, and intense than it would be if one's life were eternal. This is a clear case where "the nature of the after-effect of knowledge is determined by a man's *temperament*." In other words, how a man reacts to the knowledge of his own mortality depends on what kind of man he is; a free spirit will not find mortality to be a cause for despair. Nietzsche ultimately came to reject strongly Schopenhauer's condemnation of existence. He came to the view that what Schopenhauer did was to come up with an accurate description of the world, but Schopenhauer went a step further by judging the world. To describe accurately is one thing, to pass judgment is another, and one need not condemn existence when faced with these existential truths.

[30] Ibid.

Helpful here is Nietzsche's idea of "Dionysian" pessimism, the insistence that pessimism need not lead to despair.[31] Joshua Fao Dienstag explains Nietzsche's view accordingly: "[a]ll pessimisms conclude that the universe has no order and human history no progress; the Dionysian variety is the only one that can find something to like about this situation."[32] The free spirit can still achieve spiritual fullness without belief in cosmic, metaphysical unity or human progress.[33] Furthermore, the Dionysian pessimist does not find suffering to be cause for rejecting the idea that life has value on the whole: "The problem is that of the meaning of suffering: whether a Christian meaning or a tragic meaning."[34] Identifying the problem in this way means, stated most simply, that suffering need not result in a negation of this world in the hope of a better world after death (Christianity). Instead, a free spirit may view suffering as simply an unalterable part of life; one can affirm life as a whole in spite of suffering, which means affirming the suffering that is an essential part of life.

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[31] For a good summary of the Dionysian perspective—and its contrasting Apollonian perspective, see chapter 2 of Kathleen Higgins *Nietzsche's "Zarathustra"*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.

[32] Joshua Fao Dienstag "Nietzsche's Dionysian Pessimism," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 4, p. 933. I do not wish to delve too deeply into Dionysian pessimism in this dissertation, but I should acknowledge that a deeper apprehension of Dionysian pessimism does shed light on the temperament of the free spirit. Dienstag's article is the best place to start exploring Nietzschean/Dionysian pessimism. Here is a helpful quote: "In Dionysian pessimism, Nietzsche creates an alternative that is as ruthlessly skeptical toward all ideas of progress as is Schopenhauer's pessimism but does not issue in despair (see Janaway 1998, 25). It looks toward the future, not with the expectation that better things are foreordained, but with a hope founded only on taking joy in the constant processes of transformation and destruction that mark out the human condition." P. 935 In other words, the experience of human life itself is sufficient to found hope for the future, absent any illusions about a better life in the future.

[33] Gordon Bearn proffers a concise explanation for how this may occur: "for those with the courage to live without metaphysics, the discovery that what we care about has no rational foundation is, at the same time, the discovery that what we care about is precious, wonderful." Gordon Bearn, *Waking to Wonder: Wittgenstein's Existential Investigations*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), P. 36.

[34] Friedrich Nietzshe, *The Will to Power.* Trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Random House, Inc. 1967) Sec. 1052, p. 543.

Now that we have seen how the free spirit faces existential truths, let us turn to the other two categories of "terrible truths", the epistemic and moral. Leiter's headings here again align quite closely with Nietzsche's claim that what is good in life comes from what is "illogical" and "unjust", respectively. Regarding epistemology, it is easy to see why, according to Nietzsche, we are wont to resist the idea that the world is not comprehensible to us. Indeed, we would like to think that what we see, hear, and feel—the world of the senses—is made up of stuff that we can understand in a basic sense. As Leiter puts it, we'd like to think that "at least we *know* a few certain things about the world, like what our senses tell us about the immediate environment." But Nietzsche reminds us throughout his writings that this is not the case. Leiter goes on to say that Nietzsche "understood the point in terms of the illusion of 'being' or stable things, when the reality was one of constant flux and change, but the basic epistemic point is the same: ordinary beliefs about the world around us are illusory."[35]

Nietzsche questions our commonsensical understanding of our immediate environments, and he also judges our foundational spiritual beliefs—those residing in our religious doctrines and metaphysical philosophies—to be illusory as well. To make a claim of true knowledge in any of these areas is to succumb to "illogic", according to Nietzsche. He further claims that much of what is good in life, and what preserves life,

[35] Leiter, p. 4. Examples of our illusory claims to knowledge abound in Nietzshe's works, but for a quick summary of his epistemological skepticism see Sections 110-12 of GS, pp. 169-173. That our ordinary beliefs are illusory is only more strongly evidenced by the scientific advances since Nietzsche's time, a point that Leiter mentions as well. For example, our modern understanding of physics—and the questions raised by quantum mechanics—only take us further away from the belief that the world of our senses is the world as it is in itself.

comes from what is illogical. Indeed, Nietzsche claims that the constant flux and change of existence *necessitated* a belief in the illogical notions of "being" and "substance" for logic to exist in the first place. "In order that the concept of substance could originate—which is indispensable for logic although in the strictest nothing real corresponds to it—it was likewise necessary that for a long time one did not see nor perceive the changes in things."[36] The belief in logic stems from belief in what is illogical—unchanging substance or being—and Nietzsche's claim that much of what is good in life coming from what is "illogical" reflects this understanding. In a similar manner, our foundational spiritual beliefs also arise from what is false or fantasized, and the vast majority of humans will recoil at the thought that they have no true knowledge of the physical world or of metaphysics. Moreover, we will see that this lack of true knowledge extends to morality as well.

The "terrible" moral truth flows from the epistemic truth that we have no iron-clad, dependable knowledge of the world. As Leiter suggests, "there is the terrible epistemic truth (which implicates a moral one), namely, that all of our moral beliefs are based on lies and falsehoods, as Nietzsche never tires of emphasizing."[37] Moral systems tend to be based on belief in some sort of enduring and eternal knowledge. Such knowledge provides a solid foundation upon which to create moral laws. It may be knowledge of human nature and therewith natural laws; it may be a Kantian version of ethical imperatives that result from the constitution of human reason; or it may be

[36] GS, Sec. 111, p. 171.
[37] Leiter, p. 5.

knowledge of a supernatural kind, manifest in revelatory decrees from a deity. Nietzsche endeavors to pull the rug from under all of these possibilities, intimating instead that such types of moral truths, moral truths that are objective and universal, are illusory.[38] Therefore, the "terrible" moral truth is that there is no moral truth, at least no universal moral truth.

Nietzsche's philosophical nominalism is well documented, as is his position on the idea of universal moral laws. He famously calls himself the "immoralist", and often alludes to the folly of searching for universal moral laws. For Nietzsche, the real ethical task is creating one's self or character, and the proper way to do this depends on *who* is doing it.[39] Moral truth, if we were to undergo the dubious process of stretching Nietzsche's thought to incorporate these two terms side-by-side, would be that a man's morality depends on what type of man he is and what he seeks to become. Ultimately, the "terrible" moral truth is that traditional moral laws—howsoever they manifest—are not truths at all. Like the "terrible" existential and epistemic truths, one can either face the "terrible" moral truth with a clear mind or reject it in favor of the comfort of traditional moral illusions. Most humans will choose the latter, Nietzsche is convinced, but he believes strong souls—such as the free spirits—will choose the former.

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[38] See, for example, GS, Sec. 335, pp 263-66. Here Nietzsche searches for the origination of the moral feeling that seeks validation of our actions through universal moral law. He asserts the possibility of judging morality from various perspectives, and criticizes the selfishness of assuming that our own moral judgments must be true and apply to all others. "For it is selfish to experience one's own judgment as a universal law." He continues in the next paragraph, "that our opinions about 'good' and 'noble' and great can never be *proved true* by our actions because every action is unknowable." P.265.

[39] See, for example, GS, Sec. 120, p. 176-77 and BGE, Sec 221, p. .

We still want to know, however, *how* and *why* the free spirit deals with those terrible epistemic and moral truths. What is it about free spirits that makes them different from others, those who would prefer the comfort of a belief in certain knowledge? The free spirit seeks no escape from these truths through denial because the free spirit is a skeptic. Skepticism, we will see, is an essential part of the free spirit's character, a part which cannot be traded in, as it were, without one ceasing to be a free spirit. Nietzsche insists on this skepticism from the initial image of the free spirit cited above all the way to his later works. In one of Nietzsche's last works we see him reaffirm the importance of skepticism. Although not explicitly a description of the free spirit, the following passage from *The Antichrist* recalls the free spirit from earlier works:

> One should not let oneself be misled: great intellects are skeptics. Zarathustra is a skeptic. The vigour of a mind, its *freedom* through strength and superior strength, is *proved* by skepticism. Men of conviction simply do not come into consideration where the fundamentals of value and disvalue are concerned. Convictions are prisons.[40]

Such convictions can be of the religious or scientific variety. Examples of Nietzschean attacks on convictions could be presented *ad abundantiam*.[41] That they are prevalent in both religious believers and scientists Nietzsche asserts in the aphorism "Believers and their need to believe". "How much one needs a *faith* in order to flourish…that is a measure of the degree of one's strength (or, to put the point more clearly, of one's weakness). Christianity, it seems to me, is still needed by most people in

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[40] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist (A).* Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), Sec. 54, p. 184.

[41] For just a few, see *The Gay Science* sections 57, 295-96; *The Antichrist* sec. 54 and 55; *Human, all too Human* sec. 629-630; *Beyond Good and Evil* sec. 230-231.

old Europe even today; therefore it still finds believers." The need for faith is not confined to religion. He goes on to say, "metaphysics is still needed by some; but so is that impetuous *demand for certainty* that today discharges itself among large numbers of people in a scientific-positivistic form."[42] The free-spirit, conversely, "would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, being practiced in maintaining himself on insubstantial ropes and possibilities and dancing even near abysses. Such a spirit would be the *free spirit* par excellence."[43]

As a brief yet related aside, it warrants mentioning that despite Nietzsche's negative critiques of Christianity, he places the historical Jesus in the category of free spirit in the *Antichrist*.

> One could, with some freedom of expression, call Jesus a 'free spirit'—he cares nothing for what is fixed: the word *killeth*, everything fixed *killeth*. The concept, the *experience* 'life' in the only form he knows it is opposed to any kind of word, formula, law, faith, dogma…On this point one must make absolutely no mistake, however much Christian, that is to say *ecclesiastical* prejudice, may tempt one to do so: such a symbolist *par excellence* stands outside of all religion, all conceptions of divine worship, all history, all natural science, all experience of the world, all acquirements, all politics, all psychology, all books, all art…[44]

Nietzsche interprets the historical Jesus as essentially anti-dogmatic, resistant and determined to avoid the fixed convictions that free spirits must be free of. Christian doctrine represents a dangerous and common pitfall for free spirits, but Jesus himself was a model free spirit. This conclusion should leave us with a cautious attitude regarding the easy presumption that anyone associated with the Christian faith is thereby excluded from

[42] GS, Sec. 347, pp. 287-88.
[43] Ibid.
[44] A, Sec. 32, pp. 156-57.

the possibility of free spiritedness. The case, rather, is that unflinching adherence to ecclesiastical doctrine or dogma imprisons the spirit, while following the teachings of Jesus—particularly by following the example of his life—can in fact help one to achieve spiritual freedom.

The statements cited above, culled from works that span Nietzsche's writing, provide a glimpse of how the free spirit avoids the pitfalls of belief in "untruths". In large part, the free spirit avoids such pitfalls because of his cheerful temperament. In addition, however, the free spirit resists such pitfalls through his active skepticism. The free-spirited skeptic refuses to place belief in religious, metaphysical, or scientific traditions, viewing them—despite their usefulness in alleviating "terrible truths"—as illusions. "What characterizes the free spirit is not that his opinions are the more correct but that he has liberated himself from tradition, whether the outcome has been successful or a failure. As a rule, though, he will nonetheless have truth on his side, or at least the spirit of inquiry after truth: he demands reasons, the rest demand faith."[45] As this passage suggests, by choosing skepticism the free spirit liberates herself from traditional claims to knowledge.

Recall Nietzsche's claim when describing the free spirit that a "free, fearless hovering over men, customs, laws and the traditional evaluations of things must *suffice* him as the condition he considers most desirable."[46] Later in this work I will explore how this spiritual liberation paves the way for an aesthetic perspective, but for now we

[45] HH, Sec. 225, p. 108
[46] Ibid., Sec. 34, p. 30.

should note that skepticism is not merely the default position of the unbeliever. The passage above suggests that skepticism need not be viewed as a negative reaction to what the moral and epistemic traditions offer—it is not world denial. It can be, instead, a positive reaction to the unknown, a "free, fearless hovering over men, customs, laws and the traditional evaluations of things." The free spirit seeks out a skeptical attitude as a means to the liberation which is "the condition he considers most desirable"; skepticism is an indication that the free spirit's goal of spiritual liberation from tradition has been achieved.

That the free spirit finds this condition of spiritual freedom most desirable has far-reaching implications. He prefers this condition over other conditions that many would never consider leaving or would at least prefer to such spiritual freedom: the sense of peace and consolation that stems from participating in traditions like religious ceremonies; the sense of identity that comes from being part of a certain nation, race, or people; or the sense of fellowship that may result from seeing oneself as a member of a political community. Living without such attachments may be difficult for many, and for this reason Nietzsche takes pains to warn would-be free spirits that the condition of spiritual freedom "must *suffice* him" as the most desirable condition.

Many of Nietzsche's readers do or ought to ask some questions here: what is it about breaking with tradition and community that will "suffice" one, i.e. will be sufficient to one, as the most desirable condition? Spiritual liberation is well and good, but how can mere freedom be all that one desires? Why should I think of freedom and skepticism

as positive conditions, when they seem instead to negate so many things? I will attempt to answer these questions below, but first we must take note of the importance that the idea of a cheerful temperament, or disposition, has to any answer we may come up with.

We should remember that Nietzsche asserts the importance of one's temperament in confronting terrible truths. A spirit who is naturally free by temperament, possessing "a firm, mild and at bottom cheerful soul", is capable of inwardly facing up to the existential, moral, and epistemic truths described above. But how does one come to possess such a temperament? In the language of contemporary psychology, temperament is not something one has any control over. Temperament is a pre-disposition one is born with, or a "configuration of inclinations" we are given, as opposed to a "configuration of habits" that we may arrange and that constitute our character.[47] Thus, temperament is fixed while character is changeable. Moreover, psychologists like David Keirsey argue that internal temperament, when influenced by the external environment, *determines* character.[48] It would therefore be impossible, in this psychological picture, for one to achieve the cheerful soul requisite for free-spiritedness if one were not born with it.

When Nietzsche employs the term "temperament", however, he does not adhere to the sharp distinction between temperament and character psychologists make today. Rather, Nietzsche asserts that one may indeed be born with a certain temperament—in this case "cheerful"—but does not believe that such a temperament is impossible for one

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[47] David Keirsey *Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence*. (Toronto: Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, 1998) p. 20.
[48] Ibid., p. 21

not born with it. In section 486 of HATH, entitled "One thing is needful", Nietzsche states that "There is one thing one has to have: either a cheerful disposition by nature, or a *disposition made cheerful* by art and knowledge."[49] Hence, while Nietzsche acknowledges a difference between temperament one is born with and character that can be cultivated, one does not preclude the other. Instead, one may work towards having a cheerful soul. To understand how Nietzsche thinks this can be done we should look at his understanding of drives, which we may treat as equivalent to the term "inclinations" that is used by Keirsey. For Nietzsche, there are numerous methods (six, to be precise) one can use to resist, and thereby to shape and mold, the "vehemence of a drive".[50] Individuals are able to shape their drives, and they are therefore able to shape their characters—at least to a limited extent. Character formation is a result of *arranging* one's drives in order to form a coherent character or personality. One may not choose one's drives, but one may choose which to cultivate and which to combat, which to weaken and which to strengthen, and in doing so form a chosen character. Nietzsche describes it accordingly: "one can dispose of one's drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis…"[51] As a gardener cultivates his plants to

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[49] HH, sec. 486, p. 179. See also section 290 of GS, pp. 232-33. Near the end of this section comes the phrase "For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself, whether it be by means of this or that poetry or art…"

[50] For these 6 methods, see *Daybreak*, sec 109, Pp. 64-65.

[51] Ibid., sec. 560, p. 225. On Nietzsche's use of the gardening metaphor see pages 81-83 of Paul Franco, *Nietzsche's Enlightenment: The Free-Spirit Trilogy of the Middle Period* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011). Here is a short summary, taken from pages 81-82: "We observed in *Human, All Too Human* that Nietzsche's denial of free will is not as global or deterministic as it sometimes seems. And towards the

create a coherent and beautiful garden, a free spirit may arrange one's drives to form a "firm, mild and at bottom, cheerful soul."

Armed with such a soul, free spirits are better equipped to face the "terrible truths" of existence. Yet the idea that free spirits possess the requisite temperament for a world free of illusion still does not explain how the condition of spiritual freedom is sufficient for them. Nor does it explain why free spirits are attracted to skepticism; it merely suggests that they may be better able to live with a skeptical attitude. Free-spirited skepticism remains a negation of the "traditional evaluations of things", but it does not provide one with a positive direction. The orientation of the free spirit is characterized in terms of what it is oriented *away from*; one still requires an orientation *towards* something.

With this we return to the second of our three central questions: In the absence of belief in any of these "untruths"—i.e. the claims of religion and science to answers of the fundamental existential, epistemic, and moral questions—how is the free spirit to evade despair and find a way to value and affirm life? How does the free spirit achieve spiritual fullness? The answer, I endeavor to show, is that spiritual freedom opens the way to choosing an aesthetic perspective. To return to section 34 of HATH, spiritual freedom allows one to "live among men and with oneself as in nature, without praising, blaming,

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end of the previous section, we noted that he insists that the way we think about things and evaluate them can have a profound effect on our actions. This does not mean, however, that there isn't an awful lot about ourselves that is given or natural or even undeniable. That is the point of the gardening and artistic metaphors…[O]ur liberty extends only to arranging, cultivating, nourishing, and composing what is already there. This creative activity is powerfully circumscribed by the natural facts that make-up our being, but we are still far from being "fully developed facts" prior to this activity." See pp. 31-35 for Franco's aforementioned analysis of Nietzsche's attitude towards free will in *Human, All Too Human*.

contending, gazing contentedly, as though at a spectacle." Why does the free spirit not praise, blame, or contend? Because unlike the men who do these things the free spirit rejects the traditional, moral evaluations by which things are measured to be praiseworthy, blameworthy, or contentious. The absence of such concerns leaves one free to approach life "gazing contentedly, as though at a spectacle." That is, the free spirit looks at life as though at a spectacle; she treats life as an aesthetic phenomenon. An aesthetic perspective can be the positive orientation of the free spirit. Liberated from the burdens of moral perspective, the free spirit chooses an aesthetic perspective, a perspective in which she is able to affirm life.

But what does it mean to choose an aesthetic perspective? Nietzsche has a lot to say about aesthetics, though he does not explicitly use the phrase aesthetic perspective. In what follows I hope to clarify what I mean by aesthetic perspective and to identify some differences between my way of looking at Nietzsche's views on aesthetics and other scholarly interpretations.

From the beginning of his writings to the end, Nietzsche argues that the whole of existence should be treated as an "aesthetic phenomenon". Only as such can existence be "eternally justified"[52], or become the object of our affirmation.[53] What Nietzsche precisely means by this will be examined below, but let us begin with a basic definition of an aesthetic perspective. Put simply, taking an aesthetic perspective is the act of

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[52] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy (BT)*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. (Toronto: Random House, Inc., 1967), Sec. 5, p. 52.

[53] The doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil (BGE)*. Tr. Walter Kaufmann. (Random House, Inc. New York: 1966), Sec. 56, p. 68.

treating the whole of existence[54] as an aesthetic phenomenon. I partially choose "aesthetic perspective" in order to avoid confusion with previous scholarly work on Nietzsche's "aestheticism". Alexander Nehamas examined Nietzsche's "aestheticism" in his seminal *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* in 1985. Nehamas's idea is, roughly speaking, that Nietzsche engages the world "as if it were a literary text. And he arrives at many of his views of human beings by generalizing them to ideas and principles that apply almost intuitively to the literary situation, to the creation and interpretation of literary texts and characters."[55] The world is treated as a work of art, open to as many interpretations as are interpretations of literary texts and other works of art. Nehamas's view of Nietzsche interpreting the world as art or text has met with serious challenges, but remains a powerful view.[56] The scholarly discussion surrounding "aestheticism" focuses primarily on interpretation, and examining Nietzschean interpretation is not my primary objective. Nor am I interested in building on the analogy of world as literary text. Instead, I am concerned with Nietzsche's emphasis on an aesthetic perspective as a means to justify or affirm existence itself.[57] While the task of using an aesthetic perspective to affirm life may include the activity of interpreting the world as art, I will focus more on the role of an aesthetic perspective in helping one to achieve spiritual fullness. We have already

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[54] I will also render "whole of existence" as "world". I will use the two interchangeably throughout.

[55] Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1985), P. 3.

[56] See Brian Leiter, "Nietzsche and Aestheticism" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Vol. 30, No. 2, April 1992.

[57] Aesthetic perspective allows for aesthetic justification for the world, as opposed to moral justification. Nietzsche, the self-declared "Immoralist", praises aesthetic valuation over moral valuation. See Phillipa Foot "Nietzsche: The Revaluation of Values" in Robert Solomon, ed., *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973) pp. 156-168.

discussed spiritual fullness, and it is clear that it is closely related to Nietzsche's idea of affirming existence. Yet, to be just, I should mention again that Nietzsche nowhere discusses or defends spiritual fullness.

Nietzsche first treats existence aesthetically in the *Birth of Tragedy*. I will quote the passage at length and offer three interpretations, which together provide a clear idea of what Nietzsche is getting at. In section 5 he writes:

> we may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections for the true author, and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art—for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*—while of course our consciousness of our own significance hardly differs from that which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it.[58]

Here we see Nietzsche's characterization of aesthetic justification of existence. We do not live to carry out the will of God, gaining our eternal reward in another life; nor do we merely exist to serve Nature through our role in preserving the species. Our "highest dignity"—the justification for existence and the world—is "in our significance as works of art". Yet our consciousness of this significance is hidden from us, "because as knowing beings we are not one and identical with the being which, as the sole author and spectator of this comedy of art, prepares a perpetual entertainment for itself."[59] We can, from time to time, participate or share in this aesthetic spectacle as co-creators, "only

[58] BT Sec. 5, p. 52
[59] Ibid.

insofar as the genius in the act of artistic creation coalesces with this primordial artist of the world, does he know anything of the eternal essence of art."[60]

The statement "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified" is one of Nietzsche's most quoted passages, and I want to analyze it from a few different angles to see what it can mean. In the last paragraph I engaged in a first possible interpretation, what we might call a metaphysical approach to aesthetic justification. It is evident that there remains a "metaphysical need"[61], as Nietzsche called it, present in these statements. At this time he was still captivated by Schopenhauer's idea of a unitary and primordial will; he was, as he claims in his "Attempt at Self-Criticism", the new preface to *Birth of Tragedy* written 14 years later, "the disciple of a still 'unknown God'"; he was speaking with "a *strange* voice".[62] The later Nietzsche takes pains, at least at times, to repudiate metaphysics, so how can we take any of these early statements seriously? One way is to simply say that Nietzsche was something of a believer when he wrote BT, but later lost that belief, rendering the metaphysical approach to aesthetic justification a dead relic of the past.

