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## Nietzsche's Philosophy of Conflict and the Logic of Organisational Struggle

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# CHAPTER 2

## NIETZSCHE *CONTRA* VERNICHTUNGSKAMPF

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

Surveying the various justifications of war that were enumerated in the previous chapter, one would perhaps not be blamed for thinking that Nietzsche's thoughts concerning conflict should be understood, above all, as a general endorsement of destructive, unmeasured struggle. And indeed, there is no shortage of readers who take Nietzsche to valorise destructive conflict in a generalised manner. He was widely deemed to be at least partly responsible for both of the World Wars, namely insofar as he was taken to promulgate a ruthless strain of immoralism, and was read as actively promoting war as a remedy for modern Europe's ills. Both his acolytes and detractors alike interpreted him as a proponent of war. Thus, we find Bernhardt, Bäumler and Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche (amongst many others) all reading his work as a literal call to arms. In concert with myriad other critics of Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell reiterated a commonly held lay prejudice when he claimed in his *History of Western Philosophy* that Nietzsche's works are informed by a generally militaristic impulse, it being "obvious" that "in his day-dreams he is a warrior, not a professor; all of the

men he admires were military”.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Ernst Nolte (among others) reads Nietzsche as a philosopher of unbending intolerance, inciting his readers to both the physical and ideological extermination of the decadent elements of modern culture, be these moralities, philosophical worldviews, or human beings.<sup>2</sup>

In the following chapter, I will refute the fallacious belief that Nietzsche’s philosophy of conflict is best read as generally endorsing unmeasured conflict and try to bring into relief the grounds upon which he endorses measured conflict. *En passant*, we have already witnessed the fact that Nietzsche advocates a non-destructive form of conflict – one that he maintains is exemplified in the ancient Greek practice of the agon. The agon (ἀγών) was typified in the athletic, equestrian and dramaturgical games that took place at Olympia and Delphi, but it also designated the more general cultural phenomenon of individuals competing to outdo one another in the pursuit of excellence. The key text for understanding Nietzsche’s early celebration of the agon is undoubtedly CV 5; however, we also find him explicitly dealing with the agon (or “Wettkampf” and “Wettstreit”, which I will hitherto read as synonyms for “agon”) in a sustained manner in MA, the *Nachlass* of 1883 and GD.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he is commonly taken to be implicitly referring to the agon in a number of aphorisms from JGB.<sup>4</sup> Thus, whereas in

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<sup>1</sup> See Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.693. For an excellent review of the innumerable journalists and intellectuals who read Nietzsche as a warmonger, see Nicolas Martin “Nietzsche as Hate-Figure in Britain’s Great War”, in Fred Bridgeham (ed.), *The First World War as a Clash of Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.147-66; see also Ascheim (1994), esp. ch.5 and ch.8. As Martin (2006) points out, Bernhardt’s only explicit reference to Nietzsche in *Deutschland und der nächste Krieg* (Stuttgart und Berlin: J. G. Cotta, 1913) is a quote he takes from Z I Krieg (p.149).

<sup>2</sup> Nolte (1963), see esp. pp.533-4.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. MA 158 and 170; NL 7[161] 10.295 and NL 15[21]10.485; GD Alten 3 6.157, GD Sokrates 8 6.71 and GD Streifzüge 23 6.126.

<sup>4</sup> Especially JGB 259 and 265.

the previous chapter I rebutted exclusively measured, agonal readings of Nietzsche by highlighting his valorisation of war, I will now rebut the exclusively unmeasured, militaristic interpretation of his thought by underscoring and elucidating his advocacy of *agonal* conflict.

In the wake of influential liberal-democratic readings of Nietzsche, such as those of Kaufmann, Hatab and Connolly, the conception of the agon as measured and non-violent may appear self-evident and unproblematic; yet a broader reading of the literature on Nietzsche's agonism suggests otherwise. Indeed, for my thesis to stand in any meaningful way, it must overcome three key problems reflected by three points of contention in the critical literature. The first, and most pressing, of these issues is that Nietzsche's notion of agonal conflict has in fact been interpreted as inclusive of violent, unmeasured forms of conflict (such as war). This is what I will call the *destructive* reading, and (as we shall see) we find it propounded by Bäumler, Dombowsky and Martin Ruehl. In the first section of this chapter, however, I contend that for both the early and the later Nietzsche, the concept of agonal conflict is *intrinsically* non-destructive; indeed, one of the ways in which he commonly defines the agon is in its exclusive opposition to unmeasured forms of conflict.

Having established that Nietzsche's agonism describes a decidedly measured form of conflict, we then need to ascertain how this measure is characterised for Nietzsche. We thus arrive at our second obstacle. This regards the social scope within which Nietzsche thinks agonal measure is *possible* (a descriptive issue) and the scope within which he then endorses such measure (a normative issue). First off, there is the idea that agonally measured conflict is only deemed possible or desirable by Nietzsche within the very limited confines of an aristocratic minority struggling over political

power. This is what I will call the *aristocratic* reading, which can be found in both Appel's and Dombowsky's interpretations of Nietzsche's agon. On the other hand, within what I will call *democratic* readings of Nietzsche's agonism – such as that of Hatab, for example – the agon is depicted as globally realisable and desirable within the bounds of any given society. Caught between these two extreme readings, we are left with little clue as to the scope of Nietzsche's agonal recommendations. I will argue, however, that in both the early and the later writings, Nietzsche maintains that individuals of every capacity and social standing are conceivably able to engage in agonal conflict, though only with individuals of approximately equal ability. Nonetheless, we also see that both the early and the later Nietzsche celebrate a more exclusive conception of the agon, only open to a minority of individuals – whether this is the elite artistic struggle for fame (*Ruhm*), as in the early works, or the equally elitist struggle for socio-political power (*Macht*), as in the later works.

The third problem relates to Nietzsche's observation that agonal conflict "entfesselt das Individuum" but also, simultaneously, "bändigt" him (NL 16[22] 7.402). It productively *unleashes* the individual insofar as it arouses their envy and egoistic ambition. Yet, beyond a certain point, these affects become socially and culturally detrimental, since they can lead individuals to strive for a form of permanent dominance that suppresses the contest of which they are a part; alternatively, Nietzsche thinks that such *Maßlosigkeit*, and the blind arrogance imbued in some by victory, can lead to violent acts of hubris, sedition or war – that is, back into the *Vernichtungskampf* from whence the agon originally emerged (a risk Nietzsche repeatedly flags up in CV 5, for example). How does agonal conflict restrain or *bändigen* the destabilising and potentially seditious affects

that it provokes and thereby avoid bringing about its own downfall? There are two contradictory answers to this question. According to the first interpretation (which I will call the *respect* reading), it is argued that the source of the agon's measure is a shift in attitude on the part of the contestants. As we shall see, in their political appropriations of Nietzsche, William Connolly and Lawrence Hatab have contended that someone who affirms agonal political contest must respect the right of all individuals to participate in democratic struggle. The way in which this respect is engendered according to the respect reading, is that individuals come to appreciate a "Nietzschean" ontology of difference, whereby each acknowledges their adversaries as the constitutive ground of their existence. The contrary position maintains that within any agonal practice, the attitudes and goals of contestants are no different from those that drive more destructive forms of conflict – they still seek absolute domination. Measure is rather based in the fact that agonal contest is between roughly equal powers who mutually frustrate one another's tyrannical aspirations. This reading, which I will call the *counterbalancing* reading, is proposed by Bonnie Honig and Herman Siemens. Both also posit the need for an institutional framework able to restore the state of mutual balance when counterbalancing fails, namely by forcibly removing violent or excessively dominant contestants (i.e. through the practice of ostracism).

In the final section of this chapter, having unpacked the nature of this stand-off in more detail, I argue that neither of these readings is wholly adequate. Contrary to the counterbalancing reading, the self-limitation of contestants is imperative for both the early and the later Nietzsche. However, contrary to the respect reading, Nietzsche does not understand this self-limitation as originating in one's respect for the other as the ground of one's

own existence. Rather, in the early work, self-limitation is motivated by a respect for the social whole and a religious piety. Then in the later work, Nietzsche replaces this with the Schmidt-inspired notion of *Ehrfurcht* – that is, a noble sense of reverence for opponents that who deems to be of equal worth, an affect that leads individuals to refrain from harming or exploiting one another.

Although there exist some common features to Nietzsche's various overlapping configurations of agonal conflict, I will be trying to foreground the irreducible plurality and discord between these. It is little wonder that the concept is as nebulous as it is, since the Greeks themselves had no explicit theory of the agon.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, even among the historical sources with which Nietzsche would have been familiar, there is little consensus regarding the precise nature of the ancient Greek agon. The key historical conceptions of the agon with which Nietzsche would have been acquainted are to be found in Ernst Curtius' "Der Wettkampf",<sup>6</sup> George Grote's *A History of Greece*,<sup>7</sup> Burckhardt's *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*<sup>8</sup> and Leopold Schmidt's *Die*

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<sup>5</sup> See Andreas Kalyvas, "The Democratic Narcissus: The Agonism of the Ancients Compared to that of the (Post)Moderns", in Andrew Schaap (ed.), *Law and Agonistic Politics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp.15-41 (p.18).

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Curtius, "Der Wettkampf", in *Göttinger Festreden* (Berlin: Wilhelm Herz, 1864), pp.1-22. James Porter has claimed that both Nietzsche and Burckhardt "adored" Curtius' study (see James Porter, "Hellenism and Modernity", in George Boys-Stones, Barbara Graziosi, Phiroze Vasunia (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Hellenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also Curt Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Biographie*, 3 vols (Munich: Hanser, 1978-9), vol.1, p.491. There is also evidence that Curtius influenced Burckhardt's agonal interpretation of the Greeks (see Henning Ottmann, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999], p.49, fn.22). Moreover, the significant overlap in content between Curtius' essay and CV 5 indicates that Nietzsche had independent knowledge of this text.

<sup>7</sup> George Grote, *History of Greece*, 2nd edn, 12 vols (London: John Murray, 1851). For evidence of Grote's influence on Nietzsche, see NL 16[39] 7.407.

<sup>8</sup> We know that Burckhardt had discussed the content of his lectures at length with Nietzsche prior to presenting them. See letter to Erwin Rohde 21.12.1871 (KGB II/1, p.257), where Nietzsche indicates that, preceding the composition of CV 5, and while Burckhardt was composing *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, "Mit Jakob Burckhardt [hat er] einige schöne Tage



*Ethik der alten Griechen*.<sup>9</sup> And to be sure, we find a number of the contemporary readings of the agon at least partially anticipated by Nietzsche's forerunners. Thus, in Ernst Curtius, we find a precursor of the destructive reading; in Burckhardt we uncover an early analogue of the aristocratic reading; finally, in Grote we find a democratic interpretation of the agon resembling the respect reading.

Though I will be bringing to light the way in which these philological studies foreshadow many of the contemporary misinterpretations of Nietzsche's agonism, it is not this that is of primary interest to us. Rather, by looking at where Nietzsche agrees and develops their idiosyncratic conceptions of the agon, we will see that each of them offers us a key to resolving the three interpretive disputes that are the central concern of this chapter. Thus, in Burckhardt we find a strong rejection of destructive readings of the agon – one that Nietzsche himself adopts (with modifications). Furthermore, in Burckhardt we also find a strong rejection of the idea that the agon is necessarily limited to an elite ruling caste – a stance that Nietzsche radicalises, rendering the agon even more inclusive. In opposition to the respect reading, the early Nietzsche follows Curtius and Grote in arguing that what gives rise to self-restraint is *not* respect for the other but patriotic love and religious fervour. Finally, against the counterbalancing reading, in his later work, Nietzsche directly draws upon Schmidt's notion of *Aidos*, a noble form of *self*-restraint. Since a historical contextualisation of Nietzsche's

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erlebt, und unter [ihnen] wird viel über das Hellenische conferirt." See Ruehl (2004) (p.91 and p.96, n.44) for further references demonstrating this connection. This gainsays Acampora, who claims that the influence of Burckhardt on Nietzsche was negligible. See Acampora (2013), p.211 (n.7).

<sup>9</sup> Leopold Schmidt, *Die Ethik der alten Griechen* (Berlin: Wilhelm Herz Verlag, 1882). For evidence of his influence on Nietzsche, see e.g. NL 7[161] 10.295. For an excellent overview of this line of influence, see Andrea Orsucci, *Orient—Okzident: Nietzsches Versuch einer Loslösung vom europäischen Weltbild* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), pp.248-75.

conception of the agon has not yet been performed in a comprehensive manner, and moreover, since such work will help us make tractable the three aforementioned obstacles, filling this lacuna will constitute one of the main objectives of this chapter. Let us therefore begin with Curtius, Burckhardt and the destructive reading.

## 2.2. DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT AND THE AGON

The destructive reading of the agon is the most problematic with respect to the thesis being defended in this chapter – namely, that Nietzsche’s agonism attests to the fact that he advocates a *measured* form of conflict. This is because the destructive reading construes Nietzsche’s conception of the agon as co-extensive with, or at least inclusive of, unmeasured physical conflict (i.e. PDC). Bäumler, for example, puts forward a distinctly militaristic interpretation of Nietzsche’s agon. He reads CV 5 as stressing the need to affirm the “Lust des Sieges” and reads Nietzsche’s interpretation of Heraclitus’ metaphysics in terms of a naked (i.e. brutal and unlimited) struggle for political power.<sup>10</sup> He then uses these readings to ground his claim that for Nietzsche the most effective remedy for the decline of modern Europeans is an affirmation of “Gefahr und Krieg”; indeed, he declares that Nietzsche “gehört in das Zeitalter des großen Krieges”.<sup>11</sup> Bäumler arrives at the portentously fascist conclusion that the task of Germany is to be the “Führer Europas” – a mission requiring the national leadership of a single heroic individual.<sup>12</sup> The affirmation of victory in CV 5 is thus equated with an affirmation of martial

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<sup>10</sup> See Bäumler (1931), pp.63-4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.172 and p.183.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp.181-2.

conquest. Similarly, Ruehl, Dombowsky and Enrico Müller have also interpreted Nietzsche's agonism as inclusive of physically unmeasured conflict. Ruehl and Dombowsky do this by reading CV 5 as continuous with the militaristic sentiments of CV 3.<sup>13</sup> To be sure, as we saw in Chapter 1, Nietzsche does positively value martial conflict in CV 3, provided it does not take the form of relentless all-out war. But can the same be said for CV 5?<sup>14</sup>

At a more general level, to subsume physically destructive modes of conflict under the concept of "agon" is perfectly consistent with historical usage. In ancient Greek, "ἀγών", though initially signifying any "gathering [or] assembly; [...] especially met to see public games" or a "contest for a prize at the games", can also refer to "contests in general", or "generally, struggle" and even specifically "struggle[s] for life and death" or "battle[s]".<sup>15</sup> Then, in post-classical Latin, "agon" was used to signify (among other things) martyrdom.<sup>16</sup> And surveying the history of German, one can see that "Wettkampf" has also been used to refer to measured and unmeasured conflict alike.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, we might cite Curtius' study as further evidence

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<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Dombowsky (2004), p.94: "In his early essays of 1871–72, the agonistic conception Nietzsche endorses does not exclude physical warfare, but wars of extermination (*bellum internecinum*).” And he continues “Nietzsche approvingly cites fragment 83 of Heraclitus, ‘*War is the father of all good things*’ (GS 92). Here it should be said, against the tenor of the radical liberal democratic interpretation that Nietzschean agonism is basically compatible [...] with the commitment to perpetual war or permanent confrontation characteristic of fascist ideology...” (see also pp.43-4). See also Müller (2005) p.83. Müller considers Nietzsche to describe the *Wettkampf* as (among other things) “Kriegszustand zwischen den vereinzelt Poleis, als Stasis zwischen den verfeindeten Parteien innerhalb der Poleis”. See also Ruehl (2004), p.91, where he argues that in CV 3, “Nietzsche describe[s], with obvious relish, the Greek *agon* as ‘the bloody jealousy of one town for another, one party for another, this murderous greed of those petty wars, the tiger-like triumph over the corpse of the slain enemy’.”

<sup>14</sup> Note that commentators such as Acampora (2013), who read CV 5 as an unequivocal promotion of non-destructive conflict, nevertheless refer to Nietzsche's later “agonal practice” as including destructiveness (see e.g. p.189).

<sup>15</sup> See entry for “ἀγών”, in Liddel and Scott (1961), pp.18-9.

<sup>16</sup> See entry for “agon”, in *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (Lipsiae: B. G. Teubneri, 1900-), vol.1, p.1412.

<sup>17</sup> See entry for “Wettkampf, m.”, in DWB, vol.29, col.779). The first definition given of Wettkampf is: an “auseinandersetzung zweier oder mehrerer gegner”, the examples for which include military struggles – e.g. “das dänische Reich wird auch zum Ringplatz für eine Reihe jener Wettkämpfe politischer und militärischer Rivalität [...]”.

of such usage, since for him “Wettkampf” and “Krieg” are not mutually exclusive concepts (as we will see below). Finally, even in Nietzsche’s notebooks, we find at least one fragment in which he also uses the term “Wettkampf” to signify the violent “Kampf um’s Dasein”.<sup>18</sup>

In the following section, I begin by arguing that if we take a closer look at Curtius’ “Der Wettkampf”, we can see that although he uses the term “Wettkampf” to refer to war and measured contest alike, he nonetheless distinguishes between two types of *Wettkampf*: one unmeasured, martial *Wettkampf*, and one measured, non-violent *Wettkampf*, for which he shows an unequivocal preference. I then expound how Burckhardt rejects this subdivision of *Wettkampf*, preferring to strictly distinguish *Wettkampf* from war, though nonetheless acknowledging the often violent and even fatal consequences of agonal contest. Finally, in the remainder of the section, I argue that Nietzsche sides with Burckhardt’s approach, but suppresses the violent elements of the *Wettkampf* remarked by his predecessor, thereby creating an idealised conceptual distinction between agonal conflict and PDC. Although I therefore defend the thesis that agon and war remain *conceptually* distinct for Nietzsche, I also explicate how he follows Burckhardt in underscoring the *genealogical* relation of agonal to destructive conflict.

### 2.2.1. CURTIUS, BURCKHARDT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DISTINCTION

For Curtius what distinguishes the Greeks from other cultures is what he calls their “wetteifender Thatenlust” – their joyful desire to engage in competitive activity and prove themselves preminent. Thus, he proclaims, “Sollte ich Ihnen mit einem Worte ein Kennzeichen des hellenischen Lebens angeben, durch das es sich von dem aller anderen Völker unterscheidet – ich würde sagen es sei der Kranz”.<sup>19</sup> For the

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<sup>18</sup> NL 21[15] 7.527.

<sup>19</sup> Curtius (1864), p.3.

Greeks, he continues, the meaning and value of life lay not in security and material comfort (as it does for modern individuals) but in “Ringen und Streben”,<sup>20</sup> and he traces their cultural productivity back to the inordinately high value they placed on contest and victory. At the most general level, Curtius uses the term *Wettkampf* to signify any struggle for ascendancy in which the value of contest is placed above that of Arcadian contentment.

Nothing in this vision of the *Wettkampf* is incompatible with military conflict, and indeed, Curtius maintains that the ancient Greek *Wettkampf* began as a military contest of tribes vying for ascendancy. What motivated such tribes to overcome one another, says Curtius, was their *difference*. He describes how they sought to establish the superiority of their “Eigenthumlichkeit” in “Verfassung, Kunst und Sitte” by destroying their rivals (though as Curtius points out, this would negate the very grounds of the victorious tribe’s *Eigenthumlichkeit*, since it was defined in its opposition to that of the eliminated tribe).<sup>21</sup> Never in history, asserts Curtius, has any “Wetteifer der Kräfte so viel Energie entfaltet” as in ancient Greece in this all-out tribal (and later, inter-*poleis*) contention.<sup>22</sup> Further equating *Krieg* and *Wettkampf*, though now between Greeks and non-Greeks, Curtius also compares the first Persian war to a *Wettkampf*.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, Curtius goes on to recount how later the Greeks conscripted religion as a means to developing a more stable, institutionalised form of agon, such as took place at Delphi or Olympia – what he calls the “regelmäßig[e] Wettkampf”.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*: “Ein Wettkampf – zunächst der Stämme. Zwar sehen wir auch in der orientalischen Geschichte die verschiedensten Stämme mit einander ringen; ein Volk erhebt sich über das andere und drängt es aus seiner Stelle; aber hier gilt es nur einen bestimmten Besitz. Ist dieser gewonnen, so folgt das Leben wieder den alten Gleisen; mit Erreichung des Ziels hört das Streben auf, und der Stämme Eigentümlichkeit verschwindet.” He additionally discusses the “Wettkampf” of Athens, Sparta and Ionia, apparently also referring to their military struggle (*ibid.*, p.5).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7: “Ja als zum großartigsten Wettkampfe die Persernot alle Kräfte des Griechenvolks aufrief, da hat Athen in der Schule der schwersten Drangsale, mit unglaublicher Anstrengung und Opferfreudigkeit den Ehrenkranz gewonnen”.

It is this regulated mode of contest that Curtius wishes to cultivate in German educational institutions in the form of a “geistig[e] Wettkampf”. His hope is that encouraging individuals to compete for ascendancy within the *wissenschaftliche* domain will act as a tonic for academic progress.<sup>24</sup> Although Curtius unequivocally favours this limited species of *Wettkampf*, his wider use of the concept nevertheless encompasses *all* forms of struggle driven by a love of contest and ascendancy.

Conversely, Burckhardt eschews this use of the term, opting instead to completely dissociate the notion of the agon from martial conflict. According to him, the Greek agon emerges only with the passing of “das heroische Zeitalter” of warfare. Only then is a form of victory other than that realised through the destruction of the other established, namely, “der Agonalsieg, d.h. der edle Sieg ohne Feindschaft [...], den friedlichen Sieg einer Individualität”.<sup>25</sup> Burckhardt traces the birth of the agon back to a burgeoning of the aristocracy, who, thanks to their slaves, had the time and wealth to engage in this new form of contest:

Die durch die Geburt gegebenen Individuen der herrschenden Klasse sind nicht mehr, wie vorher, in beschränkter Anzahl vorhanden, sondern es herrscht eine große, wesentlich von Grundrenten lebende städtische Aristokratie, deren Lebenszweck und Ideal wiederum der Kampf, *aber weniger der Krieg als der Wettkampf unter Gleichen* ist. Die ganze Nation ist überzeugt, daß dies das Höchste auf Erden sei.<sup>26</sup>

Like Curtius, Burckhardt underscores how the brilliance of Greek culture can be traced back to the enlivening effects of the Greeks’ agonally competitive spirit, as well as the inclusion of the arts within the institution of the agon.<sup>27</sup> From the above quote, we can already see that Burckhardt understands agon as conceptually distinct from *Krieg* insofar as they refer to mutually exclusive states of conflictual affairs

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<sup>24</sup> See pp.19ff.

<sup>25</sup> Burckhardt (2014), vol.4, p.88.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, p.117 (my italics).

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*, p.83. Burckhardt refers to the agon as “das allgemeine Gärungselement, welches jegliches Wollen und Können, sobald die nötige Freiheit da ist, in Fermentation bringt”.

(even though both are similarly motivated by a desire for victory).<sup>28</sup> To fully articulate this division, Burckhardt invokes Hesiod's distinction of the two Eris goddesses, or goddesses of strife, each of whom symbolised a unique species of discord:

Bei [Hesiod] finden wir denn auch die Kunde vom Agon, wie er sich im ländlichen und bürgerlichen Leben offenbart, d.h. der Konkurrenz, welche nur eine Parallele zum vornehmen und idealen Agon ist, und zwar kommt hier seine Lehre von der bösen und der guten Eris in Betracht, die wir am Anfang der Werke und Tage [...] lesen. Letztere ist die früher geborene (wonach die böse etwa nur eine Ausartung ins Große, zu Krieg und Streit wäre), und zwar scheint Hesiod sie nicht nur im Menschenleben zu finden, sondern auch in der elementaren Natur; denn der Kronide hat sie schon in die Wurzeln der Erde gelegt. Sie ist es, welche auch den Trägen und Unbehilflichen zur Arbeit aufweckt; indem er einen andern sieht, welcher reich ist, müht dann auch er sich, zu pflügen und zu pflanzen und das Haus zu ordnen, und Nachbar eifert mit Nachbar im Streben nach Reichtum.<sup>29</sup>

Burckhardt appears to assent to Hesiod's parsing of war and *Wettkampf*, each of which are symbolised by distinct Eris deities. The good ("gute") Eris symbolises *Konkurrenz* and agon, which manifest themselves in *productive* activity (i.e. "pflügen", "pflanzen" and "das Haus ... ordnen"), while the evil ("böse") Eris is manifested in the *destructive* activity of war and strife ("Krieg und Streit").

In his analysis, however, Burckhardt does not create an absolutely clear-cut dichotomy between *Wettkampf* and destructive conflict; namely, insofar as he also accents the often-fatal consequences of the official agon, particularly the pankration – a no holds barred contest that combined boxing and wrestling, unrestrained by rules except those forbidding eye-gouging and biting. In such contests, people lost teeth, fingers were broken, and "[d]urch das Würgen, die entsetzlichen Stöße in den

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<sup>28</sup> Though he only distinguishes "*Wettkampf unter Gleichen*" from "Krieg", we find that, unlike Curtius, Burckhardt generally refrains from using the term "*Wettkampf*" (or "Agon") to refer to martial conflict.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.88.

