

Domenico Losurdo. *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel: Intellectual Biography and Critical Balance-Sheet.* Translated by Gregor Benton. Introduction by Harrison Fluss. Haymarket Books, 2021. 1052 pp. \$65.00 USD (Paperback 9781642593402).

Domenico Losurdo's *Nietzsche, The Aristocratic Rebel* serves as a corrective to the distortions and evasions that many leftist fans of this far-right German philosopher have peddled about him. Such irresponsibility and denialism, which Losurdo terms the "hermeneutics of innocence" (1004), sadly persist in the twenty-first century, over a century after his death.

For instance, in a 2005 essay, anti-fascist researcher Spencer Sunshine celebrates Friedrich Nietzsche's positive reception among many now-deceased anarchists, including Emma Goldman, Rudolf Rocker, Murray Bookchin, and "Hakim Bey" (*Fifth Estate*, 2004–2005). However, this gloss—apparently written to help promote Sunshine's co-edited 2004 volume, *I Am Not A Man, I Am Dynamite! Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*—"make[s] difficult cuts" to reality, as Losurdo might say (827), by denying the thinker's antisemitism and German nationalism. Moreover, it omits that the philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy, subject of one of the chapters in said volume, mirrored Nietzsche in supporting the Hindu caste system, as anarchist Brian Morris points out in his critical review (*Philosophy Now*, 2006), and that the Nietzschean enthusiast and volume contributor Peter Lamborn Wilson ("Bey") was a known pedophile apologist, as Robert P. Helms reminds us (*The Anarchist Library*, 2004).

Against proponents of an incoherent "Left Nietzscheanism," the author highlights the "consistently reactionary character" of this philosopher's approach (949). Although Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a middle-class German philologist, he admired the feudal landlords: hence, the author's summary of him as an "aristocratic rebel," and of Morris's description of him as promoting "aristocratic individualism." Indeed, Nietzsche was a fanatical counter-revolutionary who was as rattled by Judeo-Christian egalitarianism, the French Revolution, and the Paris Commune as he was obsessed with brutality, slavery, and rank-ordering. This ultra-reactionary announced that "[t]here is no right either to existence or [...] to 'happiness,'" declared human dignity and equality to be "conceptual hallucinations," and held "it necessary to remain, in the Congo or wherever, master over the barbarians [*sic*]" (97, 336, 599).

As is detailed by Losurdo and Ronald Beiner, author of *Dangerous Minds* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), Nietzsche embraced slavery in ancient Greece, Zoroastrian hierarchies, the Hindu caste system, and European feudalism and colonialism for their ostensible contributions to art, "civilization," and "culture" (358, 415, 675–7, 928–9, 973; Beiner 24, 42–50). Employing the founder of Zoroastrianism as his spokesperson in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883), Nietzsche attempts a full-throated legitimization of despotism, majesty, "master morality," and genocidal antagonism (Losurdo 573, 721, 940). Not coincidentally, Nietzsche has provided great inspiration to numerous fascists, including Mussolini, Hitler, Goebbels, Heidegger, Evola, Spencer, and Dugin (719, 733–4, 808–16; Beiner 2–12).

Above all, Nietzsche believed most human beings to have been "born to serve and to obey" (Beiner 2–12). As Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson explain in *Foucault and the Iranian*



Revolution (University of Chicago Press, 2005), Nietzsche's follower Michel Foucault preferred Eastern pre-modern societies and anti-modern movements like Iranian Khomeinism over Western modernity, just as his German predecessor had fixated on the hierarchies of classical antiquity and the Brahminical caste system as flights of fancy from subversive, rationalistic, and optimistic Western tendencies (13–23). In this vein, Nietzsche acknowledged his “terrible ‘antidemocratism,’” self-identified as an “opponent” of “socialists,” and often targeted what he called the “anarchism of indignation.” In fact, he fantasized about crushing the International Workingmen’s Association, or First International (1864–1876), which was famously divided between Marxists and anarchists (Losurdo 22, 188, 330, 586).

In parallel, Nietzsche viewed the eighteenth-century *philosophe* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who inspired the French Revolution (1789–1793), as utter anathema. In his dual rejection of the liberal and radical elements of the Revolution, Nietzsche mirrored notorious European conservatives like Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre. Plus, far from being a critic of German nationalism, as Sunshine would have it, the young Nietzsche actually sympathized with Prussian resistance to Napoleon Bonaparte, supported Otto von Bismarck, and joined the army as a volunteer at the start of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) (38–9, 68, 188, 250–1, 336–8; Beiner 8).