But a second interpretation, one that takes into account Nietzsche's Lutheran roots (Nietzsche's father was a Lutheran pastor), may be more helpful. Nietzsche's idea of treating existence aesthetically might be interpreted as a modification of the Lutheran doctrine of "justification by faith." Through one's faith that Jesus died for our sins on the

[60] Ibid.
[61] GS, Sec. 347, pp. 277-278
[62] BT, Sec. 3, p. 20.

cross the unrighteous sinner can become righteous; he can become "right with God." A sort of eternal salvation, or a solution to the problem of theodicy, is what Nietzsche has in mind when he claims, "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified." Elsewhere in his writings, of course, Nietzsche jettisons the idea of eternal salvation in the religious sense, but he seems to suggest that by treating existence aesthetically one can become "right with existence"; i.e. one can affirm and value existence in this way, finding a sort of existential harmony and spiritual fullness, and "save" oneself from the dangerous disease of nihilism—the belief that one's life, and the whole of existence, have no meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value. Looked at in this way we can see how Nietzsche's concern with justification relates to other religious ideas of spiritual fullness or fulfillment, albeit without the belief in a higher power.

There is a third interpretation of this important statement, which comes through Daniel Came's suggestion that when Nietzsche talks about aesthetic justification he means the achievement of an affective attachment to the world. Came argues that "Nietzsche spent most of his productive life trying to identify the foundational conditions that invite love of life and protect against world-denying pessimism."[63] It is with this goal in mind that Nietzsche speaks of aesthetic justification: "It is my general contention that when Nietzsche speaks of the aesthetic justifying life, he does not mean that it shows us that life is *actually* justified, but rather that it educes an affectively positive attitude

[63] Daniel Came, "The Aesthetic Justification of Existence", in *A Companion to Nietzsche,* ed. Keith Ansell Pearson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006. P. 60

towards life that is *epistemically neutral*."[64] In other words, without any moral judgment on life—seeing life as something "essentially amoral"—one can still achieve a love and affirmation of life and an attachment to existence through an aesthetic perspective. That is, one can achieve a necessary condition of spiritual fullness, as we have described it here, through an aesthetic perspective. Recall that spiritual fullness requires an attachment to something, to some source of meaning greater than ourselves. For a free spirit this attachment comes through treating existence aesthetically—an aesthetic perspective imbues existence with value. In addition, the argument here claims that free spirits are uniquely capable of finding this value and affirming life through an aesthetic perspective. Indeed, free spirits endeavor to face the moral and epistemic truths without despair, to turn instead to an aesthetic perspective to find life's value.

All three interpretations arrive, albeit along different paths, at the same basic conclusion: treating life as an aesthetic phenomenon is way of coming to value and affirm life. In other words, an aesthetic perspective is a means for a free spirit to achieve spiritual fullness. It has now become clearer why an aesthetic perspective is important, but we may also ask what it means to take an aesthetic perspective, or to have an aesthetic experience. Often, aesthetic experience is thought to include a sensory response, and something that is aesthetically beautiful is thought to be pleasurable to the senses. But there is also a strong intellectual component to aesthetic experience, and the emphasis here is on the intellectual component. Nevertheless, aesthetic engagement is at

[64] Ibid., p. 61.

once sensory and intellectual, corporeal and spiritual. Free spirits do not have to choose between one or the other, but the emphasis in this work on epistemology and moral freedom does skew the image to the intellectual/spiritual side. Indeed, the thinkers that will be highlighted here emphasize the intellectual orientation of aesthetic experience. Nietzsche, and as we will see later also Nabokov, Thoreau, and Goethe are not typical hedonists and sensualists, yet they seek aesthetic engagement with the world.

With this idea of aesthetic engagement as sensual and spiritual in mind, we may also ask: what it exactly means to have an aesthetic perspective, rather than, say, a scientific one? I hope a simple example of a snowy mountain peak will illustrate this point. When hiking in the woods with a snowy mountain in view I might say to a friend that it appears as though "the mountain's soft cap of snow keeps it warm during the winter." My friend is a botanist and doesn't care much for my interpretation, because he is coming from a scientific perspective. He responds with something like: "no, the snow is frozen precipitation that typically gathers at higher elevations, and as it melts it feeds the rivers and streams that irrigate the valleys and meadows where plants and grasses can then grow." Which interpretation is correct? The answer is that both can be considered correct; it is not the case that one interpretation is right and the other wrong, but rather that the interpretations stem from distinct perspectives. From these distinct perspectives, they can both be right. "The mountain's soft cap of snow keeps it warm in the winter" is an interpretation that arises out of an aesthetic perspective of the view of the mountain. From this perspective, the mountain is seen as a whole, as a unified phenomenon. It is

also viewed with some degree of aesthetic distance.[65] The botanist's interpretation, on the other hand, is more in line with what we may call a reductionistic, scientific perspective. The question about which perspective is better, then, depends on the attitudes and interests of the people involved, it depends on what a particular situation calls for. Scientific perspective is clearly better if one wishes to learn about the snow's ecological function, but if one seeks to enjoy the beauty of the momentary glimpse of a snowy mountain peak, an aesthetic perspective is clearly superior. And Nietzsche does argue, as I do here, that it is an aesthetic perspective that leads to life affirmation, to spiritual fullness.[66]

With the above example in mind we can easily imagine the importance that art has to facilitating an aesthetic perspective. We should remember that Nietzsche's use of the word "aesthetic" includes not only sensory perception but art—that is, with the interpretation and expression of sensory perceptions. Nietzsche returns to the subject of art in his later works, albeit without the metaphysical overtones we saw in *Birth of Tragedy*. He continues his argument that art—understood broadly as the engagement of aesthetic sensibilities, and as encompassing both artistic creation and the enjoyment of created art by participants and spectators—is of paramount importance in treating existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. It is most clearly evident in the aphorism "Our

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[65] I am indebted to Kathleen Higgins for the wording in this and the preceding sentence. It should be noted, as well, that an aesthetic perspective does not require the use of metaphor, as this particular example uses.

[66] This is not to suggest that Nietzsche deems scientific perspective "bad" or even second best. Scientific perspective—i.e. the activity of science—is extremely useful, and Nietzsche praises science throughout his works.

ultimate gratitude to art" in the *Gay Science*. Here Nietzsche claims that "as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be *able* to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon."[67] We should note the striking difference from his earlier formulation that emerges: existence is made "bearable" aesthetically, not "justified". Existence as an aesthetic phenomenon is no given metaphysical or cosmic significance, but it is made bearable, with an intimation that existence is also made *valuable*. This passage also shows the role of art in transforming ourselves, our lives, into an aesthetic phenomenon. Art provides us with the tools to engage with our lives as an artist with his creation, transforming our lives into a creation that engages our aesthetic sensibilities and responds to our artistic input. Art, as a model for one's outlook on life, takes on paramount importance for a free spirit.

Art is needed for the free spirits to face what they consider the "terrible" truths of existence; art makes this task not only bearable but joyful. Nietzsche wants to show that we are able to realize the value and idealization of existence through art: "we need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish, and blissful art lest we lose the *freedom above things* that our ideal demands of us." The "ideal" that Nietzsche describes here reminds us of the "free, fearless hovering" that the free spirit regards as the "most desirable condition." Art is a medium by which free spirits are brought back to the freedom of an aesthetic perspective. Living with the knowledge of the "terrible" truths of

[67] GS Sec, 107, pp. 163-164.

existence can leave one cold and detached from life, but the moments of bliss that can be reached through an aesthetic perspective make life, at the very least, "bearable."[68]

We can find an illuminating example of this in a position taken by novelist Vladimir Nabokov. When facing critics of his controversial novel *Lolita* in the 1950s, he writes a defense that seems fitting for a free spirit. He defends himself accordingly:

> There are gentle souls who would pronounce *Lolita* meaningless because it does not teach them anything…for me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm.[69]

Art, and creating art, is for Nabokov good for its own sake. More importantly for the argument here, Nabakov views his work of art as liberated from morality, from the putative need to teach a moral lesson. This is not to suggest that art cannot contain moral lessons, but the "aesthetic bliss" that comes to Nabokov seems to flow out of a "free, fearless hovering" over traditional moral lessons. Nietzsche expresses the need for art in a similar way. "At times we need a rest from ourselves by looking upon, by looking *down* upon, ourselves and, from an artistic distance, laughing *over* ourselves or weeping *over* ourselves."[70]

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[68] Paul Franco considers the role of art described in GS, Sec. 107 to be essential to a free spirit's independence from morality, and to the production of gay science. "Art is indispensable to achieving this standpoint, which, insofar as it floats above morality, can be understood as the quintessence of gay science." Franco (2011), pg. 127. One can see the kinship between Franco's statement here and Nietzsche's early description of the free spirit as "free, fearless hovering over men, customs, laws and the traditional evaluations of things." Art and aesthetic perspective dislocate us, they can sweep us away from the concerns of everyday life, including the concerns of morality and traditional evaluations.

[69] This comes from afterword to *Lolita* in the 2nd edition. See Vladimir Nabokov *Lolita* New York: Vintage Books, 2nd edition, June 1997, pp. 314-15.

[70] GS Sec. 107, p. 164

We may also profitably consider Nietzsche's famous doctrine of the eternal recurrence and what it might mean for an aesthetic perspective. Briefly put, eternal recurrence is the idea that states of affairs, being as they are at any moment, will return or recur an infinite number of times, and that the whole series of momentary states of affairs will recur as well. He first introduces this idea in the aphorism "The Greatest Weight" and wonders what this idea might mean to the individual who believes it . He asks whether, if a demon told you, "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it..." you would be able affirm such an existence; to give it significance and value through your own affirmation. Nietzsche continues: "the question in each and every thing, 'Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?' would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?"[71] One may wonder whether, through the doctrine of eternal recurrence, one is forced, in a sense, to will all of eternity if one wills one moment.[72] For each moment is tied to all events past, present, and future. To will one moment is to will every set of finite combinations of causes that led to that moment, to will everything that ever has or will ever exist. Nietzsche claims in an unpublished note from 1881 that "the number of

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[71] Ibid. Sec. 341, pp. 273-274.

[72] See section 8 of the "The Drunken Song" in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (TSZ) Trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1966) p. 323. Here Zarathustra asks: "Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamored; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said, 'You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!' then you wanted *all* back."

positions, alterations, combinations, and concatenations of this force [the world force or force of existence], to be sure, quite enormous and in practical terms '*immeasurable*,' but in any case still determinate and not infinite."[73] Time, conversely, is infinite, and therefore every sequence of possible combinations or configurations of this force *must* at some point in time repeat itself.

Whether or not Nietzsche actually believed this cosmological picture is difficult to confirm. The fact that he left this idea unpublished may suggest that he didn't. Nevertheless, this picture assists us in understanding what the purposes are behind the idea itself. Moreover, it may help us to understand Nietzsche's engagement with existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. I want to highlight two ways in which the eternal recurrence and aesthetic perspective might be related: first, through art—or more particularly through "aesthetic distance"— and, secondly, through one's attitude towards time. Let us address the role of art—art as the model for life—first.

Nietzsche returns to the eternal recurrence in *Beyond Good and Evil*, and here he reveals its aesthetic character.

> The ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably *da capo*—not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle, and not only to a spectacle but at bottom to him who needs precisely this spectacle—and who makes it necessary because again and again he needs himself—and makes himself necessary.[74]

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[73] Quoted in Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Vol. II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, Trans. David Farell Krell San Francisco: Harper and Row (1984) p. 89. Heidegger dates this group of notes from the fall of 1881.

[74] BGE, Sec. 56, p. 68

Willing the eternal recurrence of all events presupposes the "aesthetic distance" we need to look down on ourselves as at a spectacle. Through this doctrine we are able to treat the whole of existence as a spectacle, i.e. as an aesthetic phenomenon, and to be grateful for it. The free spirit needs aesthetic distance and an artistic role to be grateful for existence, to affirm life in the face of the terrible truth that life has no cosmic or metaphysical significance.[75]

There is a further link between the notion of eternal recurrence and aesthetic perspective in the way the theory impacts one's attitude towards time. In short, eternal recurrence focuses one's view on the present moment. The present moment is "unique," because "in this model the past and future collapse into one another."[76] If time recurs eternally past and future are ultimately one and the same, although one may at least utilize "past" and "future" as relative designations. Therefore, "the present moment is the only moment in time that stands out from the swirl of recurrence. Moreover, it is a moment of privileged significance because it is the only moment in which we are actively involved in time."[77] Yet Nietzsche is not advocating a sort of light-hearted, "forget the past," seize the day philosophy. Instead, the idea of eternal recurrence emphasizes the present moment as it is "causally connected to all other moments. It is the point at which the causal streams of past and present converge."[78] The lesson of the idea of the eternal recurrence is not to lose oneself in the moment. It is to recognize the importance each

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[75] BT, Sec. 15, p. 98. And again in GS Sec, 107, p. 164.
[76] Kathleen Higgins *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987. P. 175.
[77] Ibid..
[78] Ibid., p. 177

moment has in affecting past and future. This knowledge of recurring time, then, gives the present moment a certain weight and importance that slogans like "carpe diem" do not.[79]

The question we are interested in here is: how might this attitude towards time, privileging the present moment, be linked to an aesthetic perspective? There is a sense in which taking an aesthetic perspective privileges the present moment, as well. Leslie Paul Thiele claims that "one lives aesthetically not to arrive at an end called the self-as-art, but because only life lived aesthetically yields its fullest realization at every moment."[80] We discussed earlier the role of art in transforming ourselves. In similar fashion, art allows us to transform the present moment, to focus our artistic energies on the present moment. Thiele offers a stirring passage from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* to support this claim, and it bears repeating here. Thoreau writes:

> It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour.[81]

Thoreau's attitude is closely mirrored by Nietzsche in the aphorism "What one should learn from artists." He begins the aphorism with the question: "How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not?" We ought to look to artists,

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[79] For a fuller discussion of how one might interpret the eternal recurrence see Chapter 6 of Higgins *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987. Pp 159-201.
[80] Leslie Paul Thiele *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990. P. 137
[81] Quoted from Thoreau's *Walden* "What I live for" in Thiele, p. 136.

for "we want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest most everyday matters."[82]

There is a sense in which living aesthetically is akin to living in the moment, but also to willing the moment. We may not wish to will every moment, for many terrible moments inevitably occur in one's life. Nevertheless, if we will the present moment we do, in a sense, agree to will all the moments that led to the present moment, the bad moments included. If willing one moment requires the willing of eternal recurrence of events, then living aesthetically may be crucial to such willing. For an aesthetic perspective calls for one to will the moment, which does in a sense mean to will all of the causes that led to that moment. The realization that the present moment depends on all other moments in time, i.e., accepting the idea of eternal recurrence, involves taking a broader view of the present moment by interpretively placing it in its larger context. Through placing the present moment in its larger context, one interpretively creates "aesthetic" distance from the present moment; one takes an aesthetic perspective.[83] Viewed this way we may better understand why Nietzsche included the word "eternal" when he said "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are *eternally* justified" (italics mine). Willing the eternal recurrence of time creates and requires aesthetic distance. This seems to be what Nietzsche has in mind when he connects aesthetic perspective to an "eternal" justification of existence.

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[82] GS, Sec. 299, pp. 239-40.

[83] I am indebted to Kathleen Higgins for some of the wording in this sentence and the preceding one.

The above discussion should not be regarded as an exhaustive or precise account of the eternal recurrence, but rather as a possible interpretation of the relationship between eternal recurrence and an aesthetic perspective. How seriously Nietzsche took the idea of eternal recurrence—i.e. whether he truly thought events did recur over and over again in the same precise way—is an open question among Nietzsche scholars, and it is not my intention to resolve this debate here.[84] Furthermore, what the implications of the eternal recurrence are is likewise a topic that has sparked debate and spawned multiple interpretations.[85] The above discussion is only meant to suggest that the eternal recurrence has implications for how we understand an aesthetic perspective. First, willing the eternal recurrence presupposes the aesthetic distance necessary to engage the world as a spectacle, as an aesthetic phenomenon. According to Nietzsche, he who wills the eternal recurrence affirms the "play and spectacle" of life. He treats life as an aesthetic phenomenon.[86] Secondly, embracing the idea of eternal recurrence shapes

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[84] For my part, I agree with Nehamas, who claims that while we cannot say for sure whether Nietzsche believed in the eternal recurrence as a true cosmological theory, we can at least be pretty sure that he was not confident enough in his ability to prove it that he saw it as fit for publication. It was Nietzsche's sister, Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, who included sketches of a proof in *The Will to Power*, which she published after Nietzsche's death. *The Will to Power* was constructed from a collection of Nietzsche's notes. These notes were organized and published by Förster-Nietzsche and Nietzsche's friend Heinrich Köselitz, so one can only speculate as to how well the ideas in this book do justice to what Nietzsche himself would have expressed, or whether Nietzsche would have attempted to publish these notes at all. See Nehamas's *Life as Literature*, chapter 5 for a thorough discussion.

[85] To cite only a few: Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 203-209; Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1997); Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 265-266; Arnold Zuboff, "Nietzsche and Eternal Recurrence," in Robert Solomon, ed. *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Publishing, 1973), pp. 348-357.

[86] BGE, Sec. 56, p. 68

one's attitude towards time, emphasizing the present moment in an attempt to yield life's "fullest realization at every moment."

In this chapter, I have introduced the free spirit and explored his nature. Nietzsche's rendering leaves one with an image of the free spirit as philosopher. Indubitably, the free spirit possesses many philosophic characteristics: a skeptical, curious attitude and a penchant for solitude most notable among them.[87] However, Nietzsche does not categorize the free spirit as a philosopher, and we limit our understanding of the free spirit, I will argue, if we look only to philosophers for an embodiment. The criteria for a free spirit are general and abstract enough to allow for a wide spectrum of eligible individuals. What we have discovered in the preceding pages is what these criteria entail. Let us summarize the criteria here: the free spirit is a skeptic who seeks above all to be free of illusions about the world. He is able to face the "terrible truths" of existence without falling into despair due to his cheerful temperament, and to his ability to view a world without rational meaning as a cause for wonder rather than crushing doubt, as an invitation to create meaning rather than as a terrifying abyss. The free spirit affirms life, creates value in it, and finds an attachment to it—that is, he achieves spiritual fullness—through an aesthetic perspective, as opposed to traditional moral perspectives such as communal or religious doctrines or belief in human progress of some sort.

[87] Solitude here does not necessarily imply reclusiveness, but rather the endeavor to always grant oneself enough time alone to gather one's own thoughts and reflect upon them.

Now that we have discovered and enumerated the criteria for being a free spirit, we can see that free spirits might be found in many different walks of life.[88] We could find free spirits among the ranks of myriad artists such as writers, composers, painters and others. I believe we can also find free spirits amongst persons that would not be considered members of the literati, persons who may work in agriculture, industry, services and the like. As long as one meets the criteria that we have identified above, it should not matter what vocation one has. Rejecting metaphysical explanations of the world offered by religion and traditional culture, and choosing instead an aesthetic perspective, does not require a certain occupation. What it does require to some extent, however, is a certain relation to the human community at large. We must ask some questions about how a free spirit relates to society. I will argue that what is important for us to focus on is not where a person is positioned—socially, economically, politically, etc—in society, but *how a person positions himself in relation to society.* How a person chooses to relate to society will be explored in the next chapter, which examines how a free spirit relates to society. Further, I will supply some real world examples of exceptional free spirits, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Herman Hesse, to illuminate how the free spirit may operate vis-à-vis society.

[88] We may also find philosophers in many different walks of life, and we may suspect that Nietzsche would expect free spirits and philosophers in many places in society, not merely in philosophy departments and other places in academia. Evidence of this can be found in the section "On Scholars" in *TSZ*, Part Two, Sec. 16, p. 124.

2. The Place of Politics

This chapter examines the free spirits' relation to society. But what is society? Do we define society as civil society, the political regime, religious or ethnic community, or just a group of friends or acquaintances? Society can mean all of these things, so we must break it apart if we are to inspect it further. I am interested in understanding the free spirits' relation to three different types of society: the society of friends, that of politics, and that of what political philosophers call community. I will show in what follows that the free spirit avoids deep engagement with the practice of politics[89] and the community, but in doing so does not necessarily choose reclusive solitude. The pursuit of spiritual freedom and fullness requires distance—perhaps even active disentanglement—from politics and community, but it need not prevent one from enjoying the society of friends. Regarding politics and community, we will find that the distancing and disentangling that free spirits undergo do, however, constitute a sort of social role for them. Consciously or not, free spirits have an effect on the spheres of politics and community. The following discussion should illuminate this effect and the ways in which free spirits relate to different types of society more broadly, and it will culminate in some real world examples of exactly how they do this.

A free spirit aimed at spiritual liberation does, necessarily, walk on a more deserted road than most. Such spiritual independence is not common. Nor should one

[89] What sort of political practice free spirits avoid will be explained in greater detail later. However practice should be distinguished from theory. Free spirits, as we shall see, may engage in political philosophy whilst shunning engagement in practical politics.

who seeks it expect to be surrounded by peers. Nietzsche makes multiple claims to this effect: "Independence is for the very few; it is a privilege of the strong"[90]; these very few strive "instinctively for a citadel and a secrecy where [they are] saved from the crowd, the many, the great majority"[91]; and finally, "namely, insofar as we are born, sworn, jealous friends of solitude, of our own most profound, most midnightly, most middaily solitude: that is the type of man we are, we free spirits!."[92] Such strong statements lead one to think of the free spirit as a solitary spiritual hermit. Nietzsche himself spent the bulk of his productive writing years largely in his own company—in Switzerland during the summers and Italy and France during winter months—staying in modest bunkhouses and mostly keeping to himself.[93]

Some scholars have remarked that such statements are indicative of Nietzsche's radical individualism, which is a natural offshoot of his epistemological skepticism. Leslie Paul Thiele argues, for example, that "[t]he road to radical individualism, which has its greatest ramifications in the realms of politics and morality, finds its origin in epistemology. The starting point is the limitation of man's mind. Nietzsche's individualism is above all the extension of his skepticism." Thiele continues: "[t]he individual, like the species, cannot see around his own corner. Each is locked into a world of his own."[94] If one believes that all knowledge is peculiar to some degree to the

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[90] BGE, Sec. 29, p. 41.
[91] Ibid., Sec. 26, p. 37.
[92] Ibid., Sec. 44, p. 56
[93] See, for example, Walter Kaufmann's portrait of Nietzsche in the introduction of *Thus Spoke Zarathrustra*.
[94]Thiele, p..28, 30.

person who holds it, social interaction may be strained. Shared understanding and mental connection with others at a deep level would certainly be more difficult to come by.

For Thiele this radical individualism leads to a general rejection of society. "The individual is a law unto himself, unpredictable and unmanageable. Society, then, cannot be composed of individuals. It requires members…The price of social membership is the forfeiture of self-rule, this by means of establishing social norms."[95] This argument suggests that the radically individualistic free spirit will shun the constraints imposed by social membership, and that maintaining a strong solitary life may be a practical necessity for her. Social interactions for the basic necessities of life, and for human connection and friendship, are available to the free spirit, but the forfeiture of self-rule and unquestioned obedience to social norms come with costs free spirits are unwilling to pay. Social membership often requires these costs, according to Thiele, and the true individualist will therefore shun social membership. I agree with Thiele's assessment of Nietzsche as an individualist, and the figure of the free spirit seems to fit with such a position.[96]

I think, however, that it is important to dig a little deeper to see whether the free spirit is truly required to be so solitary. First, we should question if Nietzsche thought the free spirit must wholly take leave of society. My reading suggests that, on the contrary, the free spirit must abstain not from all societal interaction but from the arena of practical

[95] Ibid., p. 38. Thiele's use of the term "law" is odd in this sentence insofar as a law must be promulgated in order to be law. But the meaning—that the individual seeks to rule himself at all costs, even taking leave of society—should be clear.

[96] When Thiele discusses Nietzsche's individualism he is not speaking specifically about the free spirit, as I am here. My disagreement with Thiele's argument may be at least partially attributed to this difference in object.

politics and the identification with her community. Free spirits can still be members of society, while maintaining their distance from certain aspects of it. The society of others is not necessarily dangerous to spiritual liberation; it is a question of society with whom. A second consideration regarding the free spirit as presented here, which may not necessarily be Nietzsche's view, is that the tendencies of free spiritedness may be more or less evident at given times. Free spirits may choose when and how much to engage in social interaction, and sometimes this interaction may connect with politics and political community. However, free spirits will always be wary of identifying too closely with the traditions of their community, or of becoming too involved in practical politics; both of these potential problems will be discussed in more detail later.