Unterleib usw. kamen aber auch nicht selten Tötungen vor”.<sup>30</sup> Thus, although intentionally killing the other was supposed to be proscribed, fatalities were undoubtedly tolerated.<sup>31</sup>

It should also be observed that in Burckhardt’s citation of Hesiod, while the twin godheads are depicted as mutually exclusive in *conceptual* terms, the two species of conflict that they represent are figured as standing in *genetic* relation to one another. However, Burckhardt formulates this relation in a manner quite different from that of Curtius, who conceived of war as originary, and the “regelmäßig[e] Wettkampf” as only emerging later by means of human artifice (i.e. through the institution of religion). Contrastingly, for Burckhardt’s Hesiod, this relation is inverted, and it is the good Eris whom is conceived as the “früher geborene”; the evil Eris (i.e. “Krieg und Streit”) only arises as the result of human corruption or degeneration: “die böse etwa nur eine Ausartung ins Große [...] wäre”, says Burckhardt. Therefore, although Burckhardt construes the Greek agonal age as *historically* posterior to the belligerently unmeasured heroic age, his interpretation of Hesiod indicates that the agonal impulse is ultimately genetically prior to the impulse for war. We should now determine where Nietzsche sits in this debate.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp.97-8. Burckhardt also maintains that artistic contests could be equally violent insofar as they often descended into a chaos of frenzied partisanship, which often eventuated in the spectators murdering one or more of the contestants. Indeed, the outcome of artistic contests were treated as a matter of life or death, claims Burckhardt, since contestants could be “scourged” (“blutig gegeißelt”) and expelled in the event of unfavourable judgement (see *ibid.*, p.112 and fn.208).

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, whereas the grecophilic Curtius postulated that the Greeks took some inherent relish in the activity of struggle, Burckhardt stresses that “Es war nichts positiv Glückliches, wenn das ganze Leben auf einen Augenblick der furchtbarsten Spannung eingerichtet war; in der Zwischenzeit muß Abspannung oder tiefe Sorge um die Zukunft die Betreffenden ergriffen haben” (*ibid.*, p.102.). Burckhardt also shows how envy, animosity and the shame of defeat were crippling and even drove competitors to suicide (see *ibid.*, pp.102-3.).



## 2.2.2. THE EARLY NIETZSCHE ON THE RELATION OF *WETTKAMPF* AND *VERNICHTUNGSKAMPF* (1869-80)

As already stated, Nietzsche himself can be found to use the term “Wettkampf” to refer to unmeasured conflict – namely, the unmeasured struggle pervading nature, as described by Darwin, Hobbes and Schopenhauer (and expounded in Chapter 1). For example, in an early *Nachlass* note, he describes the Schopenhauerian will (“Wille”), in terms of *Wettkampf*: “Der Wille tödtend (in der Natur im Wettkampfe des Schwächeren und des Stärkeren)” (NL 21[15] 7.527).<sup>32</sup> There are then further texts that appear to support the idea that Nietzsche’s agonism is compatible with warmongery. For instance, in the opening paragraphs of CV 5, he marvels at the how the Greeks – widely considered “die humansten Menschen der alten Zeit” – could have been so violent and cruel, and taken such pleasure in the horrors depicted in the *Iliad*. Indeed, he censures our “weichlichen Begriff der modernen Humanität”, and our corresponding inability to conceive of this aspect of Greek culture as anything but an aberration. It is in contrast to these failings, therefore, that in CV 5 Nietzsche endeavours to recuperate a vision of humanity able to incorporate such ostensibly savage tendencies.<sup>33</sup>

This desire to acknowledge PDC as an intrinsic part of our humanity certainly recalls Nietzsche’s affirmation of war and its representation in CV 3, where he maintains that the warmongery of the Greeks, as depicted in the *Iliad*, was

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<sup>32</sup> Like Burckhardt, he also states in lecture notes from 1874-5 that the artistic “Wettkampf” was a “Kampf” in which a contestant’s life or death (“Leben oder Tod”) was often at stake (GGL III, KGW II/5, p.290).

<sup>33</sup> See CV 5 1.783: “So haben die Griechen, die humansten Menschen der alten Zeit, einen Zug von Grausamkeit, von tigerartiger Vernichtungslust an sich: ein Zug, der [...] in ihrer Mythologie uns, die wir mit dem weichlichen Begriff der modernen Humanität ihnen entgegenkommen, in Angst versetzen muß. [...] Warum mußte der griechische Bildhauer immer wieder Krieg und Kämpfe in zahllosen Wiederholungen ausprägen, ausgereckte Menschenleiber, deren Sehnen vom Hasse gespannt sind oder vom Übermuthe des Triumphes, sich krümmende Verwundete, ausröchelnde Sterbende? Warum jauchzte die ganze griechische Welt bei den Kampfbildern der Ilias? Ich fürchte daß wir diese nicht ‘griechisch’ genug verstehen, ja daß wir schauern würden, wenn wir sie einmal griechisch verstünden.”

justified due to its forming the foundation of the *Gesellschaft* and its culture.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Don Dombowsky argues that in justifying PDC, in CV 3 Nietzsche also affirms, “without utilizing the term, the Greek *agon*, or the agonal situation of competition and perpetual conflict between individuals and power-complexes.”<sup>35</sup> But can we read CV 3 and CV 5 together in this way? Or give Nietzsche’s agonism such a broad and inclusive definition? The previous chapter has already gestured towards the fact that we must answer both of these questions in the negative – however, it is worth our while giving a full explanation of why this must necessarily be the case.

We should begin by scrutinizing Nietzsche’s statements regarding violence at the beginning of CV 5. Casting his eye back to pre-Homeric Greece, he describes a savage world of unrelenting, violent strife – one in which “die Grausamkeit des Sieges ist die Spitze des Lebensjubels”. (N.B. that this roughly maps onto Burckhardt’s description of the “heroisch[e] Zeitalter”.) During this ferocious epoch, it was deemed just, “nach dem Rechte des Krieges”, to enslave or put to death the inhabitants of a conquered city as one saw fit. This ferocious world was one devoid

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<sup>34</sup> CV 3 1.771: “[B]lutige Eifersucht von Stadt auf Stadt, von Partei auf Partei, diese mörderische Gier jener kleinen Kriege, der tigerartige Triumph auf dem Leichnam des erlegten Feindes, kurz die unablässige Erneuerung jener trojanischen Kampf- und Greuelszenen, in deren Anblick Homer lustvoll versunken, als ächter Hellene, vor uns steht — wohin deutet diese naive Barbarei des griechischen Staates, woher nimmt er seine Entschuldigung vor dem Richterstuhle der ewigen Gerechtigkeit? Stolz und ruhig tritt der Staat vor ihn hin: und an der Hand führt er das herrlich blühende Weib, die griechische Gesellschaft.”

<sup>35</sup> See Dombowsky (2004), pp.43-4: “Nietzsche, writing in *The Greek State*, considers the Greeks as the ‘political men in themselves’. He defines their ‘political passion’, in opposition to the liberal optimistic view rooted in ‘the doctrines of French Rationalism and the French Revolution’, in terms of the unconditional subjection of all interests to the natural ‘State-instinct’, by which he means, the artistic and passionate maintenance of a state of war, the ‘bloody jealousy of city against city, of party against party . . . the incessant renewal of . . . Trojan scenes of struggle’. Thus, Nietzsche affirms here, without utilizing the term, the Greek *agon*, or the agonal situation of competition and perpetual conflict between individuals and power-complexes (also articulated by the conservative political forces of his generation).” See also Müller (2005), p.78. Müller states that, within the Homeric world depicted in CV 3 and CV 5, “der Agon [sich] vornehmlich als heroischer Zweikampf um Leben und Tod, das Machtgefühl des Siegs wiederum als moralisch unreflektierter ‘Triumph auf dem Leichnam des erlegten Feindes’ [...] darstellt.”

of measure, in which justice was equated with the will of the heroically mighty. Reinforcing his assertion in CV 3 (and GM II 17 5.324) that the state is born out of violence, Nietzsche seeks to illuminate the violent roots of Greek civilisation: “Und wie sich in Wahrheit vom Morde und der Mordsühne aus der Begriff des griechischen Rechtes entwickelt hat, so nimmt auch die edlere Kultur ihren ersten Siegeskranz vom Altar der Mordsühne” (CV 5 1.785).

According to Nietzsche, the horror of any violent epoch has certain ramifications for the spiritual *Weltanschauung* of those enduring such times. Individuals subjected to unremittingly baleful conditions of this kind often come to equate life with suffering and punishment; hence, such an existence tends to generate a pessimistic worldview, what Nietzsche refers to as an “Ekel am Dasein” (CV 5 1.785). This form of pessimism is exemplified, he claims, in both Eastern Buddhism and Greek Orphism (though we may also group the philosophies of Anaximander and Schopenhauer in this category). Yet this is not the only possible spiritual response to such a world. The Greek genius, Nietzsche tells us, formulates a quite contrary rejoinder to the question “was will ein Leben des Kampfes und des Sieges?” Rather than deeming life-denial the appropriate response to the horrific character of existence, “der griechische Genius den einmal so furchtbar vorhandenen Trieb gelten ließ und als berechtigt erachtet” (CV 5 1.785-6). The drive (*Trieb*) that the genius acknowledges is the drive for “Kampf und der Lust des Sieges”, what he calls in WS 226 “das Siegen- und Hervorragenwollen”. In Homer’s *Iliad*, this is expressed by Achilles as the desire “[e]ver to excel, to do better than others”.<sup>36</sup> What is implied by Nietzsche is that, in evaluating the heroic world, the “Genius” places the accent on the supreme joy of victory, instead of on the dispiriting prevalence of crushing defeat, subjugation, slavery and murder.

In speaking of the Greek “Genius”, Nietzsche is ostensibly referring to Homer, or at least some kind of archetypal Greek spirit epitomised in Homer.

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<sup>36</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, Book 6, l.208.

Certainly, Nietzsche thought that Homer ingeniously aestheticized brutal war in such a way as to make it tolerable if not affirmable.<sup>37</sup> Thus, in Homer's world,

werden wir bereits durch die außerordentliche künstlerische Bestimmtheit, Ruhe und Reinheit der Linien über die rein stoffliche Verschmelzung hinweggehoben: ihre Farben erscheinen, durch eine künstlerische Täuschung, lichter, milder, wärmer, ihre Menschen, in dieser farbigen warmen Beleuchtung, besser und sympathischer [...]. (CV 5 1.784)

Nietzsche also describes this poetic act of idealisation as one that overcomes the brutal *Kampf um's Dasein* (thereby contradicting the note cited above in which he categorises Darwinian struggle as a form of *Wettkampf*): “Der Dichter überwindet den Kampf um's Dasein, indem er ihn zu einem freien Wettkampfe [*sic*] idealisirt” (NL 16[15] 7.398). Nevertheless, he is remarkably reticent when it comes to expounding how Homer concretely contributed to the advent of the Greek agonal age (after all, as Nietzsche would have undoubtedly been aware, agonal games are depicted in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which indicates that the agon predated Homer<sup>38</sup>).

If we read CV 5 in conjunction with GT, however, we get a better insight into how he might think Homer (and the communal “Genius” or “spirit” of the Greeks embodied in Homer) enabled the proliferation of non-destructive modes of contest. Thus, Nietzsche claims in GT 15 that a life of relentless violence generates a suicidal “practische[r] Pessimismus” – people simply cannot bear to go on living given the predominance of war. However, he adds, this defeatist sentiment only arose “wo

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<sup>37</sup> There are two reasons why Nietzsche might not have wanted to explicitly name the aestheticizing genius as Homer. First, Heraclitus also fits the description: viewing life as justified in conflict: “man muß wissen, daß der Krieg gemeinschaftlich ist und die Δίκη Streit ist u. daß alles gemäß dem Streite geschieht” (VPP, KGW II/4, p.273). Second, Nietzsche may have been referring to a more embracing notion of “Genius” – namely, as the “spirit” of the community (we find a similar use of “Genius” in FW 354, for example, entitled “Der Genius der Gattung”). See also Chapter 3, where this conception of genius is explored in greater depth.

<sup>38</sup> For example, the funeral games held in memory of Patroclus in Book 23 of the *Iliad*, and the games played by the Phaeacians (and in which Odysseus himself participates) in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*.

nicht die Kunst in irgend welchen Formen [...] zum Heilmittel und zur Abwehr jenes Pesthauchs erschienen ist” (GT 15 1.100). Homeric art offered solace, and acted as a prophylactic against despondency. By depicting the brutality and horror of the heroic age in such a beautiful fashion, Homer enabled the Greeks to affirm life and action.<sup>39</sup> Christa Davis Acampora, though perhaps going beyond the texts themselves, has elaborated this line of interpretation, arguing that Nietzsche thought Homer enabled specifically *agonal* modes of action. In her rapprochement of CV 5 and GT, she suggests that, with Homer,

life becomes full of possibilities to seek and win, and the wisdom of Silenus is overcome, replaced with the worldview expressed in Homeric literature. Homer’s revaluation of human existence has it that what is best is to never die – to achieve some unforgettable victory. Second best is to not die too soon – that is, to live long enough to secure the meaning of one’s life through significant action.<sup>40</sup>

Whether we accept this imaginative synthesis or not, what we can conclude from the above is that Nietzsche’s praise of the *Iliad* in CV 5 is not to be equated with a praise of its *content* (i.e. war and violence). Nietzsche is applauding the beautiful *form* Homer gives to this content – thus, he praises the *Iliad* as a “künstlerisches Spiel und Nachahmung” of the heroic world of war. Indeed, Nietzsche intimates that this ingeniously transfigured reflection is “Die Voraussetzung des Wettkampfes” (NL 16[26] 7.404); but note well that it is at most merely a *precondition* (“Voraussetzung”) of the *Wettkampf*, and not the *Wettkampf* itself. Nietzsche’s celebration of the *Iliad* in CV 5 should therefore *not* be interpreted as an affirmation of war, as it is in CV 3.

From this it should already be plain that the genius does not affirm and embrace conflict and the pleasure of victory *tout court* as the destructive reading would lead us to believe. On the contrary, Nietzsche praises how, in recognising this drive, the genius enables the Greeks to transfigure its destructive content, to forge

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<sup>39</sup> See also NL 11[20] 8.205-6 and NL 5[165] 8.86-7.

<sup>40</sup> Acampora (2013), p.51.

ways of engaging in struggle and the pursuit of victory without engaging in war and murder. As we saw in Chapter 1, this process of channelling energy away from socially pernicious forms of conflict is the essence of the *Wettkampf*, which functions as a non-destructive means of obtaining the key *desideratum* (i.e. triumph) that was previously sought in war.

Like Burckhardt, Nietzsche also appeals to Hesiod's partition of the Eris goddesses in order to illustrate the way in which he views *Wettkampf* as *conceptually* distinguished from, but *genetically* related to, murderous forms of conflict. Indeed, in the same note, Nietzsche also describes the role of the Greek poet as that of transposing destructive drives into the good Eris (i.e. *Wettkampf*): "die tigerartigen Zerfleischungstrieb der Griechen weiß er zu übertragen in die gute Eris". Yet his representation of the good–evil Eris relation is not identical with that of Burckhardt. It is worth quoting Nietzsche's citation of Hesiod at length so as to bring this divergence fully into relief:

Die eine Eris möchte man, wenn man Verstand hat, ebenso loben als die andre tadeln; denn eine ganz getrennte Gemüthsart haben diese beiden Göttinnen. Denn die Eine fördert den schlimmen Krieg und Hader, die Grausame! Kein Sterblicher mag sie leiden, sondern unter dem Joch der Noth erweist man der schwerlastenden Eris Ehre, nach dem Rathschlusse der Unsterblichen. Diese gebär, als die ältere, die schwarze Nacht; die andre aber stellte Zeus der hochwaltende hin auf die Wurzeln der Erde und unter die Menschen, als eine viel bessere. Sie treibt auch den ungeschickten Mann zur Arbeit; und schaut einer, der des Besitzthums ermangelt, auf den Anderen, der reich ist, so eilt er sich in gleicher Weise zu säen und zu pflanzen und das Haus wohl zu bestellen; der Nachbar wetteifert mit dem Nachbarn, der zum Wohlstande hinstrebt. Gut ist diese Eris für die Menschen. Auch der Töpfer grollt dem Töpfer und der Zimmermann dem Zimmermann, es neidet der Bettler den Bettler und der Sänger den Sänger. (CV 5 1.786)<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> On Nietzsche's use of the good–evil Eris distinction, see NL 16[19] 7.400, ST 1.545, M 38, MA 170, WS 29.

Nietzsche therefore follows Burckhardt in drawing a sharp conceptual line between the species of conflict respectively demarcated by the good and evil Eris sisters. The latter is associated with “feindseligen Vernichtungskämpfe [*sic*]” – that is, the “Morde”, “Krieg” “Streit” and “Wollüstige Grausamkeit” that characterises pre-Homeric culture. By contrast, the good Eris, “als Eifersucht Groll Neid die Menschen zur That reizt, aber nicht zur That des Vernichtungskampfes, sondern zur That des Wettkampfes” (CV 5 1.787).<sup>42</sup> In this way, Nietzsche unequivocally discriminates between PDC (falling under the banner of the “böse” Eris) and *Wettkampf* (falling under the banner of the “gute” Eris).

But how does this terminological distinction cash out practically? And *why* does Nietzsche endorse the *Wettkampf* as “good”? In short, the good Eris inspires envy (“Neid”) and ambition (“Ehrgeiz”) in individuals, which propels them to engage in individually and socio-culturally *constructive* modes of praxis. Otherwise put, envy and ambition push people to pursue excellence to the point of outdoing their adversaries. But as Nietzsche notes, “der Kern der hellenischen Wettkampf-Vorstellung” is not just the mutual stimulation of the contestants, but also the measure that they impose upon one another: “wie sie sich auch gegenseitig in der Grenze des Maaßes halten” (CV 5 1.789). This means that each individual’s ambition is kept within manageable bounds, and they are thereby prevented from becoming excessively dominant and stifling the contest (how this is achieved will be explored in further detail below). Evil (“böse”) Eris, contrariwise, is distinctly *unmeasured* (“grenzenlos”). It promotes detrimental modes of action such as murder and war, where one strives to win by eliminating one’s opponent.<sup>43</sup> The *Wettkampf* is therefore presented as deeply *productive* in nature. Individuals are driven by

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<sup>42</sup> See also NL 16[19] 7.400: “Die hesiodische Eris wird gewöhnlich falsch verstanden: was die Leute zum Krieg und Streit treibt, die böse: was sie zur ehrgeizigen That treibt, die gute.”

<sup>43</sup> See also WS 29, where Nietzsche distinguishes good and evil Eris in terms of the way in which individuals attempt to equal their opponents – that is, whether they try to do so by pulling their opponent down to their level (bad), or raising themselves up to the level of their opponents (good). While this aphorism sets the goal as *equality* and not victory (as in CV 5), it still sheds important light on the way in which Nietzsche conceives of the opposed dynamics of *Wettkampf* and *Vernichtungskampf*.

reciprocal stimulation to compete and prove themselves predominant *at a given task*, as opposed to through a direct clash of naked physical force. Nietzsche also underscores how this allows for the “mäßige Entladung” of a range of aggressive, though not necessarily destructive, human affects (such as envy, ambition, jealousy, hatred, and rage) that would otherwise have to be released in violent and even seditious activity.<sup>44</sup> Thus, “der Grieche [erachtete] ein volles Ausströmenlassen seines Hasses als ernste Nothwendigkeit”, and it was the agon that granted this aggressive hatred a non-destructive outlet. Diverging from Burckhardt, then, agonal victory is not figured as “ohne Feindschaft” in Nietzsche’s analysis, but is rather saturated with a controlled form of animosity. Further distinguishing himself from Burckhardt, and in spite of his affirmation of agonal animosity, Nietzsche conspicuously suppresses the often-violent practical reality of agonal contest. Thus, as Herman Siemens has stressed, Nietzsche presents us with a highly stylised vision of the ancient Greek agon, one that, I would submit, cleaves an even more definite conceptual divide between agonal and physically destructive forms of conflict.<sup>45</sup>

Insofar as the agon promotes (self-)cultivation, Nietzsche also sees it as one of the fundamentals of ancient Greek education; thus, “[j]ede Begabung muss sich kämpfend entfalten, so gebietet die hellenische Volkspädagogik” (CV 5 1.787).<sup>46</sup> In parallel with Curtius and Burckhardt, he also theorises that the Greek ethos of contest was the driving force behind their cultural flourishing. Spurred on by their envy and ambition, artists strove to outdo one another: “ihre ganze Kunst ist nicht ohne Wettkampf zu denken: die hesiodische gute Eris, der Ehrgeiz, gab ihrem Genius die

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<sup>44</sup> See NL 5[146] 8.79; see also NL 16[18] 7.399, where Nietzsche remarks “Wie die griechische Natur alle furchtbaren Eigenschaften zu benutzen weiß: die tigerartige Vernichtungswuth (der Stämme usw.) im Wettkampf”.

<sup>45</sup> See Herman Siemens, “Contesting Nietzsche’s Agon. On Christa Davis Acampora’s ‘Contesting Nietzsche,’” *Nietzsche-Studien*, 44 (2015), 446-461 (p.452).

<sup>46</sup> On the educational function of the agon, see NL 16[4] 7.394: “Hesiod und — — — Die Jesuiten — ihre antike Erziehung — der Ehrgeiz und der Wettkampf in der Erziehung. / Das Problem des Wettkampfes. / 7. Künstler im Wettkampfe. (Bei uns aus Mangel an Größen selten: Schiller und Goethe.) [...]”. See also NL 16[14] 7.397: “Die antiken Mittel der Erziehung: der Wettkampf und die Liebe.”



Flügel” (MA 170).<sup>47</sup> Note that in trying to justify non-destructive, agonal contention, Nietzsche is now invoking the same cultural criterion that he used in CV 3 to justify PDC.

If we simply focus on how Nietzsche parses *Wettkampf* and war, however, we risk glossing over what we have already identified as the primary purpose of CV 5: to show how man’s “furchtbaren und als unmenschlich geltenden Befähigungen [...] vielleicht sogar der fruchtbare Boden [sind], aus dem allein alle Humanität, in Regungen Thaten und Werken hervordachsen kann” (CV 5 1.783). We might reformulate this by saying that Nietzsche, like Burckhardt, strives to illuminate the *genetic* relation between *Vernichtungskampf* and *Wettkampf*. Though Nietzsche highlights the separate parentage of the two Eris goddesses (the evil Eris being born of “die schwarze Nacht”, and the good Eris being placed on earth by Zeus himself), he follows Burckhardt in suggesting that, in reality, one of the distinct forms of conflict that they represent is actually born out of the other. In Burckhardt’s account, as in the proem to Hesiod’s *Work and Days*, it is the *good* Eris that was born first, with the *Vernichtungskampf* emerging out of the corruption of the more originary *Wettkampf*.<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche, on the other hand, inverts the order of derivation. Why, we should ask, would he decide to do such a thing?

In the first place, Nietzsche’s motivation could be said to be purely philological. It appears from his lecture notes (GG), that he considered both the idea of the good Eris and the assertion of her genealogical priority, which are to be found

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<sup>47</sup> See also CV 5 1.790: “Mißtrauisch-eifersüchtig traten die großen musikalischen Meister, Pindar und Simonides, neben einander hin; wetteifernd begegnet der Sophist, der höhere Lehrer des Alterthums, dem anderen Sophisten; selbst die allgemeinste Art der Belehrung, durch das Drama, wurde dem Volke nur ertheilt unter der Form eines ungeheuren Ringens der großen musikalischen und dramatischen Künstler. Wie wunderbar! ‘Auch der Künstler grollt dem Künstler!’”

<sup>48</sup> See Hesiod, *Work and Days*, in Glen Most (ed. and trans.), *Theogony, Work and Days, Testimonia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp.87-8, ll.11-26: “For the one [Eris] fosters evil war and conflict – cruel one, / no mortal loves that one, but it is by necessity that they honor / the oppressive Strife, by the plans of the immortals. But / the other one gloomy Night bore first; and Cronus’ highthroned / son, who dwells in the aether, set it in the roots of / the earth, and it is much better for men.”

in the proem of *Work and Days*, to be the illegitimate additions “eines hesiodischen Rhapsoden”. According to Nietzsche, this rhapsodist invented the good Eris (along with her priority), then superimposed her onto Hesiod’s text in order to “rechtfertigen” “[d]er Wettstreit unter Dichtern [als] etwas erlaubtes.”<sup>49</sup> For Nietzsche, however, the true tenor of Hesiod’s thought is best captured in *Theogony*, in which “die böse ist [...] uralt”.<sup>50</sup>

This said, Nietzsche’s motivation for inverting the order of birth given in the proem is likely more philosophical in kind. The second obvious reason that Nietzsche might have chosen this ordering, then, is on account of his interest in situating man’s origins in a horrific world devoid of measure. This would enable him to show how such brutal measurelessness is an inextricable part of our ancestry and inheritance. Cruelty and excess are not foibles of a wicked minority whose originally “good” natures have been contingently corrupted by society (as Burckhardt’s Hesiod, like Rousseau, might have it). Such a penchant for violence in fact lies at the very root of all that we vaunt as human. What lent the Greeks their potency and cultural competence was their ability to avail themselves of their natural urges for socially beneficial ends, what Nietzsche calls “[d]ie Verwendung des Schädlichen zum Nützlichen”.<sup>51</sup> Such transformative exploitation of our primitive nature, however, presupposes that we relocate these dark impulses within ourselves and acknowledge them as an intrinsic aspect of our humanity. No wonder, then, that Nietzsche considers modern man’s attempt to hew his “natural” animalistic impulses from his concept of “humanity” as having had such a debilitating effect.

An expanded analysis of how Nietzsche thinks this transformation can be undertaken will form the subject matter of Section 3. For now we should merely note

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<sup>49</sup> See GDG, KGW II/5, pp.360-1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.: “[W]elche [Eris] wird als die ältere ἔρις u[nd] Kind d[er] Nacht bezeichnet? In Theog. die böse. [...] Gerade die böse ist nach der Theog. uralt.” Indeed, in Nietzsche’s opinion, the “Theogony kennt die ἔρις nur als eine”, and therefore *not* as a dual godhead (ibid.).

<sup>51</sup> NL 16[18] 7.399. In the same note, Nietzsche also remarks “Wie die griechische Natur alle furchtbaren Eigenschaften zu benutzen weiß: die tigerartige Vernichtungswuth (der Stämme usw.) im Wettkampf”. See also VM 220 and NL 11[186] 9.514.

how this genetic relation shows that the *Wettkampf* and *Vernichtungskampf* share certain qualities: particularly the fact that they are both forms of conflict driven by the desire for victory and the range of aforementioned aggressive affects. Nonetheless, the early Nietzsche holds agonal and destructive conflict to be distinguished both in terms of their socio-cultural utility and in terms of the modes of action to which they lead. *Vernichtungskampf* (i.e. war and murder) is an unmeasured species of conflict in which adversaries strive for victory in a socially injurious fashion – namely, insofar as they each seek the annihilation of their counterpart; *Wettkampf*, by contrast, is measured and promotes self-improvement. Naturally, this self-perfectionist impulse is of high socio-cultural value on account of the fact that it motivates individuals to prove themselves by undertaking great deeds and producing great cultural artefacts, both of which serve to enrich the commonweal.