Nietzsche was especially incensed by the 1871 Paris Commune, a short-lived experiment in revolutionary proletarian self-management that emerged spontaneously through the devastation wrought by this same war. He viewed the popular uprising in Paris as one of the “head[s] of the international hydra” of socialism. Like his fellow German Karl Marx, who cheered the outbreak of hostilities in a July 1870 letter to Friedrich Engels, Nietzsche celebrated the Prussian victory at war’s end as a defeat for the French revolutionary tradition. By stark contrast with Marx, though, Nietzsche consistently condemned modernity and progressive social transformation in his writings. He viewed the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution as part of a larger, “single Western revolution” with roots in Judaism and Christianity—while holding it *all* in contempt (26–32, 42, 62, 86–7, 252, 349, 460–6, 829–30).

In line with historically hegemonic German antisemitic attitudes, and especially those of his mentors Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner, Nietzsche actually expressed strongly Judeophobic sentiments in his youth. He associated Jews with journalism and subversion, or what he called the Socratic spirit; complained about how “despicable” he found the “Jewish phrase heaven on earth”; and lamented the supposed “[a]nnihilation of Greek culture by the Jewish world” (108–10, 117–36, 173, 247). Undoubtedly, Nietzsche’s abhorrence of Christianity had much to do with its Judaic roots, considering the two faiths’ common emphasis on morality, compassion, prophecy, social leveling, and millenarianism. The German thinker evidently felt threatened by the “deadly hatred of the masters of the earth” preached by both Judaism and Christianity—in common with the socialist and anarchist traditions. Alluding to Hinduism, he feared that Christianity represented “the victory of Chandala,” or “Untouchable,” “values.” At once, he looked on Jesus the Nazarene as a “holy anarchist” and a dangerous “political criminal” who would merit exile to Siberia, if not immediate execution, were he to be resurrected (264, 283, 413, 465–6, 510, 572–4, 959).

Given this grim panorama, how should Nietzsche's politics be read? In *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1969), the anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman controversially defends the philosopher's alarming ideas about the *Übermensch*, or "over-man," as anticipating "a state of society which will not give birth to a race of weaklings and slaves" (Dover Publications, 44). Whether one reads this vision of the future as conveying apocalyptic social leveling or, more alarmingly, a Nietzschean disregard for vulnerable populations (including sick patients, people with disabilities, and enslaved workers), Beiner interprets Nietzsche's corpus similarly to the author: that is, as a "direct call to action" to cancel the "liberal-egalitarian dispensation" of historical modernity, overturn the legacies of the Reformation and the Revolution, and restore feudal hierarchies (Beiner 40–6, 134).

In other words, Nietzsche followed counter-revolutionaries like Burke in seeking to roll back the gains of 1789, as well as "conservative revolutionaries" like Wagner, whose right-wing extremism paradoxically anticipated fascism. The Marxist philosophers György Lukács and Ernst Bloch and German artist Thomas Mann likewise saw Nietzsche's theories as preparing the ground for Nazism. To this point, Losurdo asserts that his object of study aimed at conjuring a "party of life" that would crush modern subversiveness through a brutal reassertion of domination and hierarchy. Along these lines, Nietzsche utterly rejected compassion and humanitarianism; promoted wars and strict rank-ordering; and incited killing, elite ruthlessness, and the "will to power" and other "terrible things" (274–7, 352, 365–6, 420, 597, 683, 711, 725–32, 814–9, 838, 853, 996; Beiner 40).

Indeed, in common with contemporary social Darwinists and eugenicists, and with the Nazis he arguably inspired, Nietzsche fixated on unscientific claims about ostensible genius, human degeneration, and "natural hierarchy." Reflecting his attack on Judeo-Christian morals, he announced that "[t]he great majority have no right to exist [*sic*], but are a misfortune for superior human beings [*sic*]." Outrageously, he encouraged disabled and chronically ill patients to die prematurely, whether through self-destruction or outright "[a]nnihilation" (100–6, 381, 410, 586–7, 596–9, 695, 715, 996). Accordingly, Morris aptly charges Nietzsche with "play[ing] around with the idea not simply of improving the human race, but of eradicating the weak – by poisoning their wells!" Such incitement undoubtedly amounts to a "morality of cruelty," in the words of Marxist historian Franz Mehring (718).

With this in mind, Sunshine, Foucauldians, and other Nietzschean leftists might benefit from reflecting on a spin on the saying, "He's just not that into you," seen blazoned on T-shirts being sold at the first Inland Empire Anarchist Book Fair (2025). The shirts in question knowingly remarked on how "weird and embarrassing" it is to worship politicians—or, by extension, deceased philosophers—who don't cherish you in return.

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