We will see in what follows that Nietzsche's archetypal free spirit, Goethe, creates distance between himself and politics and between himself and community while at the same time cultivating friendships of the spirit with those like himself. Hermann Hesse, who lived after Nietzsche, shares Goethe's method, as it were, of cultivating friendships while avoiding political and communal connections. As we hear their stories it becomes clear that a free spirit need not be an awkward, asocial, solitary hermit. Nevertheless, a tension between free spirits and those two spheres of society—politics and community—undoubtedly exists. The arena of politics and the choice of taking one's identity to be a matter of community membership are obstacles to spiritual liberation, according to both Nietzsche and the argument I will make here. So what does Nietzsche have to say about these spheres of life?

During the period in which Nietzsche was writing and publishing *HATH,* he wrote in his notebooks the "Die zehn Gebote des Freigeistes" (Ten Commandments for Free spirits).[97] We should probably assume that these commandments were written with quite a bit of Nietzsche's tongue in his cheek, as the idea of commandments for a free spirit isn't free of irony. Nevertheless, these commandments guide one to a better understanding of the orientation of the free spirit and what sorts of life-activities threaten his spiritual freedom. Some are quite predictable, e.g. "Thou shalt not submit yourself to any religious ceremony"; "Thou shalt avoid the famous and influential." Others are less obvious, e.g. "Thou shalt not regret an offence, but rather perform one more good deed." Our focus will be on those commandments that give us a sense of how a free spirit should position herself in relation to society, politics, and community.

The following commandments show what Nietzsche considered threatening to spiritual freedom. Regarding politics the message is unambiguous: "Thou shalt not practice politics." This blanket statement about practicing politics seems to cover both the stronger sense of politics as political rule and also the weaker sense of engaging in the political process through methods available to a common citizen. What sort of political activities a free spirit should avoid will be discussed further later. Regarding society with others we can glean a position from a commandment about the education of children: "Thou shalt let your children be educated by your friends." This presupposes that the

[97] All commandments taken from Friedrich Nietzsche *Gesammelte Werke*, Germany: Musarion Verlag Műnchen, 1923, vol. 9, p. 365. Self-translated from the German with the help of John Graeber It is hard to know precisely when Nietzsche wrote the ten commandments, but they can be found in his collected works dated 1875-1880. HH was published in 1878 with additions in 1879 and 1880.

free spirit *has* friends, and should lead us to be more skeptical of the claim that the free spirit must be a solitary hermit.[98] Finally, there are two commandments that are at least loosely tied to the idea of community and of the identification of oneself as a member of a particular community. The first commandment is "Thou shalt neither love nor hate peoples or nations." This commandment indicates the importance to spiritual liberation of the need to love oneself and other selves but never Völker[99], i.e. peoples or nations. The message here, it seems, is that one should not identify oneself with—or attach oneself too closely to—one's community or nation to the extent that one may love or hate it.

Spiritual autonomy requires the treatment of others as *individuals*, as opposed to members of a particular community. The free spirit, who seeks above all individual autonomy in the form of spiritual freedom, thereby requires individualized identity. The fifth commandment returns to this theme: "Thou shalt take your wife from a people or nation other than your own." We can further infer from the fifth commandment that to prove one's commitment to liberation from tradition a free spirit shall look past his particular community for a spouse, ostensibly in order to reduce the influence of tradition on one's marriage and life, in order to ensure that, as a free spirit, one is conscious of the way of life one is leading, rather than merely assuming the way of life most often lived by those in one's community and tradition. Moreover, one's individuality might be better

[98] It also bears noting that Nietzsche was financially supported by many friends during his writing years following his resignation from the University of Basel. Additionally, he maintained correspondence with several close friends throughout these years as an independent philosopher.

[99] Völker is translated as "people, inhabitants of particular race religion or culture; nation, people of a certain country or nationality; crowd, large group of people, mass"

maintained if one's spouse is from another people, as the contrast of diverse backgrounds illuminates individual differences. From these two commandments we can infer that Nietzsche wants the free spirit to abstain from strong identification with one's nation or community.

I think it would be a mistake to consider the 10 commandments for free spirits as an authoritative moral code for two basic reasons. First, Nietzsche never published the commandments himself; we find them in his notebooks, and perhaps they are best understood as thought exercises. Secondly, to reiterate what was said before, Nietzsche was fond of bits of wit and irony in his writings and it seems reasonable to think crafting rules for a spirit that wishes to "hover" over traditional moral rules was one of these bits. Thus, while we ought not to take these commandments too seriously, they do provide a rough guide to what Nietzsche thinks free spirits are like both individually and as members of society.

As mentioned above, our examination of the free spirit as a member of "society" separates into three spheres: societies of friends, politics, and community. The free spirit finds obstacles, or perhaps more accurately threats, to spiritual liberation in both politics and community. I will address the free spirits' relationship to each of these spheres now, beginning with politics. It is sensible to look to the sphere of politics first because it is less ambiguous than the idea of "community", and because Nietzsche directed many of his attacks at the politics of his day.

The message Nietzsche has for free spirits regarding the political sphere is fairly straightforward: stay away from it. "Thou shalt not practice politics" if you are a free spirit, but why exactly is this? The growth of all great individuals—all free spirits—is stunted or destroyed by the burdens of politics:

> questions and cares of the public weal, renewed every day, devour a daily tribute from the capital in every citizen's head and heart: the sum total of all these sacrifices and costs in individual energy and work is so tremendous that the political emergence of a people almost necessarily draws after it a spiritual impoverishment and enfeeblement and a diminution of the capacity for undertakings demanding great concentration and application.[100]

The free spirit must exist above and outside the "ephemeral chatter of politics and national egoism"[101] or risk his own destruction, i.e. the imprisoning of his spirit. Nietzsche rhetorically implores, how many "more spiritual plants and growths…have to be sacrificed to this coarse and gaudy flower of the nation?"[102]

Nietzsche makes it clear in these passages that he thinks political activity takes a toll on one's spirit, and he further makes it clear that some should be allowed to evade such a toll. I think a plausible way to think about this is to take as given that a spirit has a finite amount of energy, energy it needs to cultivate itself. Considered this way, one can argue that political activity—both in the sense of one devoting one's life to politics (e.g. running for office, taking a job in political administration) and in the lesser political engagement one may choose (e.g. public discourse, electioneering, involvement with

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[100] HH Sec, 481, p. 178. This comment should certainly strike a chord with citizens accustomed to contemporary politics. The overload of political media, flooded through 24 hour a day news channels and social media, surely has the capacity to "devour a daily tribute from the capital in every citizen's head and heart", and many have noted the "diminution of the capacity" for concentration and application.
[101] A, Foreward, p. 126
[102] HH Sec. 481, p. 178

political groups, diligently following the news as opposed to being "rationally ignorant"[103])—saps one's limited spiritual energy. Such spiritual energy is needed to cultivate a free spirit; therefore the possibility of a spirit marked by "free, fearless hovering over men, customs, laws and the traditional evaluations of things" rests to some extent on the evasion of politics.

Free spirits do then, if they are to achieve spiritual liberation and maintain it, require some distance from politics. Indeed, Nietzsche advocates the privacy of these individuals. He remarks, "If the purpose of all politics really is to make life endurable for as many as possible, then these as-many-as-possible are entitled to determine what they understand by an endurable life". But he rejects the notion that these can demand "that *everything* should become politics in this sense, that *everyone* should live and work according to such a standard." The free spirits must be allowed to detach themselves from politics:

> For a few must first of all be allowed, now more than ever, to refrain from politics and to step a little aside: they too are prompted to this by pleasure in self-determination; and there may also be a degree of pride attached to staying silent when too many, or even just many, are speaking. Then these few must be forgiven if they fail to take the happiness of the many…"[104]

The standards of the many do not apply to some few, and these few, the free spirits, should not be coerced into adopting the standards of the many.

Nietzsche does not detail precisely how these few are to "step a little aside"; i.e. we cannot tell from this statement what political system he means to advocate, if any.

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[103] I am indebted to Bill Glod for this last item on the list.
[104] Ibid. Sec. 438, p. 161

But what is clear is that a consuming and coercive politics, which seeks to force a particular way of life on its citizens,[105] cannot be reconciled with Nietzsche's apparent call for freedom of the few from politics. For regimes that place the cause of the nation above the cause of the individual—and which enforce strong membership and obedience on its citizens—are the "coarse and gaudy flowers" to which so many "spiritual plants and growths" are sacrificed. For the few—these free spirits—the cause of the nation will forever be dangerous, which gives us another clue as to what sort of politics is harmful to them. The nationalist political regimes emerging throughout Europe beginning at the end of the 18th century, which declared the state to be of primary importance—both at the expense of the individual and of all other states—were not constituted with Nietzsche's call for separation and privacy for the "few" in mind.

Nietzsche also confronts perfectionism in politics in HATH. That is, he challenges the claim that one of the state's functions is to improve and perfect the citizens within it. In the aphorism entitled "Genius incompatible with the ideal state". A perfect state[106] is one that puts the good of society, of the social (political) body, above that of the individual. For Nietzsche, even if mankind were able to produce an ideal state, "mankind would have become too feeble still to be able to produce the genius". The

[105] Regimes that force certain ways of life on citizens may be few, though these totalitarian states do and have existed (Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, modern day North Korea, etc.). Modern theocracies and even bureaucratic "nanny" states are also candidates for regimes that cannot be reconciled with Nietzsche's call from freedom from politics, depending on the level of control the state possesses and uses.

[106] We may recall Plato's "city in speech" from the *Republic*, or Hegel's ideal state in the *Philosophy of Right* as examples of what Nietzsche is here challenging on the grounds of individual freedom.

free-spirit "will refrain from promoting the foundation of the 'perfect state', inasmuch as only enfeebled individuals can have any place in it."[107]

Nietzsche's position on the relation of free spirits to politics appears straightforward on this reading. Indeed, there can be little doubt that he considered deep engagement with politics to be anathema, to put it mildly, to free spirits. Active partisan membership jeopardizes spiritual freedom, as adherence to political platforms and political ideologies is required for the promotion of political causes. We can imagine that some political positions may be compatible with a free spirit's spiritual pursuits, such as administrative positions that require no political allegiance or active political participation.[108] We can also say with reasonable judgment that a free spirit can vote without giving up too much. Nonetheless, deeper engagement should be shunned, which leaves out many common political roles and occupations: those of political officials, journalists, campaign workers, lobbyists, etc. The key argument I want to make here is that active participation in politics, understood as making political life at least a large and important aspect, if not the driving force, of one's life, is not something a free spirit can do without ceasing to be one.

With this conclusion in mind, it may be hard to imagine a political role for free spirits. Yet despite appearances to the contrary, and whether or not free spirits intend to do so, free spirits do play an important political role. To identify such a role, however,

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[107] HH Sec, 235, p. 112

[108] This claim should be qualified to an extent. Administrative positions that require constant concern with the current political climate would also seem incompatible with the free spirits' spiritual pursuits.

requires a more abstract notion of politics than what we have defined as political activity heretofore, a notion we can find throughout Nietzsche's works. Nietzsche often talks of a battle over ideas and values when referring to politics. Put differently, we might say that engaging in such a battle is to engage in political philosophy. The free spirit may avoid engagement with practical politics, but may choose to engage in political philosophy. By entering the battle over ideas and values—e.g. by doing political philosophy—free spirits can to some extent influence political culture.

Let us glance briefly at Nietzsche's views of politics before analyzing the political culture that a free spirit may influence. Nietzsche's views on politics are often dissected but seldom agreed upon. Indeed, many commentators, including Tracy Strong, have contended that what we get from Nietzsche's writing is "so complex as to defy…all attempts" at description in political terms.[109] Nevertheless, many have attempted to paint Nietzsche as a political thinker, perhaps even primarily a political thinker.[110] H.W. Siemens claims that three moments stand out in the "standard" political reading of Nietzsche:

> Nietzsche is first and foremost an autarkic individualist (Stern, MacIntyre), philosophically insensitive to the sphere of social relations and deaf to the ethical claims of community. In the wake of a total critique of reason as will to power, Nietzsche (secondly) *abandons the claims of reason* altogether, turning instead to aesthetic and archaic values such as the "Tragic," the "Dionysian" and the "Noble" (Habermas). Since, on his own terms, modernity is too decadent or depleted to sustain such values, he (thirdly) entrusts our salvation to a *mighty act*

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[109] Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. P. 287, 292.

[110] See, for example, Hugo Halferty Drochon, "The Time Is Coming When We Will Relearn Politics" *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* Issue 39 (Spring 2010), p. 80.

> *of will* on the part of superhuman redeemers (e.g., the Übermensch, Dionysos) who are yet to come.[111]

None of these views of Nietzsche as political thinker should be confused with the argument about the free spirit made here. My purpose is to better understand Nietzsche's free spirit and to reflect on how this understanding applies to the citizen of the modern, liberal democratic order. With that purpose in mind, it seems necessary to acknowledge some of the common perceptions of Nietzsche's political philosophy in order to disentangle them from the political philosophy of the free spirit. Moreover, we need to distinguish the free spirit from other human types that Nietzsche presents, notably the type he calls the "new philosopher."

In most cases, scholars who focus on Nietzsche's political philosophy note the elitist, neo-aristocratic proposals Nietzsche appears to proffer in his later works.[112] From this perspective, tying Nietzsche to liberal political order, as I am doing here, is at best an ignorant "stretch" and at worst a willful misrepresentation. I defend myself against such potential criticism by narrowing the focus to Nietzsche's figure of the free spirit. Whatever Nietzsche's true political views are—a point of contention unlikely to be resolved anytime soon—I believe I am justified in suggesting that the free spirit is of import for liberal political order. Indeed, as Amy Mullin concludes,

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[111] H.W. Siemens, "Agonal Communities of Taste: Law and Community in Nietzsche's Philosophy of Transvaluation" *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 24 (Fall 2002), p. 83.

[112] For a particularly rampant account of a radical Nietzschean politics, see Hugo Halferty Drochon, "The Time Is Coming When We Will Relearn Politics" *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* Issue 39 (Spring 2010). For a recent, broad view of Nietzsche's political thought see the compilation edited by Herman W. Siemens and Vasti Roodt, *Nietzsche, Power, and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*, New York: Walter de Gruyter Incorporated, (January 2008).

> I hope also, now that we can recognize that Nietzsche's free spirit is neither associated with particular values, nor an exception to his general denial of freedom of the will, that we can begin to examine what may be appealing about the ideal of the free spirit. *Furthermore, we can see that Nietzsche's free spirit may be of interest even to those who do not share his repudiation of liberal democratic values, but who do share his enthusiasm for the ability to explore multiple ways of interpreting human behavior and norms*.[113]

Thus, regardless of Nietzsche's alleged elitism and aristocratic leanings, one of his most important human types—the free spirit, whom Siemens calls one of Nietzsche's favored conceptions of "genius"[114]—has much to offer to liberal political thought. Thus, the focus will be squarely on the free spirit as we proceed, leaving aside questions about the political philosophy of Nietzsche himself.

The free-spirit at issue here desires not to be burdened with cultural or political goals. This does not mean, as mentioned earlier, that the free spirits do not play—consciously or unconsciously—a political role. Again, to see this role clearly we must focus on politics as political philosophy: on a grand scale, as a battle over ideas and values. Paul Glenn examines this view of politics and how it applies to the debate over Nietzsche as a political philosopher: "At times Nietzsche does not seem like a political thinker at all because he does not discuss the best regime or details of what a good society would be. But this is the point: Nietzsche is attempting to redefine politics, to move beyond the narrow realm of the state and see the important struggles occurring

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[113] Amy Mullin, "Nietzsche's Free Spirit" *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (July 2000), p. 404 (italics mine).

[114] Siemens, pg. 85. Many scholars have noted the special importance of genius to Nietzsche. See also Leiter (2012) and his discussion of the "spectacle of genius".

quietly and, at times, invisibly."[115] These important struggles are over competing epistemologies, according to Glenn, and these so-called epistemologies[116] render competing moral and cultural values. The most significant political events, then, are "not what we often think they are, namely, wars, treaties, and the creation of legislation. Instead, the greatest events are the creation of values. Therefore, most of what we think of as politics is rather petty and minor; truly great politics are the battles over values and ideas."[117]

In other words, engaging in truly great politics is akin to engaging in political philosophy, specifically political philosophy that deals with the battle over values and ideas. To find where free spirits "fit" we may contrast them with another Nietzschean type, the new philosopher. Nietzsche's understanding of the free spirit's relation to politics must be examined in light of what he calls the new philosopher, a sort of free spirit turned cultural creator. Compared with the new philosopher, the free spirit appears likely to be more contemplative than active, more private than political.

According to Nietzsche, however, out of the free spirit this political—or to be more precise cultural—type might be born: the new philosopher, whose public role is the creation and teaching of new cultural values. When Nietzsche first introduces the free spirit he states "if more is nonetheless desired of him [than his solitary freedom], he will,

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[115] Paul F. Glenn, "The Politics of Truth: Power in Nietzsche's Epistemology" *Political Research Quarterly* Vol. 57, No. 4 (Dec., 2004), pp. 582-83.
[116] The term "epistemologies" is not a common rendering, but we can make sense of Glenn's term as "claims to knowledge" and "worldviews". The struggle to which Glenn refers is the struggle over competing claims to knowledge and competing worldviews.
[117] Ibid., p. 582

with a benevolent shake of the head, point to his brother, the free man of action", but of this latter man "there is a curious tale still to be told". The more active nature of the new philosopher is foreshadowed again at the end of HATH, if and when a free spirit "and his heart grow weary of wandering."[118] In BGE Nietzsche most clearly suggests the shortcomings of the free spirit, as detached spiritual hermit, if the goal in mind is cultural or political change. If he remains "quietly and proudly hidden in his citadel, one thing is certain: he was not made, he was not predestined, for knowledge. If he were…he would go *down*, and above all, he would go 'inside'."[119] The free spirit is unwilling to leave his citadel and "go down" to the political community. The new philosopher, on the other hand, takes on the challenge of politics; he will go as a cultural creator, attempting to impose his revaluation of values. Zarathustra, and at times Nietzsche himself, especially as he presents himself in *The Antichrist*, exemplify the new philosopher.[120]

But it is important to follow Nietzsche's treatment of these as two distinct human types, rather than to treat the free spirit as merely a stepping stone to the new philosopher. First, Nietzsche treats them as kindred but separate, e.g. after his remark "that is the type of man we are, we free spirits!" he asks "And perhaps *you* have something of this, too,

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[118] HH Sec. 638, p. 203. The new philosopher is an intellectual type, like the free spirit, but the new philosopher is willing to take action in the battle over ideas and values.

[119] BGE, Sec. 26, p. 37.

[120] We should also note Nietzsche's celebration of Renaissance princes in *The Antichrist*. In that work he does praise certain types of political rule. This does not, however, contradict the idea that the free spirit shuns politics. Rather, Nietzsche seems to be playing the role of new philosopher in *The Antichrist*. That work seems to have a culturally transformative purpose. Nietzsche's use of strong rhetoric and forceful expression demonstrate an intention to influence culture, rather than merely thinking through a problem.

you that are coming? You *new* philosophers?"[121] Secondly, the free spirit can perform the role of deviating from the cultural creation of the new philosopher once that creation has become strong, fixed and stable (which, of course, signals its imminent decay).[122] The free spirits must till the soil, so to speak, for new philosophers to plant their cultural seeds, and this crop rotation continues in perpetuity. Finally, it seems as though Nietzsche thought of himself as both free spirit and new philosopher, or put differently, as neither completely one or the other. He assumes both roles; the former as he remains a solitary author throughout his life and in his admiration of Goethe, the latter in his creation of Zarathustra and in his cultural call to arms in *The Antichrist*.[123]

We can see now that the free spirit and new philosopher are distinct types, but we also see their interconnectedness, which points us to the political role of the free spirit. The free spirit prepares the ground for new philosophers by breaking with old traditions and values. This connection between the two can be interpreted in two ways, with vastly different ramifications. One is that free spirits—as a sort of societal group—all work towards the goal of liberating society from the traditional values and morals of the past. Once this is done, the new philosophers enter, revaluing values and beginning a cultural renaissance. The other way to interpret the connection between free spirit and new philosopher, to which I subscribe, is that before one is to become a new philosopher—a

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[121] Ibid., Sec. 44, p. 56.

[122] This process of value creation followed by revaluation can, of course, take multiple generations.

[123] Perhaps that is precisely the point: Nietzsche himself may be the synthesis of free spirit and new philosopher, one who first liberated himself from tradition and then began his own revaluation of cultural values. Nietzsche remained a relatively solitary author to the end of his productive life, but it bears mentioning that his later works, particularly TSZ and A, seemed to be aimed at influencing culture directly.

creator of culture—one must necessarily be a free spirit. At the level of the individual, a spirit liberated from the old cultural values is essential for one to be able to create new ones.

The connection between free spirit and new philosopher is interesting and warrants further inspection. The two types may fit together and we should now have at least a rudimentary idea of how they do. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, we need only bear in mind that they can be treated separately and should not be conflated. We will now leave the new philosopher aside and refocus on the free spirit.

What is it about politics, exactly, that makes it so objectionable to free spirits? As we saw earlier, the goals of nationalism and socialism are harmful to the free-spirit, but it is not only these political goals that he chooses to avoid. The free-spirit is reluctant to pursue any final or all-encompassing goal. As Nietzsche says, "there are people who repose so steadily within themselves and whose capacities are balanced with one another so harmoniously that any activity directed towards a goal is repugnant to them."[124] And he emphasizes this again later, "he who has attained to only some degree of freedom of mind cannot feel other than a wanderer on earth—though not as a traveler to a final destination: for this destination does not exist."[125] The free spirit searches for an inner nobility that trumps any other pursuits, including political ones.

Even so, it is possible for the free spirit to practice what Robert Galbreath calls a politics of detachment, to carve a space for him or herself outside of politics while

[124] HH Sec. 626, p. 197. In this aphorism Nietzsche presents Goethe as his example.
[125] HH Sec. 638, p. 203

working towards inner freedom. To practice a politics of detachment is not to be apolitical; rather it is to avoid deep engagement with politics while working for the improvement of society by focusing inward. Individual liberation in the sense Nietzsche understands it does not come from constructing a political platform aimed at liberation as the goal. Instead, it requires *inner* transformation aimed at individual self-realization. *Prima facie* this does not seem like a political role, instead it appears wholly private. But as we will see in the lives and actions of Goethe and Hesse, the free spirits' actions can have an effect on politics, an effect that constitutes a political role, albeit in an unconventional sense.

Goethe is Nietzsche's free spirit *par excellence,* and Goethe's relation to politics is instructive. Goethe shows up often in HATH, where Nietzsche introduces the free spirit and explains his virtues and solitude.[126] His opinion of Goethe as a model free spirit (and genius) did not waver over time, made evident by his praise in the late work *Twilight of the Idols*. Here he celebrates the traits of the free spirit that Goethe embodied:

> Goethe was, in an epoch disposed to the unreal, a convinced realist: he affirmed everything which was related to him in this respect…Goethe conceived of a strong, highly cultured human being, skilled in all physical accomplishments, who, keeping himself in check and having reverence for himself, dares to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for his freedom; a man of tolerance, not out of weakness, but out of strength, because he knows how to employ to his advantage what would destroy an average nature…A spirit thus *emancipated* stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism…[127]

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[126] See especially Sec. 625 and 626, p. 197.
[127] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols (with the Anti-Christ)* Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), Sec. 49, p. 114.