### 2.2.3. THE LATER NIETZSCHE ON THE RELATION OF *WETTKAMPF* AND *VERNICHTUNGSKAMPF* (1881-89)

As we enter the 1880s, what I will refer to as the later phase of Nietzsche's thought, explicit discussion of agonal conflict or *Wettkampf* wanes almost to the point of disappearance. Yet as I will now argue, Nietzsche can be said to uphold his earlier conception of the relation of *Wettkampf* and PDC. In a note from 1881, for instance, Nietzsche tells us that

Die griechischen Gesetzgeber haben den agon so gefördert, um den Wettkampfgedanken vom Staate abzulenken und die politische Ruhe zu gewinnen [...] Das Nachdenken über den Staat sollte durch agonale Erhitzung abgelenkt werden — ja turnen und dichten sollte man — dies hatte den Nebenerfolg, die Bürger stark schön und fein zu machen. (NL 11[186] 9.514)<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See also WS 226.

Here the agon is equated with “turnen und dichten” and “politische Ruhe”, and, furthermore, it is unambiguously opposed to civil war. However, it is once again depicted as drawing on the same energies as destructive conflict, offering a way of channelling potentially detrimental impulses into socially beneficial practices (i.e. it makes the citizens “schön und fein”).

In 1883 (around the time he was reading Schmidt), Nietzsche describes the agonal feeling (“[d]as agonale Gefühl”) as that which “vor einem Publikum siegen will und diesem Publikum verständlich sein muß” (NL 8[15] 10.339). This shows that Nietzsche’s understanding of the agon is closely related to the poetic or dramaturgical Greek contest, for it is only in such contests that one must make oneself “verständlich” before an audience (“Publikum”). We need only examine a note such as the following to remark that, even after the emergence of the notion of the will to power, Nietzsche still sees the *Wettkampf* as conceptually distinct from PDC:

Die Freien, Mässigen erfanden den Wettkampf als die immer wachsende Verfeinerung jenes Macht-Äußerungsbedürfnisses: durch den Wettkampf wurde der Hybris vorgebeugt: welche durch lange Unbefriedig<ung> des Machtgelüstes entsteht. (NL 7[161] 10.295)

The *Wettkampf* represents a *refinement* (“Verfeinerung”) of individuals’ expression of power.<sup>53</sup> It is defined, he indicates earlier in the same note, by *Aidos* – that is, “[e]ine Art Ekel vor der Verletzung des Ehrwürdigen.” It is *measure* that distinguishes agonal conflict from struggles in which one seeks the harm one’s opponent, which Nietzsche associates with “Übermaß, in dem freudigen I<nstinkt der> Hybris” (ibid.). In 1888, after a long hiatus, we then witness Nietzsche returning to the theme of the agon in his published work. Now, in GD, he is interested in how the form of philosophical debate engendered by Socrates and Plato constituted “eine neue Art agon” (GD Sokrates 8 6.71), that is, “eine Fortbildung und Verinnerlichung der alten agonalen Gymnastik” (GD Streifzüge 23 6.126).

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<sup>53</sup> See also FW 13.

Although Nietzsche in many ways construes this type of spiritualised agon as a decadent form of the practice, it is nonetheless even further removed from PDC than its physical counterparts in wrestling and gymnastics.

In GD Alten 3, Nietzsche rebukes the disempowering and sanitising effect of the ancient Greek philosophers on their surrounding culture; but what should be observed is that in making this critique, he maintains a clear *conceptual* distinction between agonal practices and violent conflict, while nonetheless accenting their *genetic* relation:

Ich sah ihren stärksten Instinkt, den Willen zur Macht, ich sah sie zittern vor der unbändigen Gewalt dieses Triebs, — ich sah alle ihre Institutionen wachsen aus Schutzmaassregeln, um sich vor einander gegen ihren inwendigen Explosivstoff sicher zu stellen. [...] Und mit Festen und Künsten wollte man auch nichts Andres als sich obenauf fühlen, sich obenauf zeigen: es sind Mittel, sich selber zu verherrlichen, unter Umständen vor sich Furcht zu machen... [...] Die Philosophen sind ja die *décadents* des Griechenthums, die Gegenbewegung gegen den alten, den vornehmen Geschmack (— gegen den agonalen Instinkt, gegen die Polis, gegen den Werth der Rasse, gegen die Autorität des Herkommens) [...]. (GD Alten 3 6.157)

Nietzsche implies that agonal practices or institutions arise out of the need to effect a *Bändigung* of the destructively explosive “[unbändige] Gewalt” of the will to power. This is achieved by creating moderated, institutional spaces in which this will can at least partially discharge itself in non-destructive activity. Thus, once again Nietzsche conceptually distinguishes measured agonal conflict – which he equates with the “Festen und Künsten” enjoyed by citizen’s living in a state of peace (i.e. who “vor sich selber Ruhe fänden”) – from the unrestrained bellicose mode of conflict occurring when “Stadtgemeinden zerfleischten sich unter einander” (ibid.).

Notwithstanding this act of division, Nietzsche *is* highlighting a strong connection between the two modes of conflict. They are *both* expressions of the one will to power, and measured, agonal conflict is developed as a response to the often-deleterious effects of this impetus. Again, as in GM, Nietzsche is trying to show how the cultural strength of the Greeks – particularly their art and (agonal) institutions –

grew out of a need to restrain and moderate the “[unbändige] Gewalt” of the will to power, to transform the “agonale Trieb” for discharge and overcoming into agonal conflict proper; thus, he says “ich sah alle ihre Institutionen wachsen aus Schutzmaassregeln”. Those things that we find laudatory in Hellenic culture are, for Nietzsche, a result of the Greeks’ ability to harness the productive potential of the will to power. As we saw in Chapter 1, however, this agonal drive is highly volatile and often releases itself with destructively explosive force.<sup>54</sup>

The conditions under which this transformation occurs will be expounded over the subsequent sections. For now the objective has been to show that, unlike Curtius, Nietzsche persistently conceptualises agonal struggle in *opposition* to PDC – that is, the two types of conflict stand in a conceptual relation of exclusive disjunction towards one another. Indeed, Nietzsche draws an even clearer conceptual distinction than Burckhardt. Nonetheless, both the early and later Nietzsche also consistently underscore the *genealogical* relation of *Wettkampf* and *Vernichtungskampf*. In reading Nietzsche’s agon as a promotion of murderous conflict, his destructive readers therefore commit a genetic fallacy insofar they confound the agon with its origins (in violent strife).

## 2.3. THE SCOPE OF THE AGON

Now that we have established that Nietzsche’s endorsement of the agon does indeed refer to a *measured* form of conflict – insofar as it is not physically destructive – we need to establish the *scope* of this endorsement of measured conflict. The point in contention is the degree of social inclusivity exhibited by Nietzsche’s ideal agon. Whereas democratic appropriations of his thought tend to interpret his agonism as profoundly open and inclusive, aristocratic readings emphasise its *exclusivity* and

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<sup>54</sup> What he describes as an unmeasured, Dionysian species of “Rausch” in GD Streifzüge 8 6.116.

confinement to a ruling minority. A survey of the internally divided critical literature therefore gives us no clear idea as to the scope of Nietzsche's agonism; and indeed, without a coherent answer to this question of scope, Nietzsche's conception of the agon is left with little, if any, practical applicability.

On the democratic side, Hatab, for example, argues that although the Nietzschean agon "eschews equal results and even equal capacity", it demands equality in the sense of equal *opportunity*. In political terms, this "agonistic openness" can be taken as the "open fair opportunity for all citizens to participate in political contention".<sup>55</sup> Thus, for Hatab, the ideal Nietzschean agon is democratic in its openness, and only aristocratic "in apportioning appropriate judgments of superiority and inferiority."<sup>56</sup> Crucially, this openness is conceived as the equal opportunity of citizens to compete for *political* power, where "losers must yield to, and live under, the policies of the winner".<sup>57</sup> The logic behind this notion of "agonistic openness" is that excluding individuals from the contest betrays "a flight from competition, a will to eliminate challenges" and is therefore "a weakness in a Nietzschean sense". On this reading, then, agonism implies a radical state of receptivity to the challenges of others, regardless of social standing or capacity.

In the other camp, we then find Appel and Conway. Conway argues that, according to Nietzsche, the agon is limited to a select "community of agonistic

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<sup>55</sup> See Hatab (1995), p.120. See also p.100, p.220 and pp.120-2.

<sup>56</sup> See Lawrence Hatab, "Prospects for a Democratic Agon: Why We Can Still Be Nietzscheans", *JNS*, 24 (2002), 132-147 (p.140; see also p.142). David Owen also suggests that the Nietzschean democratic agon is similarly aristocratic insofar as it is a contest to establish a ranking of values – i.e. to establish what counts as excellence. See David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity* (London: Sage, 1995), pp.144-6.

<sup>57</sup> He states, therefore, that we can identify "specific configurations of power, of *domination and submission* in democratic politics" (Hatab [1995], p.63). See also David Owen, "Equality, Democracy, and Self-Respect: Reflections on Nietzsche's Agonal Perfectionism", *JNS*, 24 (2002), 113-131. Following Conant, Owen argues that the inequality affirmed by Nietzsche should be conceived as interior to the parts of the self, not as an external, social form of inequality. See also Owen (1995) (esp. p.163); and for a comparable reading of Nietzsche's notion of the "Pathos der Distanz", see Thomas Fossen, "Nietzsche's Aristocratism Revisited", in H. W. Siemens and V. Roodt (eds.), *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), pp.299-318. This issue will be taken up again in ch.4.

‘friends’ founded by the *Übermensch*’.<sup>58</sup> On a similar note, Appel thinks that to read Nietzsche as a proponent of democratic openness is contrived and demands an excessively violent appropriation of his thought for liberal-democratic ends.<sup>59</sup> He contends that Nietzsche is a thoroughgoing aristocrat. But what does aristocracy mean in this context? For Appel, on the one hand, this minority is selected solely on the basis of their superior *capacity*, not according to birth-right or wealth.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, Appel attributes a more conventional notion of aristocratism to Nietzsche insofar as he reads him as campaigning for the oppressive rule of a few higher individuals over an enslaved majority. The same goes for Nietzsche’s understanding of the agon, which, echoing Conway, he describes in remarkably elitist terms as “the open clash of competing wills to power *in the aristocratic inner circle*”.<sup>61</sup>

Appel also reads a line of continuity between CV 5 and Nietzsche’s later aristocratic agon. He maintains that both present “a constructive outlet for the potentially destructive wills of competitors, thereby preserving Greek community life and fostering its high culture.” Appel continues, asserting that, “[c]asting his eyes to the future, Nietzsche wishes to foster a space of contest and rivalry with a similar function. ‘Who can command, who can obey—that is experimented here!’”<sup>62</sup> Thus, like Hatab, he construes the struggle as one in which political power over one’s adversaries is the main stake. Yet, according to Appel, beyond this aristocratic inner circle, Nietzsche proposes that the majority of individuals ought to be confined to a politically excluded and murderously repressed slave-body.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p.31: “The aristocratic regimes [Nietzsche] favors would shelter a pyramidal hierarchy of ethical communities, each equipped with a distinctive morality that reflects its unique needs and strengths. At the pinnacle of this pyramidal structure would stand the community of agonistic ‘friends’ founded by the *Übermensch*.” See also p.54: “Nietzsche depicts friendship as a mutually empowering *agon*, in which select individuals undergo moral development through their voluntary engagement in contest and conflict.”

<sup>59</sup> See Appel (1999), pp.2-5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.140.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.141.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.140 (quoting Z III Tafeln 25 4.265).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.147.



This hermeneutic dichotomy regarding Nietzsche's agonism reflects a more general division running through the secondary literature. Namely, that which exists between aristocratic and democratic appropriations of Nietzsche's wider philosophy. In the former camp, commentators such as John Rawls and Thomas Hurka have claimed that Nietzsche's perfectionist project is delimited to an aristocratic minority.<sup>64</sup> Conversely, readers such as Stanley Cavell and James Conant have argued that Nietzsche's perfectionism is open to all, perfectly compatible with democracy, and in no way confined to a particular social group.<sup>65</sup>

In the following section, then, the problem can be stated as follows: what is the social scope of Nietzsche's agonism? Must every instance of genuinely agonal conflict exhibit the openness of which Hatab speaks; or is Nietzsche's agon restricted to an aristocratic minority, excluding all others from participation? This can be divided into two sub-questions. First, does Nietzsche think that it is *possible* for anyone to participate in agonal conflict? Second, does he think it is *desirable* that anyone and everyone participate in agonal conflict, or are his positive valuations of such conflict specific to particular social groups? We should not take it for granted that Nietzsche's descriptive and normative conceptions of the agon have the same extension.

In trying to get an insight into the aristocratic aspect of Nietzsche's agon, one place we might want to begin by looking is in Burckhardt's *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, where the agon is represented as closely bound up with the noble social class. Indeed, Martin Ruehl has even claimed that, "[l]ike Burckhardt, Nietzsche regarded the *agon* as an essentially aristocratic notion that belonged to a

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<sup>64</sup> See e.g. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.285ff.; Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); see also Bruce Detwiler (1990).

<sup>65</sup> See Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp.49-53; see also James Conant, "Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of Schopenhauer as Educator", in Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.181-256.

pre-democratic age.”<sup>66</sup> However, I will show that we find cogent criticisms in Burckhardt, not just of the democratic, but indeed, also of the strictly aristocratic conception of the agon. Moreover, Burckhardt rejects the idea of the agon as a direct struggle for political power. In Burckhardt we find both a socially inclusive *and* a socially exclusive or elitist conception of the agon, side by side, as it were.

In the second subsection, I then examine Nietzsche’s conception of the agon prior to 1881, where he appears to appropriate much of Burckhardt’s account. Thus, he will be seen to propound a generalised notion of the agon, according to which any roughly equal individuals – though now this equality is conceived in terms of capacity rather than heredity – can agonally compete in local struggles for excellence. However, like Burckhardt, Nietzsche more emphatically endorses another more obviously aristocratic species of the struggle for excellence. We will also see that Nietzsche’s *ideal* agon, again paralleling Burckhardt’s, is an apolitical contest for fame and glory, and so cannot be conceived as a struggle for instrumental power fought among aristocrats. Indeed, while both Burckhardt and Nietzsche hold political agonism to be *possible*, they are both averse to it due to the fact that it can very easily deteriorate into socially detrimental forms of contest.

In the third subsection, I turn to the scope of Nietzsche’s agonism after 1881. I contend that a major shift occurs at this point insofar as power (rather than fame or glory) is now figured as the principal stake sought in agonal contest; however, I nonetheless stress that this is *not* to be understood as instrumental or political power over one’s adversary. Drawing on JGB 259 and 262, which Appel uses to defend his aristocratic reading, I show that agonal conflict arises precisely where the struggle for instrumental or exploitative power *cannot* take place – namely, between any roughly equal will to power organisations. Though Nietzsche is particularly interested in how this is true of aristocratic social groups, and so undeniably

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<sup>66</sup> Martin Ruehl, “Politeia 1871 – Nietzsche *contra* Wagner”, in Ingo Gildenhard and Martin Ruehl (eds.), *Out of Arcadia: Classics and Politics in Germany in the Age of Burckhardt, Nietzsche and Wilamowitz* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London, 2003), p.78.

foregrounds this, I contend that he holds it to be possible for *all relations of approximate equals*.

### 2.3.1. BURCKHARDT

For Jacob Burckhardt, the ancient Greek agon was driven by the aristocratic ideal of *kalokagathia*, “der Einheit von Adel, Reichtum und Trefflichkeit”.<sup>67</sup> According to his account, the agon initially emerges as a cultural practice of the noble class. The freedom to engage in the ostensibly useless practice of athletic and equestrian contest was founded on the surplus labour produced by the *banausoi*. These were the members of the working-classes, who performed almost all the manual labour in the ancient Greek polis.<sup>68</sup> Hence, initially at least, the practice of the agon emerged by virtue of the socio-economic conditions of aristocracy. As such, Burckhardt does not think that agonal culture was possible within tyrannous societies (such a Sparta), which tend to be organised around purely utilitarian goals, and therefore proscribe such apparently extravagant behaviour in favour of work and military training.<sup>69</sup>

Despite this emphasis on aristocracy, Burckhardt understands social inclusivity as a vital precondition of the agon. Thus, he glosses the agon as that which “bei den Griechen *jeder geborene Grieche* mitmachen durfte”, adding that such widespread participation would not have been possible within caste-based societies such as ancient Egypt. In such stratified societies, higher-caste individuals would not have wanted to compete before those belonging to lower social strata; thus, their contests tended to be fought before the king, where what was at stake was his

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<sup>67</sup> Burckhardt (2014), vol.4, p.81.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> See *ibid.*: “Eine Feindin des Agonalen ist bei ihrem utilitarischen Charakter zwar die Tyrannis, und auch Sparta mit seinem kargen Dorismus, wo sich das Agonale auf seine besondere Weise fixiert, steht auf der Seite; denn hier findet sich nicht eine wahre Gesellschaft, sondern ein hart herrschendes Eroberervolk, dessen gymnastisches und sonstiges Tun wesentlich den praktischen Zweck hat, die Herrschaft zu behaupten”.

political favour.<sup>70</sup> Only in ancient Greece, that is, “[n]ur in freien und kleinen Aristokratien konnte dieser *Wille der Auszeichnung unter seinesgleichen* vor gewählten oder sonst objektiv gegebenen Richtern zur Blüte kommen”.<sup>71</sup> However, the aristocracy envisioned by Burckhardt is far from an *exclusively* hereditary nobility. As he points out, there was a great deal of social mobility during this period of Greek history; thus, for example, lower standing Greeks could become aristocrats by simply migrating to the colonies.<sup>72</sup>

Burckhardt then describes how the agonal spirit spread beyond the confines of the aristocratic sphere, becoming a widespread feature of Greek social existence; indeed, “wenn überhaupt viele Griechen zusammenkamen, sich Agone ganz von selbst ergaben”.<sup>73</sup>

So wird nach dem Ausgang des heroischen Königtums alles höhere Leben der Griechen, das äußere wie das geistige, zum Agon. Dieser ist es, welcher die Trefflichkeit (*ἀρετή*) und die Rasse manifestiert, und der Agonalsieg, d.h. der edle Sieg ohne Feindschaft erscheint uns in dieser Zeit als der altertümliche Ausdruck für den friedlichen Sieg einer Individualität. Von dieser Form des Wetteifers (*φιλοτιμία*) kam man auf den verschiedensten Gebieten nicht mehr ab. Sie zeigt sich im Symposion bei den Gesprächen und wechselnden Skolien der Gäste, auf dem Gebiete der Philosophie und der Rechtshandel [...].<sup>74</sup>

In a general sense, then, the agon was a peaceful form of contest, in which opponents sought to demonstrate their excellence at specific tasks. Any free individual could participate in this form of contest. However, note that for Burckhardt, this widespread agon “im ländlichen und bürgerlichen Leben” is “zum vornehmen und idealen Agon *nur* eine Parallele”.<sup>75</sup> Though Burckhardt therefore reserves his highest praise for the noble agon, he nonetheless commends the culturally stimulating effect

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.84; my italics.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.; my italics.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.81: “Emporstrebende Massen läßt man nach den Kolonien abziehen, wo sie dann ihrerseits Aristokraten werden.”

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.87.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp.87-8, my italics.

of this pervasive culture of agonal contest, calling it “das allgemeine Gärungselement, welches jegliches Wollen und Können, sobald die nötige Freiheit da ist, in Fermentation bringt”.<sup>76</sup> Even with respect to the official agonal games (such as were held at Delphi), *de jure*, anyone could participate according to Burckhardt, provided they had enough money to cover their travel, bed and board expenses, and could pay for the necessary religious offerings.<sup>77</sup> However, due to these costs, the *de facto* rule was that the agonal games remained a privilege of wealthy aristocratic families, which excluded women, slaves and the metics.<sup>78</sup>

But what did Burckhardt think was the end sought by those engaging in agonal contest? Above all, he informs us, the goal was that of *excellence*, and every aspect of ancient Greek spiritual and physical life was thus defined by the struggle of individuals to excel their peers. They sought to measure the degree of excellence that they had attained by placing themselves in comparison with others.<sup>79</sup> Whereas in the *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, Burckhardt saw military struggle as the primary means by which a *polis* measures itself against its counterparts (as we saw in Chapter 1), we now find that it is the practice of the agon which is conceived as the principal means of obtaining such measurement, both an individual and collective level.<sup>80</sup> Burckhardt also argues that the goal of the *Wettkampf* was simply being victorious over others – that is, to achieve “der Sieg an sich”, disconnected

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.94.

<sup>78</sup> See *ibid.*, p.94, where Burckhardt speaks of the “Zusammentreffen des Agonalen und der Aristokratie”. On the exclusion of the slaves and metics from the agon, see *ibid.*, p.83: “[...] [A]ls mit der Zeit die völlige Demokratie eintrat, war man noch immer tatsächlich eine Aristokratie und Minderzahl gegenüber von Metöken und Sklaven.” See also *ibid.*, p.105: “Beiläufig mag hier noch erwähnt sein, daß das olympische Fest (wie wohl alle wichtigen Agone) ausschließlich eine Sache von Mannsleuten war, und daß man die Weiber davon drakonisch fernhielt.” Burckhardt does however, note that women were, in some instances, allowed to compete in the agon (*ibid.*, p.140).

<sup>79</sup> See *ibid.*, p.89: “Überall, schon in den engsten Kreisen, stellte sich der Wettstreit ein; die volle Entwicklung des Individuums war davon abhängig, daß man sich unaufhörlich untereinander maß und verglich und zwar durch Übungen, bei denen es auf einen direkten praktischen Nutzen nicht abgesehen war.”

<sup>80</sup> Compare *ch.1*, p.36, fn.48.

from practical goals.<sup>81</sup> It is important to recall that even in the official games, the prizes were in themselves worthless. Hence, Burckhardt is in agreement with Curtius' statement that these prizes, "[d]er Kranz von Blättern, der Laubzweig, die wollene Binde haben ja keinen andern Wert, als daß sie Symbole des Sieges sind".<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, Burckhardt states that immortal glory was the goal; hence, victory at Olympia "gilt als das Höchste auf Erden, indem er [der Sieg] dem Sieger verbürgt, was im Grunde das Ziel jedes Griechen ist, daß er im Leben angestaunt und im Tode hochgepriesen werden muß." Therefore, although Burckhardt acknowledges that contestants often sought victory in the various organised games as a means to obtaining public influence, political power was not a primary motivating factor in his conception of the ideal agon, nor is it implied that the aristocratic agon established relations of command and obedience between the victors and the vanquished.<sup>83</sup> After all one might win such honours by defeating an adversary from another *polis*.

Andreas Kalyvas has argued (following others) that what distinguishes the classical from the archaic age of ancient Greece is the *democratisation* of the agon – that is, "the encounter of the democratic logic of equality with the aristocratic spirit of excellence". To be sure, Burckhardt would at least partially assent to Kalyvas' claim that, within the classical *polis*, "the aristocratic spirit became increasingly detached from its social and material bases, as additional social groups were gradually forming and participating in their own multiple agonistic spheres".<sup>84</sup> In this way, we might label the agon aristocratic, not by dint of the social standing of its participants, but rather on account of the ethos or set of values held by those participants, an ethos which has its roots in the aristocratic classes. However, for

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.99.

<sup>82</sup> Curtius (1864), p.14.

<sup>83</sup> See *ibid.*, p.202. Here Burckhardt laments the fact that, with the coming of the democratic age, "Alle Siege in Olympia usw. garantierten eben nicht mehr den mindesten Einfluß in der Polis, *wonach doch jetzt alle strebten*" (my italics). He thereby implies that political *Einfluß* was the desideratum sought in true agonal contest.

<sup>84</sup> See Kalyvas (2013), pp.15-41, p.24.

Burckhardt, the survival of the agon depends on it *maintaining* these roots in the aristocratic social caste. Indeed, Burckhardt is severely critical of the *over-democratisation* of the agon on account of the fact that he thinks this degrades the practice by extirpating it from its aristocratic ground.

Burckhardt theorises that it was with the emergence of the artistic contest that this process of extirpation really got under way; indeed, this relatively novel type of contest heralded the demise of the ideal agon. The aesthetic agon did not require the purchasing of equipment, or even participation in official games, and thus anyone could participate given the talent. As soon as the agon proliferated beyond the domains of athletics and horseracing, however, it became an entirely public affair. Even shepherds could now participate in singing competitions, for example.<sup>85</sup> In particular, Burckhardt emphasises the way in which artistic contest enflamed the cult of *celebrity* (“*Zelebrität*”), drawing attention away from the victors of the mostly aristocratic physical agons.<sup>86</sup> Unlike Curtius (or Nietzsche for that matter), he gives this form of competition – the “*Musisch-Agonale*” – very little attention, most of which is disparaging, and he shows an unmistakeable preference for the physical, sporting agon (e.g. gymnastics, horse-racing and athletics).