The characteristics attributed to Goethe here are very similar to the characteristics Nietzsche presents in section 34 of HATH when he first introduces the free spirit. In Goethe we have a real, living free spirit, and for this reason Goethe warrants further investigation. Goethe was Nietzsche's chosen free spirit, and by understanding how Goethe viewed his own relationship to politics we will better understand a free spirit's relation to politics in general.

For Goethe it was not the outer political world, but the inner world that was of interest and that ought to be explored and expressed.[128] Politics were of the outer world and were, at best, of passing interest and, at worst, a distraction from Goethe's focus on expressing his inner life. Barker Fairley explains how Goethe's nature led him to be interested only in non-political aspects of humanity:

> It was only to be expected that a poet who began, as Goethe did, by having such a lengthy struggle with himself, one inner problem leading to another till it seemed the inner problems would never cease, would be drawn into seeing life from this point of view, privately rather than publicly, and that he would have no choice but to concentrate on those aspects of humanity which detached themselves, or came nearest to detaching themselves, from social and political questions.[129]

This explanation of Goethe's interests is supported by the opinions of his friends and associates. Georg von Reinbeck remarks in 1806 that "I can't remember [Goethe] ever talking about politics" and in January 1814 Wilhelm von Humboldt concluded that

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[128] Barker Fairley describes Goethe's lack of an "outer world" in Barker Fairley, *A Study of Goethe*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), Pp. 216-233. Fairley suggests that it is in the *Sorrows of Young Werther* that the overwhelming power of Goethe's inner world becomes apparent. "We have only to read the letter dated 18 August in which the outer world and even the universe seems to dissolve and disappear in an ocean of feeling to realize how lavishly, how dangerously, introspective a work it is. But any page of it will tell us as much. In its extreme form this sentiment rejects the outer world completely." Pp. 216-17.
[129] Fairley, p. 234.

"Goethe was by nature indifferent to politics and nationalism."[130] Goethe never tried to repudiate such claims; indeed, he himself often spoke of his indifference to politics. He was a free spirit in the Nietzschean sense, believing that individuals like himself could only be burdened or even destroyed by politics, rendering them unable to produce and contribute what they could in philosophy, science, poetry, and literature. In a letter to F.F. Buchholtz in February 1814 Goethe relates that "he and private individuals like him did right to leave the troubled affairs of state to those whose business it was to deal with them and that he knew no better service he could perform for his part than by going on with the literary and philosophical survey of the recent history of his country that he was endeavoring to provide in his autobiography."[131] In other words, Goethe found it necessary to "step a little aside" from the political arena in order to properly utilize his talents and time.

Goethe's insistence on privacy did not result in total solitude, however. He maintained his distance from politics and community, but not from other human beings simply. He cared little for societal trends or grand politics, but he sought out those people "who could share his ideals and his enthusiasms with him."[132] Indeed, Goethe claims that "the poet who fails to establish his solidarity with the rest of mankind and to shape his life accordingly is a child not yet out of tutelage."[133] In the dedicatory poem that opens the first authorized edition of his printed works in 1784 he shows, speaking

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[130] Ibid., p. 245
[131] Ibid., pp. 246-47
[132] Ibid. p. 241
[133] Ibid. p. 259

through the Muse, that he already (he was in his early thirties at the time) saw himself "as a man not so very different from other men, and that it is his duty to put his gifts at their service and to live with them in peace."[134] Thus we see that Goethe sought out connections with other humans, simultaneously maintaining his distance from politics and the political community as defined in this dissertation. His contributions to other humans took the form of expressions of his inner world. His "gift" was that of expressing his inner world as a poet and of demonstrating the cultivation of the spirit.

Goethe's own spiritual growth was a model to follow, he was a free spirit prior to Nietzsche's time and he practiced a politics of detachment. Moreover, he was cognizant of the favorable political climate in which he found himself in his later years, writing to Friedrich von Müller in 1824 that he would not choose to have lived at any other time, and that German people were happy as long as each one was allowed to go his own way.[135] In other words, Goethe was able to pursue his own spiritual fulfillment both because he detached himself from politics and because the political regime he lived under allowed him to do so. Geothe's free-spiritedness was enabled by a regime liberal enough to allow for it.

Another instructive example of how a free spirit may practice a politics of detachment comes in the form of German-Swiss writer Hermann Hesse. The story of Hesse also portrays a free spirit practicing a politics of detachment, though in a political period with greater challenges than those that Goethe faced. Hesse wrote several books

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[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid., p. 247

in the early-mid 20th century revolving around the questions of inner transformation and spiritual fulfillment. Unlike Goethe, however, Hesse wrote in a tumultuous time for politics and his works fell victim to a repressive regime; his books were eventually banned in Nazi Germany. Hesse was a free spirit who found himself in a political situation in Germany that threatened his existence as a free spirit. Fortunately, however, Hesse's dual citizenship—he became a Swiss citizen in 1924 after he was denounced in Germany as a pacifist traitor—allowed him to peacefully leave Germany and live out his days in Switzerland.

Hesse was profoundly influenced by Nietzsche and treated many Nietzschean themes in his novels.[136] Hesse is therefore an appropriate choice as a model for Nietzsche's free spirit, as he both possesses the characteristics of the free spirit outlined here and was an avid student of Nietzsche himself. Moreover, Hesse is the model Galbreath uses to describe a politics of detachment. According to Galbreath, "Hesse was detached from politics by temperament and conviction. As an emigrant, he was detached from the German scene; as an intellectual, a certain amount of detachment was an inherent part of his calling. Yet this does not mean that Hesse, or any free spirit, is somehow prohibited from taking a stand on anything whatsoever. Hesse, for example, still took an active interest in current affairs or in speaking out in defense of his ideals in ways which he deemed appropriate."[137] These "ways which he deemed appropriate" are

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[136] The influence Nietzsche had on Hesse throughout the latter's life can be found throughout Freedman, Ralph. *Hermann Hesse. Pilgrim of Crisis: A Biography.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)
[137] Galbreath, p. 70

not, however, the means typically associated with political action. Let us hear Galbreath speak of Hesse again:

> He had a strong aversion to the politics of parties, protests, and propaganda, but he did not see himself as irresponsible or as an escapist. His politics of detachment implied neither indifference nor lack of feeling. "Detachment" is used here rather to suggest a distancing effect which is intensely personal, a withdrawal from the frantic pursuit of chimerical external solutions so that a calming of the self may ensue through which brotherhood and peace may be experienced directly as living knowledge.[138]

We see from Galbreath's description that Hesse was extremely skeptical of arriving at peace and brotherhood via the right political project. Left/right, liberal/conservative, even Nazi/Jew membership does not help the progress of peace, according to Hesse. Indeed, joining in political causes may reduce the *quality* of society even if it increases its *quantity*. This is the message Hesse has for fellow intellectuals, whom he believes mistakenly assume that they have a responsibility to play an active role in politics. For Hesse, politics is a realm of quantity—of aggregating political will—whilst the intellectual realm should be one of quality. The work of intellectuals may be powerless to realize peace in the short term, but he has faith that in the long run such work is the best chance for the progress of peace.[139] Instead of engaging in political action, Hesse believed that intellectuals should transcend politics, focusing instead on the

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[138] Ibid., p. 66

[139] I do not mean to suggest that this position taken by Hesse stands in for all free spirits. Free spirits are not required to be pacificsts, and many may in fact view conflict as a means to spiritual strength. What political end Hesse deems worthy—in this case the progress of peace—is not what compels me to place him in the category of free spirit. It is, rather, the means by which he seeks to achieve this end that makes Hesse an instructive example of a free spirit's possible political role.

spiritual bonds of a common humanity.[140] This is what Hesse attempted to do during his experiences of both World Wars, experiences that were treated by his pen, but not to drum up political support for either side. On November 3, 1914, in the midst of war hysteria, Hesse published a short piece entitled "O Friends, Not these Tones" (taken from Schiller's "Ode to Joy") asking Germans to consider the human bond that transcends belligerency and patriotism.[141] Ralph Freedman sums up Hesse's method of expressing his sentiments accordingly: "[they were] non-activist, indeed, non-political, for whatever pacifist sentiments were voiced were channeled into comments about literature and art."[142]

Political progress, defined by Hesse as the progress of peace and the eradication of misguided conflict, comes from the inner transformation of individuals in society, not from the political transformation of society itself. Free spirits will always first focus inward, plumbing the depths of their inner life. The increase in the number of self-realized individuals, who have attained a higher consciousness, is what leads to the increased quality of society.[143] As quality increases, so too will the possibility that

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[140] It should be noted that Hesse's position was certainly influenced to some extent by his experience taking care of war prisoners for the Imperial Army during World War I. After initially volunteering to aid the war effort Hesse gradually came to oppose it. He also became disillusioned when his appeals to his countrymen fell on deaf ears. This experience led him to write a few polemical articles against the war under the pseudonym "Sinclair". Freedman, p. 189.

[141] Ibid., p. 166

[142] Ibid.

[143] My purpose in this essay is not to examine Hesse's mysticism or his understanding of self-realization, but this summary from Galbreath gives us a sense of Hesse's position: "'Detachment', 'non-attachment,' 'desirelessness,' 'equanimity,' and other cognates also refer in mysticism to a process of purgation or self-discipline as a necessary prerequisite to the attainment of higher consciousness. Hesse's knowledge of mysticism and its central role in his later novels suggests the immediate source of his politics of detachment". Ibid., p. 66

"brotherhood and peace" will be "experienced as living knowledge". Hesse's goal of altering the quality of society is manifestly long in view. Indeed, one who seeks such a goal cannot reasonably expect to enjoy the fruits of one's labor in their lifetime. It may take many generations for such change to be effected on a large scale. It would not be surprising, therefore, to see concerned citizens argue that the means which Hesse advocates are unsatisfactory. Galbreath addresses this accordingly:

> There is the further problem that by rejecting traditional politics, force, compromise, and collective protest, Hesse drastically reduces the range of effective action in society to that which can be accomplished by the self-realized individual. From Hesse's viewpoint, of course, he is not reducing effective action, but clarifying its real scope: through inner transformation and by personal example the quality of society will alter. To those individuals who cannot accept Hesse's premise, his conclusion may seem impractical—a pious hope and, in immediate effect at least, a defense of the status quo. Perhaps a clash of premises can never be resolved, but Hesse shies away from the confrontation. His method is an appeal to the inner spirit, not debate.[144]

This passage prescribes a dose of realism about the politics of detachment. There will undoubtedly be individuals who are skeptical about the possibility of inner transformation, believe that it is blind to the problems of evil they perceive within their midst, or, we might add, who are simply too impatient to acquiesce to Hesse's insistence that real, worthwhile change takes a very long time. Nonetheless, this passage does illuminate the practice of politics desired by and appropriate to Nietzsche's free spirit. The free spirit's focus on individual self-realization and liberation from historical and contemporary values and authority does not entail any immediate political goals. Nor can it be said that the free spirit is concerned, primarily or even tangentially, with the

[144] Ibid., p. 71.

improvement of society. Yet inner transformation can result in societal change over time, little by little, individual by individual.

The examples of Goethe and Hesse provide a glimpse of how free spirits relate to the political sphere. Free spirits may not be compelled to influence the political climate at all, but if they are, they will do so in ways that bypass or avoid common political channels, such as political parties and political media. In some cases, like that of Goethe, this method may be enough to escape the wrath of a suspicious political regime. The fate of Hesse and his work in Nazi Germany, however, evinces the potential tension between free spirit and political regime. As Freedman tells us in his biography, "despite his caution, Hesse was ultimately unable to escape the regime's disapproval." In 1943 the works of Hermann Hesse were prohibited; reading them inside Germany had become a crime.[145] The fate of Hesse and his novels show that the spiritual freedom that Hesse sought so dearly came at the expense of his political freedom. In order to retain both, Hesse would have had to live within a political order that guarantees some cluster of political rights for the individual against the state. A liberal political order may be necessary for free spirits to achieve spiritual fulfillment while retaining their political freedom. This will be a subject we return to later on.

We should acknowledge, however, that Goethe and Hesse may be exceptional examples of free spirits; men who had great direct influence on culture and at least some indirect influence on politics. These two free spirits reveal the public—if not political—

145 Freedman, p. 369

role that free spirits *can* play if they choose to or if, like Goethe and Hesse, they find themselves in a condition of fame and public recognition that makes it very difficult for them not to play *some* role. But what about free spirits that are not so exceptional? As discussed earlier, there are degrees of free spiritedness, and there may be people that meet the criteria of a free spirit, albeit to a lesser extent than Goethe and Hesse. For these, playing the role of free spirit may involve more common but still important acts, such as resisting the overtures of political activists, remaining skeptical of fleeting, ephemeral, and often-damaging political talking points, or focusing on long-term ends like liberty, prosperity, and peace while ignoring prevailing intellectual fashions.

These activities of free spirits seem increasingly important in contemporary liberal regimes, where partisan politics and mass media wield enormous influence. In an era where majority opinion finds no lack of mediums for its expansion and dominance, free spirits set an example of operating outside the fray. They thereby provide some balance against potential tyranny of the majority. As well, they provide an alternative to the extreme business of political activity, representing a way of life that at once provides a check on the encroachment of political life into one's spiritual life and has potential to benefit the political climate. It would be stretching too far to suggest that free spirits act for this latter reason, but the mere presence of free spirits in political life—visible for others to observe—contributes to the improvement of politics by providing a model of an independent citizen.

3. The Free Spirit and Individual Autonomy

The previous chapter explored how a free spirit relates to politics; more precisely, how one relates to the practice of politics. I suggested that free spirits will maintain their distance from practical politics, and that any influence they may have on the political order would come through indirect cultural influence, which also points to some engagement with political philosophy. In this chapter, I aim to explore what the idea of the free spirit means for individual autonomy. How might the existence of the free spirit affect the way we think about political order, particularly the liberal political order so prominent in the West today?

Our understanding of liberal political order is shaped by our understanding of the liberal self. We ought to know something about ourselves as individuals before accepting the task of forming a theoretical framework for a political regime. What exactly constitutes a liberal self is a matter of long debate, but it is clearly a necessary one if we are to more fully understand liberalism. John Christman and Joel Anderson remark: "[s]ince liberalism is centrally a view about the extent of legitimate interference with the wishes of the individual, it is not surprising that debates over liberalism have centered on the nature of the self."[146] In this chapter, we engage with the primary debate surrounding the liberal self—the debate surrounding autonomy—and examine the importance the free spirit may have in understanding this self.

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[146] From the "Introduction" to *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, Eds. John Christman and Joel Anderson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 9.

Perhaps the most basic claim made by proponents of liberalism is that the liberal self is autonomous. There are critics of this view who allege that the idea of an autonomous self is impossible or undesirable, and these criticisms will be taken up in the following two chapters. Our task here, however, is to flesh out what it means for the liberal self to be autonomous. Beginning here, I will replace the term "liberal self" with "autonomous individual", for that is, more precisely, what we are concerned with. Liberal political order is predicated on the idea of an autonomous individual. This is a point we will return to in the following chapter, along with a more thorough definition of liberalism, but for now let us briefly consider the importance of an autonomous individual to liberal political order. Again, here are Christman and Anderson:

> Liberalism can be characterized in a number of ways, a point addressed in several of the chapters here, but it generally involves the approach to the justification of political power emerging from the social contract tradition of the European Enlightenment, where the authority of the state is seen to rest exclusively on the will of a free and independent citizen…Central to the specification of justice in this tradition are the interests and choices of the independent, self-governing citizen, whose voice lends legitimacy to the power structures that enact and constitute justice in this sense.[147]

The autonomous individual is necessary to legitimate and maintain liberal political order. The concept of an autonomous individual requires unpacking.

The concept of individual autonomy has been explored from many angles in both moral and political philosophy. Put simply, individual autonomy is generally understood as the capacity "to be one's own person, to be directed by considerations, desires,

[147] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

conditions, and characteristics that are not simply imposed externally upon one."[148] This quite broad definition invites various refinements, and the concept of autonomy has spawned numerous related debates. The first debate surrounds the question of how many different types of autonomy we ought to pay attention to. At the high end, some commentators have argued there are five salient types. Rainer Forst argues that "five different conceptions of individual autonomy have to be distinguished: *moral, ethical, legal, political,* and *social* autonomy. All of these play a certain role in the concept of political liberty, yet none of them should become—as is so often the case—paramount and dominant at the expense of the others."[149] Additionally, theorists distinguish between "basic" autonomy and "ideal" autonomy and between "authenticity" conditions and "competency" conditions of autonomy. Others have distinguished between personal autonomy and "local" autonomy, which deals with particular, "local," aspects of the person in question.

Summarizing all of these debates is impossible here, so we must narrow our focus to the conceptions of autonomy that can be illuminated by our discussion of the free spirit. Fortunately, we can limit our focus to the debate over "moral" and "personal" autonomy (which Forst calls "ethical" autonomy), which is the distinction that is of highest import for liberalism, and the distinction that theorists of autonomy spend the most time discussing. We are concerned with the idea of the free spirit and how it

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[148] John Christman, entry on "Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy" in Edward Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html

[149] Rainer Forst, "Political Liberty: Integrating Five Conceptions of Autonomy" in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, Eds. John Christman and Joel Anderson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 229.

impacts political philosophy, hence Forst's inclusion of legal autonomy can be excluded without consequence. Furthermore, political and moral autonomy deal with relations between and amongst persons and are closely intertwined, so much so that most theorists of autonomy keep them together. Finally, social autonomy, according to Forst, refers to an arrangement of societal conditions conducive to maintaining the other four dimensions of autonomy, and therefore need not be addressed here, where our focus is on autonomy and liberal political order.[150]

We are left, then, with personal and moral autonomy. We will examine this debate and how the autonomy of the free spirit aligns with it. But we will see that the autonomy of the free spirit—at least as Nietzsche describes it—needs to be modified if we are to make it compatible with liberalism. First, let us turn to Jeremy Waldron for a summary of the distinction between moral and personal autonomy.

> Modern philosophers distinguish between *personal* autonomy and *moral* autonomy. Talk of personal autonomy evokes the image of a person in charge of his life, not just following his desires but choosing which of his desires to follow. It is not an immoral idea, but it has relatively little to do with morality. Those who value it do not value it as part of the moral enterprise of reconciling one person's interest with another's; instead, they see it as a particular way of understanding what each person's interest consists in. Moral autonomy, by contrast, is associated specifically with the relation between one person's pursuit of his own ends and others' pursuit of theirs. This is particularly true of is Kantian manifestations. A person is autonomous in the moral sense when he is not guided just by his own conception of happiness, but by a universalized concern for the ends of all rational persons.[151]

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[150] Ibid., p. 237

[151] Jeremy Waldron, "Moral Autonomy and Personal Autonomy" in Ibid., p. 307.

Personal autonomy involves pursuit of one's own ends, and it comes with no moral obligation. It does require self-reflection and self-understanding, as Waldron intimates with his claim that for a person to be personally autonomous it requires "not just following his desires but choosing which of his desires to follow." Self-knowledge is required, as is being in charge of one's life, i.e. being in charge of one's will. Put simply, we might say that one is personally autonomous when she knows herself and is in charge of her will.

Moral autonomy, by contrast, requires consideration of the ends of others and their pursuit of those ends. Moreover, it requires consideration of the "relation" between one's ends and the ends of others. Often, we find that we cannot pursue our own conception of happiness without considering the happiness of others. For example, I can hardly enjoy my beach vacation if my wife has contracted a tropical bug that keeps her bed-ridden throughout the trip's duration. But my wife's well-being is of particular importance to me, in a way that the well-being of others is not. It is therefore not particular concern I ought to have for my fellow citizens, but, as Waldron claims, a "universalized concern for the ends of all rational persons." I believe a sensible way to interpret this claim is to acknowledge that, as a morally autonomous person, I am concerned with my fellow citizens' ability to *pursue* their own ends. I do not necessarily concern myself with direct assistance in facilitating those ends, but I respect those ends and I ensure that neither I nor anything I am connected to (e.g. a political body) are responsible for preventing others' pursuit of their ends.

Liberalism, it seems, treats both personal and moral autonomy as essential. Firstly, liberal political order requires independent, self-governing citizens that choose their own ends, i.e. it requires citizens who are personally autonomous.[152] Secondly, the peaceful maintenance of a liberal political order depends upon the respect that citizens' extend each other regarding the pursuit of their own ends. Hence, liberalism also demands moral autonomy from its citizens. A simple recipe for liberal freedom based on individual autonomy can be seen in Kant's principle of freedom: "each may seek his happiness in the way that seems good to him, provided he does not infringe upon that freedom of others to strive for a like end which can coexist with the freedom of everyone…"[153] One is personally autonomous while seeking happiness in the way that seems good to him, and morally autonomous as he does not infringe on the freedom of others to do the same. In this passage, we see a marriage of personal and moral autonomy, a marriage necessary for citizens in a liberal political order. As we proceed, all allusions to an autonomous individual will include autonomy in this sense, as a combination of personal and moral autonomy.

How does the free spirit fit into this picture of autonomy? Is the free spirit an autonomous individual in the combined sense we are using? To answer these questions we should start with an investigation of Nietzsche's views on autonomy, and on his treatment of what he calls the "sovereign individual." Nietzsche did not write precisely

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[152] Recall, as well, that liberal political power is legitimated by a social contract agreed upon by independent, self-governing citizens. The end of liberal government, as it were, must be *chosen* by autonomous individuals. This is a theme we will return to in chapter 4.

[153] Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy* trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 291 (8:290).

about autonomy, nor did he follow the distinction amongst dimensions of autonomy as do modern theorists. However, his conception of the sovereign individual and his comments on freedom of will provide a map for a Nietzschean position on autonomy.

Nietzsche introduces the sovereign individual in the second essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, and it is best to quote him at length. After suggesting that the morality of custom and society are a means to cultivation of individuals with the right to make promises, Nietzsche writes:

> then we discover that the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral (for 'autonomous' and 'moral' are mutually exclusive), in short, the man who has his own, independent, protracted will and the *right to make promises*—and in him a proud consciousness, quivering in every muscle, of *what* has at length been achieved and become flesh in him, a consciousness of his own power and freedom, a sensation of mankind come to completion. This emancipated individual, with the actual *right* to make promises, this master of a *free* will, this sovereign man…[154]

Two striking claims are present in this passage: the first is that, according to Nietzsche, autonomy and morality are "mutually exclusive"; second, that only the sovereign individual who is master of a free will has the right to make promises. We need to unpack both of these claims to get a sense of Nietzschean autonomy. We will address the second claim first in order to get a clear picture of the sovereign individual and what it means for him to have a "free" will.

Nietzsche's remarks surrounding the question of free will depart from those that have been prevalent in philosophical circles since St. Augustine. Early in *Beyond Good*

[154] GM II, Sec. 2, p. 59.

and Evil, Nietzsche mocks the idea of free will in the metaphysical sense, but he likewise mocks the easy decision to assert the opposite, i.e. unfree will.

> The desire for 'freedom of the will' in the superlative metaphysical sense, which still holds sway, unfortunately, in the minds of the half-educated; the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one's actions oneself, and to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society involves nothing less than to be precisely this *causa sui* and…to pull oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the swamps of nothingness. Suppose someone were thus to see through the boorish simplicity of this celebrated concept of 'free will' and put it out of his head altogether, I beg of him to carry his 'enlightenment' a step further, and also put out of his head the contrary of this monstrous conception of 'free will': I mean 'unfree will,' which amounts to a misuse of cause and effect.[155]

Nietzsche does use the term free will, but we will see that his understanding departs from the traditional understanding of free will as unconstrained choice or unconstrained human agency. Detailed examination of Nietzsche's reasons for rejecting the traditional conceptions of free and unfree will, along with analysis if whether or not he makes a convincing case in this regard, is outside the purview of our discussion here.[156] We want to focus on Nietzsche's conception of individual autonomy; our discussion of free will is aimed at illuminating our understanding of this.

To understand free will in Nietzsche's sense we must return to our discussion of "drives" begun in chapter one. Recall that one's character is formed through the arrangement of drives—one cannot choose drives, only how to arrange them and which

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[155] BGE, Sec. 21, pp. 28-29.

[156] While the ensuing discussion should explicate the eccentric meaning of free will for Nietzsche, it will surely not be an apodictic treatment of the concept. It should be noted, however, that Nietzsche's positions on free will and determinism are hardly unequivocal. Some scholars (e.g. Leiter) see Nietzsche as a hard determinist, and with good reason. For example, Nietzsche's claim in *Daybreak* that the controlling agent that is responsible for organizing one's various drives is not the subject at all, but rather just another drive. Sec. 109, p. 65.

drives to cultivate, which to suppress—and that these drives are not rational but rather are products of the affects.[157] Free will, for Nietzsche, is not unencumbered choice; it is mastery over one's drives. Ken Gemes summarizes what constitutes a sovereign individual, master of a free will, with a genuine self: "To have a genuine self is to have an enduring coordinated hierarchy of drives. Most humans fail to have such a hierarchy; hence they are not sovereign individuals. Rather they are a jumble of drives with no coherent order."[158] The idea here is that the more control one has over one's drives, the more autonomous of external forces one becomes.

Simon May's conclusions regarding Nietzschean autonomy support the interpretation above. May also views Nietzsche's account of free will as an account of the mastery of drives. "The more *effectively* the drives are ordered into a hierarchy—the more control the self has over itself and over the circumstances with which it is faced—the more it is autonomous."[159] It isn't obvious how mastering one's drives, by ordering them into a hierarchy, applies to the question of whether one's will is free. It becomes clearer if we think of free will not as free choice, but instead as *feeling* free to act according to our own needs and wants. The sovereign individual, who is master of his drives, "gets to know what he wants and needs in order to flourish—and is conscious of

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[157] See *Daybreak*, Sec. 115 for Nietzsche's enumeration of drives and their affects. As well, Christopher Janaway asks and answers the question "What is an affect? At times Nietzsche talks simply of 'inclinations and aversions', 'pro and contra', or 'for and against'….Affects are, at the very least, ways in which we *feel*." Christopher Janaway, "Autonomy, Affect, and the Self in Nietzsche's Project of Genealogy" in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy*, Eds. Ken Gemes and Simon May (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), p. 52.

[158] Ken Gemes, "Nietzsche on Free Will, Autonomy, and the Sovereign Individual" in Ibid., p. 46.

[159] Simon May, "Nihlism and the Free Self", in Ibid., p. 90.

possessing the strength and discipline to do what it takes to fulfill those needs and wants. Willing is then free."[160] Willing is free because what one wills is aligned with one's needs and wants. A free will is free in the sense that one who possesses it feels free to act; it is not that he is free to "will" the action. The conclusion is that "[s]uccessful hierarchy is therefore not the result of something else called 'free will'; it is free will."[161]

Now that we have an image of Nietzschean free will, how might we portray the sovereign individual? May offers a conscise account:

> Now let us say that this, roughly, is Nietzsche's picture of the maximally free, autonomous self—the self he most values: such a self has the maximum number and diversity of drives, each of them maximally powerful and with its sustained yes's and no's, organized into a clear and aesthetically pleasing hierarchy by an organizing idea or single taste, which has the commanding strength to commit the individual to her chosen courses—i.e. to 'promise herself'. Such a self is 'free'; it can commit itself unflinchingly.[162]

The sovereign individual is free in the sense of being in control of herself, particularly by having organized her drives into a clear and aesthetically pleasing hierarchy. Again, autonomy or free will is likened to self-command and self-control, not unconstrained choice or agency.

What kind of autonomy, then, is exemplified by Nietzsche's sovereign individual, with whom the free spirit shares a desire for autonomy? Despite the apparently deterministic aspect of the Nietzschean account of free will, it is clear that the sovereign individual/free spirit is autonomous in the sense of personal autonomy. Recall Waldron's

[160] Ibid., p. 91.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid., p. 94.

definition: "personal autonomy evokes the image of a person in charge of his life, not just following his desires but choosing which of his desires to follow." Certainly the free spirit is autonomous in this sense. Christopher Janaway proffers a description of the sovereign individual that evinces personal autonomy more transparently than does May's account:

> We might be able to conceive of something like the following as an approximation to Nietzsche's sovereign individual: someone who is conscious of the strength and consistency of his or her own character over time; who creatively affirms and embraces him- or herself as valuable, and who values his or her actions because of the degree to which they are in character; who welcomes the limitation and discipline of internal and external nature as the true conditions of action and creation, but whose evaluations arise from a sense of who he or she is, rather than from conformity to some external or generic code of values.[163]

Again, we see Nietzsche's sovereign individual as someone in charge of his character and able to choose which desires to follow, where choosing is understood as a product of his drives, which he has organized into a hierarchy. In this sense, then, he is also in charge of his action and creation. Moreover, the sovereign individual's evaluations arise from a sense of who he is, not from external—conventional or traditional—codes of values.

It is clear that Nietzsche had an account of personal autonomy, and that his sovereign individual ought to be seen as autonomous in the personal sense. Nietzsche suggests, as well, that the free spirit possesses the same autonomy as the sovereign individual, evidenced by similar remarks he makes about autonomy and free will when

[163] Janaway, "Autonomy, Affect, and the Self in Nietzsche's Project of Genealogy" in Gemes and May, p. 62.

discussing the free spirit.[164] The autonomy of the liberal self, however, is associated with both personal and moral autonomy. Only autonomy in this combined sense qualifies as individual autonomy as we are defining that concept here. Can the Nietzschean account of autonomy be reconciled with moral autonomy as well? We remember from Waldron's definition that moral autonomy is associated with the "relation between one person's pursuit of his own ends and others' pursuit of theirs." A person who is morally autonomous must be guided "not just by his own conception of happiness, but by a universalized concern for the ends of all rational persons."[165]

On this definition, it would be hard to reconcile Nietzsche's conception of an autonomous individual with moral autonomy. We might say that the idea of moral autonomy is a liberal one, so it should come as no surprise that the decidedly anti-liberal Nietzsche does not concern himself with it. For Nietzsche, moral autonomy is at odds with personal autonomy—"'autonomous' and 'moral' are mutually exclusive"—although Nietzsche himself did not employ this precise distinction between moral and personal. Nietzsche was concerned primarily with the distinction between strong wills and weak wills.[166] Indeed, his conception of "free will" seems more appropriately a conception of a strong will—with its capacity for self-command—rather than a free will in the traditional sense.

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[164] See GS, Sec. 347, p.277-78.
[165] Waldron, "Moral Autonomy and Personal Autonomy", in Gemes and May, p. 307.
[166] In BGE, Sec. 21, p. 29 Nietzsche asserts "in real life it is only a matter of strong and weak wills."

Strong wills can rule over weak wills, perhaps ought to rule over weak wills, in Nietzsche's inegalitarian view:

> This emancipated individual, with the actual *right* to make promises, this master of a *free* will, this sovereign man—how should he not be aware of his superiority over all those who lack the right to make promises and stand as their own guarantors, of how much trust, how much fear, how much reverence he arouses—he *'deserves'* all three—and of how this mastery over himself also necessarily gives him mastery over circumstances, over nature, and over all more short-willed and unreliable creatures?[167]

On Nietzsche's account, only some individuals—the sovereign individuals—are capable of personal autonomy.[168] Those capable of autonomy should not be constrained by those too weak to achieve it. Yet this is something that moral autonomy seems to require. What results is a large gap between those few who possess a true character and those who don't. Gemes remarks, "The sovereign individual, who has a unified, independent, protracted will counts as having a genuine character, being a person. Modern man, who is at the mercy of a menagerie of competing forces, internal and external, has no such character."[169] Thus, the modern liberal does not meet the standards of Nietzsche's sovereign individual. Nietzsche's account seems to reject the view that the majority of liberal individuals can be autonomous, and he is unconcerned with this problem due to his anti-liberal leanings. Moreover, those who are autonomous will be so only the sense of personal autonomy, without regard for moral autonomy.

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[167] GM II, Sec. 2, pp. 59-60.
[168] As Gemes remarks, "[Nietzsche] then seeks to unsettle his audience with the uncanny idea that autonomy and free will are achievements of great difficulty, achievements which they themselves have by no means attained." In Gemes and May, pp. 38-39.
[169] Ibid., p. 38

While I am sympathetic to Nietzsche's account of autonomy, with its insistence that autonomy is an achievement rather than a given, I think that the account is wrong about two claims: first, that personal autonomy and moral autonomy can be so easily decoupled, and, secondly, that achieving autonomy is extremely rare. Addressing the first claim brings us back to Nietzsche's description of the sovereign individual, and the need to unpack the idea that only a sovereign individual has "the right to make promises."[170] This aspect of the sovereign individual intimates a concern with moral autonomy, as it is defined by modern liberals, to some degree. The ability to make and keep promises certainly has a moral dimension, thus it blurs the line between personal and moral autonomy.

Making a promise involves at least two people: the person making the promise and the person receiving it. There are a few ways we may evaluate the action of promise-making, but all contain a moral component. For the sovereign individual to make and keep a promise, she must either harbor a concern for the particular person or group to whom she is making the promise or she must harbor a concern "for the ends of all rational persons", insofar as trust in relations is necessary for a rational, well-functioning society. One might object, however, by claiming that Nietzsche doesn't seem to be thinking about the function of promises in society, or of concern with other persons, when he is describing the sovereign individual. He seems much more focused on demonstrating that the sovereign individual, uniquely, has "the right to make promises."

[170] GM II, Sec. 2, p. 59.

Thus, the lesson is not the importance of promise-making but rather the demonstration of strength on the part of the sovereign individual. She alone has the strength and self-command to make promises.

Despite Nietzsche's individualistic perspective on promise-making, there is still a concern for others—i.e. a moral concern—at work here. The sovereign individual, in order to be autonomous (even in only the personal sense, which he clearly is), must be recognized by others as autonomous. He wants to be seen as one with the right to make promises; his self-mastery should be recognized by others. "The 'free' man, the possessor of a protracted and unbreakable will, also possesses his *measure of value*; looking out upon others from himself, he honors or he despises; and just as he is bound to honor his peers, the strong and reliable (those with the *right* to make promises)…"[171] Indeed, the sovereign individual seeks out his peers and measures himself against them. He considers himself in relation to others, both his peers and his inferiors, which we might qualify as a moral concern. He wants others to understand that he has mastery over himself and his drives.

Clearly, the moral concern present in Nietzsche's sovereign individual does not match the concern for "the ends of all rational persons" required by Waldron's definition of moral autonomy. The sovereign individual, therefore, is not entirely autonomous in the combined sense of autonomy that we marked out earlier. He is surely personally autonomous, but his moral autonomy does not extend far enough to meet our definition.

[171] GM II, Sec. 2, p. 60.

Nevertheless, the focus on promise-making is an important one for individual autonomy and its relationship to liberalism. Its importance surrounds the idea of being responsible, or for taking ownership, of one's actions. This idea is tied to the idea of self-authorization, which is an essential component of liberalism's foundation in social contract theory. We should consider the ideas of self-authorization and responsibility for one's actions in more detail, for they may operate as a necessary supplement to the Nietzschean picture of autonomy.

Paul Benson arrives at a position on autonomy that doesn't require the allegedly rare and difficult achievement's of Nietzsche's sovereign individual. According to Benson, "I am autonomous in acting just when I *take ownership* of my actions, or at least have the unimpeded capability to take ownership of what I do and regularly exercise that capability."[172] The idea of taking ownership for one's actions as constituting autonomy requires much less than does the organization of drives required in the Nietzschean picture. Benson demonstrates that most scholars of autonomy argue that autonomous action must somehow reflect individual personalities, identities, and the agent's will. He remarks:

> According to this idea, I can bring my will and conduct within the compass of my agential ownership when my actions arise from or are incorporated within the sphere of what I really care about. Such actions are genuinely my *own* because they are appropriately related to my *identity* as a caring, reflectively

[172] Paul Benson, "Taking Ownership: Authority and Voice in Autonomous Agency," in Christman and Anderson, (2005), p. 101.

> willing creature. These relations to my practical identity constitute what I do as acts that *I* really perform.[173]

Benson finds these criteria much too stringent, as it eliminates the vast majority of human action from the category of autonomous action. As agents, Benson argues, we can take ownership of the vast majority of our actions, whether they reflect our will or personality at all.

Indeed, many trivial actions cannot truly be described as emanating from our wills, but we would not shun our responsibility for them, or disown them if we were asked to take ownership of them. Benson claims that "I can take ownership of my actions even when they do not align with who I am or what I stand for. Consider, for instance, trivial acts such as picking at a callus on my hand, swiveling my office chair, or snaring a distracting piece of lint off my desk, where these activities rise above the level of sub-intentional behaviors."[174] Trivial acts such as these make up a large chunk of our active lives, and while they do not reflect our will or identity, we are responsible for them just the same.

The crucial question for autonomy is whether or not we can be said to have ownership of our actions; whether or not our actions can be considered "self-authorized." Benson's point is that many of the actions we perform that do not meet a higher standard of autonomy—that is, they do not reflect our personality or our deepest motives—can still meet a lower standard of autonomy in the form of self-authorization. Benson argues:

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[173] Ibid., p. 102-3
[174] Ibid., p. 104

> For, as we have seen, the motives upon which autonomous agents act need not be authorized as belonging to or expressing what they really care about. Rather, these motives are their own, I propose, because autonomous agents have a certain authority in acting upon them. In other words, authorization that constitutes autonomy is an authorization of *agents* with respect to their wills, not, in the first instance, authorization of their motives or courses of action.[175]

In other words, an agent can be autonomous if they can claim authority for their actions, even post-hoc. The action does not have to express what they really care about, or we may say, how the agent understands his personality or character, which is a point to which we will return. According to Benson, "in order to grant a duly active role for agents in possessing the authority to speak for their acts, we should conceive of this authority as depending, in part, upon an active process of authorization that autonomous agents enact upon themselves."[176] As long as agents *can* claim authority for their actions, their actions can be seen as self-authorized.

One may wonder, however, in what sense an action should be considered autonomous if its performance is largely subconscious? The answer is that whether or not we consciously will an action does not determine whether we can claim ownership of it, i.e. authorize it, after the fact. Self-authorization of most actions is implicit and attitudinal. Moreover, it is based on the fact that we have authorized previous actions in our life and are sure to authorize future actions as well. As Benson remarks:

> it is not psychologically unrealistic to attribute self-authorization to all autonomous agents, even in their least reflective moments, because self-authorization can be entirely attitudinal, implicit, and un-self-conscious in most contexts. As I swivel in my office chair, I claim the authority to give account of

[175] Ibid., p. 107
[176] Ibid., p. 114

> my swiveling, or in effect I have done so through broader claims to authority I have made in the past, partly because I implicitly treat myself as having that authority, and understand that I would not possess it otherwise.[177]

We can self-authorize our actions through an attitude of self-authorization. Put differently, if we have claimed authority for our actions in the past and are accustomed to doing so, then trivial, un-self-conscious acts in the present can be considered self-authorized as well.

The important lesson contained in Benson's reasoning is that a lower standard of autonomy may be placed on our actions, a standard that does not require all of our actions to reflect our deepest motives and character. Swiveling in one's office chair hardly constitutes an action that reflects one's character, but it can pass the test of self-authorization nonetheless. This lesson is especially important for liberal self-government. Individuals in a liberal political order are assumed to be responsible, autonomous agents. Liberal government assumes its citizens can make political decisions for themselves, vote, pay taxes, follow traffic signals, be held accountable for any illegal actions, etc. All these actions must be considered autonomous for liberal self-government to function, but how many truly reflect the deepest motives and identities of each individual citizen? Not many, but in each case the self-authorization thesis that Benson puts forth demonstrates a way in which we can consider all such actions autonomous.

[177] Ibid., p. 115

Benson's minimal standard of autonomy is a necessary supplement, I believe, to the higher standard of autonomy we see in Nietzsche's sovereign individual. Nietzsche's view of autonomy is concerned primarily with how one can build a coherent character—through the organization of the drives—and act on the basis of this character. While this sense of autonomy is important, it is in some tension with the idea of liberal self-government. Liberalism requires that we authorize our actions, especially political actions, whether or not they reflect our deepest motives or character. This is true both in the act of self-governing and in the act of forming a legitimate government. We must consent to liberal government, and in doing so we implicitly authorized that government to act on our behalf. This "third-party" authorization is unproblematic if we supplement the Nietzschean view of autonomy with the self-authorization thesis. If we do not, however, it seems likely that many of the government's actions will conflict with this Nietzschean view of autonomy; that is, they will conflict with our deepest motives and character. This conflict may be unavoidable at times, but the self-authorization thesis explains how we can authorize government even when this conflict exists.

The question of whether or not Nietzsche's sovereign individual could authorize liberal government returns us to Nietzsche's claim about having "the right to make promises." By attaching this "right" to the sovereign individual, Nietzsche does approach something like the self-authorization thesis of autonomy. Surely, Nietzsche is more interested in person's strength to carry our promises than he is with self-authorization, but there is a sense in which having the strength to carry out a promise is akin to taking

ownership of an action. By promising to do something, we implicitly assert that we have the right and the ability to perform the action. Being both justified and capable of acting certainly constitutes ownership of the action. Thus, we can claim that the idea of self-authorization is embedded in making promises. Nietzsche may respond to such a claim by saying that, even if this is true, very few people are autonomous enough to truly self-authorize an action because very few are truly capable and justified in acting in a way that they intend, at least in a consistent manner. Be that as it may, Nietzschean autonomy can be said to include an idea of self-authorization, which at least mitigates, if it doesn't eliminate, the tension between Nietzsche's views of autonomy and the autonomy necessary for liberal self-government.

The discussion thus far has surrounded the concept of individual autonomy, as well as provided a minimum standard of autonomy necessary for self-authorization. Ideally, the individually autonomous liberal citizen ought to be autonomous in the combined sense, i.e. both personally and morally. However, the minimum standard is sufficient for self-authorization, which becomes extremely important for the legitimation of liberalism, which will be more thoroughly addressed in the next chapter.

But what of Nietzsche's second claim to be disputed, that the autonomous individual is extremely rare? This claim seems to be, on Nietzsche's part, little more than an assertion. While the difficulty of organizing one's drives into a hierarchy is readily apparent, so too is the difficulty of the prospect of judging whether other individuals have done so. It might not be easy to achieve individual autonomy, but it might also be too

easy to doubt the capabilities of others to achieve it. Moreover, Benson's reasonable and more humble position on taking ownership of one's actions greatly increases the prevalence and ubiquity of autonomy. There are countless trivial actions that we would, as individuals, take responsibility for regardless of how "free" we felt to act in the Nietzschean sense. Hence, while Nietzsche places a high standard on autonomy, it is at once unclear that we can judiciously evaluate the autonomy of others and that autonomy should be viewed *only* by such a high standard. A lower standard of autonomy, taking ownership of one's actions, even trivial ones, is necessary to supplement the higher standard.

To conclude this chapter we should ask some pertinent questions. Where does the free spirit fit into this overall picture of autonomy? And, what may be the difference between how Nietzsche's free spirit relates to autonomy and how a free spirit in general—one who possesses the characteristics of a free spirit that I have laid out in this work—relates to autonomy? Much of the difference between these two ideas may come down to how one views the nature of the will. If we adopt Nietzsche's notion of a free will, we are bound to follow him in positing only a minimal standard of autonomy, one that seems to follow the idea of personal autonomy, but which falls short of fully developed moral autonomy. By contrast, if we adopt a more Kantian or libertarian, i.e. non-deterministic, view of free will, we can imagine a free spirit that is fully autonomous in the combined sense. Again, delving into the philosophical debate over free will is outside the purview of this chapter, but it should be noted that there are many ways to

view individual autonomy in general, and that what is under our microscope here is how the free spirit pertains to individual autonomy.

I chose to relate important aspects of the case that scholars have presented on Nietzschean autonomy because I have borrowed so heavily from Nietzsche's presentation of the free spirit. Having expounded Nietzsche's free spirit in detail, to jettison his idea of autonomy found in the "sovereign individual", with whom the free spirit shares the salient characteristics of autonomy, seems out of order. The conclusion I offer here is that even if we adopt the minimal standard of "Nietzschean" autonomy—one that includes personal autonomy and Benson's self-authorization thesis—when describing the free spirit, we possess a sense of autonomy sufficient to the task of legitimating liberal political order, a task that will be examined further in the next chapter. Again, we can fairly easily imagine a conception of the free spirit with a more fully developed sense of autonomy[178], particularly moral autonomy, but this is not entirely necessary for our purposes here, nor would it align with Nietzsche's remarks about the free spirit and autonomy.

As we move to the next chapter we are left with a minimal standard of autonomy that we can apply to free spirits. Free spirits are personally autonomous and, while they may fall short of full-fledged moral autonomy, they possess enough "agency" or freedom of will for self-authorization. Moreover, the autonomy, and the freedom of will, that they

[178] In fact, my preference would be to do exactly this. A robust understanding of autonomy, particularly in the spiritual sense, is why I find the idea of a free spirit attractive. Furthermore, I do not think the Nietzschean account of the will is satisfactory, as even the task of arranging or organizing one's drives seems to require some sort of unconstrained agency. Nevertheless, my task here is to present a sense of individual autonomy sufficient for the project of liberalism, so I leave these other problems aside.

possess is not taken as given, for instance as a fixed component of human nature, but rather something that has been achieved. Individual autonomy is a goal rather than a gift, a goal that free spirits continually seek to reach.

4. Individual Autonomy and Origins of the State

To this point we have explored what sort of politics a free spirit is likely to practice and how the free spirit relates to individual autonomy. We turn now to the narratives surrounding the origins of liberalism and a discussion of how the idea of the free spirit impacts these narratives. Clearly, Nietzsche thought of his free spirits as few in number, and we can't be sure that he would suggest that politics be ordered with the protection of free spirits as the ultimate goal.[179] Yet, as we recall from our earlier discussion, Nietzsche does argue that the state must allow these few to "step a little aside" from the obligations of politics and community. Nietzsche wants the state to protect the strongest individuals by not sacrificing their needs to meet the needs of weaker individuals. There are other political theories that seek to make something like the free spirit the end goal of politics as well, and briefly considering one may be instructive.

The liberal republic envisioned by Baruch Spinoza, for example, placed liberation from authority and independence of mind at the top of political goals, calling them the *summum bonum* and *finis ultimus*.[180] Citizens in Spinoza's liberal republic would be free of superstitions and religious authority, and the spirituality of each citizen would consist in "the desire each human being naturally feels to continue existing as a human being,

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[179] Nietzsche argues in *HH* Section 438: "Moreover, if the purpose of all politics really is to make life endurable for as many as possible, then these as-many-as-possible are entitled to determine what they understand by an endurable life." P. 161.

[180] *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise* Trans. Martin Yaffe. Maryland: Focus Publishing, 2004. Chp. Iii, 1-2 and iv, 10.

that is, as a being who lives 'full of his own sense of things'."[181] Mirroring the free spirit, Spinoza's liberal citizen will feel as many felt living in the Dutch Republic of 1670, "where nothing is esteemed dearer or more precious than freedom."[182] Thus, for Spinoza the goal of the best political regime was the production of citizens that were much like free spirits or at least shared some characteristics—at least in terms of freedom of spirit and independence of mind, if not solitude and aesthetic perspective.

The position taken in this paper is somewhere in the middle between Nietzsche and Spinoza. This discussion does not take the free spirit to be as rare and exceptional as Nietzsche does, but it also does not expect or wish for something like a republic of free spirits, or at least a politics ordered by this ultimate goal.[183] The aim of this project is more humble, attempting to expose the desirability of free spirits for our liberal democracies of today. I have argued that the idea of the free spirit intimates the need for a regime that protects basic rights for the individual, for a liberal political order comprised of autonomous individuals. Free spirits must be allowed, as Nietzsche implores, to "step a little aside."[184] In other words, spiritual and intellectual freedom must be understood and protected through political freedom. Indeed, the idea of the free spirit justifies, in an important sense, liberal regimes as they exist today.