Following the advent of the *Musisch-Agonale*, philosophical dialogues and judicial trials start to take on a markedly contestatory character.<sup>87</sup> For Burckhardt, this ushered in the end of the true agon: as the practice of oral contest became more widespread, the now vocal and contentious democratic polis demanded its leaders subordinate themselves to the whim of the demos. Exacerbating this decline, during the same period, Socrates also worked to undermine the notion of *kalokagathia* in his philosophical agons – namely, by redefining it as a concern with the betterment of *all* individuals and even the human race; thus, he sullied the goal of excellence by

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<sup>85</sup> Burckhardt (2014), vol.4, p.113. Burckhardt also remarks upon the low social standing of many competing artists (ibid., p.128).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.149.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.114.

bifurcating it from its elitist, aristocratic element.<sup>88</sup> On account of both of these occurrences, the goal of personal excellence and predominance fell into serious disrepute and the agon descended into a base oral contest over who could most effectively fawn to the caprices of the public: “ja die ganze Praxis der Demokratie wird mit der Zeit ein *unechter* Agon, wobei die scheußliche Übelrede, die Sykophantie usw. sich in den Vordergrund drängen.”<sup>89</sup>

As popularity came to replace the goal of noble excellence (*Edeltrefflichkeit*), the contest lost its right to be called authentically agonal according to Burckhardt; instead, he calls this type of contest a *pseudo*-agon (“ein *unechter* Agon”). This is the age of demagogues and conceited personalities. Within this new pseudo-agon, the element of *measure* or *restraint* is lost: “Die Macht der Persönlichkeit zeigt sich also jetzt in den großen Beispielen nicht mehr agonal, d.h. im Siege über einen oder einige Ähnliche, sondern absolut”.<sup>90</sup> Modesty no longer found a place in Greek society, and individuals ceased to compete for transitory, agonal victory over those of a similar capacity to themselves. Instead, they began to pursue *absolute* victory – that is, to establish themselves as tyrants. Needless to say, this had injurious repercussions for the old aristocratic agon. Burckhardt sees the case of Alcibiades as symptomatic of the destructive way in which the celebrities produced by the democratic agon eroded the noble sporting agon. Thus, Alcibiades stifled the gymnastic agon due to his scorn for participating with people of lower social standing, and in the equestrian agon, his inordinate wealth gave him such an overwhelming advantage that no one else saw any point in participating.<sup>91</sup> In this way, he tyrannised over the games, and in his effort to obtain a complete victory, he

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.205. “War die Kalokagathie ein Sein gewesen, so tritt nun an ihre Stelle ein Wirken auf andere, nämlich das ‘die Menschen besser machen’ [...] [D]ies wird nunmehr der Maßstab, der an Menschen und Einrichtungen gelegt wird; Sokrates aber, und wer sonst noch so redete, sprach damit ein neues Ideal aus, mochte es mit der Wirklichkeit aussehen, wie es wollte. Und schon hatte man dabei nicht mehr den Edelfreien, sondern den Bürger überhaupt, ja bald den Menschen überhaupt im Auge.”

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.; my italics. See also pp.182ff.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.203.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.204.



effectively brought the aristocratic agon to an end. Recall that Burckhardt maintains that the foundation of Greek superiority was their ability to measure themselves against others, and exercise their “Wille der Auszeichnung”, non-violently, through the practice of the agon.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Burckhardt remarks upon the rarity of inter-Greek war during the agonal age.<sup>93</sup> However, coupled with the arrogance and ambition of the celebrity statesmen (which was inflated by victory in the first Persian War), it is no wonder that Burckhardt thought that with the corrosion of the agon – *qua* means for satisfying the desire for distinction – the seeds of the Peloponnesian war were sown and the fate of the agonal age was sealed.<sup>94</sup>

Burckhardt’s affirmation of the aristocratic nature of the agon is therefore not to be construed as a restriction of the agon to the social strata of the landed, hereditary aristocracy. Rather, he suggests that the *sine qua non* of agonal conflict is the pursuit of the aristocratic value of excellence among one’s equals (“seinesgleichen”). Indeed, Burckhardt praises this inclusive notion of the agon as the actual foundation of Greek predominance – so long as it did not spill into oral, and especially political, contests for celebrity. Nonetheless, he thinks that the value of excellence is ultimately parasitic on the continued dominance of a noble social class, and he praises the sporting agons, which *de facto* excluded non-nobles, as the sustaining well-spring of the wider agonal culture of the Hellenes. Burckhardt’s agon should therefore be conceived as *dependent upon*, but *not limited to*, aristocratic social organisation. In Burckhardt, then, there are two Greek agons – one democratically inclusive agon, which is general to Greek society, and one that is aristocratically exclusive, which is reserved for the nobility – neither of which are directly political in nature. Moreover, Burckhardt conceives of the agon as *possible*

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<sup>92</sup> See *ibid.*, p.89: “die volle Entwicklung des Individuums war davon abhängig, daß man sich unaufhörlich untereinander maß und verglich und zwar durch Übungen, bei denen es auf einen direkten praktischen Nutzen nicht abgesehen war.”

<sup>93</sup> See *ibid.*, p.158: “Das schönste Distinguens der Zeit aber ist die Wenigkeit der Kriege zwischen Hellenen.”

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.258: “Ehrgeiz und Eitelkeit finden nicht mehr ihr Genüge im Proklamieren und Bejubeln von Agonalsiegern; man muß sich nach außen regen, d.h. gegen andere Poleis, andere höchst empfindliche, in letzter Instanz nur durch Zernichtung unschädlich”.

across the entire of society and all its domains, though he certainly does not advocate it within the sphere of the political. I will now argue that Nietzsche makes comparable divisions and limitations in conceptualising the agon, and that these undercut the opposition we find between Hatab and Appel.

### 2.3.2. THE INCLUSIVITY OF NIETZSCHE'S EARLY AGONISM

Among the preparatory *Nachlass* notes for CV 5, we find a fragment that *prima facie* supports a strong aristocratic reading of his agonism: “Der Wettkampf! Und das Aristokratische, Geburtsmäßige, Edle bei den Griechen!” (NL 16[9] 7.396). Here the implication is that the agon is directly associated with hereditary (*geburtsmäßig*) aristocracy. However, I will now argue that in this note, Nietzsche is only referring to the *origins* of the agon, and not to the limits of its social extension. Nietzsche's use of Hesiod's commercial, agrarian and generally banausic conception of the *Wettkampf* in CV 5 indicates that, like Burckhardt, he assents to a socially inclusive model of the agon. Yet Ottmann has claimed that, although Nietzsche cites Hesiod and may think that the agon is *possible* in a wider socially inclusive sense, we should not conclude that he equates agonal conflict with economic competition:

Hesiod läßt für Nietzsche gerade vermissen, was für die aristokratische Verachtung des Banausischen typische war. [...] [Nietzsche's] Ziel war der Ruhm der Stadt, die Bildung, die Kultur. [...] Das Ethos, das Nietzsche sucht, war das von Helden, nicht Arbeitern oder Bürgern.<sup>95</sup>

Certainly, during this period we find numerous texts in which Nietzsche explicitly rebukes the pursuit of material gain (*Geldgewinn*) as a boorish and philistine endeavour, adverse to the improvement of culture.<sup>96</sup> But is Ottmann's heroic

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<sup>95</sup> Ottmann (1999), p.50.

<sup>96</sup> See NL 10[1] 7.346; CV 3 1.774; BA 1 1.667; UB III 5 1.379. See also Ritchie Robertson, “Competition and Democracy in Burckhardt and Nietzsche”, in Herman Siemens and James Pearson (eds.), *Nietzsche on Conflict* (forthcoming, 2017).

interpretation of Nietzsche's agon justified? After all, we have already discerned the sharp distinction Burckhardt draws between the heroic and agonal ages.

In CV 5, Nietzsche does not frame agonal contest as a struggle for *Wohlstand*, which signifies prosperity, health and well-being (*Wohlfahrt* or *Wohlergehen*), but not necessarily fiscal or material wealth.<sup>97</sup> Nietzsche appears to be comfortable, like Burckhardt, representing this struggle for "Wohlstand" as a manifestation of the general impetus to improve and empower oneself, rather than as a base struggle for monetary gain.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, he is at ease ascribing this to the category of conflict he endorses as *Wettkampf* (without even making the qualification, which we find in Burckhardt, that this is only a "Parallel" of the noble *Wettkampf*).<sup>99</sup> As Enrico Müller has observed, CV 5 sets up a contest between the Homeric and the Hesiodic depictions of the pursuit of pre-eminence (*aristeuein*):

Gegenüber dem Elitendiskurs, dem Homer durchgehend verpflichtet bleibt, war Hesiod ausgehend von seiner bäuerlichen Lebenswelt bemüht, ein Gerechtigkeitskonzept als Korrektiv gegen die hybriden Tendenzen des ungezügelten *aristeuein* zu errichten. Seine eigene Lebensperspektive hat es ihm ermöglicht, die Agonalitätsideologie einer bestimmten sozialen Gruppe in den Gedanken einer agonalen Sozialität als solcher zu verwandeln.<sup>100</sup>

So is the agon necessarily limited to "das Aristokratische, Geburtsmäßige, [und] Edle" for Nietzsche? Turning to CV 5 itself, one cannot help but notice that the

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<sup>97</sup> See entry for "Wohlstand", in DWB, vol.30, cols.1181-1184.

<sup>98</sup> CV 5 1.786: "[D]er Nachbar wetteifert mit dem Nachbarn, der zum Wohlstande hinstrebt."

<sup>99</sup> For an example of Nietzsche seemingly endorsing the agon of the *banausoi*, see NL 16[8] 7.396. See also Tracy Strong, *Politics of Transfiguration: Expanded Edition* (California: University of California Press, 1988), p.151: "In Nietzsche's reading, Hesiod retains the agonal principle as the basis of culture, and, in his contest with Homer, manages to establish an agon that is purely human and no longer tied to the immortal gods. By emphasising the human nature of the *agon*, Hesiod opens the contest up to potentially much richer variations." As Müller (2005) has noted, for Strong, Nietzsche's Hesiodic vision is generally opposed to the "aristokratisch kriegerischen Ausprägung des Agongedankens in den Homerischen Epen" (see p.80, fn.215).

<sup>100</sup> Enrico Müller, "Kompetitives Ethos und kulturelle Dynamik. Das Prinzip der Agonalität bei Jacob Burckhardt und Friedrich Nietzsche", in Herman Siemens and James Pearson (eds.), *Nietzsche on Conflict* (forthcoming, 2017).

nominalised adjectives “Aristokratisch” and “Geburtsmäßig” have been suppressed. It is only “edel” that remains. Thus, Nietzsche opens his essay on the *Wettkampf* indicating that he will be scrutinising the human “in seinen höchsten und edelsten Kräften” (CV 5 1.783), then closes the piece describing the *Wettkampf* as the “edelsten hellenischen Grundgedanken” (CV 5 1.792). As has been observed in the *Nietzsche-Wörterbuch* entry for “edel”, although the term is closely bound up with the noble social class, “(hohe) Geburt [ist] keine conditio sine qua non” governing Nietzsche’s use of the adjective. The term is rather used to signify participation in a set of values that are typically *associated* with nobility, such as strength (“Stärke”), measure (“Maß”), and self-determination (“selbst-Beherrschung”). Further evidence for this thesis is that Nietzsche refers to other individuals, not necessarily of aristocratic lineage, as “edel” (e.g. the “heroische Mensch” and the “Mensch der tragischen Gesinnung”). Later, the *Wörterbuch* entry continues, around JGB, Nietzsche shows a preference for the terms “aristokratisch” and “noblesse”, and with this “der ‘höhere Rangklasse’ [...] wird sogar noch starker herausgehoben”.<sup>101</sup> His decision to use the term “edel”, instead of “aristokratisch” or “geburtsmäßig”, strongly implies that he sought to connect the *Wettkampf* to certain values originating in the ancient Greek aristocracy, but without necessarily limiting participation in the *Wettkampf* to the noble social classes.<sup>102</sup>

Further contradicting the idea of caste pedigree as a precondition of participating in agonal relations, is the fact that, echoing Burckhardt, Nietzsche stresses the condition of *equality* between contestants, without any mention of their social standing. Already in ST, he argues that as soon as two “gleichberechtigt Hauptspieler sich gegenüber standen, so erhob sich, einem tief hellenischen Triebe gemäß, der Wettkampf” (1.545). Even in the citation from Hesiod, there is a

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<sup>101</sup> Entry for “edel”, in Paul van Tongeren, Gerd Schank and Herman Siemens (eds.), *Nietzsche-Wörterbuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), p.698. See also entry for “Adel”: “der Adel wird [...] auch durch sein soziale Stelle, wie durch psychologische Züge und Gewohnheiten charakterisiert” (p.42).

<sup>102</sup> See also Müller (2005), p.80 (esp. fn.214), who also looks at how, according to Nietzsche’s account, aristocratic values became detached from the aristocratic social class.

symmetry to the agonal adversaries (“der Töpfer grollt dem Töpfer und der Zimmermann dem Zimmermann, es neidet der Bettler den Bettler und der Sänger den Sänger”); and if we look forward to the representation of Eris in WS 29, this condition of equality is unsurprisingly emphasised: “Wo die Gleichheit wirklich durchgedrungen und dauernd begründet ist, entsteht jener, im Ganzen als unmoralisch geltende Hang, der im Naturzustande kaum begreiflich wäre: der Neid.”

In these texts, perceived equality of ability is a prerequisite of the impulse to agonal contest – namely, because such a perception is necessary to arouse the feeling of envy (as de Tocqueville also famously remarked). The perception of approximate equality acts as a *stimulant*, or fillip to *Wettkampf*. Just like Burckhardt, Nietzsche emphasises how this was also reflected in the institutionally official forms of agon; thus, he states in WS 226 that “der griechische Staat [hatte] den gymnastischen und musischen Wettkampf innerhalb der Gleichen sanctionirt”.

These texts indicate that *Wettkampf* can take place between *any* individuals of roughly equal ability, not merely the equals of the aristocratic social classes. However, as Hannah Arendt has underscored, equality had a far more restricted meaning in antiquity,

[...] and notably in the Greek city states. To belong to the few “equals” (*homoioi*) meant to be permitted to live among one's peers; but the public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aim aristeuein*).<sup>103</sup>

On this reading, it is only a minority of individuals that enjoy the status of “equals” in the Greek *polis*, and who can therefore participate in the struggle for victory and predominance. Perhaps, then, the agonal equality of which Nietzsche speaks is therefore only applicable to the highest strata of Greek society – namely, *citizens*, who are able to participate in the public space of action?

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<sup>103</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), p.41.

In order to demonstrate that Nietzsche does not share Arendt's limited conception of agonal equality, we might look at GGL, where Nietzsche implies that agonal conflict (here referred to as "Wetteifer") is a relation reserved for equals of *any* caste:

Die Griechen verkehren mit ihren Göttern *wie eine niedere Kaste mit einer höheren mächtigeren edleren*, mit der man sich aber von gleicher Abstammung weiß. Man lebt mit ihr zusammen [und] thut alles, um dies Zusammenleben für sich wohlthätig zu gestalten: das allgem. Mittel ist, zu lieben, was jene liebt, zu hassen, was jene haßt, *aber nicht im Wetteifer mit ihr* [...]. (GGL III, KGW II/5, p.519; my italics)

Yet, Nietzsche held that, among themselves, the Gods enjoyed agonal relations, remarking in another note that the Trojan War was "ein Wettspiel der hellenischen Götter" (NL 2[6] 7.46).<sup>104</sup> Moreover, he states elsewhere that although the Greeks saw the Gods as a separate, higher caste ("Kaste"), that did not render the Greeks themselves ignoble; rather "[e]s ist ein Verhältniss, wie von niederem zu höherem Adel" (NL 5[150] 8.81). Having an aristocratic nature was not binary for Nietzsche's Greeks, but a matter of degree. This implies that for Nietzsche belonging to the aristocratic classes is by no means a precondition of engaging in nobly measured, agonal conflict. *Both* humans and the pantheon of gods could agonally struggle *within the bounds of their distinct groups*. All of this would contradict Dombowsky's thesis that for Nietzsche "agonism implies [social] inequality, class struggle and class war".<sup>105</sup>

But this emphasis on caste would appear to distinguish Nietzsche from Burckhardt, since the latter expressly stated that the agon rested on a partial effacement of the boundaries between social strata (excluding slaves, of course). However, as we turn away from the relation of the Greeks to their gods, and towards the specifically human agon, it becomes doubtful whether Nietzsche held equality

<sup>104</sup> However, he also indicates that the gods engaged in destructive relations resembling the evil Eris: "Die Götter in Fehde. Die Titanenkämpfe wissen noch nichts vom Wettkampf" (NL 16[22] 7.402).

<sup>105</sup> Dombowsky (2004), p.45.

of social class to be a prerequisite of individuals entering into *Wettkampf* with one another. Like Burckhardt, he distinguishes the Greeks from the caste-based societies of the “Orientals”; moreover, he viewed the (agonal) educational institutions as concerned with *individuals* as opposed to castes: “Orientalische Völker haben Kasten. Die Institute wie Schulen, *διδασκαλαί*, dienen nicht dem Stande, sondern dem Individuum” (NL 16[26] 7.404). Furthermore, the fact that Nietzsche considers the political tête-à-tête of Themistocles (of low-birth) and Aristides (of aristocratic lineage), to be a *Wettkampf* indicates that he was perfectly at ease considering individuals of different castes in *wettkämpferische* relations (see NL 16[35] 7.406). On the basis of this, it is likely that the kind of equality Nietzsche has in mind is an approximate equality of *ability*, and that his discussion of castes is a metaphor for the different “leagues” of contenders that constitute any domain of competitive practice. Indeed, Nietzsche often describes the agon as taking place between people of the same professional expertise – for example, the “Bettler”, “Sänger”, “Töpfer” and “Zimmermänner” already mentioned above, in addition to which he also explicitly mentions poets and philosophers.<sup>106</sup>

### 2.3.3. THE ARISTOCRATIC VALUES OF NIETZSCHE’S EARLY AGONISM

An overview of Nietzsche’s early conception of agonal contest reveals that it is motivated by the pursuit of three aristocratic values: ascendancy (i.e. excellence – *ἀριστεύειν*), fame (*Ruhm*), and education (*Erziehung* and *Bildung*). We have already seen that the agonal impulse for ascendancy is socially generalizable. In this subsection, I now want to consider the values that might render Nietzsche’s *agon* socially exclusive. I will begin by arguing that the agon is not a struggle for political

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<sup>106</sup> See CV 5 1.788: “Je größer und erhabener aber ein griechischer Mensch ist, um so heller bricht aus ihm die ehrgeizige Flamme heraus, jeden verzehrend, der mit ihm auf gleicher Bahn läuft”.

power – in either an aristocratic or a democratic sense – and so cannot be considered aristocratic insofar as it apportions such power (as both Hatab and Appel both claim, in different ways). However, Nietzsche’s notion of the agon, understood as a struggle for *Ruhm* and *Erziehung*, is nonetheless inextricably tied to stratified, aristocratic social order.

As we saw in the introduction to this chapter, numerous readers aside from Appel and Hatab interpret Nietzsche’s *Wettkampf* as a struggle for political power. There are two ways that we might figure the relation of agonal conflict and political power: first, as both Hatab and Appel imply, as a direct struggle for power within explicitly political fora; and second, as Burckhardt (and Curtius) suggest, as an indirect struggle for political power within the non-political, official agonal games, success in which then brings the victor certain political honours and influence.<sup>107</sup> There is of course some indication that Nietzsche saw direct political contention as an instance of *Wettkampf*; for example, where he describes the “Ringen der politischen Parteien und der Städte mit einander” as an instance of “der Wettkampfgedanke des einzelnen Griechen und des griechischen Staates” (PHG 5 1.825); or in CV 5 itself, he refers to Themistocles’ “langen Wetteifer mit Aristides” and “jener einzig merkwürdigen rein instinktiven Genialität seines politischen Handelns”. Finally, in his early lectures, he further recounts how poets were often motivated by the desire for “der persönl[iche] Vortheil, theils der Ehre, theils des Gewinns, theils zur Durchführung der eignen (politisch.) Pläne” (GGL III, KGW II/5, p.292). Yet, except for these few oblique references to political *Wettkämpfe*, in CV 5 and the early published works, the idea of the agon as a struggle for political power (be this direct or indirect) is notably suppressed. Indeed, even in CV 5, his reference to the political figure of Themistocles is used to illustrate the fact that ancient Greeks (though particularly artists and philosophers) were driven by the

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<sup>107</sup> See Curtius (1864), p.9: “auch der einzelne Staat war eine Palästra bürgerlicher Tüchtigkeit, wo dem Bestbewährten als Preis Macht und Ehre erteilt wurde”.



desire to supplant the existing preeminent figure in their competitive field and thereby inherit his *fame* (i.e. his “Ruhm zu erben” [CV 5 1.788]).

Later in the 1870s, though, Nietzsche breaks his relative silence regarding the political agon, revealing himself to be actively hostile towards such an idea. In WS 226, for example, he censures political contest in no uncertain terms:

Klugheit der Griechen. — Da das Siegen- und Hervorragewollen ein unüberwindlicher Zug der Natur ist, älter und ursprünglicher, als alle Achtung und Freude der Gleichstellung, so hatte der griechische Staat den gymnastischen und musischen Wettkampf innerhalb der Gleichen sanctionirt, also einen Tummelplatz abgegränzt, wo jener Trieb sich entladen konnte, ohne die politische Ordnung in Gefahr zu bringen. Mit dem endlichen Verfall des gymnastischen und musischen Wettkampfes gerieth der griechische Staat in innere Unruhe und Auflösung.

The *Wettkampf* is only promoted as a means of diverting the desire for victory and ascendancy (“Siegen- und Hervorragewollen”) *away* from the political sphere. Though here it is implied that it is the state that encourages this, Nietzsche at other times proposes that the state is actively hostile to the agon.<sup>108</sup> The institutional agon circumscribes a space for the apolitical discharge of the drive for victory and ascendancy. The idea, echoing Burckhardt, is that a political agon jeopardises the state insofar as it so easily descends into unmeasured, violent sedition (*stasis*). Political conflict simply loses the measure necessary for it to be considered agonal.<sup>109</sup> Though Nietzsche suggests that political agonism is conceptually

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<sup>108</sup> See NL 5[179] 8.91: “Die geistige Cultur Griechenlands eine Aberration des ungeheuren politischen Triebes nach ἀριστεύειν. — Die πόλις höchst ablehnend gegen neue Bildung. Trotzdem existirte die Cultur.” See also MA 474, where Nietzsche suggests that “Die griechische Polis war, wie jede organisirende politische Macht, ausschliessend und misstrauisch gegen das Wachsthum der Bildung” since it preferred a statically perfect state.

<sup>109</sup> This idea of the agon as a means of channelling potentially seditious, disgregative energies into culturally productive modes of activity is one that Nietzsche returns to on a number of occasions. See e.g. NL 5[146] 8.79: “Die Weisheit ihrer [die Griechen] Institutionen liegt in dem Mangel einer Scheidung zwischen gut und böse, schwarz und weiss. Die Natur, wie sie sich zeigt, wird nicht weggeleugnet, sondern nur ingeordnet, auf bestimmte Culte und Tage beschränkt. Dies ist die Wurzel aller Freisinnigkeit des Alterthums; man suchte für die Naturkräfte eine mässige Entladung, nicht eine Vernichtung und Verneinung. — Das ganze

*possible*, it is too unstable and high-risk to be profitable for the community. Agonism was a means of sustaining political order and organisation (and, as Nietzsche explains elsewhere in MA, the higher culture grounded upon that political order<sup>110</sup>). The criterion Nietzsche is using to distinguish between good and bad modes of agonism is the extent to which a form of agon promotes a cohesive culture. *Pace* Appel and Hatab, then, this very strongly suggests that Nietzsche's ideal agon is *not* embodied in either democratic or aristocratic struggles for political supremacy.

Mirroring Burckhardt, Nietzsche is therefore disinclined towards political agon of any kind. Hence, we can reject Ottmann's thesis that what distinguishes Nietzsche from Burckhardt is that he "will die agonale Kultur, und er will sie *ohne Abstriche*".<sup>111</sup> Yet, whereas Burckhardt pays special attention to the sporting agon – neglecting (and even maligning) artistic contest – the early Nietzsche is far more interested in the social contribution of the *geistig* agon.<sup>112</sup> (Though this is not to say

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System von neuer Ordnung ist dann der Staat." See also NL 11[186] 9.514-5: "Die griechischen Gesetzgeber haben den agon so gefördert, um den Wettkampfgedanken vom Staate abzulenken und die politische Ruhe zu gewinnen. (Jetzt denkt man an die Concurrenz des Handels) Das Nachdenken über den Staat sollte durch agonale Erhitzung abgelenkt werden — ja turnen und dichten sollte man — dies hatte den Nebenerfolg, die Bürger stark schön und fein zu machen. — Ebenso förderten sie die Knabenliebe, einmal um der Übervölkerung vorzubeugen (welche unruhige verarmte Kreise erzeugt, auch innerhalb des Adels) sodann als Erziehungsmittel zum agon: die Jungen und die Älteren sollten bei einander bleiben, sich nicht trennen und das Interesse der Jungen festhalten — sonst hätte sich der Ehrgeiz der abgesonderten Älteren auf den Staat geworfen, aber mit Knaben konnte man nicht vom Staate sprechen. So benutzte vielleicht Richelieu die Galanterie der Männer, um die ehrgeizigen Triebe abzulenken und andere Gespräche als über den Staat in Curs zu bringen."

<sup>110</sup> For a helpful overview of this, see Ansell-Pearson (1994), pp.90ff.

<sup>111</sup> See Ottmann (1999), p.50.