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[181] Aaron L. Herold "Spinoza's Liberal Republicanism and the Challenge of Revealed Religion," *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2014): p. 246.

[182]Baruch Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise Trans. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998, Preface, p. 3.

[183] Even Spinoza, however, did not *expect* a regime to be capable of producing only liberal, free-spirited citizens. He believed that the "common people" would likely never overcome superstition and the "emotional attitudes" that make free-thinking impossible (Ibid., Preface, p. 8). Nevertheless, Spinoza still made a republic that respects free-thinking persons the aim of politics. Ibid., Chp. 20, pp. 231-232, 234.

[184] HH Sec. 481, p. 161.

How might this conclusion differ, however, from other theoretical justifications for a liberal political order? In other words, what import does this conclusion have for liberal political theory? Let us look at a prominent narrative in political theory about origins of liberal government. Liberalism is predicated on the idea individuals must consent to form a government under which they will live. From liberal theory emerges a need to locate a position, in space or time, that is separate from extant government or social organization. Efforts to locate such a position, outside of government, from which individuals can consent to initiate government has led to theories of a "state of nature", or a "veil of ignorance". These theories are necessary to ground individual rights philosophically. That is, we must be able to conceive of some state prior to the formation of government where individual rights are located if we are to believe that individuals can be autonomous of government.

Critics of liberalism seek to undermine these "origin stories" of individual rights by refuting the idea of a pre-social state of nature or of a hypothetical veil of ignorance. In other words, these critics doubt the possibility of an autonomous individual. My conjecture here is that the very existence of free spirits demonstrates individual autonomy and the need for basic individual rights without recourse to a pre-social state or hypothetical veil of ignorance. Indeed, I will suggest that a justification of individual rights can be found even if we take the criticisms of these "origin stories" to be powerful. I will do so by addressing two basic challenges, in the next two chapters, levied by critics

of individual autonomy. This first is whether it is possible, the second is whether it is desirable.

The first challenge to individual autonomy that the free spirit informs surrounds the question of the very possibility of autonomy. Many political theorists have doubted the notion that the individual can be treated as a discrete unit of analysis. In other words, many theorists have asserted that the individual is but a part of the social whole, a social whole that is prior–and therefore irreducible—to individuals, or a social whole that is the natural and necessary end of the individual. If one canvasses the history of Western political thought, a view that society—or the state—is of greater importance than the individual will emerge in various forms. To be reminded of some well-known examples: society is prior to the individual (Aristotle); the individual reaches his highest potential and fulfillment in the state (Plato); the individual realizes the full expression of the ethical life only as a member of the state (Hegel); and the individual experiences true freedom only when he dissolves his particular will into the general will of the state (Rousseau). These views may differ in the timing at which an individual is absorbed into the state—Plato, Hegel, and Rousseau all see the individual achieving their highest fulfillment as a member of the state over time, while Aristotle claims that the individual is never separated, temporally, from society to begin with—but all these various theories assert that separating the individual from society is either impossible or undesirable. Recounting these arguments in detail is outside the purview of my project, but it is

important to acknowledge the influence they have had on progressives and communitarians, both of the recent past and today.

The placement of society above the individual has a long history in political theory, constituting something closer to the rule than the exception. John Dewey, the early intellectual heavyweight of the progressive movement, starts from the premise that individuals cannot be separated from society, made evident in his summary of the theory of the "social organism" in *The Ethics of Democracy.*

> …that theory that men are not isolated non-social atoms, but are men only when in intrinsic relations to men…Society in its unified and structural character is the fact of the case…Society, as a real whole, is the normal order, and the mass as an aggregate of isolated units is the fiction. If this be the case, and if democracy be a form of society, it not only does have, but must have, a common will; for it is this unity of will which makes it an organism. A state represents men so far as they have become organically related to one another, or are possessed of unity or purpose and interest…[185]

In words that echo Hegel and Rousseau, Dewey asserts the idea that men "are men only when in intrinsic relations to men." Only through interactions with other men are individual men capable of understanding themselves, a view that is carried on by more recent communitarians.

In *Reconstructing Public Philosophy*, William Sullivan encapsulates the communitarian position on the individual's relation to society.

> [S]elf-fulfillment and even the working out of personal identity and a sense of orientation in the world depend upon a communal enterprise. This shared process is the civic life, and its root is involvement with others: other generations, other sorts of persons whose differences are significant because they contribute to the

[185] John Dewey, "The Ethics of Democracy" in *The Early Works of John Dewey: Vol. 1, 1882-1898*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969, p. 238-39

> whole upon which our particular sense of self depends…Outside a linguistic community of shared practices, there would be biological *homo sapiens* as logical abstraction, but there could not be human beings. This is the meaning of the Greek and medieval dictum that the political community is ontologically *prior* to the individual. The *polis* is, literally, that which makes man, as human being, possible.[186]

Sullivan adopts the classical republican thesis that the individual is but a part of the larger political community, i.e. the individual does not exist outside of community. In Aristotle's famous phrasing: "It is clear, then, that the city exists by nature and is prior to the individual. For if no individual is self-sufficient when isolated, he will be like other parts in relation to their whole."[187]

Similar statements could be culled from myriad sources. As we progress, we will note similar statements in progressives from Dewey to Herbert Croly and Charles Merriam, and in communitarians from Sullivan to Sandel, MacIntyre, and Taylor. Whatsoever their theoretical differences, the most prominent progressive and communitarian thinkers agree on the basic premise that the individual cannot be separated from society. Instead, the individual is a part of the social whole. We might collapse these theories into one category: theories that treat the state as a "social organism." Those who view the state as a living "organism" naturally view the life of the individual as an organic ingredient of the state, as a means to the growth and maintenance of the state. If the state is a social organism, the individual becomes an organic part of the larger living whole. The agency individuals would need to consent to liberal

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[186] William Sullivan, Reconstructing Public Philosophy, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 158, 173.
[187] Aristotle, *Politics* Trans. Peter L. Phillips Simpson (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 1253a24-27 (pg. 12 in Simpson text).

government is ruled out by the fact of their being something akin to biological parts of the social whole.

Liberalism, as defined in this dissertation, departs from progressivism and communitarianism at the very outset of theorizing. Liberalism begins with autonomous individuals; it begins with the idea that individuals possess an essential freedom or autonomy that cannot be infringed upon without justification. Liberalism thus denies the conception of state as primarily a "social organism." Dewey was keenly aware of the difference in starting point, and he juxtaposes the theory of state as a "social organism" with the theory of state as a "social contract."

> The essence of the "Social contract" theory is not the idea of the formulation of a contract; it is the idea that men are mere individuals, without any social relations until they form a contract. The method by which they get out of their individualistic condition is not the important matter; rather this is the fact, that they are in an individualistic condition out of which they have to be got. The notion, in short, which lay in the minds of those who proposed this theory was that men in their natural state are non-social units, are a mere multitude; and that some artifice must be devised to constitute them into political society…[188]

According to Dewey, the social contract is the basis of liberalism, and it rests on the faulty assumption that "men in their natural state are non-social units." What Dewey is aiming his criticism at, implicitly, is the "state of nature" at the foundation of liberal theorizing. This criticism is echoed by many of his progressive and communitarian sympathizers.

The concept of a state of nature hardly needs introduction to those familiar with the history of Western political thought. Modern liberalism begins with Thomas Hobbes'

[188] Dewey (1969), p. 241

argument that human life in the state of nature was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Rights of the individual were first established by appeal to the inalienable right of self-preservation. Hobbes begins liberal "rights talk" by placing the right to self-preservation above all else.[189] The individual's need to preserve his material/physical existence trumps the duties towards other men encouraged in ancient and medieval political philosophy. Once individual right is placed above duty in modern political philosophy, the individual is placed above—or at least before—the political community. John Locke also presupposes the right of self-preservation, using a paradigm very similar to Hobbes's state of nature to justify the preeminence of this right.[190] Liberty promises that each and every person may do what *he* deems necessary for his preservation, that other men or governments "cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgment and reason shall dictate to him."[191]

Thus, to have liberty is to be free to act according to your own reason in the interest of self-preservation. We have this liberty in the state of nature, but, as both Hobbes and Locke warn us, protection of this liberty is hardly robust in such a state. The state of nature is dangerous and unforgiving, so individuals consented to a social compact that, through political institutions, would alleviate the dangers of the state of nature. Hobbes's and Locke's respective versions of the social compact contain important

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[189] Hobbes claim is that "the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life…". Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan* Ed. Edwin Curley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994. P. 79.

[190] In his chapter on "The State of Nature", Locke claims: "Every one as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station willfully". John Locke *Two Treatises of Government* Ed. Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960. P. 271.

[191] *Leviathan*, p. 79

differences, but, in both, alleviation of the dangers in the state of nature is the goal. Notably, Hobbes's social compact is the more illiberal solution of the two insofar as men give away their natural liberties in order to leave the state of nature. In this way, Hobbes's civil state requires more than just consent. In Chapter 17 of *Leviathan*, he states:

> This is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all, in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner as if every man should say to every man *I authorize and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men*…"[192]

Hobbes begins with individuals in a position where they may consent to government, but once government is formed the individual and his natural liberty are no longer placed above or protected by government power. Hobbes begins from a liberal standpoint but ends with an illiberal solution.

The more liberal Locke, by contrast, seeks to create a government that respects the natural liberties of citizens, and allows them to govern themselves. Government is the institution of natural laws that already exist in the state of nature, where each person has executive power to enforce them. For Locke, government is the institutionalization of individual freedom, not the reduction or extermination of it. Through the social compact we have justification for the creation of government. As individuals, we consent

[192] Ibid., p. 109.

to a government that guarantees to protect our "natural rights"—rights that exist in a state of nature—in a way that they cannot be protected in the state of nature.[193]

In both Hobbes and Locke, the social contract begins with the idea of consent, arising amongst individuals in an assumed state of nature. Contemporary progressives and communitarians are wont to make the state of nature their target. A number of progressive political scientists in the late 19th century, trained in the German schools, jettisoned the idea of the state of nature. Francis Lieber, who had studied in Berlin under Johann Fichte and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel before advancing German political thought in 1830s America, categorically rejects the concept. As Charles Merriam states, "In Lieber's opinion, the 'state of nature' has no basis in fact. Man is essentially a social creature, and hence no artificial means for bringing him into society need be devised."[194] Moreover, for Lieber, the state is the "natural condition of man, because essential to the full development of his faculties."[195] Charles Merriam claims that this new German school of political science had ushered in a new era, based on history rather than natural right.

> The individualistic ideas of the 'natural right' school of political theory, indorsed (sic) in the Revolution, are discredited and repudiated. The notion that political society and government are based upon a contract between independent

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[193] This brief summary does not, admittedly, encompass the logic of, or the debates surrounding, the concept of the state of nature. Nor does it mention other thinkers, notably Hume, Rousseau, and Montesquieu, who bring different conceptions of the state of nature to the fore. For my purposes here, however, I mean only to remind the reader that the state of nature portrayed by early liberals positioned the individual—or at least individual families—as prior to the formation of society.

[194] Charles E. Merriam, *A History of American Political Theories* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903), p. 307.

[195] John Gunnell, *The Descent of Political Theory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 27.

> individuals and that such a contract is the sole source of political obligation, is regarded as no longer tenable.[196]

John Burgess, another descendent of the German school, comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that the social contract theory assumes that "the idea of the state with all its attributes is consciously present in the minds of individuals proposing to constitute the state, and that the disposition to obey law is universally established."[197] That is, the requisite conditions for a social contract exist only where individuals have a pre-existing understanding of and obedience to ordered society. Burgess thinks that these conditions do not exist in a state of nature. Only through living socially, i.e. through the emergence and later inculcation of social norms and rules, can a group of individuals be prepared to enter into a social contract. If this is true, it follows that the social contract cannot describe the origination of a state. Rather, the social contract could, at most, be the institutionalization of an already existing social order. Again, the idea of isolated individuals constituting political society is declared to be a myth. Social contract theory based on natural right is, by extension, rejected as a plausible and solid foundation for liberal government.

The most recent social contract theorist, John Rawls, attempted to elude the critics of the state of nature while retaining rights-based liberalism. He did this by creating a thought experiment. He started with individuals in an "original position." The original position is:

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[196] Ibid..
[197] John W. Burgess *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law*, (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1891), p. 62.

> a device of representation: it models, first, what we regard (here and now) as fair conditions for the terms of social cooperation to be agreed to…; and second, it models what we regard (here and now) as reasonable restrictions on reasons that may be used in arguing for principles of justice to regulate the basic structure.[198]

The original position allows for decisions about the terms of social cooperation, and about how to form a just society, in a fair and impartial way. It does this by ensuring that those in the original position are ignorant about basic facts about themselves. Individuals have no knowledge of their particular abilities, desires, or of their relative position in the social order. This lack of knowledge is what Rawls calls the "veil of ignorance," and his thought experiment requires that each individual wear this veil when deciding upon basic political terms.

Specifically, individuals in an "original position," wearing a "veil of ignorance," must decide on principles of justice, i.e. on the distribution of rights, positions and resources in the society they are forming. For Rawls, the key to the formation of a just society is that those doing the forming are equal in a highly abstract way, they are equal because of their common ignorance regarding basic facts about themselves.[199] It is the lack of self-knowledge that makes the thought experiment work, specifically the fact that in the original position "no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his

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[198] John Rawls *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003) p. 85.

[199] It should be noted that as Rawls continued to develop his theory of justice—and as critics argued that even persons in the original position could not unreservedly be considered impartial—persons behind the veil of ignorance were considered to have different stores of "knowledge". In *A Theory of Justice*, persons behind the veil of ignorance shared equally a conception of the right. In *Political Liberalism*, however, persons behind the veil shared a conception of the good.

intelligence and strength, and the like."[200] This ignorance regarding basic facts renders the principles of justice chosen by persons in the original position fair. Moreover, it renders those principles legitimate, as every reasonable person ought to be willing to offer their consent to them.

Rawls's original position offers an alternative method by which to ground and legitimate liberal political order on the basis of consent. It differs from the state of nature theorizing of Hobbes and Locke, but it remains a version of a social contract. As such, it requires individual autonomy, both for the representatives in the original position and the citizens that accept and heed the principles of justice chosen by those representatives. It requires citizens who can reflect upon their own preferred ends as well as share concern for the ends of others, two characteristics present in our conception of individual autonomy in chapter 3. Rawls's novel and provocative suggestion, furthermore, is that autonomous, reflective citizens attempt to agree on political principles and terms of social cooperation from a position of near total equality. The purpose of the social contract is not to leave the dangerous state of nature, but to create a just and fair society of equals.

Does the Rawlsian thought experiment successfully dodge the potential criticisms? Does it successfully evade the attacks that have been launched at the state of nature? The short answer is no. According to communitarians, it fails because the idea of an original position without self-knowledge disregards the reality of a social understanding of the self. As we will discuss in more detail later, communitarians see

[200] John Rawls *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 118.

the self as socially embedded, and therefore the individual self is incapable of imagining the detached self necessary for the Rawlsian thought experiment to work. Communitarians often aim their critique not only at the idea of a political founding via social contract, but at the idea of contracts, entered into by private individuals, as a basis for political life in general. Just as the idea of independent citizens forming a contract out of the state of nature is rejected by progressives and communitarians, so is the idea of free and equal persons in an original position.

The reason these ideas are rejected by communitarians is fairly straightforward. There are no such persons as an independent citizen or an autonomous individual. Or, at least, there are not persons independent or autonomous enough to truly reflect on their ends and others ends, and to choose rationally how best to take both into account in a political framework. Real human beings—not abstract, imaginary equals in an original position—are not autonomous relative to their life-situation (social position, natural gifts, familial roles, cultural identity, etc.), or so the argument goes. Michael Sandel, for example, argues that "the liberal attempt to construe all obligation in terms [of voluntary contract]….fails to capture those loyalties and responsibilities whose moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are—as members of this family or city or nation or people, as bearers of that history, as citizens of this republic."[201]

[201] Michael J. Sandel *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 14.

For Sandel, an autonomous individual, one who can imagine herself in an "original position" or able to enter into a social contract, is impossible. We cannot separate ourselves from who we are, and who we are is determined by attachments that we have not chosen. His argument, then, mirrors those of the thinkers discussed above, who converge on the idea of the state as a social organism. Sandel goes further, however, as he attacks the "voluntarist self-image", or "unencumbered self", inherent in liberalism. He claims that the:

> predicament of liberal democracy in contemporary America may be traced to a deficiency in the voluntarist self-image that underlies it. The sense of disempowerment that afflicts citizens of the procedural republic may reflect the loss of agency that results when liberty is detached from self-government and located in the will of an independent self, unencumbered by moral and communal ties it has not chosen. Such a self, liberated though it be from the burden of identities it has not chosen, entitled though it be to the range of rights assured by the welfare state, may nonetheless find itself overwhelmed as it turns to face the world on its own resources.[202]

Sandel here asserts that the voluntarist self-image is "deficient" and leads to a sense of disempowerment. Liberal citizens are "afflicted" by a loss of agency when liberty is "detached from self-government and located in the will of an independent self."

More will be discussed about the "deficiency" of the unencumbered self in the next chapter, but for our purposes here let us conclude that both progressive and communitarian critiques of liberalism are aimed at the impossibility of autonomous individuals entering into a social contract. These critics conclude that individuals cannot be shown to possess "natural rights", nor can they sensibly be placed in an ignorant

[202]Ibid.., p. 203.

"original position." Consequently, another philosophical justification of legitimate government must be found.

Progressives find this foundation in a philosophy of history (History with a capital H), in the Hegelian idea of history as a rational process and of the modern, rational, democratic state as the "end of history." Along with the idea of History—the never-ending march of social progress—the rational state became the only legitimate concern of political science. "It was the idea of the state, itself, which gave meaning to [political science's] existence and legitimacy to its method…As a result, political science could be established as an applied science of the rational state."[203] Political science and theory, then, is concerned with the progress of the modern, democratic, rational state. The legitimacy of government, of the state, is proved by the continuity of its role in social progress, of improving society. For progressives, there need not be a narrative of state origins, because the state is the result of rational History and social progress. Thus, the debate over legitimate government is the debate between natural right and History.[204]

Yet this debate is, concomitantly, a debate about whether political theory ought to treat the individual as the basic unit, or whether the state—as a social organism—is the sole political unit worth analysis. Perhaps the more fundamental question is not whether a pre-social state of nature actually existed, but rather whether it is sensible to treat the individual as the discrete unit at the foundation of political order. In other words, is it

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[203] John Marini, "Progressivism" in *The Progressive Revolution in Politics and Political Science: Transforming the American Regime*, eds. John Marini and Ken Masugi Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. P. 234.

[204] For a brief discussion of this debate, see James Ceasar, *Nature and History in American Political Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) pp. 70 – 81.

possible to begin with autonomous individuals and to build political society up from there? Does an autonomous individual exist? It is surely implausible to expect to settle this debate here, but the conception of the free spirit does, at minimum, urge us to return to this fundamental question.

The existence of the free spirit described in this dissertation points to the existence of the autonomous individual, and in doing so has profound implications for liberal theory. The existence of the free spirit points to the possibility of a social contract, consented to by individuals and that guarantees rights for individuals against government over-reach, even if state of nature or the Rawlsian "original position" is jettisoned. Debunking the idea of natural right (regardless of whether critics have truly done this) does not prove that the autonomous individual is a fiction, or that rights for individuals need not be claimed and protected. Indeed, the free spirit is brought into the world as part of the social order, but, through his own efforts, emerges *out of society*, at least in the spiritual sense. He is an individual that has liberated himself in important ways from the social state, from the "social organism." He *becomes*, to a large extent, an autonomous individual. Thus, the progressive/communitarian assertion that a social state is the normal order, and that "the mass as an aggregate of isolated units is the fiction," may be true at the outset of life, but need not be at the end.

The free spirit is a product of the social order, but liberates himself from that order as he matures. Naturally, any person born and raised in society, who has been socialized through a common language and common practices, is bound to share some of

the thinking of that society. He is bound, as well, to grow up sharing the values of the society in which he was reared. The relationship of the individual to society is the same for all persons at the beginning of life; it is a relationship of dependence and strong identification of the individual with society. The free spirit, however, gradually liberates himself from society over time, gradually decreasing his dependence on and identification with society. As he seeks spiritual fullness, the free spirit breaks away from the common practices and values that were given to him. Again, we should recall that the free spirit may retain attachments to people and things of his choosing, but strong attachments to society, and membership in the political community, will not be the source of his spiritual fulfillment.

The sequence of the social contract could, then, be inverted. Rather than forming relations between isolated individuals and constituting them into political society, the social contract might be viewed as an agreement amongst individuals already in society—but liberated from the social order—that some individual rights, guaranteed against the political order, should be put in place. The free spirit represents an autonomous individual, albeit one who *emerges out* of the social order. If we take the free spirit seriously, liberalism doesn't require an imaginary "veil of ignorance," or a proof of "natural man," to justify individual political rights. By acknowledging the possibility of a free spirit, we also acknowledge the possibility of treating the individual as the foundational unit of political theory. In other words, the bedrock of liberal political

theory—the autonomous individual—remains possible without justification through a pre-social state of nature or an original position.

Progressive and communitarian critics will likely respond, however, that liberal theory treats *all* individuals as autonomous, not only those who may be considered free spirits. Merely introducing the free spirit as an example of an autonomous individual is not enough to "save" the origin story of liberal political order. Yet demonstrating the autonomy of *any* individuals is enough for liberal theory. If liberalism is predicated in part on the existence of autonomous individuals, demonstrating their existence bolsters the case for liberalism. Non free spirits, those who view their selves as socially embedded, or those who have not yet achieved individual autonomy, are free in a liberal regime to think of themselves in these ways. Freedom of association allows for individuals to treat themselves, first and foremost, as members of a community or social group. Liberalism, then, does not require that each individual think of herself as autonomous. It does not, therefore, threaten the freedom of progressives and communitarians to think of themselves in terms of their roles in the state, and in their communities, respectively. Furthermore, liberalism does protect the right for some citizens—like our free spirits—to remain autonomous of those obligations of society that threaten their spiritual freedom.

Progressives and communitarians assert that no individual is or can be an autonomous. In doing so, they claim to have refuted a basic liberal tenet. Yet the picture of the free spirit provided here demonstrates the possibility of treating individuals as

autonomous. It proves the assertion of the socially embedded self—without the potential for individual autonomy—wrong, at least for some individuals, and suggests that progressives and communitarians ought to be satisfied with the fundamental liberal institutions of free speech, assembly, and association, lest they impose oppressive constraints on free spirits. After all, the existence of communal or common values, collective deliberation, and social action is not threatened by liberal political order. Instead, individuals are protected from being coerced into participating in such things. The liberal does not deny the existence or even the importance these things, she merely denies the obligation to participate in them.[205] For the free spirit specifically, we can infer that she will likely opt out of such participation in order to secure her autonomy.

[205] Will Kymlicka provides a good argument for why the communitarian "social thesis" ultimately fails in Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) pp. 219-225.

5. Individual Autonomy, Spiritual Autonomy, and Spiritual Fullness

There is a second narrative in political theory that is challenged by existence of the free spirit, a narrative that doubts the desirability of individual autonomy. In this chapter we will question this desirability, or more precisely, we will listen to some critics of individual autonomy and respond to their concerns. Specifically, the argument in this chapter will address the desirability of the individual as spiritually independent of society, or the social whole. The focus will be on spiritual autonomy, on the question of whether or not the individual is as spiritually independent or whether the individual is inextricably tied to the "spiritual organism" of community or state.

Communitarians have repeatedly argued that the notion of individual autonomy obscures the socially embedded nature of identity and value. In light of this argument, "calls have been made to reconfigure the idea of autonomy in ways that take more direct account of the social nature of the self and the relational dynamics that define the value structure of most people."[206] Where questions of value and identity are concerned, according to communitarians, we cannot sensibly speak of an autonomous individual. If we try, we are guilty of advocating "hyper-individualism," of trying to assert the existence of individual identity and value creation where none is possible.[207] Values and attachments are essential to our understanding of spiritual fullness, so communitarians

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[206] Ibid.., p. 8.

[207] John Christman and Joel Anderson identify as one of the major challenges to autonomy "the allegedly hyper-individualism of both autonomy-based liberalism and standard accounts of the autonomous self." *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, Eds. John Christman and Joel Anderson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 2

can also be said to imply that spiritual fullness and individual autonomy are incompatible. Thus, our political philosophy must reflect the fact that individual spiritual autonomy is impossible.

What kind of citizen, or character, does a liberal order produce, according to communitarians? Why do they find the liberal character to be unfinished, or spiritually malnourished, so to speak? Both Sandel and MacIntyre focus on the alleged lack of "narrative" or "storytelling" in our liberal democracies, which has led to a spiritually crippling notion of liberal individualism. In a similar vein, Taylor sees a "disengaged self", separated from the meaning drawn from community and tradition and in need of a "'public order of standards and evaluations."[208] Sandel, MacIntyre, and Taylor all seek in some way to bring community and tradition back in. While each has unique, specific concerns about modern liberalism, all look to the importance of community and tradition in filling in the alleged spiritual lacuna of liberal individualism. In other words, they all identify a problem in the liberal order: the spiritual emptiness of the liberal individual.

Their arguments do not attack liberal democracy on the basis of political injustice, legislative or executive inefficacy, or the threat of diminishing economic prosperity. The arguments they levy against modern liberal democracy surround the individual that lives within the regime. The liberal individual is variously "lost", "disempowered", "atomized", "lacking meaning", or "lacking narrative unity". In other words, they argue that liberal individualism precludes spiritual fullness by overlooking the need for

[208] Jack Crittenden *Beyond Individualism*, 1992, p. 19

individuals to be attached to some source of meaning. This argument presupposes the idea that it is the task of community to provide some sort of meaning for individuals, to provide a source of meaning outside of themselves. Consequently, it is not liberal democracy as a regime that needs to be rescued via a return to stronger communal or historical ties, but rather the liberal citizen. I will argue, however, that communitarians ignore an important possible source of attachment, an affective attachment to life through taking an aesthetic perspective. Furthermore, the moral claims embedded in their theories may in fact preclude the attempt of some liberal individuals—the free spirits—to achieve their own spiritual fullness.

These critics of liberalism attempt to uncover—explicitly and implicitly—the spiritual emptiness of individuals in liberal society. Indeed, communitarians insist that it is liberal political order that begins the disintegration of the connections between ourselves and the things that might bring us spiritual fullness, things like religion, community, and traditional values. The idea of these communitarians, like Sandel but also Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre, seems to be that liberalism disconnects individuals from sources of meaning, sources that offer a place for our attachments and provide a sense of identity. The communitarian challenge focuses on the absence of attachments. Recall the definition of spiritual fullness; it requires some sort of attachment. Thus, *prima facie*, it appears that this challenge may have some merit. Communitarians, however, have very specific ideas of where this attachment should be

located; meaningful attachments, they emphasize, come from engagement with the political community.

This brings us to the question: Is it possible for the individual in liberal democratic societies to achieve spiritual fullness? If you look for the answer in the writings of Taylor, Macintyre, and Sandel you are bound to hear a fairly conclusive "no". These political theorists may not all proffer the same reasons for why the liberal individual is inevitably an unfinished or unfulfilled human project, but all of their theories suggest that the liberal political order must be modified, if not overturned, if spiritual fullness of the individual is to be made possible. That is, liberalism must either be somehow modified to reflect the importance of community to the constitution of individual identity and thereby to meaningful attachments, or it must be overturned and replaced by a communitarian political order that is organized around the importance of community.

What is it about liberalism that precludes meaningful attachments, and consequently spiritual fullness? To understand the critiques by communitarians, we need to grasp a basic sense of liberalism. Defining liberalism is a difficult task, and political philosophers have warned that liberal theories form a broad continuum ranging from full-blown philosophical systems to purely political doctrines.[209] Historically speaking, liberalism is a tradition of thought beginning with John Locke, carried on by Immanuel Kant and J.S. Mill, and extended to recent proponents like John Rawls and Robert

[209] See, for example, Gaus, Gerald F. (2004). 'The Diversity of Comprehensive Liberalisms ' in *The Handbook of Political Theory*, Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kukathas (eds.), London: Sage, 100-114.

Nozick.[210] Certain theoretical differences notwithstanding, all of these thinkers emphasized individual liberty, guaranteed by individual rights and private property, and the political virtue of toleration as the preferred ends of political order. Because Rawls comes later and his thought combines, in a sense, the aspects of liberalism from earlier thinkers, we can use Rawlsian liberalism as a standard here. In addition, Sandel, MacIntyre, and Taylor all view liberalism from a Rawlsian perspective, as do most liberal theorists today.

Our point of departure will be the position in which Rawlsian liberalism places the individual in relation to political community. The liberal self has a very limited scope of obligation to community. Rawls follows Kant's argument that there are "natural duties" we owe other persons as persons. These duties obtain regardless of what political regime a person lives under. For the liberal self only such natural duties are obligatory, i.e. they are duties one has whether one has consented to them or not. One may, as a liberal citizen, incur other duties and obligations, but only on the condition that they are voluntary. All particular obligations to others—i.e. those that are not universally applicable to all other humans—can only be founded in consent. Therefore, particular obligations to others in the same political community cannot be coerced or forced upon the liberal self; they must be freely chosen. This renders the liberal citizen largely

[210] Some may find it odd to put Rawls and Nozick together, but in terms of bedrock liberal principles I would argue that the two are in general agreement. The major disagreement comes over property—Rawls in favor of state redistribution while Nozick is not—but both still believe in the importance of private property rights.

independent of political society. As Rawls acknowledges "there is no political obligation, strictly speaking, for citizens generally."[211]

The autonomous individual—or the liberal individual—has little obligation to the political community, unless she decides to enter into some obligations willingly. Underlying this state-citizen relationship is the assumption that the state's proper role does not include the provision of spiritual guidance. In other words, guiding the pursuit of spiritual fullness for each citizen—through, for example, inculcation of communal values—is not deemed a proper state function in a liberal political order. A liberal state will allow citizens to pursue spiritual fullness privately. Citizens are free to associate with others in order to achieve this goal if they so choose, but there is no compulsion to locate the source of spiritual fullness in the political community.

Communitarians view this fact of liberalism as resulting in the "atomization" of society. Taylor lumps all liberal theories into this category. Taylor uses the term 'atomism' often to describe liberalism, as he describes in his essay of the same name:

> The term 'atomism' is used loosely to characterize the doctrines of social contract theory which arose in the seventeenth century and also successor doctrines which may not have made use of the notion of social contract but which inherited a vision of society as in some sense constituted by individuals for the fulfillment of ends which were primarily individual.[212]

Atomistic liberal theories place the ends of individuals above the ends of society and community. For communitarians, this relationship of individual to society at once

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[211] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 114

[212] Charles Taylor "Atomism" in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 187. It is highly probable, given Taylor's writings on Rawls elsewhere, that the "successor doctrines" that Taylor has in mind begin with Rawls.

misinterprets the values held by individuals and is an obstacle for creating the meaningful attachments that can lead to spiritual fullness. Instead, the political community—or the state—is essential to citizens' pursuit of spiritual fullness. Before we delve more deeply into the idea of community, we need to first grasp the scope of the progressive and communitarian state, i.e. what the state's role can and should be.

Progressives and communitarians are unconcerned about treating individuals as autonomous units because the state that they imagine has a role to play in nearly every aspect of a human life. Clearly, their idea of the state is not merely "institutional", as they make clear with their definition of the state as a social organism. Yet it is also more than the social organism discussed earlier. While they may use the notion of a social organism to describe the "natural" origins of the state, the end of the state promises even more. Membership in the state makes spiritual fulfillment possible for the individual. Dewey invokes Plato as he discusses the spiritual role of the state:

> Nothing could be more aside from the mark than to say that the Platonic ideal subordinates and sacrifices the individual to the state. It does, indeed, hold that the individual can be what he ought to be, can become what, in idea, he is, only as a member of a *spiritual organism*, called by Plato the state, and, in losing his own individual will, acquiring that of this larger reality. But this is not loss of selfhood or personality, it is its realization. The individual is not sacrificed; he is brought to reality in the state.[213]

The state, then, is not only a social organism but a spiritual organism. It has a central role to play in the spiritual life of its citizens.

[213]Dewey 1969, p. 241. (emphasis added)

This spiritual role of the state is not confined to the Platonic, classical republic and its aristocratic structure. This role extends to the liberal democratic state as well. According to Dewey, "[d]emocracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association."[214] The progressive/communitarian ideal of the state recognizes no natural limit to the state, because, according to Theodore Woolsey, the state "is as truly natural as rights are."[215] It follows, then, that the power of the state "may reach as far as the nature and needs of man reach, including intellectual and aesthetic wants of the individual, and the religious and moral nature of its citizens."[216] In a state so empowered—and, as Woolsey asserts, a state made capable—to satisfy all of these human needs and longings, one would find it hard to convince others of the need for the individual to have protected freedoms *from* the state.[217]

What follows from this line of thinking is that the state, and what communitarians call political community, is justified in taking a guiding, perhaps even paternal, role in shaping the spiritual lives of citizens. Spiritual fulfillment requires attachment to some source of meaning, and membership in the political community can provide this. If political community is dissolved, or if the state is thought to be merely a set of institutions, rather than a social and spiritual organism, citizens' search for meaning

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214 Ibid., p. 240.

215 Woolsey quoted in Charles Merriam, *American Political Ideas*, *Studies in the Development of American Political Thought 1865-1917*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1923, 378.

216 Ibid..

217 Woolsey, like Burgess and Lieber, was influenced by Hegel, so we would do well to remember Hegel's view of the state. "[A]s high as mind stands above nature, so high does the state stand above physical life. Man must therefore venerate the state as a secular deity, and observe that if it is difficult to understand nature, it is infinitely harder to understand the state." G.F.W. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 235.

becomes a much more difficult quest. According to Sandel, the tenets of liberal political order destroy this meaning, and liberal citizen suffer from a lack of meaningful attachments. They become lost in a world without an anchor. In the past, membership in the state, in the political community, provided the anchor and the source of attachment, but the liberal political order destroyed this. To hear Sandel again, "with the loss of community came an acute sense of dislocation. In an impersonal world, men and women groped for bearings."[218] It is no surprise, then, that Sandel prescribes a return to strong political community as a cure for the ills that liberal democracy has wrought. But we must ask what, precisely, is the source of these ills? If liberalism succeeds in founding legitimate government, protecting basic rights, upholding contracts, and providing a form of procedural justice, what does it lack? Why does it leave men and women "groping for bearings?"

To answer these questions we need to delve more deeply into the idea of community. All of us live somewhere and with some others, with the exception of those very few who decide to take leave of any place where humans live together.[219] Simply being part of a grouping of humans may have certain pitfalls for free spirits. Community, however, is a technical philosophical concept, not simply association with others. Communitarians are often inclusive in their descriptions of community, identifying both micro and macro communities. Communities can be particular organized groups—

[218] Sandel (1996), p. 205

[219] I'm referring to those people who choose to live completely cut off from society, learning to be self-sufficient and residing in mountain huts, desert caves, or some other self-constructed shelter. Clearly this is a very small percentage of the population, but warranted mention nonetheless.

religious congregations, ethnic groups, groups united by local history, etc.—and community can be used to describe civil society as a whole. Going back to Aristotle's *Politics*, civil society is described also as a "community", where there existed a common ethos and a shared set of norms around which citizens collectively sought the good life. Thus, communitarians mean to include many different types of community as they discuss the role of community, from local communities to American civil society.[220]

Communities come in various shapes and sizes, but regardless of a community's characteristics, what we will focus on here is the role community membership plays in an individual's spiritual life. As I have already argued, free spirits can and do choose to associate with others, they can and do have friends. But the notion of membership in a community entails more than association or cooperation, it is also be a source of identification and attachment. The idea of community overlaps, but cannot be wholly included in, the realm of politics, for a community is comprised of a grouping of persons that cannot be separated by partisan divisions or the outcome of an election. Indeed, one's political activities do not determine whether one is considered to be a member of the larger community. Community is linked, in its most basic sense, to geographical space, to a location where a group of people live. Moreover, a "community of place also has an affective component—it refers to the place one calls 'home', often the place where

[220] Communitiarians do distinguish communities from one another. Briefly put, there are communities of place (from towns to nations), communities of memories (where shared memories and traditions are the bond, regardless of location), and psychological communities (small, tightly connected communities of trust centered around a common goal). Explicating the differences between these types of communities is outside the purview of this dissertation, but for a more complete summary see Daniel Bell, Entry entitled "Communitarianism" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/

one is born and bred."[221] Community is not merely a geographic location, therefore, but also a place to which we form affective attachments. Community is not, however, limited only to geographic space. Many religious and ethnic groups consider themselves part of communities that cross oceans, national boundaries, and disconnected space, but these widely dispersed groups are still considered communities. According to communitarians, there exist:

> communities of memory, or groups of strangers who share a morally-significant history…[b]esides tying us to the past, such communities turn us towards the future—members strive to realize the ideals and aspirations embedded in past experiences of those communities, seeing their efforts as being, in part, contributions to a common good. They provide a source of meaning and hope in people's lives.[222]

Community, then, is a broad concept which can be applied to groups from local organizations to transnational religious and ethnic groups. Moreover, community provides a sense of attachment, meaning and hope.

The emphasis on memory, history, shared meaning and hope distinguishes the sphere of community from the sphere of politics we examined earlier; it further distinguishes it from what we might call political cooperation. Philosopher Josiah Royce explains the difference between community and political cooperation:

> Men do not form a community, in our present restricted sense of that word, merely in so far as the men cooperate. They form a community…when they not only cooperate, but accompany this cooperation with that ideal extension of the lives of individuals whereby each cooperating member says: 'This activity which

[221] From the entry on "Communitarianism" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/
[222] Ibid.

we perform together, this work of ours, its past, its future, its sequence, its order, its sense—all these enter in to my life, and are the life of my own self writ large.'[223]

Clearly, community membership is more involved than political membership, and what this means for free spirits will be examined with what follows. First, however, we need to consult our communitarians to better understand the role they claim that community plays in helping individuals to achieve spiritual fullness.

We have already discussed that for Sandel the self that liberalism requires is incomplete, lacking an identity and stripped of meaningful attachments to the world. In other words, individual identity is substantially comprised of the social, historical, and political roles given to us. When we identify ourselves in these roles the loyalties and responsibilities we have to them are infused with "moral force". Yet what if one simply chooses not to recognize the alleged "moral force" of these particular loyalties and obligations, or more radically still rejects the historical and political roles themselves?[224] Why will this detached individual be spiritually empty? It is because, according to Sandel, human beings require a meaningful narrative for life, a story about who they are, why they are here, and how they should live. Liberalism threatens to enervate or potentially eliminate the natural human capacity for narrative by allowing individuals to reject their own traditions and historical roles. He remarks:

> There is a growing danger that, individually and collectively, we will find ourselves slipping into a fragmented, storyless condition. The loss of the capacity

[223] Michael J. Sandel *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 207

[224] I do not mean to suggest one might disregard the "moral force" of relationships with family and friends. The focus here is on our loyalties and obligations to social traditions and history and ties to political community.

> for narrative would amount to the ultimate disempowering of the human subject, for without narrative there is no continuity between present and past, and therefore no responsibility, and therefore no possibility of acting together to govern ourselves. *Since human beings are storytelling beings*, we are bound to rebel against the drift to storylessness.[225]

We must recover our meaningful narrative, according to Sandel, by once again recognizing and reaffirming the social, historical, and political roles given to us.

MacIntyre likewise emphasizes the importance of narrative for a full spiritual life. MacIntyre's theory of virtue ethics is his self-proclaimed attempt to put us on a path out of the "new dark ages" of morality that he claims we live in. A brief summary of this attempt is required for our purposes here. MacIntyre argues that liberal modernity is marked by a disappearance of the belief in a natural human good, i.e. an objective good that we can reason about in order to reach its truth. It has been replaced with subjective morality with a focus on a person's "values", which cannot be argued about. The consequences of this disappearance are that it has become impossible to provide morality with a rational justification and that morality has ceased to have a coherent relation to human nature. He concludes that Nietzschean nihilism and an empty moral pluralism are the inevitable, and extremely undesirable, products of modern liberalism.[226] MacIntyre's prescription for this liberal malady is a return to Aristotelian virtue.[227] His theory of virtue consists of three stages of temporal development: the first outlines how individuals

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[225] Sandel 1996, p. 351 (italics mine).
[226] J.B. Schneewind "Virtue, Narrative, and Community: MacIntyre and Morality" *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1982, p. 654.
[227] As I mentioned in an earlier footnote, the affinity between Nietzschean and Aristotelian virtue ethics is well-recorded. MacIntyre argues that the future of morality depends on a choice *between* Nietzsche and Aristotle.

acquire virtues for themselves; the second stage examines how virtues fit in a whole, unified life; the third shows how virtue "relates the life of the individual to that of his or her community."[228]

Concerning the role of the virtues in a whole human life, MacIntyre rhetorically implores: "is it rationally justifiable to conceive of each human life as a unity, so that we may try to specify each such life as having its good and so that we may understand the virtues as having their function in enabling an individual to make of his or her life one kind of unity rather than another?"[229] In other words, MacIntyre is arguing that human virtues, while good in themselves, also must work together to form a whole virtuous life; they each have a function and collectively they provide a life with "narrative unity". When we see that lives have "narrative unity"—that life itself is a story with a beginning and end—we can evaluate the virtue of a whole life.[230] Not only can we see the good of individual virtues, but the good of a whole life. MacIntyre claims that unity of an individual life is "the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life…to ask 'What is the good for me?' is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion."[231]

The second stage of moral development ceases when one's virtues are arranged in such a way that they may bring about the good, the narrative unity, of one's life. The third stage begins when one realizes that "I am never able to seek for the good or exercise

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[228] Schneewind, p. 655.
[229] Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue: A study in Moral Theory*. Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1984. P. 203.
[230] MacIntyre mirrors Sandel's claim about the story-telling nature of man: "A central thesis then begins to emerge: man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal." MacIntyre, p. 216
[231] MacIntyre, p. 218

the virtues only *qua* individual…it is not just that different individuals live in different social circumstances; it is also that we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity."[232] The wholeness or "narrative unity" of one's life must include the story of one's social, historical, and political background. MacIntyre uses language nearly identical to Sandel to illustrate this fact. "I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles."[233] For MacIntyre as Sandel the self is empty, stripped of meaningful narrative, without the social, historical, and political content such roles provide. The idea of the autonomous individual, with its emphasis on voluntarism and choice, wrongly locates these roles in the realm of choice, as open to acceptance or rejection and, thereby misses the essential nature of humans as storytelling beings.

We may be skeptical, however, that all human beings require a meaningful narrative for life. It is far from obvious that a life with less or no narrative unity—we can imagine a life filled rather with seemingly random events—is *ipso facto* less meaningful or without meaning. One may even question what the implications of the claim that all human beings require a meaningful narrative would be for a person with a physical

[232] MacIntyre, p. 220
[233] Ibid.

disability that impairs the long-term memory, and inhibits memories of the narrative variety.[234] Is it impossible for this person's life to have meaning?

A second contentious point raised by MacIntyre is that the good is inextricably tied to the idea of narrative unity. Many humans are forced to live relatively horrible lives due to external constraints largely outside of their control. If an understanding of one's narrative unity is required to answer the question "What is the good for me?", it follows that humans whose narratives approach horror stories are somehow supposed to discover their own specific good by delving deeper into this narrative, an activity that in all probability is likely to cause more horror. Also, less dramatically, we can imagine greater numbers of people who feel that finding the good *requires* a departure from the story of their lives and the social roles they inhabit. Put differently, people who find themselves in this position must *change* their story, replacing the familial, tradition, and historical roles they've been given with something better. Indeed, they may seek to leave the roles that MacIntyre describes above—that is, they may seek to change their narrative drastically in order to shed these roles—as they seek to find the good. In such a case, following a free spirit's quest for liberation from tradition, society, and history seems like a sensible decision.

Despite these criticisms of the idea of narrative unity, MacIntyre and Sandel are not alone in advocating its importance. Charles Taylor may be better described as a theorist of modernity than a theorist of liberalism, but his version of modernity dovetails

[234] I am indebted to Aloysius P. Martinich for this idea.

with the version of liberalism presented by MacIntyre and Sandel. Taylor is responsible more than anyone else for exploring the constitution of the modern self, and his concerns about this self mirror those of Sandel and Macintyre. He too asserts the importance and inescapability of understanding our lives in narrative form.[235] What the modern man must do, according to Taylor, is live within a framework that supplies meaning to his life. This is peculiar to the modern, secular age in which religious and philosophic moral structures built around ideas of good and evil are weakening and no longer have a hold on most people. Taylor claims that "the [ancient and medieval] existential predicament in which one fears condemnation is quite different from the [modern] one where one fears, above all, meaninglessness."[236] Thus a framework of meaning is necessary if we are to overcome our greatest fear, but also to ground one's identity. "To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide my frame or horizon."[237]

All frameworks of meaning must, according to Taylor, come from social, historical, and political commitments to which all individuals are inextricably attached. Taylor contrasts the "disengaged self" with the "strong evaluator". The former is the self of liberal modernity, an atomistic person who is "metaphysically independent of society."[238] This person seeks a framework of meaning to supply standards of living but

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[235] Charles Taylor *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 52.
[236] Ibid., p. 18
[237] Ibid., p. 27
[238] Jack Crittenden, *Beyond Individualism: Reconstituting the Liberal Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 16.

has nowhere to go to find these standards. We must get such standards outside ourselves lest any evaluation of our lives become merely preference. A "strong evaluator" recognizes this, utilizing a "vocabulary of worth" to undergird his standards of living. This "vocabulary of worth" comes from the "horizon of evaluations"—or frameworks—rooted in history, community and society.[239] Taylor endeavors to show that without the standards and evaluations that membership in a larger human community offers to the individual, he or she will be lost at sea, meandering through life without a framework of meaning. In other words, communal values are necessary for any meaningful attachment to life, and therefore for spiritual fullness.

Taylor does suggest, however, that it is possible for "some superman of disengaged objectification" to be the only one who could live without a framework.[240] But he quickly adds that such a person who lives outside of society, detached from society's evaluations and standards, is "pathological", has an "identity crisis", and is incapable of realizing her full human potential.[241] It should be readily apparent that the free spirit described here falls under this category. For Taylor, it appears our free spirit would be "pathological," exhibiting an ill-conceived notion of spiritual freedom in an obsessive and compulsive manner. In addition, the free spirit would lack any meaningful sense of attachment or identity. Meaningful attachment—which is a requirement of

[239] Ibid., p. 18
[240] Taylor (1989), p. 27
[241] Ibid., p. 31

spiritual fullness—can only be found if one seeks it in political society, community, and tradition.

The reservations about the spiritual health of the modern, liberal individual held by Sandel, MacIntyre, and Taylor come in different guises, yet all point to the same basic conclusion: the spiritual malaise of liberal modernity is due to the separation and detachment of the individual from society and the treatment of the individual as a sort of spiritual "atom". Individual autonomy undermines the pursuit of spiritual fullness, and therefore ought to be jettisoned.[242] Whether or not individual autonomy is possible, these arguments certainly endeavor to show that it is undesirable. Can a free spirit successfully rebut this challenge? How does a free spirit relate to the values and traditions of a community—let's call these communal values for brevity—aimed towards a community's common good?