<sup>112</sup> See e.g. Nietzsche's "Einführung in das Studium der platonischen Dialoge" (KGW II/4, p.122). We also find reference to the *Wettkampf* of ancient Greek painters (see NL 1[19] 7.16.); and Nietzsche takes a special interest in the contest of Homer and Hesiod, who were of course contemporaries (see e.g. NL 1[112] 7.44; NL 3[84] 7.134; NL 6[15] 7.134; NL 16[4] 7.394. See also Nietzsche's early philological analysis of their contest in "Der Florentische Tractat über Homer und Hesiod, ihr Geschlecht und ihren Wettkampf" (KGW II/1, pp.272–337). Likewise, in his lectures on rhetoric, he analyses the way in which the culture of public agonism shaped the formal development of ancient Greek rhetoric in philosophy, poetry, drama and historical tracts (See e.g. "Darstellung der antiken Rhetorik" [KGW II/4, p.434] and "Geschichte der griechischen Beredsamkeit" [KGW II/4, p.393]). Finally, echoing Curtius, Nietzsche describes the way in which the ancient musician

that he consistently celebrates the artistic agon.<sup>113</sup>) In ST, now inverting Burckhardt's position, Nietzsche also argues that it was in fact the political-juridical agon that corrupted the artistic agon (and not the other way round) – namely, by imposing the criteria of rationality onto the artistic domain, which thrives on instinct.<sup>114</sup>

Nietzsche was also interested in how the aesthetic agon was able to generate *value*. But what is of particular relevance is that in his writings on this matter we find the strongest evidence that Nietzsche thought of power or *influence* – i.e. guiding the behaviour of others, particularly one's opponents – as the goal of agonal contest. Yet this power is the power to establish artistic norms over others, rather than instrumental political power, and it manifests itself as a pressure exerted upon others to conform through imitation insofar as “Das Vorbild des Grossen reizt die eitleren Naturen zum äusserlichen Nachmachen” (MA 158). As he phrases it in GGL: “Es gehörte Macht der Persönlichkeit dazu, um solche Neuerungen durchzusetzen; siegte man nicht, so wurde man bestraft; siegte man, so ward das Neue Regel” (KGW II/2, p.405).<sup>115</sup> At some level then, the agon represents a contest of norms, with individuals inventing new styles and striving to institute these as norms (of what counts as a good performance). Viewed from this standpoint, cultural contest is therefore not just a struggle to prevail according to a pre-given measure, but is the further struggle to prevail by means of establishing one's own standard as

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Terpander, by initiating a musical agon, brought about a great flourishing of talent, as people felt themselves enticed by the competition he presented (“Vorlesung über die griechischen Lyriker” [KGW II/2, p.402]).

<sup>113</sup> As Siemens (2015) notes: “For a sharp dose of realism, we can do no better than to turn to his *Geschichte der griechischen Litteratur* [...] lectures, where we read of the prevalence of degeneration in Greek art; of the stifling of talent at the hands of publics utterly incapable of sound aesthetic judgement (GGL III, KGW II/5, pp.322ff.); of the fear of innovation in art and the resistance to it through harsh repressive laws (GGL III, KGW II/5, p.298); and how the agon repressed the emergence of individuals for a long time” (p.452). See also GGL III, KGW II/5, p.290, where Nietzsche argues that the pursuit of public praise could cause the agon to degenerate into mere posturing and pretense.

<sup>114</sup> See ST 1.545.

<sup>115</sup> See Acampora (2013), who also emphasises the ability of the agon to generate values: “He [Nietzsche] relishes the agon because of its potential for what he later describes as the ‘revaluation of values’” (p.25).

a rule.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, Nietzsche states that “[n]ur im Wetteifer lernt man das Gute kennen” (NL 23[132] 8.450).<sup>117</sup>

Needless to say, he does not think that anyone and everyone can participate in such struggle for cultural influence; indeed, his valorisation of the *geistig* agon has an undeniably elitist streak. In his depiction of this higher cultural struggle, he not only emphasises the motivational force of the desire for ascendancy, but, along with Burckhardt, he further accents the force of the desire for glory (*Ruhm*); thus, Nietzsche tells us of the jealous desire with which Plato and the ancient Greek poets sought to overthrow Homer and “an die Stelle des gestürzten Dichters zu treten und dessen Ruhm zu erben” (CV 5 1.789). This is variously expressed as the desire for honour (*Ehre*<sup>118</sup>), praise (*Lob*) or posthumous fame (*Nachruhm*):

Der Dichter überwindet den Kampf um's Dasein, indem er ihn zu einem freien Wettkampfe idealisirt. Hier ist das Dasein, um das noch gekämpft wird, das Dasein im Lobe, im Nachruhm.  
(NL 16[15] 7.397)

This note gestures towards the fact that, for Nietzsche, the quest for *Ruhm* is incompatible with the struggle for existence (the “Kampf um's Dasein”), and furthermore, that his conception of the agon might also be incompatible with the banausic struggle to achieve predominance through the accumulation of

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<sup>116</sup> See MA 170. See also NL 16[21]7.401, where Nietzsche asks, “Was ist das aesthetische Urtheil? Das Richterthum in der Tragödie. / Der Wettkampf unter Künstlern setzt das rechte Publikum voraus. Fehlt dies Publikum, dann ist er im Exil (Philoktet).” See also NL 16[6] 7.395: “Der Künstler und der Nichtkünstler. Was ist Kunsturtheil? Dies das allgemeine Problem. / Der Dichter nur möglich unter einem Publikum von Dichtern. [...] / Die Entscheidung im ἀγών ist nur das Geständniß: der und der macht uns mehr zum Dichter: dem folgen wir, da schaffen wir die Bilder schneller. Also ein künstlerisches Urtheil, aus einer Erregung der künstlerischen Fähigkeit gewonnen. Nicht aus Begriffen.” On the topic of aesthetic judgement in Nietzsche, see Herman Siemens, “Reassessing Radical Democratic Theory in Light of Nietzsche’s Ontology of Conflict”, in Keith Ansell Pearson (ed.), *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp.83-106 (p.86).

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Paul van Tongeren, “Nietzsche’s Greek Measure”, *JNS*, 24 (2002), 5-24 (p.7).

<sup>118</sup> See MA 170 and 474.

“Besitzthum”, “Reichthum” and “Wohlstand”.<sup>119</sup> And to be sure, we find ample evidence to substantiate the idea that Nietzsche held the concern with “Ruhm” to be limited to an elite, non-banausic minority. In CV 1, for example, he states that “Ruhm” “ist doch an die seltensten Menschen, als Begierde, angeknüpft und wiederum an die seltensten Momente derselben.” Indeed, the struggle for immortal fame is reserved for a superior minority of individuals, whom “Das Gewöhnliche, das Kleine, das Gemein” only obstruct. The majority, according to Nietzsche, merely “wollen leben, etwas leben — um jeden Preis. Wer möchte unter ihnen jenen schwierigen Fackelwettbewerb vermuthen, durch den das Große allein weiterlebt?” (CV 1 1.756).

Evidently, the banausic struggle to excel one’s neighbour by accumulating more material wealth than them does not qualify as an instance of this higher form of *Wettkampf*. However, according to Nietzsche, it is not artists and poets that are the exemplary seekers of glory; rather “[d]ie verwegensten Ritter unter diesen Ruhmsüchtigen, die daran glauben ihr Wappen an einem Sternbild hängend zu finden, muß man bei den Philosophen suchen” (CV 1 1.757).<sup>120</sup> In this quote, he associates *Ruhm* with a chivalrous vision of a noble minority of knightly (*ritterlich*) individuals engaged in a quest for fame and glory; yet at the same time, he also illuminates how the pursuit of *Ruhm* has now been transferred into the realm of the *cultural* elite (i.e. of philosophers).

What further distinguishes the Nietzschean agon from the banausic contest for material wealth is Nietzsche’s association of the *Wettkampf* with the value of cultivation (*Erziehung*). This value is defined by the pursuit of excellence understood not simply as “being first” but as the cultivation of one’s highest capacities (what Nietzsche elsewhere calls “antike Tugend” and what Burckhardt

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<sup>119</sup> Nietzsche also describes the “Ruhm und Glück” enjoyed by victorious contestants, which was in some cases so completely overwhelming that they were led to commit heinous or sacrilegious acts (CV 5 1.791).

<sup>120</sup> See also NL 19[170] 7.471: “Die Philosophen sind die vornehmste Klasse der Großen des Geistes. Sie haben kein Publikum, sie brauchen den Ruhm.”

refers to as *Edeltrefflichkeit* or *arête*<sup>121</sup>). He highlights how the ancient Greek agon was interwoven with their pursuit of cultivation, observing how the agonal Greeks demanded that “Jede Begabung muß sich kämpfend entfalten” (CV 5 1.789), and again, how it was ambitious envy of the excellence or virtue (“Tugend”) of others that spurred individuals to cultivate themselves (“an jeder großen Tugend entzündet sich eine neue Größe” [CV 5 1.788]).<sup>122</sup> But it was not just students that unfolded their virtuosity in a field of contest – Nietzsche tells us that their teachers were correspondingly in contention with one another.<sup>123</sup> He therefore envisions the agon as inseparable from the Hellenic valuation of cultivation over and against the values of Arcadian happiness or wealth.<sup>124</sup> Unfortunately, however, says Nietzsche, the Socratic-Christian inheritance of modernity has led us to denigrate and devalue ambition, struggle and genuine cultivation in favour of modesty, peace and bourgeois contentment. Indeed, modern educators “[haben] vor Nichts eine so große Scheu [...] als vor der Entfesselung des sogenannten Ehrgeizes”, and “der moderne Mensch fürchtet nichts so sehr an einem Künstler als die persönliche Kampfbegier” (CV 5 1.789-90).

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<sup>121</sup> See M 195 and UB III 1.345.

<sup>122</sup> In enumerating some of the empowering attributes of the Greeks, Nietzsche also underscores both good education (“gute Erziehung”) and “Eifersucht im ἀριστεύειν” – that is, the covetous desire to be the best (the fundamental value driving the agon) (NL 5[40] 8.51).

<sup>123</sup> See CV 5 1.790: “Wie aber die zu erziehenden Jünglinge mit einander wettkämpfend erzogen wurden, so waren wiederum ihre Erzieher unter sich im Wetteifer”. On the connection of *Wettkampf* and *Erziehung*, see also NL 8[77] 7.251; NL 8[80] 7.252; NL 16[4] 7.394: “Die Jesuiten — ihre antike Erziehung — der Ehrgeiz und der Wettkampf in der Erziehung.”; NL 16[14] 7.397: “Die antiken Mittel der Erziehung: der Wettkampf und die Liebe.”

<sup>124</sup> See e.g. NL 6[31] 8.110, where Nietzsche, quoting Schopenhauer states: “[V]orzügliche und edle Menschen werden jener Erziehung des Schicksals bald inne und fügen sich bildsam und dankbar in dieselbe; sie sehn ein, dass in der Welt wohl Belehrung, aber nicht Glück zu finden sei [...]’ — Parerga I 439. Damit vergleiche man die Socratiker und die Jagd nach Glück!” Compare, however, NL 4[301] 9.174 and M 199, where Nietzsche suggests that the Greeks sought to become tyrants in the belief that this constituted the highest form of happiness (though it is of course most likely that Nietzsche is working with different conceptions of happiness across these texts).

In an analogous manner, Nietzsche avers that proper cultivation (*Bildung*) is incompatible with the modern liberal-capitalistic state, which is predominantly geared towards promoting the economic strength of the nation and propagating the (bourgeois) happiness of its citizens.<sup>125</sup> Given these beliefs, it is understandable why Nietzsche would suggest in MA 439 that artistic development depends on the state being divided into a leisure class, on the one hand, and a working- or even slave-class, on the other:

Cultur und Kaste. — Eine höhere Cultur kann allein dort entstehen, wo es zwei unterschiedene Kasten der Gesellschaft giebt: die der Arbeitenden und die der Müssigen, zu wahrer Musse Befähigten; oder mit stärkerem Ausdruck: die Kaste der Zwangs-Arbeit und die Kaste der Frei-Arbeit. Der Gesichtspunct der Vertheilung des Glücks ist nicht wesentlich, wenn es sich um die Erzeugung einer höheren Cultur handelt [...].<sup>126</sup>

Converging with Burckhardt, Nietzsche makes the practical observation that pursuing non-utilitarian values (what he refers to in CV 3 as a “neue Welt des Bedürfnisses”) such as *Bildung* (or *Erziehung* or *Ruhm*, for that matter), upon which the higher cultural agon depends, is enabled by, *yet also foreclosed to*, the banausic

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<sup>125</sup> See UB III 6 1.388: “Jede Bildung ist hier verhasst, die einsam macht, die über Geld und Erwerb hinaus Ziele steckt, die viel Zeit verbraucht; man pflegt wohl solche ernstere Arten der Bildung als ‘feineren Egoismus’, als ‘unsittlichen Bildungs-Epikureismus’ zu verunglimpfen. [...] Dem Menschen wird nur soviel Kultur gestattet, als im Interesse des allgemeinen Erwerbs und des Weltverkehrs ist, aber soviel wird auch von ihm gefordert. Kurz: ‘der Mensch hat einen nothwendigen Anspruch auf Erdenglück, darum ist die Bildung nothwendig, aber auch nur darum!’” See also BA IV 1.715: “Jede Erziehung aber, welche an das Ende ihrer Laufbahn ein Amt oder einen Brodgewinn in Aussicht stellt, ist keine Erziehung zur Bildung, wie wir sie verstehen, sondern nur eine Anweisung, auf welchem Wege man im Kampf um das Dasein sein Subjekt rette und schütze.”

<sup>126</sup> Even in this aphorism, however, Nietzsche accepts class mobility as a fact of social existence.

working-classes.<sup>127</sup> As Aristotle observed long before Nietzsche or Burckhardt, the pursuit of excellence requires leisure.<sup>128</sup>

So, does Nietzsche think that the values that he extols are necessarily confined to the landed aristocracy (as Nietzsche frames Theogonis as having argued when he made “good” and “noble” synonyms)?<sup>129</sup> Generally speaking, it has already been established that Nietzsche, like Burckhardt before him, thinks that agonal conflict can arise between any equal parties, so long as they seek to win by excelling rather than harming their adversaries. Thus, though Nietzsche maintains that the value of excellence originated in the nobility, it is not inextricably bound to this group or domain. Nonetheless, again recalling Burckhardt’s position, Nietzsche also identifies a higher agon that is intimately bound-up with the values of education and *Ruhm*, both of which are portrayed as incompatible with the struggle for material wealth.<sup>130</sup> The pursuit of these higher cultural values does therefore seem to be parasitic on social stratification and the division of labour. For Nietzsche, although the agon that takes place as individuals vie to achieve these values is only ever seriously pursued by a minority, this minority is not necessarily coextensive with the

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<sup>127</sup> See also CV 3 1.767: “Die Bildung, die vornehmlich wahrhaftes Kunstbedürfnis ist, ruht auf einem erschrecklichen Grunde [...]. Damit es einen breiten tiefen und ergiebigen Erdboden für eine Kunstentwicklung gebe, muß die ungeheure Mehrzahl im Dienste einer Minderzahl, über das Maaß ihrer individuellen Bedürftigkeit hinaus, der Lebensnoth sklavisch unterworfen sein. Auf ihre Unkosten, durch ihre Mehrarbeit soll jene bevorzugte Klasse dem Existenzkampfe entrückt werden, um nun eine neue Welt des Bedürfnisses zu erzeugen und zu befriedigen”.

<sup>128</sup> See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278a: “[U]nder some governments the mechanic and the labourer will be citizens, but not in others, as, for example, in so-called aristocracies, if there are any, in which honours are given according to excellence and merit; for no man can practise excellence who is living the life of a mechanic or labourer.”

<sup>129</sup> For an excellent overview of the relation of Nietzsche’s thoughts on the agon and ancient Greek aristocracy, see Anthony K. Jensen, “Anti-Politicality and Agon in Nietzsche’s Philology”, in Herman Siemens and Vasti Roodt (eds.), *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche’s Legacy for Political Thought* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), pp.319-46. Jensen questions the idea that Nietzsche was a committed aristocrat by illuminating his rejection of Theogonis’ attempts to segregate and purify an aristocratic race. He also argues that, for Nietzsche, “agon is not the exclusive right of either the old landed elite or the newly rich, and thus not the exclusive arena for either group’s values” (p.328).

<sup>130</sup> However, see MA 459, where Nietzsche describes how Diogenes was for a time a slave. We might also think of Epictetus as falling within this category.



*ruling* minority – i.e. the aristocracy; rather, participation is open to any individuals with the financial means and freedom to commit themselves to the contest for glory. We might therefore distance, though not fully dissociate, Nietzsche’s cultural aristocratism from an aristocratic political agenda.<sup>131</sup>

Despite the many differences between Nietzsche and Burckhardt (in their attitudes towards artistic contest, for example), both offer a two-tier model of the agon, with one tier being characterised by social inclusivity, while the other is defined by its social exclusivity. However, this does not entail that *both* Hatab and Appel are therefore correct. On the contrary, since *neither* the elitist nor the generalizable agon are conceived as political struggles to establish instrumental power over one’s adversaries, we can reject both Hatab’s and Appel’s interpretations. The question we now need to ask is how Nietzsche’s position might have evolved as he became increasingly convinced that instrumental power is the true stake in all conflictual relations.

#### 2.3.4. THE INCLUSIVITY OF NIETZSCHE’S LATER AGONISM

From 1881 onwards, Nietzsche almost completely drops *Wettkampf* and *agon* from his philosophical vocabulary. This should come as no surprise given the fact that two of the key features of Nietzsche’s earlier notion of the agon are problematized by the emergence of his conception of the world as will to power. According to Nietzsche, will to power organisations *always* act as a will to command or dominate

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<sup>131</sup> This gainsays Hatab’s argument (2002, p.141) that, when reading Nietzsche, “[w]e need a distinction between: 1) the aristocracy-democracy encounter in the *cultural* sphere pertaining to matters of creativity and normalcy, excellence and mediocrity; and 2) the aristocracy-democracy encounter in the *political* sphere pertaining to the formation of institutions, actual political practices, the justification of coercion, and the extent of sovereignty.” Hatab himself “maintain[s] that Nietzsche’s aristocratism is defensible regarding the first encounter but not so regarding the second encounter.”

(*Herrschen*) understood as a will to *direct* weaker wills.<sup>132</sup> This conception of life as will to power seems to undermine the idea of the agon as a non-exploitative relation of approximate equals – how is such a relation possible if the world is invariably characterised by the will to power?<sup>133</sup>

Neither Nietzsche's destructive nor his aristocratic readers raise this issue, however, viewing the agon as perfectly compatible, and even coextensive with the later Nietzsche's more aggressive formulations of the will to power.<sup>134</sup> Both Dombowsky and Appel take it as a given that in light of his desire to foster a form of human life that affirms the world as will to power, Nietzsche promotes a highly stratified type of society. Dombowsky interprets Nietzsche's later conception of the agon as the violent struggle of an elite minority to oppress a subordinate slave-class.<sup>135</sup> Appel, drawing mostly on JGB 265, makes the slightly less extreme claim that the Nietzschean agon takes place *among* this minority as they non-violently struggle for command over one another, although in order to enjoy this agonal space, says Appel, this elite must engage in unmeasured conflict towards a slave-class.<sup>136</sup> We have already vitiated Dombowsky's position in Section 1, where it was shown

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<sup>132</sup> NL 35[15] 11.514: "der Wille zur Macht sich spezialisierend als Wille zur Nahrung, nach Eigenthum, nach Werkzeugen, nach Dienern — Gehorchen und Herrschen: der Leib. — der stärkere Wille dirigirt den schwächeren."

<sup>133</sup> NL 2[131] 12.132: "Der Wille zur Macht. [...] Die Rangordnung als Machtordnung: Krieg und Gefahr die Voraussetzung, daß ein Rang seine Bedingungen festhält. Das grandiose Vorbild: der Mensch in der Natur, das Schwächste Klügste Wesen sich zum Herrn machend, die dümmere Gewalten sich unterjochend" (quoted in Dombowsky [2004], p.93). See also e.g. NL 25[430] 11.126: "Die Rangordnung hat sich festgestellt durch den Sieg des Stärkeren und die Unentbehrlichkeit des Schwächeren für den Stärkeren und des Stärkeren für den Schwächeren — da entstehen getrennte Funktionen: denn Gehorchen ist ebenso eine Selbst-Erhaltungs-Funktion als, für das stärkere Wesen, Befehlen." Z II Ueberwindung 4.147: "Alles Lebendige ist ein Gehorchendes".

<sup>134</sup> Dombowsky has simply argued that we reduce Nietzsche's conception of agonal conflict to the aggressive notion of the will to power: "Nietzschean agonism is thought along with will to power, which says [...] that life operates on the basis of exploitation, and with order of rank, which says that an order of rank is an order of power which presupposes 'war and danger'" (p.93).

<sup>135</sup> See Dombowsky (2004), p.91: "The full benefit of freedom, in the Nietzschean sense, where freedom is the privilege of the few and not considered an inalienable right, can be appreciated only under agonal conditions where order of rank, war and inequality prevail."

<sup>136</sup> See Appel (1999), pp.140-7.

that the Nietzschean agon consistently signifies a non-destructive mode of conflict. It is therefore with Appel's claim that we should now concern ourselves.

The most extreme counter-position to Appel is that of Hatab, who takes a diametrically opposed line of interpretation. He attempts to read the will to power in terms of Nietzsche's earlier conception of the agon, which is to say that he reads the will to power as an inherently measured form of conflict. Indeed, Hatab has proposed that the will to power is intrinsically agonal.<sup>137</sup> In its most simple formulation, his position runs as follows:

[T]he will to power expresses an agonistic force-field, wherein any achievement or production of meaning is constituted by an overcoming of some opposing force. Consequently, my Other is always implicated in my nature; the annulment of my Other would be the annulment of myself.<sup>138</sup>

Hatab uses this notion of the will to power – understood as a theory asserting that the existence of all power organisations depends on the resistance offered by opposed organisations – to argue that affirming the world as will to power at the socio-political level “entails giving all beliefs a hearing” – that is, to affirm and invite the potential resistance that these beliefs might offer us.<sup>139</sup>

In this subsection, I demonstrate that Nietzsche's later agonism cannot be characterised in either of these ways. Both, in their own fashion, unjustifiably confound the will to power and Nietzsche's early conception of the agon. This then translates into either a socially inclusive or exclusive vision of Nietzsche's later will

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<sup>137</sup> See Hatab (2005), p.17: “The Greek *agōn* is a historical source of what Nietzsche later generalized into the dynamic, reciprocal structure of will to power. And it is important to recognize that such a structure undermines the idea that power could or should run unchecked, either in the sense of sheer domination or chaotic indeterminacy. Will to power implies a certain measure of oppositional limits, even though such a measure could not imply an overarching order or a stable principle of balance.”

<sup>138</sup> Hatab (1995) p.68. See also Hatab (2005) p.16: “Since power can only involve resistance, then one's power to overcome is essentially related to a counterpower; if resistance were eliminated, if one's counterpower were destroyed or even neutralized by sheer domination, one's power would evaporate, it would no longer be power. Power is overcoming something, not annihilating it ...”

<sup>139</sup> Hatab (1995) p.70.

to power-based-agonism. I will contend that though we do indeed now see the later Nietzsche interpreting agonally measured conflict as a struggle for power, this is a mode of struggle that can take place between individuals of any social standing so long as they are approximately equal in power. Notwithstanding, we witness Nietzsche *emphatically* (though not exclusively) endorsing the agon that takes place within the elite social sphere of the nobility.

In 1881, while his conception of the will to power was still very much inchoate, Nietzsche develops an abstract notion of *Wettstreit*, which is perhaps most lucidly articulated in NL 11[134] 9.491.<sup>140</sup> In this text from 1881, Nietzsche's not yet fully formulated conception of life as will to power – i.e. as a push for the incorporation and exploitation of weaker entities – is undeniably discernible; yet, within the depicted dynamic, there also seems to be a clear space for agonal relations. Thus, discussing “die Eigenschaften des niedersten belebten Wesens”, he states the following:

Ein solches Wesen assimilirt sich das Nächste, verwandelt es in sein Eigenthum (Eigenthum ist zuerst Nahrung und Aufspeicherung von Nahrung), es sucht möglichst viel sich einzuverleiben, nicht nur den Verlust zu compensiren — es ist habsüchtig. So wächst es allein und endlich wird es so reproduktiv — es theilt sich in 2 Wesen. Dem unbegrenzten Aneignungstriebe folgt Wachsthum und Generation. — Dieser Trieb bringt es in die Ausnützung des Schwächeren, und in Wettstreit mit ähnlich Starken, er kämpft d.h. er haßt, fürchtet, verstellt sich. [...] (NL 11[134] 9.491<sup>141</sup>).

Nietzsche describes how plastidules greedily strive for nutrition and growth through the assimilation and exploitation of weaker entities (the “Ausnützung des Schwächeren”). However, this process of exploitative assimilation is distinctly unmeasured insofar as consumed entities are catabolised and then anabolised into

<sup>140</sup> See KTO, p.107. See also DWB on “Wettkampf” as a synonym of “Wettstreit” (vol.29, col.780).

<sup>141</sup> Compare NL 7[3] 12.257: “Was gemeinsam ist: die herrschenden Triebe wollen auch als höchste Werth-Instanzen überhaupt, ja als schöpferische und regierende Gewalten betrachtet werden. Es versteht sich, daß diese Triebe sich gegenseitig entweder anfeinden oder unterwerfen (synthetisch auch wohl binden) oder in der Herrschaft wechseln.”

new, utilisable compounds. This is the activity of the “*unbegrenzten Aneignungstrieb*”. Nonetheless, Nietzsche indicates that situations of *Begrenzung* do arise in this environment of rapacious contention. These are situations of approximate equality, where the *Aneignungstrieb* cannot be immediately satisfied through the incorporation of the other. In such cases of struggle “mit ähnlich Starken”, a *Wettstreit* ensues. With respect to our current concerns, one of the most pertinent features of this *Wettstreit* is that it occurs under (it would seem) *any* condition of approximate equality or *Gleichgewicht*. However, during this period, Nietzsche also stresses that the conditions of such non-exploitative interrelation are extremely rare: “Ein labiles Gleichgewicht kommt in der Natur so wenig vor, wie zwei congruente Dreiecke” (NL 11[190] 9.516).<sup>142</sup> Let us now examine how these ideas come into play later, when he returns to the ancient Greek conception of the agon, having more comprehensively formulated his notion of the world as will to power.

#### 2.3.4.1. NIETZSCHE’S APPROPRIATION OF SCHMIDT (1883)

In Nietzsche’s writings from 1883, we bear witness to a resurgence of interest in the *Wettkampf* as he turns his gaze back towards the Greek conception of the agon. This shift is at least partially attributable to his reading of Schmidt’s *Die Ethik der alten Griechen* in the same year. In Schmidt’s philological treatment of the agon, the Greek practice is first and foremost conceived as a struggle for *Geltung* and *Ehre* as individuals strove to validate their high self-estimations.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, in the second

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<sup>142</sup> See also NL 11[231] 9.530.