Free spirits do not seek spiritual fullness through community membership, or through the adoption of communal values. As we discussed in chapter four, a free spirit is reared in society and therefore ineluctably shares common values early on in life. And she may continue to hold some of these values later in life, provided she has independently arrived at the recognition of their merit. Nevertheless, communal values are for the free spirit something to be suspicious of and, often, to avoid. A free spirit's

[242] It warrants mentioning that Taylor does not reject individual autonomy, but he does argue that any claims of autonomy must be understood in light of the need to belong to society. In his essay "Atomism" he writes: "I am arguing that the free individual of the West is only what he is by virtue of the whole society and civilization which brought him to be and which nourishes him….And I want to claim finally that all this creates a significant obligation to belong for whoever would affirm the value of this freedom; this includes all those who want to assert rights either to this freedom or for its sake." Taylor (1985), p. 206

skeptical attitude leads her to detach from community in search of spiritual freedom and, ultimately, the spiritually fulfilling qualities of an aesthetic perspective. Communitarians argue that one cannot achieve spiritual fullness without adopting communal values, and to see if the free spirit can fulfill his spirit outside of community we need to take this argument seriously.

In our definition of community above there was a mention of its "affective component", and I want to briefly place this under our microscope. Communitarians place importance on the affective attachment one has to the community, to the place one calls "home". We know from our discussion of aesthetic perspective, and from our interpretation of Nietzsche's famous passage about treating life and existence as an aesthetic phenomenon, that treating life aesthetically can produce in free spirits an affective attachment to one's own existence, attachment that may help one achieve spiritual fullness. The crucial difference is this: the communitarian highlights affective attachment to community, the free spirit affective attachment to existence. Both indicate the need to have positive feelings for and an attachment to something, but the scope of that something is very different. In both there is a search for meaning in life or, in the language I am using here, a pursuit of spiritual fullness.

Indeed, much of the communitarian argument for greater communal attachment is predicated on this affective component, this idea that the individual feels somehow empty or incomplete when detached from community. Moreover, communitarians like Sandel and Taylor deny the possibility of spiritual fullness *without* community. We can see,

however, that the free spirit may seek the same thing—spiritual fullness—outside of community. For a free spirit affective attachment to existence, engendering love of life and the world, is achieved through an aesthetic perspective. I believe I have identified, then, a mutual goal of spiritual fullness, albeit a goal arrived at by very different methods. For communitarians, community is the place of spiritual fullness, the place of affective attachment to others and the place to find life's meaning. For free spirits, the community that communitarians advocate is an obstacle to spiritual fullness.

So why, exactly, are communal values an obstacle? We have seen that freedom of spirit is a necessary condition of an aesthetic perspective, and that an aesthetic perspective is essential for a free spirit's spiritual fullness. Hence, if freedom of spirit is threatened by communal values, so is spiritual fullness. The reason that adoption of communal values is impossible for the free spirit should be readily apparent from our earlier discussion of the free spirit. Mullin aptly summarizes the logic when she states that "free spirits are not characterized by values that they have in common, but are instead identified by their ability to shake loose of contemporary value judgments and to interpret differently."[243] Indeed, a free spirit is only free if he has liberated himself from the values of community. If eventual adoption of any of his community's values did occur, it would only occur after the initial process of liberation was followed by a process

[243] Mullin, p. 387.

of reasoning, a process that led to the free spirit concluding that such a value is worth esteeming.[244]

We know, then, that freedom of spirit requires detachment from communal values. The characteristics of the free spirit show why he values this detachment, this freedom of spirit. What does the free spirit value so highly that communal values seem less valuable by comparison? While it may be overly simplistic to attribute the free spirits' way of life to the pursuit of one value, we can surmise that the characteristics of the free spirit –such as solitude, skepticism, autonomy, and detachment—all follow in some way from a very strong evaluation of self-knowledge and for knowledge gained by oneself, through experience and experimentation. Mullin claims that:

> [f]ree spirits take it upon themselves to decide what and whether and how to assimilate the new to the old. They refuse to be dictated to by tradition, authority, or the power of habit, and are resolutely experimental. The free spirit is immoral because he is determined to depend upon himself in all things, and not upon a tradition.[245]

The experimental free spirit is determined to see things anew, to seek out new perspectives.[246] This determination to rely on oneself while pursuing knowledge is not merely idle curiosity, however. Rather, disregard of communal values is necessary for the free spirit to avoid oppression. For the free spirit, communal values are oppressive.

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[244] HH, sec. 226.

[245] Mullin, p. 394.

[246] Nietzsche's free spirit is strongly concerned with the pursuit of knowledge, with experience and experimentation essential to this pursuit. And it is Nietzsche's free spirit to which Mullin refers here. But the more broad conception of free spirit may include "un-experimental" free spirits. In other words, there may be unexceptional, even boring or pathological, persons who would meet the criteria for free spirit outlined at the beginning of this work. Free spirits may be more heterogeneous than Nietzsche describes, which we would do well to bear in mind. Therefore, it should be noted that Nietzsche's experimental free spirit is not the only possibility, although I do think he is the most attractive possibility, and as such has been treated more thoroughly and with greater emphasis.

For Nietzsche, these values were those of the Christian slave morality of his time, which enervated the wills of great individuals and were an illness to healthy souls. Indeed, he found himself infected with the values of this age, "I am, no less than Wagner, a child of this time; that is, a decadent."[247] Yet Nietzsche found a way, he claims in *Ecce Homo*, to throw off the values of his time and the illness they brought with them. In "Why I am so Wise", he explains—while describing himself—that the free spirit "instinctively…collects from everything he sees, hears, lives through, *his* sum: he is a principle of selection, he discards much. He is always in his own company, whether he associates with books, human beings, or landscapes…"[248] By rejecting the values of his time and choosing solitude Nietzsche nursed himself back to health. But, he insists, to do this the nature of the free spirit was required, that is, to be healthy at bottom. "I took myself in hand, I made myself healthy again: the condition for this—every physiologist would admit it—is *that one be healthy at bottom*."[249]

Thus, free-spirited experimentation and the drive to pursue knowledge independently are both good for their own sake and necessary for the free spirits' health. In a society where membership requires adoption of communal values—whether the political structure of that society is communist, fascist, or merely communitarian—is a threat to the health of free spirits. If this is so, can a free spirit live in any type of society

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[247]Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* Tr. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967. Preface, p. 155.
[248] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo (with the Genealogy of Morals),* Tr. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967, Sec. 2, pp. 224-25
[249] Ibid.. Refer to sec. 34 of HH to find Nietzsche's description of the free-spirit as an "at bottom cheerful soul".

that has shared values? It is hard to imagine a "society" of people without some shared values. What is distinctive about liberal political order is that it supports a society within which shared values can be held without being oppressive. Liberal values like liberty, toleration, and privacy can be held collectively without oppressing individuality.[250] Indeed, the health of free spirits may depend on liberal values.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a poet and thinker that Nietzsche admired and one who seems to fit the criteria of a free spirit, understood the importance of liberal values to individual freedom. Neal Dolan claims that Emerson's political philosophy was concerned with one crucial question: "How does a society go about enshrining, symbolizing, and transmitting counter-traditional liberal values without creating another potentially rigid and repressive tradition?"[251] Dolan argues that Emerson used his poetic gifts to inspire his fellow American citizens "with liberal values such as rational wonder at the cosmos, disciplined work in pursuit of property, a critical attitude toward tradition, suspicion of government, and respect for natural rights, especially the core right to liberty."[252] Moreover, Emerson was a strong advocate for the realm of the "private man", and I believe we can add toleration to his list of liberal values as well. Emerson realized that protection of individual spiritual freedom did not require the abolishment of all

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[250] The reader may here object that the free spirit aims to liberate himself from communal values, while here the claim is that shared values may be essential to a free spirit's health. But we should not conflate shared values with communal values. Communal values are the result of a public order of standards and evaluations, and are meant to be an alignment of an individual's values with the values of the community. Free spirits' may share some values, like the ones mentioned above, if those values increase their ability to liberate themselves from community. Liberty, toleration, and privacy all contribute to the individual's "safe distance" from society.

[251] Neal Dolan, *Emerson's Liberalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), p. 4.

[252] Ibid., p. 5.

shared values, but rather that dynamic, liberal values must be the values that are shared. Like all free spirits, Emerson was a deeply skeptical man, and this skepticism prevented him from ever having "a basis for any coherent set of religious, ethical, or political commitments."[253] In spite of this skepticism, however, Emerson was able to hold and promote those liberal values described above.

Not surprisingly, it was the potential excesses of the values that the republicanism and communitarianism popular in Emerson's time that prevented him from drawing upon them in his political writings.

> Emerson pointedly refrained from tapping into the available classical-republican concept of democracy precisely because it implied the sacrifice of individuals to the needs of the community or the state. Instead, he richly endorsed the liberal concept of democracy because it contains a check on the potential excesses of democratic communitarianism.[254]

Communitarian and republican values—what we have called communal values—are directed at the flourishing of the community at the expense of the individual. Liberal values like those endorsed by Emerson, conversely, are directed at individual liberty and self-reliance. As George Kateb writes, "Emerson's guiding sense [was] that society is a means for the end of individuals, who are themselves ends. [Liberal] democracy is the set of political arrangements that provide the protections and encouragements to become individuals, rather than servants of society."[255]

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[253] Ibid., p. 8
[254] Ibid., p. 23
[255] George Kateb, *Emerson and Self-reliance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 178-79.

If society is a means for the end of individuals, our free spirits should find themselves in an environment conducive to their own spiritual pursuits. Liberal values are not designed to produce spiritual fullness, but they are designed to allow individuals to achieve spiritual fullness on their own. We may note, as well, that Emerson's identification of "rational wonder at the cosmos" has much in common with the free spirits' valuation of aesthetic perspective. Rational wonder at the cosmos may result in the affective attachment to existence that our free spirit gains through an aesthetic perspective. Again, the complementarity of liberal values and spiritual fullness is evident.

By way of conclusion, let us note that free spirits reject the power of communal values, but that this does not require the repudiation of all values. Instead, free spirits have a strong interest in a society with shared liberal values, values aimed at protecting individual freedom.[256] The free spirit liberates himself from communal values that would obviate his pursuit of spiritual fullness, but he will likely adopt, or at least tolerate, liberal values that allow for such a pursuit. Earlier, it was shown that political and cultural oppression threaten to obviate, or at least severely retard, the free spirits' quest for spiritual fullness. Just as the free spirit is threatened by the external political environment, he is also threatened by the power of communal values.

[256] Many readers may find the partnership between the free spirit and liberal values a little odd, particularly when Nietzsche's oft-expressed aversion to liberal democracy is considered. I do not have the space to deal with this problem extensively here, but merely ask the reader to consider that what Nietzsche loathed most about liberal democracy was its emphasis on the value of equality, not on the value of liberty.

That the free spirit can achieve spiritual fullness in a liberal political order that protects individual freedom should be obvious by now. But we would do well to anticipate a likely and justifiable criticism. That is, are not free spirits also free riders? Do they not benefit greatly from a political system to which they contribute very little? I believe this criticism can be softened when we consider that the free spirits' greatest demand is for spiritual autonomy. Clearly, the free spirit also demands certain political freedoms, but these are in no way extraordinary. And the free spirit is unlikely to refuse the minimal obligations of a liberal political order. Political obligations such as voting, paying taxes, and showing up for jury duty are well within the limits a free spirit places on political engagement. There is little reason to think that free spirits are likely to be parasitical on the practical provisions of a political system than any other citizen is likely to be. The free spirit will shun political activism, strong engagement in political and communal discourse, and the like, but she feels the same obligation to provide for her own material necessities as other citizens do. Indeed, her spiritual independence may depend in some measure on whether or not she can provide for her own material necessities, given the entangling of one's will to another when the other is depended upon for basic needs. Yet any type of political obligation that substantially threatens spiritual freedom is cause for political disobedience. The free spirits' spiritual fullness requires political and communal detachment and an aesthetic perspective. If political overreach threatens this spiritual fullness the free spirit is justified, I believe, in opposing political authority. A liberal political order ensures that such opposition is very unlikely.

In a basic sense, then, society owes the free spirit very little, and the free spirit owes society a minimum of obedience. Moreover, there is a positive role that free spirits play in society, that of a bulwark against spiritual and political oppression. In extreme cases, such oppression may take the form of political propaganda, which free spirits will clearly resist, at least internally. Yet even in modern liberal democracies the power of public opinion can result in spiritual oppression. Free spirits are consistently resistant to public opinion and the putative authority it can possess, and this provides a check on would be political oppressors.

Many political thinkers, such as Hume, Tocqueville, and Mill have cautioned liberal societies about the dangers of public opinion. Modern liberal societies are often not, in practice, as tolerant of freedom of thought as they are in theory. Tocqueville warned of the democratic "tyranny of the majority," Hume worried that a politics of opinion would be run by parties running on extreme and especially abstract speculative principles that were in reality merely prejudices. John Stuart Mill also worried about public opinion and accordingly argues, "Protection against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling, against the tendency of society to impose…its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them."[257]

These warnings should not fall on deaf ears, as thoughtful liberal citizens are all too accustomed to these problems. The putative authority of public opinion in liberal

[257] Mill, John Stuart *On Liberty* New York: Penguin Books, 1981. P. 63.

societies —on virtually all topics of human concern, from politics to religion to natural science—poses a severe threat to the intellectual freedom these societies are, at least in theory, designed to protect. Resistance to public opinion is the responsibility and choice of individual citizens; it is not a function of government to liberate citizens from such authority, nor could it plausibly do so without contradicting its own role in protecting intellectual and spiritual freedom.

But some protection from public opinion seems necessary. As Mill claims, "there is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence; and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs as protection against political despotism."[258] Yet how is one to find and measure the "legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence?" This seems a tall task, for it is extremely difficult to pinpoint the quantity of "interference" collective opinion has on an individual's independence. Indeed, given different individuals with different resistances to "interference," a given quantity of "interference" may abolish the independence of one individual while hardly affecting another. We do not, however, need such precision in our measurement of collective "interference" in order to judge political regimes on the basis of their protection of intellectual freedom and individual independence. Freedom of speech, press, and assembly are reliable measuring sticks for the openness of a political

[258] Ibid. It should be noted that Mill's contemporary, Alexis de Tocqueville, drew very similar conclusions about the dangers of public opinion. Tocqueville's famous concepts of "soft despotism" and the tyranny of the majority certainly support Mill's arguments as well as the one being made here.

regime. They indicate how free a regime is in theory, but none of these can be used to measure the "interference of collective opinion with individual independence" described above. It is enough, however, to acknowledge that some interference exists and to look for the influence of public opinion in liberal regimes and to search for ways to mitigate it.

The free spirits have a role to play in this battle. Free spirits demonstrate how intellectual and spiritual freedom in theory—i.e., freedom of thought protected through political rights— also becomes intellectual and spiritual freedom in practice. Skepticism is a powerful way to destabilize, and thereby mitigate the influence of, the authority of public opinion because skeptical citizens, like our free spirits, tend to be wary of not just political party propaganda but dogmatic theories of politics, science, and religion in general. Indeed, the way free spirits live, in practice rather than theory, provides an alternative to the extremes of public opinion. British political philosopher John Gray distinguishes between liberalism as a practice and liberalism as dogma, and he argues that the practice of liberalism is the much more resilient of the two. Gray argues that the skeptic (which he calls the "political Pyrrhonist") is suited to the liberal project because "he will not engage in the vain project of constructing a liberal doctrine," but will instead "protect the historical inheritance of liberal practice from the excesses of an inordinate liberal ideology."[259]

The free spirited skeptic will focus on liberal practices without seeking to establish a liberal doctrine, much like the Emersonian vision of liberal values discussed

[259] Gray, p. 264

earlier, where the values chosen will be those that can be held without becoming dogmatic and oppressive. In both cases, the free spirit acts as a sort of role model for spiritual freedom. By remaining steadfastly resistant to traditional values, political party lines, and public opinion, free spirits exemplify the possibilities of spiritual independence in a liberal political order. It is one thing to acknowledge the existence of freedom of thought, with freedom of speech, press, and assembly as its guarantor, but it is quite another to truly exercise this freedom. As Soren Kierkegaard observed, "aren't people absurd! They never use the freedoms they do have but demand those they don't have; they have freedom of thought, they demand freedom of speech."[260] Free spirits are a model for others in liberal societies to think critically about their freedoms and to practice them as well.

Through their solitude, skepticism, and resistance to social and political pressures free spirits serve as a constant reminder of spiritual freedom for other citizens. They cleanse the air, so to speak, surrounding political and social discourse. They bring balance to conversations about how to live by providing a genuine alternative to the ethics of the ubiquitous political community. In today's modern democracies, aggregated political will, representative government on a huge scale, mass-marketing, political polling, and mass media combine to make the individual increasingly insignificant. Correspondingly, varied individual viewpoints become increasingly scarce, diluting and enervating political and social discourse. Free spirits certainly cannot stem such a tide on

[260] Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* Trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1992), p. 43. At the time of Kierkegaard's writing, Denmark was still a monarchy, and freedom of speech was not a protected right.

their own, but they play a positive role by demonstrating spiritual independence in the midst of such a storm.

Conclusion

The free spirit has implications for liberal political theory and for politics in general. In both cases, the existence of free spirits urges us to think about spiritual freedom and how it affects our understanding of political freedom. I have argued that the free spirit offers new insights into the possibility of individual autonomy. I have shown that free spirited individuals can be largely autonomous relative to the political, social, traditional, and historical roles they are born and raised into. This argument may not, however, debunk all challenges to individual autonomy.[261] Nonetheless, the existence of the free spirit does debunk the claim that individuals are lost without attachment to community or to the "social organism," suffering from a crisis of identity and spiritual emptiness. The question of whether we can think of individuals as autonomous units—of whether we can embrace a broad view of autonomy as "an individual's ability to govern herself, independent of her place in a metaphysical order or her role in social structures and political institutions"—is answered in the affirmative by the free spirit.

It would be a difficult empirical task to determine the prevalence, and influence, of free spirits in society. There are degrees of free spiritedness found in individuals, and determining which individuals "are" or "are not" free spirits would be a difficult and likely fruitless endeavor. The free spirit as discussed in this work, through Nietzsche's rich descriptions and the examples of Goethe and Hesse, provides a model for the free

[261] For example, there is an argument that one cannot be autonomous without the economic means to provide for herself. The autonomy of the free spirit does not address the concern of economic independence. And there are certainly other challenges to autonomy—from psychological and epistemological perspectives—that were not addressed in this project.

spirit. This model may be aspired to and emulated by others, but we should not think of free spiritedness as an all or nothing affair, as a case of achieving the title or coming up short. The criteria for a free spirit provided here allow for many eligible individuals, and in many cases individuals may achieve the criteria only partially.

Furthermore, the goal of quantifying the number of free spirits would likely prove elusive, at least partially due to the fact that they are unlikely to gather in social organizations in the manner of organized religious or political groups.[262] Yet there is little doubt that the growth and strength of the scientific perspective since the enlightenment, particularly in Western Europe and North America, has increased the strength of skepticism.[263] Science, with its insistence on verification of claims, promotes skepticism. But science hasn't been able, for many people, to provide what is needed for spiritual fullness or to answer questions about the importance of spiritual freedom. Moreover, government propaganda, mass-marketing, and public opinion are potent forces working against spiritual freedom today. Thus, despite the difficulty of quantifying free spirits, their importance as a check on the dominant worldviews in the West seems readily apparent.

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[262] It should also be noted that free spirits are unlikely to gather into communities of their own, i.e. we would not expect to see a community of free spirits like we would a community of contemplative monks. Being a free spirit is not only about separation from strong societal influence, it is also about spiritual independence.

[263] There may be a rise of skepticism and the scientific perspective in other parts of the world as well, but only in Europe and America might we consider it the dominant worldview. Currently, we are seeing a rise of religion in many parts of the developing world, such as China and Brazil. It remains to be seen whether the rise of religion will be compatible with the continuing rise of science. John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

This argument is not meant to suggest that the production of free spirits should be the end of politics or the basis for the ideal regime. It is not, for example, a call to arms for the advancement of a Spinozan liberal republic, where independence of mind is held up as the ultimate goal for every citizen. The more humble aims of the argument were twofold: to buttress the liberal idea that the individual, treated as an autonomous unit, ought to be the foundation of political theorizing, and to confront the charge levied by progressives and communitarians that individuals are inevitably spiritually empty when detached from political community.

The primary goal should not be to turn all citizens into free spirits, but to allow for free spirits in a liberal society that fosters pluralism. A key component of liberal theory is that political freedom, which protects individual autonomy, must be withheld from noone. Majority choice in democracies does not over-ride this freedom. As Maurizio Viroli remarks, a "law accepted voluntarily by members of the most democratic assembly on earth may very well be an arbitrary law that permits some part of the society to constrain the will of other parts, thus depriving them of their autonomy."[264] To apply this logic to the argument here, if one part of society (communitarians and progressives) seeks to constrain the will of another part (free spirits) through a majoritarian vote, the former part has still passed an arbitrary law that deprives the latter of their autonomy. Thus, the question of whether or not our liberal political order should protect free spirits does not depend on how ubiquitous free spirits are. I believe a loose definition of free

[264] Quoted in Richard Dagger, "Autonomy, Domination, and the Republican Challenge to Liberalism", in Christman and Anderson compilation (2005), p. 199,

spiritedness may apply to many citizens in the West, but the strength of the argument here does not rely on any sort of quantification. If there are merely a few free spirits, the requirements for their spiritual freedom still ought to be understood and provided for. Liberal political order does this already, and I think liberals should be committed to making sure it continues to do so.

A secondary goal is to encourage liberal citizens to be more free spirited. On the one hand, the argument here is for tolerance of the free spirit as an exception. On the other, the argument here is meant to inspire reflection on spiritual freedom amongst liberal citizens. Powerful political parties, mass media, and mass marketing are all strong forces that, in some sense, seek the capture of the spirit. By selling or promoting certain ideologies, beliefs and lifestyles, these forces ineluctably encroach upon the individual's spiritual freedom. I am not suggesting that all political messages or all marketing campaigns are empty and nefarious, but it seems uncontroversial to suggest that individuals would do well to treat them with skepticism to avoid wholesale acceptance. Similarly, the aforementioned forces together constitute the major threat of majority tyranny, and if free spiritedness increased amongst liberal citizens, the influence of these forces would decrease. One should not need to look further than the history of mass movements in the 20th century to realize the importance of keeping these forces in check.

A third goal of this dissertation was to explicate the idea of the free spirit and to suggest that one can achieve spiritual fullness by engaging the world aesthetically, by taking an aesthetic perspective. I attempted to bring the free spirit into broad daylight

and argue that our understanding of political order must take this human type into account. Throughout this work I have explored Nietzsche's free spirit, while also generating the criteria for a free spirit in a broader sense. Nietzsche's various descriptions of the free spirit offer a guide, but nowhere does Nietzsche present a clear set of characteristics for one. I endeavored here to offer some basic criteria for a free spirit, and I have also suggested that free spirits are more numerous and heterogeneous than Nietzsche seemed to think.

Taken together, the arguments in this dissertation carry a strong normative motivation. They endeavor to show a type of human being whose ethical choices—namely, to seek a strong sense of personal and spiritual autonomy and to engage the world aesthetically—ought to be taken seriously by political philosophy. A philosophic concern for free spirits should urge us, I believe, towards an accompanying concern for maintaining the institutions of a liberal political order. Hence, this dissertation is also meant to serve as a defense of liberalism, insofar as liberalism is understood as a political philosophy predicated on individual autonomy and a political philosophy that seeks to retain as much autonomy for liberal citizens as possible.

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