<sup>143</sup> Schmidt (1882), vol.1, pp.193-4: “So waren alle ernsten wie alle heitern Seiten des Lebens von einer Neigung durchzogen, welche unverständlich sein würde, wenn sie nicht mit einer Grundauffassung des Daseins im engsten Zusammenhange stände, nach welcher der Mann bestimmt ist sich hervorzuthun und seines Gleichen zu übertreffen. Aus ihr entspringt die Beliertheit einer bildlichen Ausdrucksweise, welche jede auf ein höheres Ziel gerichtete Anstrengung des Menschen als einen Agon, d. h. als einem um eines Preises willen unternommenen Wettkampf, bezeichnet.”

volume of *Die Ethik der alten Griechen*, Schmidt informs us of how the ancient Greeks rebuked a life of isolationism and solitude; the reason for this being that the duty to “know oneself” – and avoid falling into a state of vanity or undue modesty – could only be fulfilled by testing oneself against others.<sup>144</sup> Accordingly, the desire for self-validation and honour (*Ehrliebe* or *φιλότιμο*) was praised by the Greeks so long as it did not exceed certain ethical boundaries by descending into wild self-pursuit.<sup>145</sup>

Schmidt also foregrounds how a strong understanding of honour also had an important limiting effect on this tendency for self-pursuit, namely, insofar as it discouraged individuals from harming the honour of others. This is what Schmidt variously calls *Aidos*, *Ehrfurcht* and *Ehrgefühl* (which we might translate as “reverence”): “das Streben Anderen, denen aus irgend einem Grunde Ehrerbietung gezollt wird, nicht wehe zu thun”.<sup>146</sup> Schmidt distinguishes this noble affect of reverence from what the Greeks held to be the baser, though likewise limiting, affect of *Aischyne* (“shame” or “Schamgefühl”), “die Scheu sich selbst Tadel zuzuziehen”. Schmidt further discriminates between the two affects insofar as *Aidos* “wurzelt in der Reflexion auf das Fremde”, whereas *Aischyne* is rooted in reflection “auf das eigene Gefühl”, which is to say in *self*-concern.<sup>147</sup>

In Schmidt’s conceptions of the agon and *Aidos*, we uncover a tension between social inclusivity and exclusivity that recalls Burckhardt and the early Nietzsche. On the one hand, Schmidt claims that the desire to prove oneself in *Wettkampf* permeated all social strata – that is, it “[durchdrang] das Bewusstsein

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., vol.2, pp.394-8.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., vol.2, p.394.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p.168. However, Schmidt, like Burckhardt, Curtius, and Nietzsche in his early lectures, thought that success in the agon translated into political favours. Indeed, Schmidt quotes Thucydides’ Pericles as promising that the state would pay for the education of Miltiades’ children, “denn bei denen, bei welchen die grössten Preise für die Tugend ausgesetzt sind, sind auch die besten Männer im Staat thätig” (see *ibid.*, vol.1, p.195). Schmidt also gives further evidence for the claim that individuals fought for posthumous fame (*Ruhm*) (see *ibid.*, vol.1, p.197).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p.168.

aller Schichten des griechischen Volkes”.<sup>148</sup> His depiction of *Aidos*, however, is more equivocal. Unlike the feeling of shame, which is an affect that only arises in relation to figures of authority, Schmidt states that for the Greeks, *Aidos* “kann sich auch auf Gleichstehende richten, ja sie wendet sich gern auf Hülflöse und Unglückliche [...] und kann so selbst gleichbedeutend mit Mitleid werden”.<sup>149</sup> The feeling of not wishing to harm the honour of another therefore arises, according to Schmidt, in relation not only to one’s superiors, but also in relation to one’s equals, and even subordinates. On the other hand, however, it is an exclusive affect, of which some individuals are not worthy: as he points out, in the *Odyssey*, *Aidos* is pronounced “nicht angemessen” for beggars.<sup>150</sup> Thus, the fact that it is considered appropriate to feel *Aidos* towards the “Hülflöse und Unglückliche” does not entail that it is proper to feel it towards those beyond one’s own caste. So far, I have sketched Schmidt’s thoughts on the agon, *Aidos* and *Aischyne*, but we should now examine how Nietzsche, in his appropriation of Schmidt, uniquely combines these ideas. As we will now see, tracking the way Nietzsche calls upon these philological theses is illuminating with respect to our current goal of ascertaining the social inclusivity of Nietzsche’s later agonism.

Under the unmistakeable influence of Schmidt, in 1883 Nietzsche tries to appropriate features of the Greek *Wettkampf* for his project of cultivating a minority of superior, ruling *Übermenschen*.<sup>151</sup> In a preparatory note for Book 3 of *Z*, we can identify the end to which Nietzsche is going to enlist Schmidt’s notion of the agon:

[D]er Übergang vom Freigeist und Einsiedler zum Herrschen-Müssen: das Schenken verwandelt sich — aus dem Geben entstand der Wille,

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p.190. Schmidt cites *Work and Days* and the *Iliad* to substantiate his claim that *Wettkampf* was present among both aristocratic and working class social strata.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p.169.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p.177.

<sup>151</sup> NL 35[72] 11.541: “Es muß viele Übermenschen geben: alle Güte entwickelt sich nur unter seines Gleichen. Ein Gott wäre immer ein Teufel! Eine herrschende Rasse. Zu ‘die Herrn der Erde.’” See also NL 35[73] 11.541: “Die Rangordnung durchgeführt in einem Systeme der Erdregierung: die Herrn der Erde zuletzt, eine neue herrschende Kaste.” *Z* III Tafeln 21 4.263: “[D]as Beste soll herrschen, das Beste will auch herrschen! Und wo die Lehre anders lautet, da fehlt es am Besten”.

Zwang-zum-Nehmen zu üben. Die Tyrannei des Künstlers zuerst als Selbst-Bezwungung und -Verhärtung! (NL 16[51] 10.516)

Nietzsche is clearly seeking to overcome the Epicurean isolationism that dominates the free-spirit trilogy.<sup>152</sup> His *Übermensch* cannot simply close themselves off from society (as they might like). The future of humanity depends on their returning from hermitude and taking a commanding role in society. Indeed, dissatisfied with the isolationist tendencies of Zarathustra, he explicitly latches onto Schmidt's conception of the agon, which framed the practice as both a locus of public action, and a means of self-validation. Nietzsche therefore calls the minority of isolated *Freigeister* to convene for the sake of engaging in a *Wettkampf*; however, Nietzsche's ideal agon now has a markedly political dimension insofar as it is figured as a struggle of aspiring rulers for socio-political power – i.e. to command (“herrschen”) the people (“Volk”):

Gerade jene zum Wettkampfe um Macht aufrufen, welche sich gerne verstecken und für sich leben möchten — auch die Weisen, Frommen, Stillen im Lande! Hohn über ihre genießende Einsamkeit!

Alle schöpferischen Naturen ringen um Einfluß, auch wenn sie allein leben — ‘Nachruhm’ ist nur ein falscher Ausdruck für das, was sie wollen.

Die ungeheure Aufgabe des Herrschenden, der sich selber erzieht — die Art Menschen und Volk, über welche er herrschen will, muß in ihm vorgebildet sein: da muß er erst Herr geworden sein! (NL 16[86] 10.529)<sup>153</sup>

<sup>152</sup> See e.g. FW 388: “Lebe im Verborgenen, damit du dir leben kannst! Lebe unwissend über Das, was deinem Zeitalter das Wichtigste dünkt! Lege zwischen dich und heute wenigstens die Haut von drei Jahrhunderten! Und das Geschrei von heute, der Lärm der Kriege und Revolutionen, soll dir ein Gemurmel sein!”

<sup>153</sup> See also NL 15[21] 10.485: “Problem! / Zum agon aufrufen! gerade die, welche sich gern verstecken möchten, die Stillen, Frommen, — Bewerbung um Herrschaft! / Einsamkeit nur Mittel der Erziehung! / gegen alle bloß Genießenden!” See also NL 8[15] 10.339: “Das agonale Gefühl, welches vor einem Publikum siegen will und diesem Publikum verständlich sein muß.” For an early example of Nietzsche emphasising this public dimension of the agon, see also “Darstellung der antiken Rhetorik” (KGW II/4, p.434): “[A]lles öffentliche Auftreten des Individuums ist ein Wettkampf”.



Needless to say, this appeal for a contemporary *Wettkampf* is not socially inclusive in nature; rather, it is specifically directed towards the scattering of higher individuals caged in self-imposed isolation, whom Nietzsche wishes to draw into the public domain. However, whereas in Schmidt the emphasis is still massively on *Ehre* and *Ruhm*, Nietzsche conceives of this public struggle as one fought over *power* (“Macht”). Indeed, Nietzsche now construes the quest for *Ruhm* as a masquerade for the pursuit of *influence* (“Einfluß”) over others. Whereas *Einfluß* was posited as a motivating goal of agonal contest in an exclusively aesthetic sense in his early agonism, the final three lines of the above note unmistakably evoke the idea of a struggle for influence *qua political* domination. At the very least, it mixes the political and the aesthetical in a manner reminiscent of his portrayal of “Künstler-Tyrannen” (NL 16[51] 10.516; NL 2[57] 12.87). The supposition informing this plan for Z is that a society built upon the principle of contest will be a proficient, noble one akin to that of the ancient Greeks.<sup>154</sup>

In these texts, we therefore find that Nietzsche’s endorsement of the agon is restricted to a minority of individuals whom he perceives as potentially worthy of ruling, and whom he seeks to bring into society and subject to selective pressure. However, in other texts we discover Nietzsche advocating a far more inclusive form of *Wettkampf* – for example, in a key *Nachlass* fragment in which he takes Schmidt’s notion of *Aidos* and brings it directly to bear on the concept of the agon:

[...] Aidos ist die Regung und Scheu, nicht Götter, Menschen und ewige Gesetze zu verletzen: also der Instinkt der Ehrfurcht als habituell bei dem Guten. Eine Art Ekel vor der Verletzung des Ehrwürdigen. Die griechische Abneigung gegen das Übermaß, in dem freudigen I<nstinkt der> Hybris, <gegen> die Überschreitung seiner Grenzen, ist sehr vornehm — und altadelig! Es ist die Verletzung des Aidos ein schrecklicher Anblick für den, welcher an Aidos gewöhnt ist. [...] Die Freien, Mässigen erfanden den Wettkampf als die immer wachsende

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<sup>154</sup> See also NL 16[50] 10.515: “Neuer Adel, durch Züchtung. Die Gründungs-Feste von Familien. / Der Tag neu eingetheilt; die körperlichen Übungen für alle Lebensalter. Der Wettkampf als Princip. / Die Geschlechts-Liebe als Wettkampf um das Princip im Werden, Kommenden. — Das ‘Herrschen’ wird gelehrt, geübt, die Härte ebenso wie die Milde. Sobald ein Zustand meisterlich gekonnt wird, muß ein neuer erstrebt werden.”

Verfeinerung jenes Macht-Äußerungsbedürfnisses: durch den Wettkampf wurde der Hybris vorgebeugt: welche durch lange Unbefriedig<ung> des Machtgelüstes entsteht. (NL 7[161] 10.295)

While Nietzsche is ostensibly merely describing Greek culture in this note, his account has a strong normative dimension; indeed, it is reasonable to infer that he is picking out the features of Greek agonal culture that should to some extent be reprised by modern society. Notably, in his account, it is *prima facie* only a select group who are able to limit themselves in a manner necessary for agonal conflict. These are the “Guten”, who are “an Aidos gewöhnt”. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this group is necessarily tied to the aristocratic social classes. Indeed, though Nietzsche underscores the aristocratic *origins* of *Aidos* and the *Wettkampf* – describing the former as “altadelig”, and claiming the latter to have been *invented* (“erfand”) by “[d]ie Freien, Mässigen” – he in no way claims that they are *still* confined to the nobility. As in his early writings, Nietzsche’s suggestion that this agonal virtue *originated* in the nobility should not be equated with the proposition that it did not, or could not, proliferate beyond this social caste. We should now examine how he develops these ideas in JGB, where his conception of the agon becomes even more inclusive.

#### 2.3.4.2. *AIDOS* AND AGONAL CONFLICT IN JGB

While neither *Wettkampf* nor agon are explicitly mentioned in JGB, the species of conflict that they denote is conspicuously present in a number of aphorisms. Thus, the kinds of struggle depicted in JGB 259 and 265 fulfil many of the defining criteria of agonal conflict. Moreover, in JGB 259, *Aidos* is present in all but name as the noble ethos of “[s]ich gegenseitig der Verletzung, der Gewalt, der Ausbeutung enthalten”; again, in JGB 265, the disposition is present as “Feinheit und Selbstbeschränkung im Verkehre mit ihres Gleichen”. What is of further interest about these aphorisms is that both have been used by Appel to corroborate his

assertion that Nietzsche's agonism is restricted to an aristocratic minority.<sup>155</sup> But do they permit such a conclusion?

The argument for a socially exclusive interpretation of these texts runs as follows. First, Nietzsche asserts that "Leben selbst ist wesentlich Aneignung, Verletzung, Überwältigung des Fremden und Schwächeren, Unterdrückung, Härte, Aufzwingung eigener Formen, Einverleibung und mindestens, mildestens, Ausbeutung" (JGB 259). If self-restraint, the treatment of others as one's equals, and the renunciation of exploitation are to be life-enhancing, then, they cannot universally pertain, even within a society – in other words, they cannot form social "Grundprinzip[ien]" (as socialists, Christians and utilitarians would have it). For Nietzsche, this constitutes an attempt to suppress life's essential characteristics – it is a case of the "Wille zur Verneinung des Lebens" – and so, such values represent "Auflösungs- und Verfalls-Prinzip[ien]". Thriving life depends on struggle for Nietzsche; hence, such restrained behaviour must be radically limited:

Auch jener Körper, innerhalb dessen, wie vorher angenommen wurde, die Einzelnen sich als gleich behandeln — es geschieht in jeder gesunden Aristokratie —, muss selber, falls er ein lebendiger und nicht ein absterbender Körper ist, alles Das gegen andre Körper thun, wessen sich die Einzelnen in ihm gegen einander enthalten: er wird der leibhafte Wille zur Macht sein müssen, er wird wachsen, um sich greifen, an sich ziehn, Übergewicht gewinnen wollen [...]. (JGB 259)<sup>156</sup>

Of course, this is not to say that within such bodies of equals there is an absence of conflict. For Nietzsche (echoing Wilhelm Roux, as we will see in Chapter 4), the vitality of any body is conditioned by *inner* struggle. However, since between such mutually dependent equals this struggle can neither be destructive nor exploitative, I suggest that we think of it as an *agonal* mode of struggle – let us now look at some of the reasons for doing so.

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<sup>155</sup> See Appel (1999), p.141.

<sup>156</sup> See also GM II 11 5.312-3.

We have just recounted how Nietzsche figures *Ehrfurcht* as a relation exclusively reserved for nobly-minded, higher individuals.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, during this phase of his thought, he maintains that these higher individuals are in the minority, “denn alles, was hervorragt, ist seinem Wesen nach, selten [...]” (NL 7[70] 12.321). However, it would constitute a *non-sequitur* to conclude from these premises that Nietzsche thinks that the kind of *Ehrfurcht* undergirding agonal conflict is restricted to the aristocratic classes. The conditions stated for agonal limitation in JGB 259 are simply “thatsächliche Ähnlichkeit in Kraftmengen und Werthmaassen und ihre Zusammengehörigkeit innerhalb Eines Körpers”. It is incidental that this “geschieht in jeder gesunden Aristokratie” in an exemplary fashion. This is absolutely *not* to be confused with the claim that such limitation *only* occurs within healthy aristocracies. An aristocracy is just one example of such a body; indeed, a guild of tradesman would equally seem to qualify. So, though we still see Nietzsche taking an especial interest in the noble agon practiced by the aristocratic classes, he nevertheless endeavours to keep this radically open for all those willing to take on the task of cultivating noble virtues.

Nietzsche pushes this line further in JGB 265. Having again stressed the necessity of exploitation, he also goes on to state that “[d]ie vornehme Seele”

gesteht sich, unter Umständen, die sie anfangs zögern lassen, zu, dass es mit ihr Gleichberechtigte giebt; sobald sie über diese Frage des Rangs im Reinen ist, bewegt sie sich unter diesen Gleichen und Gleichberechtigten mit der gleichen Sicherheit in Scham und zarter Ehrfurcht, welche sie im Verkehre mit sich selbst hat, — gemäss einer eingebornen himmlischen Mechanik, auf welche sich alle Sterne verstehn. Es ist ein Stück ihres Egoismus mehr, diese Feinheit und Selbstbeschränkung im Verkehre mit ihres Gleichen — jeder Stern ist ein solcher Egoist —: sie ehrt sich in ihnen und in den Rechten, welche sie an dieselben abgiebt, sie zweifelt nicht, dass der Austausch von Ehren und Rechten als Wesen alles Verkehrs ebenfalls zum naturgemässen Zustand der Dinge gehört. (JGB 265)

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<sup>157</sup> Though N.B. that Nietzsche also refers to another form of *Ehrfurcht* for things that are superior. See e.g. JGB 263.

What is noble is the ability to exhibit self-restraint towards an equal out of complete egoism – that is, insofar as one merely views one's relation to that individual as analogous to one's own *self*-relation. While the vital limiting effect that Nietzsche attributes to *Ehrfurcht* within this dynamic is strongly reminiscent of Schmidt, he has nonetheless given the concept a notable modification: it is no longer primarily other-oriented in opposition to *Schamgefühl*, which, for Schmidt, was self-oriented; indeed, for Nietzsche, “Scham und zarter Ehrfurcht” are not represented as being defined by different relations to alterity – *both* are the result of overt *egoism*, and in no way to be confused with mercy or (we can assume) *Mitleid*.<sup>158</sup>

Across these two aphorisms, in making the claim that *Ehrfurcht* is limited to equals, Nietzsche draws an analogy between three domains: the biological, the social and the physical. Agonal self-restraint inheres, according to Nietzsche, within a “lebendiger und nicht ein absterbender Körper”, between equal individuals, and between stars, in accordance with an “eingeborn himmlisch Mechanik”. The biological thesis draws on his reading of Roux, who proposed that an organism is a dynamic *Gleichgewicht* of struggling parts.<sup>159</sup> The physical thesis appears to be a reconfiguration of his early Heraclitean worldview concerning the dynamic equilibrium of inanimate entities, now projected into the celestial realm.<sup>160</sup> The social thesis then draws upon his early representation of the agon as a non-exploitative, conflictual relation between equals. Nietzsche's assertion that inanimate entities (such as stars) can act with reverence and shame towards one another may strike us as odd, if not as a patent example of the anthropomorphic fallacy.<sup>161</sup> We will return to this problem in the final section. Let it suffice for now

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<sup>158</sup> As Paul van Tongeren has emphasised, one of the virtues that Nietzsche wants to foster is “Ehrfurcht vor sich”, a form of endogenous self-belief that does not rely on the judgement of others. See *Die Moral von Nietzsche's Moralkritik* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1989), pp.228-31.

<sup>159</sup> See ch.4, §4.3.

<sup>160</sup> See PHG §§5-6 (1.822-30) and VPP §10 (KGW II/4, pp.261-82).

<sup>161</sup> Nietzsche seems to admit so much in NL 7[55] 10.259 when, speaking of the state, he asserts the following: “Wie kann der Staat Rache übernehmen! Erstens ist er kalt und handelt nicht im Affekt: was der Rache-Übende thut. Dann ist er keine Person, am wenigsten eine noble Person: kann also auch nicht im Maßhalten (im ‘Gleiches mit Gleichem’) seine noblesse und Selbstzucht beweisen.”

to note how, in drawing these analogies, Nietzsche is gesturing towards the fact that *locally* restraining the will to power need not entail a denial of nature insofar as such restraint is manifest in nature itself, and can indeed be seen to facilitate the exercise of power.

How can agonal conflict be an expression of power, however, if it is non-exploitative? How is this possible if command and instrumentalisation are essential to the activity of will to power? Looking back to Nietzsche's Mayer-inspired conception of the will to power, which was explicated in Chapter 1, we can begin to formulate a response to these queries. Will to power does not just express itself as the *accumulation* and organisation of force, but also as the *discharge* of this force, which does not have to directly generate exploitative relations. There are three alternatives. First, power can be expressed purely for the sake of the sensation of relieving pent up force and experiencing how much command one has over *oneself* (and one's "Auslösungsapparat") – as can be the case in sport. We find this conception of agonal contest as an otherwise useless vent for force in a fragment where he affirms how the Greeks held "Die 'unnütze' Kraftvergeudung (im Agon jeder Art) als Ideal" (NL 8[15] 10.336).<sup>162</sup> Second, discharge can be purely motivated by the desire to experience how much force one has accumulated *relative to others* – that is, a nominal dominance, without exercising any actual instrumental power over those dominated. As Nietzsche says of the Greek agon in GD Alten 3,

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<sup>162</sup> See also JGB 260: "Die Fähigkeit und Pflicht zu langer Dankbarkeit und langer Rache — beides nur innerhalb seines Gleichen —, die Feinheit in der Wiedervergeltung, das Begriffs-Raffinement in der Freundschaft, eine gewisse Nothwendigkeit, Feinde zu haben (gleichsam als Abzugsgräben für die Affekte Neid Streitsucht Übermuth, — im Grunde, um gut freund sein zu können)". It is crucial to observe that Nietzsche's notion of enmity is by no means necessarily purely negative in kind. One's enemy should ideally be an equal who gives us the opportunity to cleanse, exercise and improve ourselves. Indeed, although in JGB 260 Nietzsche distinguishes the friend from the enemy (the enemy being the necessary condition for the friend), we find in Z I Freunde that friend and foe are not depicted as standing in a relation of exclusive disjunction towards one another: "In seinem Freunde soll man seinen besten Feind haben. Du sollst ihm am nächsten mit dem Herzen sein, wenn du ihm widerstrebst." (4.72). See also Z I Krieg 4.59, where Nietzsche entreats us to rejoice in the successes of our enemies: "Ihr müsst stolz auf euren Feind sein: dann sind die Erfolge eures Feindes auch eure Erfolge."

“mit Festen und Künsten wollte man auch nichts Andres als sich obenauf fühlen, sich obenauf zeigen: es sind Mittel, sich selber zu verherrlichen” (6.157). The accent is on *feeling* and *showing* oneself as “obenauf”, but not on *exercising* this dominance by controlling the behaviour of defeated adversaries. Finally, Nietzsche also conceives of agonal conflict as a means to strengthening and training oneself, or the community, for the exploitative struggle against others outside of the given agonal contest or community. As such, we might think of the form of restraint inherent to the agon in the same way Nietzsche thinks of law in GM II 11, namely, as a *means* (*Mittel*) in the exploitative, unmeasured “Kampf von Macht-Complexen” (5.313). As he also says in GD Alten 3, with agonal institutions, “[d]ie ungeheure Spannung im Innern entlud sich dann in furchtbarer und rücksichtsloser Feindschaft nach Aussen” (6.157). Such institutions did not *replace* exploitative or destructive conflict, but rather enabled it to be more effectively directed towards the outside. Thus, Nietzsche’s later conception of agonal conflict can be understood as cohering with his notion of the world as will to power, namely, insofar as such measured struggle represents a “Verfeinerung jenes Macht-Äußerungsbedürfnisses” (NL 7[161] 10.295).

The will to power can express itself variously in destructive conflict, exploitative conflict or agonal conflict. It is *not* necessarily agonal, and any agonal unity exhibited by a social group is always local and can never be extended across an entire community. Within the framework of Nietzsche’s argumentation, to conceive of the agon, as Hatab does, as embodied in the democratic principle of “open fair opportunity for all citizens to participate in political contention” is precisely to attempt to turn agonal equality into a “Grundprinzip der Gesellschaft”. This is because, for Nietzsche, agonal relations only subsist between approximate equals. The strong should not limit themselves agonally towards the weak. He does not advise the strong to exhibit *Ehrfurcht* towards the less fortunate and helpless, as Schmidt considers the Greeks to have done. Such behaviour would be a symptom of decline. Hatab suggests that the logic of the will to power demands not only that we show agonal moderation towards less capable individuals, but that we actively strive

to render them worthy opponents.<sup>163</sup> However, Nietzsche's later writings suggest that what takes place in nature and what must take place within any healthy society is that inferior individuals are excluded from agonal contest with their superiors, who should always opt to establish exploitative relations with those weaker than them.

Nonetheless, *pace* Appel, this is once again perfectly compatible with Nietzsche's conviction that *any* social subgroup of equals (i.e. equal in terms of capacity, rather than class) can engage in agonal conflict. However, the vibrancy of the agon is again conditioned by social stratification, since any social group of agonal equals can only sustain this equality on the basis of exploiting others within society (JGB 259). Thus, we see that Nietzsche's later agonism, like his earlier agonism, is socially inclusive while at the same time demanding social stratification.

Casting our mind back to Burckhardt, we can see the misleading nature of Martin Ruehl's thesis that, "[l]ike Burckhardt, Nietzsche regarded the agon as an essentially aristocratic notion that belonged to a pre-democratic age."<sup>164</sup> The relation of agonal measure to aristocratic social order is complex and multifaceted for both Burckhardt and Nietzsche. Both appear to propound the idea that the values of the agon originate, and can be appreciated in their purest form, within an aristocratic social class, and that an agonal culture is best conceived as situated within a stratified society; however, both also bring into relief how agonal relations can proliferate *beyond* that class.

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<sup>163</sup> See Hatab (2005), p.142: "As in athletics, defeating an incapable or incapacitated competitor winds up being meaningless. So I should not only will the presence of others in an agon, I should also want that they be able adversaries, that they have opportunities and capacities to succeed in the contest."

<sup>164</sup> See fn.67.



## 2.4. ON THE SOURCES OF AGONAL MEASURE

We are left with the third and final obstacle to our having a clear picture of what agonal conflict practically signifies. This concerns the question as to how measure is imposed on evil Eris, which is to say the primal tendency to engage in unmeasured destructive conflict. As was established above, the agon draws upon, and harnesses, a range of the drives and affects that underpin the *Vernichtungskampf*: for example, the “so furchtbar vorhandenen Trieb” for “Kampf und die Lust des Sieges”, along with envy (*Neid*) and ambition (*Ehrgeiz*). Yet, even once these have been bridled and canalised into culturally productive *Wettkampf*, they are nonetheless constantly pushing towards excess (“Übermaß”). Indeed, Nietzsche recounts how the ancient Greek *Wettkampf* stimulated the ambition and envy of competitors to such an extent that, in their struggle to excel their adversaries, they were often tempted to resort to unmeasured means that were antithetical to the measured ethos of the *Wettkampf* itself.

The first risk is that superdominant contestants will strive for the unmeasured goal of tyrannising over the contest and establishing a permanent victory, or what Nietzsche calls an *Alleinherrschaft*. Should an individual be sufficiently talented to dominate a given contest – that is, to become *hors de concours*, as Alcibiades does in Burckhardt’s account of the equestrian agon – the contest dries up due to the fact that others are no longer motivated to compete. As such, in the first place, measure is a precondition of agonal conflict insofar as approximate equality must be maintained in order to arouse the affects of envy and ambition, which represent the driving force of such contest. The loss of constant measured tension, Nietzsche thought, led the Greeks back into the *Vernichtungskampf*, since

ohne Neid Eifersucht und wettkämpfenden Ehrgeiz der hellenische Staat wie der hellenische Mensch entartet. Er wird böse und grausam,

er wird rachsüchtig und gottlos, kurz, er wird “vorhomerisch” — und dann bedarf es nur eines panischen Schreckens, um ihn zum Fall zu bringen und zu zerschmettern. (CV 5 1.792)

Since the Greeks needed the *Wettkampf* as a means of releasing their competitive energies, it makes sense that with the loss of such measured non-violent means, they would revert to violent, unmeasured forms of contest. The second risk, however, is that individuals will directly resort to violent or murderous means in an attempt to secure victory. Thus, Nietzsche warns of the situation in which “einer der großen um die Wette kämpfenden Politiker und Parteihäupter [fühlt sich] zu schädlichen und zerstörenden Mitteln und zu bedenklichen Staatsstreichen, in der Hitze des Kampfes, [...] gereizt [...]” (CV 5 1.789).

Nonetheless, Nietzsche maintains that “[d]er Wettkampf entfesselt das Individuum: und zugleich bändigt er dasselbe nach ewigen Gesetzen” (NL 16[22] 7.402; my italics). How, then, does Nietzsche think that the two risks just outlined were staved off? How did the agon contain (*bändigen*) individuals at the same time as it released (*entfesselt*) them in provoking their personal ambitions? How was the ambition and envy of contestants curbed or *begrenzt* and the descent back into pre-Homeric violence forestalled?

In the critical literature, there is a deep disagreement regarding Nietzsche’s proposed solution to this problem. On the one hand, there are those who propound what I will call the *respect* reading; on the other, there are those who defend what I will call the *counterbalancing* reading. The former is put forward by Hatab and Connolly, while the latter is to be found in Herman Siemens, and to some extent, also Bonnie Honig. I will briefly reconstruct these readings before examining what Nietzsche’s historical sources on the ancient Greek agon (*viz.* Curtius, Burckhardt and Grote) say about agonal moderation. I will then argue that an appreciation of how Nietzsche develops their thoughts reveals an interesting, and more convincing, alternative to both the respect and counterbalancing readings.

It should be emphatically stated at the outset that my intention is in no way to fully reconstruct, deflate or debunk the particular brands of democratic agonism

that the aforementioned political philosophers develop out of their interpretations of Nietzsche. Excepting Herman Siemens, they all proffer their readings as *appropriations* of Nietzsche's thought, rather than strictly representative exegeses. I am not contending that their appropriations are in themselves without worth, but only that they take us farther than we might think from the tenor of Nietzsche's thought, which in fact presents us with an as yet unremarked solution to the problem at hand. I will therefore be reconstructing their readings of Nietzsche only with a view to delineating two fallacious ways in which we might be tempted to read him on the question of agonal moderation.

The foremost representatives of the respect reading are Hatab and Connolly. Both to some degree construe agonal measure as a subjectively imposed form of self-restraint that one exercises in relation to one's adversaries. Nonetheless, each does so in their own way, and we should highlight some of the points of convergence and divergence in their Nietzschean (or arguably *post-Nietzschean*) visions. Thus, in *Political Theory and Modernity* (1988) and *Identity and Difference* (1991) Connolly marshals Nietzsche in his effort to sketch a democratic ethos of "respect" able to safeguard social pluralism – that is "agonistic care and self-limitation" towards one's adversaries.<sup>165</sup> Connolly refers to texts from throughout the corpus (though notably none in which the agon is explicitly discussed) in trying to illuminate Nietzsche's affirmation of both the contingency and relationality of identity. In brief, the idea is that, though one might define oneself (or one's community) as Christian, heterosexual, republican and non-violent, these features are contingent, which is to say that one *could* have been born elsewhere and *could* have developed a quite different identity.<sup>166</sup> According to Connolly, this means that identity is always an artificial construction for Nietzsche, and *not* the expression of an essence. Connolly invokes NL 9[151] 12.424, which states that "Der Wille zur Macht kann sich nur an Widerständen äußern", in an effort to demonstrate that the

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<sup>165</sup> William Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p.185.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.

identity of the modern subject is, for Nietzsche, defined in opposition or resistance to the aspects of itself and its society that fail fit that identity. Hence, on this reading, the modern subject is conditioned by difference. We do not “contain an inner essence which draws us toward stasis and subjectivity”; rather, the modern subject is ineluctably “the locus of a struggle one strives to suppress”.<sup>167</sup>

It is the modern subject’s “refus[al] to accept difference in itself and others”, and its desire to deny and escape this irreducible state of strife, that tempts it to assert its identity in a universalising, intolerant and even aggressive manner.<sup>168</sup> This will to conquer, convert, exclude or eliminate otherness is what Connolly understands to be the basis of modern suffering, what he glosses as Nietzschean *ressentiment*. As an alternative to the gnawing resentment of pursuing this unachievable goal, Connolly recommends a Nietzschean ethic by which we “come to terms with difference and [...] seek ways to enable difference to be”.<sup>169</sup> He maintains that this ethic can be cultivated by means of an “acceptance of [Nietzsche’s] ontology of resistance” – namely, insofar as this ontology “calls into question the project of perfecting mastery of the world” on the grounds that resistance is ineffaceable.<sup>170</sup> This fosters what he calls an “agonistic respect for difference”:

Recognition of these conditions of strife and interdependence, especially when such recognition contains an element of mutuality, can flow into an ethic in which adversaries are respected and maintained in a mode of agonistic mutuality, an ethic in which alter-identities foster agonistic respect for the differences that constitute them [...].<sup>171</sup>

Connolly reads Nietzsche as commending that each take a more “ironic” stance towards the norms and ideals that they endorse in order to avoid falling into a

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<sup>167</sup> William Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p.156. For his invocation of NL 9[151] 12.424, see p.146.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.158. Within the history of political philosophy, Connolly sees thinkers such as Hobbes, Hegel and Rousseau, who try to convert or excise those deviating from their ideal visions of society, as exemplary of such practices (see *ibid.*, p.175).

<sup>169</sup> Hatab (1995), p.161.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>171</sup> Connolly (1991), p.166

disaffected state of *ressentiment*.<sup>172</sup> As opposed to asserting one's ideals dogmatically, one should a) acknowledge the aspects of oneself, and the members of one's community, that fail to fit one's ideals; and then b) engage in the necessary struggle with them in a measured manner – i.e. without seeking their eradication. In this way, Connolly appeals to us to “convert an antagonism of identity into an agonism of difference”.<sup>173</sup>

While Connolly does not refer to Hesiod or CV 5, we can read the above as a summary of his Nietzsche-inspired account of how evil *Eris* can be stably transformed into good *Eris*. Thus, in order to prevent bloody forms of conflict, he tells us,

Each must overcome its own fear and loathing to enter into equitable relations with others, and only an entity which has made progress in that respect is in a position to let others be what they are or must be.<sup>174</sup>

Nonetheless, Connolly does not think that this shift in disposition towards the Other is wholly sufficient to ensure that social struggle remains non-violent. Sometimes violent behaviour will be too deeply ingrained in a person's identity for her to be able to agonistically struggle with others. In such cases, the state must be capable of taking “the minimum legal action needed to protect others from the danger of violence”.<sup>175</sup> We should note, then, Connolly's ethical project therefore relies on the existence of an institutional safety-net (though some have argued that this is not sufficiently fleshed out by Connolly).<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p.165; see also Connolly (1991), p.183.

<sup>173</sup> See *ibid.*, p.178.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p.167. Connolly does not view this as the mere tolerance of subordinate minorities within hegemonic systems, but rather as the “relations between a variety of *intersecting and interdependent constituencies*, none of which sets the unquestioned matrix within which others are placed”. See William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralisation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p.92.

<sup>175</sup> Connolly (1991), p.180.

<sup>176</sup> Indeed, Mark Wenman has accused Connolly of excessively focussing on the ethical, subjective aspect of social problems, and neglecting the wider institutional sources of, and solutions to, these problems. See Mark Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy: Constituent Power*

Resonating with Connolly, Hatab argues that it is by means of acknowledging the will to power as that which “can manifest itself only against resistances” that we are able to cultivate a “civic attitude” of “agonistic respect” based on “equal regard”. This, he believes, can act as the foundation of an agonally organised democracy. However, alluding to Connolly, Hatab warns us that this attitude is not to be confused with a positive regard of compassion for one’s adversaries. It should rather be thought of as a minimal affirmation of the Other *qua* legitimate opponent, or in other words, as an acknowledgement of their equality of opportunity (to agonally compete with me). Indeed, Hatab rejects Connolly’s vision of a democracy founded upon an “ethics of letting-be” and “delight in difference” as a sanguine vision of a political community based upon just such a positive regard.

Hatab accepts that “agonistic respect” can often be found wanting and that democratic institutional measures are required to counteract individuals’ or groups’ attempts to exclude their potential adversaries and thereby shut down the contest.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, Hatab also notes the need for non-procedural forms of political resistance, such as were deployed during the civil rights movement. However, he asserts that such protesters must “submit to the penalties of violating a law they think is unjust.”<sup>178</sup> Thus, as in Connolly, we again find that he must take recourse to an institutional safety-net.

Though both Hatab and Connolly therefore affirm the need for such institutional safeguards, both predominantly attribute agonal limitation to a dispositional shift on the part of democratic adversaries. As Herman Siemens has remarked, both “approach the question of limits *from the position of the subject* and the kind of ethos or attitude that must be adopted for political antagonism to remain this side of mutual destruction.”<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, this ethos is conditioned by an

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*in the Era of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.116, p.120, p.123.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.192.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.92.

<sup>179</sup> Siemens (2013), p.90. See also Herman Siemens, “Nietzsche’s Political Philosophy: A Review of Recent Literature”, *Nietzsche-Studien*, 30 (2001b), 509-526 (esp. pp.521-2).

acknowledgement of the irreducible and constitutive function of resistance and struggle with respect to personal identity.

On the other side, Herman Siemens, and, to some extent Bonnie Honig, present us with a picture of agonal measure that contrasts sharply with that of Connolly and Hatab. Both Honig and Siemens cite the same passage in CV 5 where Nietzsche states that the essence of the “hellenischen Wettkampf-Vorstellung” is that it “verabscheut die Alleinherrschaft und fürchtet ihre Gefahren, sie begehrt, als Schutzmittel gegen das Genie — ein zweites Genie” (CV 5 1.789).<sup>180</sup> This is Nietzsche’s conception of reciprocally limiting forces. Within this vision of agonal measure, competing individuals invariably hold tyrannical aspirations, but so long as these individuals are roughly equal in strength, and are therefore able to keep one another’s ambitions in check, neither will be able to gain the upper-hand and tyranny will be (at least temporarily) foreclosed. Honig compares this to Machiavelli’s account of the mutual limitation of the people and the nobles in the Roman republic:

[W]ere it not for their fear of being dominated by the nobles, the people would withdraw from politics [...]. Were it not for the people’s active, political resistance to them, the nobles would put an end to all liberty, public and private, and impose a tyrannical rule on the republic. Because the nobles in a republic are always moved by their ambition to dominate the people, and the people moved always by their desire to secure their liberty, their struggle is perpetual. The perpetuity of their struggle, and the institutional obstacles to its resolution, prevent any one party from dominating and closing the public space of law, liberty and *virtù*.<sup>181</sup>

Siemens similarly conceives of Nietzsche’s notion of agonal measure as “the result of a given equilibrium of forces” (i.e. as an instance of *counterbalancing*).<sup>182</sup> He uses this conception of the agon to rebut Hatab’s and Connolly’s claim that agonal

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<sup>180</sup> See Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.71; see e.g. Herman Siemens, “Agonal Communities of Taste: Law and Community in Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Transvaluation”, *JNS*, 24 (2002), 83-112 (p.90 and p.104).

<sup>181</sup> Bonnie Honig (1993), pp.70-1.

<sup>182</sup> Siemens (2001b), p.521.

measure is above all a matter of the *self*-limitation of contestants. As evidence that Nietzsche did not think that agonal conflict involved the softening of contestants' aspirations, Siemens cites NL 4[301] 9.175 (among other notes), in which Nietzsche explicitly states that "[d]ie Gleichheit der Bürger ist das Mittel zur Verhinderung der Tyrannis, ihre gegenseitige Bewachung und Niederhaltung."<sup>183</sup> We also find this belief in the uncompromising disposition of agonal contestants in Nietzsche's description of the *Wettkampfgedanke* in PHG 5 1.825: "jeder Grieche kämpft *als ob er allein im Recht sei*, und ein unendlich sicheres Maaß des richterlichen Urtheils in jedem Augenblick bestimmt" (my italics).<sup>184</sup> In this way, says Siemens, measure is imposed *medially* at the same time as both parties reciprocally stimulate one another:

Equilibrium is, then, an "intersubjective" or relational phenomenon, a function of the *relations between* more-or-less equal forces, each striving for supremacy. So once again, the relational concept of equilibrium inserts a *radical disjunction* between the subject-position of the antagonists – their desires, intentions and claims – and the qualities of their resulting agonal interaction: each wants to be the best, yet an equilibrium is, or can be, achieved; each is tempted to excess and *hubris*, yet limits or measure can be achieved. The relational sense of the agon means that the measure or limit on action is determined *not* by the players' goals, interests or disposition; rather it is the contingent result of dynamic relations that emerge between social forces competing for supremacy.<sup>185</sup>

Like Hatab and Connolly, both Honig and Siemens also acknowledge the need for institutional safeguards. Indeed, both draw on the importance of the practice of ostracism within Nietzsche's early account of the agon. As Nietzsche informs us in

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<sup>183</sup> Siemens (2002), p.105. To further substantiate his reading, Siemens also refers us to MA 261, NL 5[146] 8.78-9; NL 23[1] 7.537; NL 6[7] 8.99: "In seinen geheimen Wünschen war jeder Grieche Tyrann".

<sup>184</sup> We might also cite NL 16[18] 7.399, where Nietzsche observes "[w]ie die griechische Natur alle furchtbaren Eigenschaften zu benutzen weiß: die tigerartige Vernichtungswuth (der Stämme usw.) im Wettkampf". Insofar as they exercised their "tigerartige Vernichtungswuth im Wettkampf", it would appear that their affective disposition towards their opponents was not in the slightest restrained.

<sup>185</sup> Siemens (2013), p.91.



CV 5, ostracism was the practice whereby the ancient Greeks banished any individual who was deemed excessively predominant and who might therefore repress a given contest. As the Ephesians said upon exiling Hermador: “Unter uns soll Niemand der Beste sein; ist Jemand es aber, so sei er anderswo und bei Anderen” (CV 5 1.788). For Honig, a vital part of the agon’s measure is continually maintained by means of institutional checks and balances, as well as the oral institutional channels through which the agon is forced.<sup>186</sup> For Siemens, however, the institution of ostracism is depicted as a last-resort or fall-back option, where pure mutual limitation is figured as the normal means of sustaining measure: “The function of ostracism was precisely to enforce limits where the emergence of absolute victors undid the mutual resistance offered by a *Gegeneinander* of more-or-less equal forces”.<sup>187</sup>

We have now delineated two quite commonsensical, though nonetheless fundamentally opposed, models of how agonal moderation might be achieved: one prioritising the role played by adversaries’ *self*-limitation, while the other emphasises the importance of their *reciprocal* limitation. What is more, their proponents claim that these models are either representative of Nietzsche’s thought, or at least inspired thereby. In the remaining two subsections, I will propose that a historically contextualised reading of Nietzsche’s early thought in fact presents us with a philosophically interesting third-way – one that can in many ways be said to combine aspects from both of the conflicting models, and indeed, even sublate their antagonism.

### 2.4.1. NIETZSCHE’S CONTEMPORARIES

The philological work of Nietzsche’s contemporaries again represents a fruitful point of entry with respect to our current task: that of resolving the aforementioned

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<sup>186</sup> See Honig (1993), ch.3.

<sup>187</sup> Siemens (2001b), p. 521.

dilemma and bringing Nietzsche's synthetic alternative to the fore. The reason for this is that, as I will contend, we find his alternative model of moderation prefigured in their philological studies of the *Wettkampf*.

In "Der Wettkampf", Curtius observes how the agonal culture of the ancient Greeks, by overly stimulating individual ambition, would often descend into bloody sedition and civil war: "so ist die vom Wetteifer entfachte Flamme der Begeisterung ein Feuer geworden, das im Brande des Bürgerkriegs die Blüte der Staaten frühzeitig vernichtet hat." Consequently, he continues, the Greeks were "weit entfernt, den Trieb, welchen der Wetteifer anregt, seiner natürlichen Beschaffenheit zu überlassen, in welcher er mehr zum Schlechten als zum Guten führt."<sup>188</sup> But how, we ought to ask, was this drive ("Trieb") transformed?

It was *religion*, according to Curtius, that restrained these socially harmful affects: "Sie [die Griechen] haben den wilden Trieb gezähmt, sie haben ihn gesittigt und veredelt, indem sie ihn der Religion dienstbar gemacht haben."<sup>189</sup> But how did religion enable this act of transfiguration? In short, according to Curtius, religion propagated a sense of subservience to the god-head of the *polis*, which in turn had the effect of counteracting the individualism normally concomitant with such struggle. This thereby rendered the Hellenic desire for contention serviceable to the *polis*. The reason organised agons were located at sites of religious significance (e.g. Delphi and Olympia), says Curtius, was that this encouraged contestants to view their performance as a tribute to the gods. In participating in the agon, the pious contestant sought to demonstrate the extent to which they had cultivated the mind and body bestowed upon them from above. Moreover, following the games, all prizes had to be bequeathed to the gods in their respective temples. Failure to do so would result in divine wrath, and the community would treat the offending individual as they would a temple robber.<sup>190</sup> Hence, religion both *spurred* people to agonally cultivate themselves (so as to impress the gods), while simultaneously

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<sup>188</sup> Curtius (1864), p.9.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p.14.

placing a cap on their dangerous egoism insofar as they were forced to dedicate their trophies to the gods out of fear of both social and divine retribution. Contestants had to willingly submit themselves to these religious norms; thus, as Curtius states, “keiner empfing den Siegerkranz, welcher sich nicht allen feierlich beschworen Normen des Kampfes willig unterworfen hatte.” This explains why, says Curtius, “alle regelmäßigen Wettkämpfe [sind] [...] an Götterfeste geknüpft [...] [und] ihre Schauplätze sind ursprünglich die Tempelhöfe, die eigentlichen Zuschauer die Götter.”<sup>191</sup>

In contrast to Curtius, Burckhardt primarily attributes agonal measure to the rigorous style of education practiced by the Greeks during the agonal age (sixth-century BC). On the one hand, Burckhardt informs us, gymnastic education had a cultivating effect, allowing military training to be substituted by the “vollendete Durchbildung des Leibes zur Schönheit”. But crucially, in order to achieve this, “[mußte] das Individuum sich so gut als für das Musische einer sehr methodischen Lehre unterziehen [...] und [durfte] sich keine eigenwillige sogenannte Genialität erlauben”.<sup>192</sup> The role of education, both in gymnastics and the arts, was therefore to simultaneously cultivate *and curtail* the individuality and ambition of individual contestants. The socially salubrious effects of this dual function were so marked that there was an “allgemeine Überzeugung vom Werte der Schulung (παίδευσις) [...], die so stark war, daß der Staat (abgesehen davon, daß er die Gymnasien errichtete) seinerseits für die Sache nicht bemüht zu werden brauchte.”<sup>193</sup>

Finally, whereas Curtius underlines the function of religion, and Burckhardt that of education, in limiting the ambitions of those competing in the agon, Grote underscores the importance of patriotic feeling, and communal subscription to a shared moral framework. Grote first describes the Corcyrean sedition – as recounted by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* – as an historical example of the complete loss of measure. Indeed, Nietzsche himself explicitly cites Grote’s

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>192</sup> Burckhardt (2014), vol.4, p.82; my italics.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

account of this event in order to gloss his conception of *Vernichtungskampf*.<sup>194</sup> Grote describes the pandemonium of butchery that erupted as two Corcyrean social groups vied for political power – namely, the oligarchs, who sought to ally Corcyra with Sparta and Corinth, and the demos, who wished to remain loyal to Athens.<sup>195</sup> A violent and internecine revolution broke out, during which half of the main town was raised to the ground. Grote refers to the week of massacre as a “deplorable suspension of legal, as well as moral restraints”, which allowed the “fierce sentiment out of which [the slaughter] arose” to be “satiated”.<sup>196</sup> Grote points out the fact that such states of frenzied *stasis* are a perennial feature of human history (he explicitly mentions the French revolution, for example). The Corcyrean revolution is, according to Grote, merely an archetype of this state of disarray.<sup>197</sup> Grote describes some of the paradigmatic features of such chaotic upheavals as follows:

[C]onstitutional maxims [...] [cease] to carry authority either as restraint or as protection – the superior popularity of the man who is most forward with the sword, or runs down his enemies in the most unmeasured language, coupled with the disposition to treat both prudence in action and candour in speech as if it were nothing but treachery or cowardice – [...] *the loss of respect for legal authority* [...], the unnatural predominance of the ambitious and contentious passions, overpowering in men’s minds all real public objects...<sup>198</sup>

Since the propensity for destructive excess is “deeply seated in the human mind”, Grote warns us that “unless the bases of constitutional morality” are firmly and surely laid, we are condemned to continually fall back into the dissolute mayhem of the *Vernichtungskampf*.

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<sup>194</sup> See NL 16[39] 7.407: “Die korkyräische Revolution als Vernichtungskampf zweier Parteien. / In Athen dagegen eine Art Wettkampf. Grote, 3, p.536. [Vgl. George Grote, *Geschichte Griechenlands*. Dritter Band. Leipzig: Dyk, 1853:535-6.]” See also CV 5 1.784.

<sup>195</sup> For the original English version of Grote’s comparison of Corcyra and Athens (from which I shall be working), see Grote (1851), vol.6, pp.362-86.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p.377.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p.380 (my italics).

The contrary of this lamentable condition is, according to Grote, exemplified in Athenian democracy, which, though non-violent, is nonetheless conflictual; indeed, Nietzsche labels Grote's description of Athens "eine Art Wettkampf" (NL 16[39] 7.407). In classical Athens, says Grote, citizens were able to both exercise their combative instincts and express their political discontent by means of institutionalised debate, that is, in lieu of bloodshed.<sup>199</sup> Thus, with ancient Athenian democracy, one bears witness to

how much the habit of active participation in political and judicial affairs – of open, conflicting discussion, discharging the malignant passions by way of speech, and followed by appeal to the vote – *of having constantly present, to the mind of every citizen [...] the conditions of a pacific society, and the paramount authority of a constitutional majority* – how much all these circumstances, brought home as they were at Athens more than in any other democracy to the feelings of individuals, contributed to soften the instincts of intestine violence and revenge, even under very great provocation.<sup>200</sup>

Grote identifies how the Athenians granted their destructively aggressive instincts a controlled outlet in impassioned democratic debate. Victory was then decided not by direct brute force but indirectly, by appeal to a vote. As such, we can see how within this account, moderation is imposed both by virtue of a constitutional legal edifice as well as by means of individual self-restraint – that is, insofar as citizens exercise respect for legal norms. Furthermore, moderation is also founded on the fact that individuals appreciate the needs of the state and the conditions of "pacific

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<sup>199</sup> This cathartic vision of democracy bears a great deal of resemblance to Machiavelli's conception of the Roman practice of accusation, which he describes as an outlet "by which to vent, in some mode against some citizen, those humors that grow up in cities; and when these humours do not have an outlet by which they may be vented ordinarily, they have recourse to extraordinary modes that bring a whole republic to ruin. So there is nothing that makes a republic so stable and steady as to order it in a mode so that those alternating humors that agitate it can be vented in a way ordered by laws." See Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. by Harvey Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), p.23 (see also ch.7 and ch.8).

<sup>200</sup> Grote (1851), vol.6, p.386 (emphasis added).

society” over and against their desire to give free reign to their instincts for violence and revenge.

What recurs across the accounts of Curtius, Burckhardt and Grote, therefore, is an emphasis on the limiting (and enlivening) function of institutions such as religion, formal education and law. This reason for this is that each serve to check the egoistic excesses of agonal adversaries. However, what has also been brought into relief is that such institutions modify the disposition of opponents insofar as they promote the virtue of continence or self-restraint. For Curtius, religion contained the egoism of competitors, and they were only permitted to compete once they had voluntarily acquiesced to the constitutive (religious) norms of the agon. For Burckhardt, it was then regimented education that kept contestants’ pretensions of grandeur under control. And finally, for Grote, participation in political and juridical affairs helped instil a sense of patriotic concern for the commonweal. In none of these cases, however, does respect for one’s adversary come into the picture. Where we do find respect figuring prominently – i.e. with Curtius and Grote – it is conceived as respect for religious or juridical authority, or for the good of the *polis*. In the following subsection, I will illuminate how Nietzsche’s conception of agonal moderation is informed by analogous notions of respect and self-restraint.

#### 2.4.2. A NIETZSCHEAN MODEL OF AGONAL MODERATION

As we have seen, some conception of equality is fundamental to both the counterbalancing and respect models of agonal moderation. However, it is conspicuously absent from the accounts of Curtius, Burckhardt and Grote. Thus, before taking a broader look at how Nietzsche conceives of agonal measure, it behoves us to answer the following question: what kind of role does equality play within Nietzsche’s conception of the agon?

### 2.4.2.1. EQUALITY AND THE AGON

We should begin by cross-examining some of the evidence cited in support of the counterbalancing reading as presented by Herman Siemens (since his version of this reading is substantially more developed than that of Honig). Since the notion of equality is, unsurprisingly, foundational within the counterbalancing model, we should first try to ascertain the way in which this kind of relation is intrinsic to Nietzsche's vision of the agon.

One conception of equality that is often thought to be fundamental to Nietzsche's conception of the agon is the notion of equilibrium (*Gleichgewicht*), particularly as this is articulated by Volker Gerhardt in his paper "Das 'Princip des Gleichgewichts'".<sup>201</sup> In trying to shed light upon how agonally counterbalanced tyrants stand in a relation of equality to one another, Herman Siemens has drawn extensively on Gerhardt's analysis:

By "equality of power," Nietzsche does not mean a quantitative measure of objective magnitudes, nor a judgement made from an external standpoint, but the expression of an estimated correspondence between powers, where each power judges itself (as equal) in relation to another power. Unlike the measure of equality, however, the concept of "equilibrium" can *not* be understood from the subject-position, the standpoint of the single antagonists or powers as their conscious goal. For the antagonists do not *aim* at equilibrium; rather, each strives for supremacy (*Übermacht*) – to be the best.<sup>202</sup>

Here we have a lucid account of precisely what is being counterbalanced in Siemens' model of agonal moderation. Yet, it is odd that the measure of the agon should at one and the same time be based in the *judgement* of each of the contestants, without this judgement in some way altering their subjective aims and dispositions. How does this judgement bring measure to the

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<sup>201</sup> Volker Gerhardt, "Das 'Princip des Gleichgewichts'", *Nietzsche-Studien*, 12 (1983), 111-133. For examples of the influence of this study on recent accounts of Nietzsche's agonism, see e.g. Enrico Müller, (2005), p.87 (fn.230); and Acampora (2013), p.236.

<sup>202</sup> Siemens (2013), p.91.

conflictual state of affairs if not by affecting the intentional stance of those making the judgement? I might interpret my adversary as roughly equal to me, but if I do not give up the pursuit of tyranny, this judgement has no practical effect. Let us now turn to the key texts from MA and WS, as well as to Gerhardt's analysis itself, in order to assess whether such *Gleichgewicht* accurately describes the kind of equality that undergirds Nietzsche's agonism.

In MA 92, Nietzsche presents us with a theory of justice that counters the idea of transcendent or natural rights. In an Aristotelian fashion, he tries to ground the idea of law in a notion of equality. The concept of justice ("Gerechtigkeit", "Billigkeit"), he tells us, emerges when "ungefähr gleich Mächtigen" come face-to-face with one another in the state of nature (be these powers individuals or communities). Where each assesses the other to be of roughly equal power, and where, therefore, "es keine deutlich erkennbare Uebergewalt giebt und ein Kampf zum erfolglosen, gegenseitigen Schädigen würde, da entsteht der Gedanke sich zu verständigen und über die beiderseitigen Ansprüche zu verhandeln [...]" (MA 92). What Volker Gerhardt brings into relief is the fact that the equality (*Gleichheit*) that is being discussed in these texts does not refer to an objective state of equality, "vom Standpunkt eines neutralen Beobachters festgestellt"; it is rather based on the mutual evaluation each party makes of their counterpart. We should remark that this is not a simple case of each measuring the other in terms of brute physical strength, but also in terms of the myriad other capacities that contribute to martial might; thus, for example, "[d]er physische Kraft des einen kann die größere List des anderen gegenüberstehen".<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> See Gerhardt (1983), p.117.



In such circumstances, *each* renounces the goal of physically overpowering the other in favour of self-preservation (“Selbsterhaltung”): “Gerechtigkeit geht natürlich auf den Gesichtspunct einer einsichtigen Selbsterhaltung zurück, also auf den Egoismus jener Ueberlegung: ‘wozu sollte ich mich nutzlos schädigen und mein Ziel vielleicht doch nicht erreichen?’” (MA 92; see also WS 22). *Pace* Siemens, it therefore turns out that *Gleichgewicht* does occasion the exercise of self-control. There *is* a decisive shift in the intentional disposition of each of the contestants insofar as they choose to renounce the goal of martially overpowering one another by means of physical destruction. In place of this, they decide to pursue the end of compromise. Justice is basically the terms of this compromise, which is to say that it represents a type of contract (*Vertrag*). Punishment then represents a form of exchange (*Austausch*) through which this *Gleichgewicht* is reestablished by forcing he who has broken this contract to resubmit to the law and exercise self-restraint.<sup>204</sup> In this case, then, the claim that “the measure or limit on action is determined *not* by the players’ goals, interests or disposition” is supported by neither Nietzsche’s writings on *Gleichgewicht* nor Volker Gerhardt’s analysis thereof.

Reading these aphorisms together with CV 5, Volker Gerhardt interprets this as a pivotal moment in the movement from the state of nature (i.e. the quasi-Darwinian *Kampf ums Dasein*) to a culture of *Wettkampf*. Gerhardt further asserts that equally opposed organisations (classes, states or individuals) still “streben nach Übermacht” once they have entered into this condition of justice; the difference is that now “Die Machtsteigerung wird auch im übertragenen Sinn in der *Selbstherrschaft*, im spielerischen *Wettkampf* und überhaupt in den Produktionen der

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<sup>204</sup> See MA 446; see also WS 22, where Nietzsche describes punishment as follows: “[S]ie [die Strafe] stellt gegen das Uebergewicht, das sich jeder Verbrecher zuspricht, ein viel grösseres Gegengewicht auf, gegen Gewaltthat den Kerkerzwang, gegen den Diebstahl den Wiederersatz und die Strafsumme. So wird der Frevler erinnert, dass er mit seiner Handlung aus der Gemeinde und deren Moral-Vortheilen ausschied: sie behandelt ihn wie einen Ungleichen, Schwachen, ausser ihr Stehenden; desshalb ist Strafe nicht nur Wiedervergeltung, sondern hat ein Mehr, ein Etwas von der Härte des Naturzustandes; an diesen will sie eben erinnern.”

Kultur und der Kunst gesucht.”<sup>205</sup> So while the element of striving for supremacy is preserved in the shift to a social condition of justice, the key moment of limitation, which is the laying down of one’s arms, emerges from a definite change in the disposition and aims of the contending parties.

In addition to this, Nietzsche also rejects the idea that adversaries invariably aim at supremacy, asserting that they *do* sometimes aim at equilibrium. However, contrary to the respect reading, the stronger party does not endeavour to “constitute adversaries worthy of agonistic respect”.<sup>206</sup> Rather, a *weaker* power will sometimes pursue this goal vis-à-vis a stronger power:

[Z]ieht die Gemeinde vor, ihre Macht zu Vertheidigung und Angriff genau auf die Höhe zu bringen, auf der die Macht des gefährlichen Nachbars ist, und ihm zu verstehen zu geben, dass in ihrer Wagschale jetzt gleichviel Erz liege: warum wolle man nicht gut Freund mit einander sein? (WS 22)

Thus, a weaker party may pursue the more modest objective of establishing a relation of equilibrium and friendship, rather than trying to achieve physical *Übermacht*. This is because achieving *Übermacht*, or the destruction of the stronger power, is often not worth the effort. Nonetheless, one of Nietzsche’s wider aims is to show how this state of compromise and mutual self-control – which he describes as a condition in which there exists “rule of law” (a *Rechtszustand*) – does not obtain between unequal parties. Where inequality arises, according to Nietzsche, relations of subjugation (“Unterwerfung”) will be established since any compacts (“Verträge”) upon which law had been founded will become void:

Dieser [der Rechtszustand] aber ist ebenso endgültig ein Ende gemacht, wenn der eine Theil entschieden schwächer, als der andere, geworden ist: dann tritt Unterwerfung ein und das Recht hört auf, aber der Erfolg ist der selbe wie der, welcher bisher durch das Recht erreicht wurde. (WS 26)

<sup>205</sup> Gerhardt (1983), p.125 (my italics); see also p.124.

<sup>206</sup> See fn.165; see also Connolly (1991), p.165.

Though the weaker party may strive for equilibrium out of economic interest, the stronger does not stand to gain anything in bringing this about. Indeed, in the state of nature, there is no way of reestablishing *Gleichgewicht* should it be lost since there is no overarching institutional or juridical framework able to reimpose balance (for example, though practices such as ostracism). Should one party become stronger, there is nothing to stop this party monopolising all available power. This would seem to contradict the idea we found in the respect model, namely, that we should raise other weaker powers into a state of equality with us in order to agonally compete with them. Notwithstanding, what has been demonstrated is that if we want to think of the Nietzschean agon as based on some form of *Gleichgewicht*, we must concede that it *does* involve self-limitation, which is to say a renunciation of violent means of pursuing preponderance (*Übergewicht*), even if the goal of preponderance is itself preserved.

But what about the agonal conflict that takes place *within* the state of justice, where there *is* an overarching power, or where individuals exist within a community that has already renounced physical violence and are competing for dominance within a given pacific contest? What prevents *these* adversaries from erecting a tyrannical hegemony? To be sure, Nietzsche thinks that, in a “natural order of things”, counterbalancing serves just this purpose:

[I]n einer natürlichen Ordnung der Dinge, [giebt] es immer mehrere Genies [...], die sich gegenseitig zur That reizen, wie sie sich auch gegenseitig in der Grenze des Maaßes halten. Das ist der Kern der hellenischen Wettkampf-Vorstellung: sie verabscheut die Alleinherrschaft und fürchtet ihre Gefahren, sie begehrt, als Schutzmittel gegen das Genie — ein zweites Genie. (CV 5 1.789)

The ideal situation is one in which no single competitor is able to tyrannise over the contest due to the fact that their opponent is always strong enough to remain, on average, neck and neck with them. However, what is notable is that, *contra* Siemens’ account of the counterbalancing model, this is *not* a mutually *perceived* equality, but

a *de facto* form of equality: contestants striving maximally to achieve predominance within a given competitive practice are unable to conclusively prevail due to the approximately equal ability of their adversaries. Unlike the situation of *Gleichgewicht*, their *perception* of the equality of their counterpart does not have a limiting effect in this context. We might imagine a pair of wrestlers who, despite struggling to the utmost of their abilities, and each believing themselves to be superior in strength, are nonetheless unable to conclusively force their opponent into submission (without resorting to illegitimate means) due to their actual relative equality.

This is not the only characterisation of the agon in Nietzsche's writings that fails to fit Siemens' counterbalancing reading. For another example, we might turn to MA 158:

Verhängniss der Grösse. — Jeder grossen Erscheinung folgt die Entartung nach, namentlich im Bereiche der Kunst. Das Vorbild des Grossen reizt die eitleren Naturen zum äusserlichen Nachmachen oder zum Ueberbieten; dazu haben alle grossen Begabungen das Verhängnissvolle an sich, viele schwächere Kräfte und Keime zu erdrücken und um sich herum gleichsam die Natur zu veröden. Der glücklichste Fall in der Entwicklung einer Kunst ist der, dass mehrere Genie's sich gegenseitig in Schranken halten; bei diesem Kampfe wird gewöhnlich den schwächeren und zarteren Naturen auch Luft und Licht gegönnt.

This state of affairs contrasts sharply with that depicted in the aphorisms on *Gleichgewicht*. The task is no longer that of foreclosing violent or internecine struggle, but rather that of preventing the suffocation of burgeoning talents. In their pursuit of glory, the artist does not limit themselves; furthermore, they are already committed to a non-violent mode of contest; and finally, their acknowledgement of others of a similar ability is not going to cause them to abandon the goal of preponderance out of concerns for their self-preservation (as was the case with *Gleichgewicht*). Consequently, a *Wettkampf* in the arts is rare and difficult to actively sustain. It overexcites the desire to establish absolute ascendancy and therefore constantly threatens to arrest cultural development; thus, in the arts at any rate, "[d]as

Agonale ist auch die Gefahr bei aller Entwicklung” (NL 5[146] 8.78). Indeed, Nietzsche portrays the history of art as a concatenation of tyrants. Thus, with reference to Homer, and his suffocation of the ancient Greek aesthetic agon:

Alles Gute stammt doch von ihm her: aber zugleich ist er die gewaltigste Schranke geblieben, die es gab. Er verflachte, und deshalb kämpften die Ernstern so gegen ihn, umsonst. Homer siegte immer. (NL 5[146] 8.78)

In this transgenerational contest of artists, there is no mutual assessment and subsequent adjustment of goals such as is occasioned by the kind of *Gleichgewicht* that occasionally arises in the state of nature. There is at most a one-way assessment of equality as the new contender feels themselves worthy of assuming the mantle of their predecessor.<sup>207</sup> And yet, Homer “always triumphed”, even in death. Indeed, no institutional mechanism, such as ostracism for example, is able to remove excessively dominant individuals if they are deceased. In such cases, it *is* a third party – namely, an *audience* – who must judge the adversaries as being equal. An agon arises in this context when a plurality of artists are actually incapable of monopolising critical acclaim (despite their best efforts). The equality implied here is an *actual* equality in the adversaries’ relative abilities to win the favour of their audience.<sup>208</sup> Since there are no institutions to enforce this counterbalancing of great cultural figures, it is simply “[d]er *glücklichste* Fall” when “mehrere Genie’s sich gegenseitig in Schranken halten”.

In CV 5, while Nietzsche does refer to the transgenerational contest of cultural figures, his focus on the practice of ostracism as a limiting mechanism shows that he primarily has the contention of *living* individuals in mind. We should observe that his conception of ostracism is quite different from that of Aristotle, for whom

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<sup>207</sup> See CV 5 1.787.

<sup>208</sup> Indeed, Nietzsche stresses the importance of third-party judgement in a number of notes. See e.g. NL 16[22] 7.402, where Nietzsche describes the *Wettkampf* as a “Kampf vor einem Tribunal.” See also NL 16[21] 7.401: “Was ist das aesthetische Urtheil? Das Richterthum in der Tragödie. / Der Wettkampf unter Künstlern setzt das rechte Publikum voraus.” See also PHG §6 1.826-7.

banishing “those who seemed to predominate too much through their wealth, or the number of their friends, or through any other political influence” fulfilled the function of levelling citizens so as to create harmonious proportion within the state. Moreover, according to Aristotle, ostracism secures the equality needed to sustain a legal order insofar as excessively preeminent individuals stand above, and are therefore unanswerable to, the laws of ordinary men.<sup>209</sup> For Nietzsche, however, the Aristotelian conception of ostracism as a means to counteracting the rise of tyrants only emerged later in Greek history – namely, within the explicitly political context, when, as was already mentioned above, “die Gefahr offenkundig [war], daß einer der großen um die Wette kämpfenden Politiker und Parteihäupter zu schädlichen und zerstörenden Mitteln und zu bedenklichen Staatsstreichen, in der Hitze des Kampfes, sich gereizt fühlt” (CV 5 1.789). In this guise, then, ostracism is conceived as a prophylactic against violent *Vernichtungskampf*.

In contrast to this levelling or stabilising construal of ostracism, by which the pursuit of excellence was *curtailed*, Nietzsche asserts that the *original* function of ostracism was not only to reestablish the *de facto* form of mutual moderation referred to above, but also to *stimulate* the pursuit of excellence. He claims that with the emergence of an overly dominant individual, “damit der Wettkampf versiegen würde und der ewige Lebensgrund des hellenischen Staates gefährdet wäre” (ibid.). The reason excessive dominance dries up agonal contest is that such contest is driven by *envy*, and envy only arises under conditions of approximately equality of ability.<sup>210</sup> Adversaries must feel themselves capable of defeating their peers, and as equal to them in the sense of belonging to the same competitive league as them.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> See Aristotle, *Politics*, 1284a3-1284b3.

<sup>210</sup> This is strongly suggested by WS 29: “Wo die Gleichheit wirklich durchgedrungen und dauernd begründet ist, entsteht jener, im Ganzen als unmoralisch geltende Hang, der im Naturzustande kaum begreiflich wäre: der Neid. Der Neidische fühlt jedes Hervorragende des Anderen über das gemeinsame Maass und will ihn bis dahin herabdrücken — oder sich bis dorthin erheben [...]”

<sup>211</sup> We find a similar idea in Aristotle (and de Tocqueville, for that matter). See *Rhetoric*, 1388a5f.: “It is clear also what kind of people we envy; that was included in what has been said already; we envy those who are near us in time, place, age, or reputation. [...] Also our

Ostracism, in preventing any individual from setting up a permanent hegemony, thereby maintains the flow of contest; that is, it protects “das Wettspiel der Kräfte” (ibid.). What should be remarked, however, is that in this case, the equality that is safeguarded is the mutually perceived (i.e. envy eliciting) equality of the contestants.

What we can conclude from these observations, then, is that there are multiple conceptions of equality informing Nietzsche’s early conception of the *Wettkampf*:

1. A form of equality that *prevents* violent struggle and thereby *enables* agonal contest; namely, *Gleichgewicht*: a mutually perceived equality of martial capacity, which causes opposed parties to renounce the goal of violently overpowering one another;
2. A *de facto* equality established independently of third-party adjudicators. This is an equality of ability such that maximally striving opponents cannot conclusively defeat one another at a given non-violent competitive practice;
3. A *de facto* equality in the eyes of third-party adjudicators, which concretely limits the opposed contestants’ claims to predominance (particularly in the context of aesthetic agonal struggle);
4. A form of equality that *provokes* agonal struggle; namely, the mutually perceived equality of agonistic adversaries with respect to their proficiency at a particular non-violent task. This elicits contestants’ envy and, correspondingly, their desire to enter into contest with one another.

We now have a clear insight into how, for Nietzsche, the mechanics of the agon rely on distinct, and equally indispensable, forms of equality. It should now be evident how Siemens’ counterbalancing model obfuscates the way in which a) *self*-restraint

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fellow-competitors, [...] [are not] those whom, in our opinion or that of others, we take to be far below us or far above us.”

is a necessary *enabling* condition of the agon insofar as it gets us out of the unmeasured state of nature; and, b) judgements of equality from a third-party standpoint are often a necessary component of agonal limitation.

Nonetheless, from the analysis so far, it may appear as though ostracism and *de facto* equality (i.e. either [2] or [3]) are the only available sources of agonal moderation. Self-restraint has only been shown to be involved in getting parties out of the initial state of nature and preventing violence, but not necessarily in preventing individuals from tyrannising over a given agon while obeying the rules. Is self-restraint, even within the norms of a given agonal practice, irrelevant for Nietzsche? By Gerhardt's and Siemens' interpretations, if contestants are not of roughly equal capacity, ostracism is the only available corrective, since the opposed parties will always strive maximally for supremacy over the competitive practice in question. However, as we will now see, there is abundant evidence that controverts this interpretation and which demonstrates the importance of self-restraint within Nietzsche's understanding of agonal measure.

#### 2.4.2.2. AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTION OF AGONAL RESPECT

Nietzsche was undoubtedly aware of the role played by religion and myth within Greek agonal culture. Already in his 1875-6 lecture notes on "Der Gottesdienst der Griechen", he reiterates Curtius' observation that victors in the various official agons were obliged to bequeath their prizes to the gods.<sup>212</sup> But as we look beyond the *Philologica*, we see that Nietzsche uses the term "mythisch" to refer to two quite distinct ideas within the context of the agon. First, he uses the term to denote the violently heroic world of *Homeric* myth, which Nietzsche, like Burckhardt, thought

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<sup>212</sup> See GDG, KGW II/5, pp.424-5: "Alle Siegespreise, die in den Agonen gewonnen wurden, mußten vom Sieger dem Gott wieder geweiht werden." Nietzsche also notes how there were temples used solely for crowning the victors of the agonal games (see *ibid.*, pp.418-9).



was antagonistic to the agonal world of pacifically competing individuals.<sup>213</sup> On the other hand, he uses the term to refer to the ancient Greek institution of religion and religious belief. This latter form of the *mythisch* is figured as integral to agonal culture insofar as it functions as a brake on the affect of ambition:

Gegensatz zu dem Wettkampf der mythische Zug: d.h. er verhindert die Selbstsucht des Individuums. Der Mensch kommt in Betracht als Resultat einer Vergangenheit: in ihm wird die Vergangenheit geehrt.

Welches Mittel wendet der hellenische Wille an, um die nackte Selbstsucht in diesem Kampfe zu verhüten und sie in den Dienst des Ganzen zu stellen? Das Mythische.

Beispiel: Aeschylus' Oresteia und die politischen Ereignisse. [...]

Dieser mythische Geist erklärt es nun auch, wie die Künstler wetteifern durften: ihre Selbstsucht war gereinigt, insofern sie sich als Medium fühlten: wie der Priester ohne Eitelkeit war, wenn er als sein Gott auftrat. (NL 8[68] 7.248)

From this rather fragmentary *Nachlass* note, we can extrapolate a number of different ways in which religious myth served to delimit Greek agonal ambition according to Nietzsche. First, religious myth reminds contestants of the importance of their ancestry or past ("Vergangenheit") – that is, it reminds them that they compete not for their own glory, but for the glory of their ancestral line. Second, myth serves as a *warning*. In Aeschylus' Orestian trilogy, the excessive political ambition of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (who murder Agamemnon upon his return from Troy) is brutally punished, with Apollo ordering Orestes to murder the usurpers and Athena sanctioning the act of vengeance. Finally, religious sensibility purified artists' personal ambition insofar as they felt that they were personally channelling

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<sup>213</sup> See e.g. NL 16[21] 7.401. "Kampf des Heroisch-Mythischen mit dem Individuum: Bevor das Individuum erwacht, erwacht die Heroenwelt als Welt von Individuen. Kampf des Heroisch-Repräsentativen und des agonalen Individuums: bei Pindar. Hesiods Eris und Homer selbst".

the divinity in their artistic activity; on account of this, they did not hold their talent to be strictly attributable to themselves.<sup>214</sup>

Note that all of the aforementioned restraining effects of religion take the form of a modification of contestants' dispositions. In their consideration of myth, the tyrannous ambition of the individual is hindered (*verhindert*) in such a way as to corral it into the "Dienst des Ganzen". This idea is already articulated in CV 5, and in far more lucid terms:

Der Grieche ist neidisch und empfindet diese Eigenschaft nicht als Makel, sondern als Wirkung einer wohlthätigen Gottheit: welche Kluft des ethischen Urtheils zwischen uns und ihm! Weil er neidisch ist, fühlt er auch, bei jedem Übermaaß von Ehre Reichthum Glanz und Glück, das neidische Auge eines Gottes auf sich ruhen und er fürchtet diesen Neid; in diesem Falle mahnt er ihn an das Vergängliche jedes Menschenlooses, ihm graut vor seinem Glücke und das Beste davon opfernd beugt er sich vor dem göttlichen Neide. (CV 5 1.787)<sup>215</sup>

In chorus with Curtius, Nietzsche portrays religious belief as having both a stimulating and restraining effect. For Nietzsche, the Greeks felt that their envy could be affirmed and acted upon on account of the fact that they thought it bestowed upon them by a "wohlthätige Gottheit". Simultaneously though, the Greeks feared divine envy, which they felt would bring the scourge of *nemesis* upon them should they pursue their hubristic ambitions or achieve immoderate success. Myths such as those of Thamyras, Marsyas and Niobe, helped inculcate this fear into the mind of every Greek, and with it, some modicum of prudence and self-restraint (what we might call *sōphrosynē*). We can deduce from these considerations that Nietzsche did not think that the Greeks pursued supremacy in an unrestrained fashion (only being limited by the tyrannical desires of others); rather, out of fear, they would willingly remove themselves from any competition in which they sensed their success was becoming disproportionate.

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<sup>214</sup> See also GGL III, KGW II/5, p.299: "[D]as siegreiche Individuum gilt als Incarnation des Gottes, tritt in den Gott zurück."

<sup>215</sup> On the envy of the gods, see also WS 30.

A similar dynamic of self-limitation can be identified in Nietzsche's conception of patriotism. Already in an early *Nachlass* fragment, Nietzsche presents "der Heimatsinstinkt" as one of the most effective means in the struggle "gegen die maßlose Selbstsucht des Individuums" (NL 16[16] 7.398). Or as he expresses it in another note: "Was ist es, was die mächtigen Triebe in die Bahn der Wohlfahrt bringt? Im Allgemeinen die Liebe. Die Liebe zur Heimatstadt umschließt und bändigt den agonalen Trieb" (NL 21[14] 7.526). Again, this thought given a more comprehensive treatment in CV 5:

Für die Alten aber war das Ziel der agonalen Erziehung die Wohlfahrt des Ganzen, der staatlichen Gesellschaft. Jeder Athener z.B. sollte sein Selbst im Wettkampfe soweit entwickeln, als es Athen vom höchsten Nutzen sei und am wenigsten Schaden bringe. Es war kein Ehrgeiz in's Ungemessene und Unzumessende, wie meistens der moderne Ehrgeiz: an das Wohl seiner Mutterstadt dachte der Jüngling, wenn er um die Wette lief oder warf oder sang; ihren Ruhm wollte er in dem seinigen mehren; seinen Stadtgöttern weihte er die Kränze, die die Kampfrichter ehrend auf sein Haupt setzten. Jeder Grieche empfand in sich von Kindheit an den brennenden Wunsch, im Wettkampf der Städte ein Werkzeug zum Heile seiner Stadt zu sein: darin war seine Selbstsucht entflammt, darin war sie gezügelt und umschränkt. (CV 5 1.789-90)

Nietzsche thus marries the at once stimulating ("entflammend") and restraining ("zügelnd") effects of both religion and patriotism in a manner strongly recalling Curtius. Agonal contestants are compelled to compete out of love for the commonweal (i.e. "die Wohlfahrt des Ganzen") and their national godheads ("Stadtgötter"). Notwithstanding, these ideas (of the state and of the national godheads) also exert a restrictive force insofar as they impel the individual to check their agonal drives as soon as they threaten to come into conflict with the higher interests of the *polis*. Agonal education was therefore motivated by what Nietzsche calls a "burning wish" to serve the public good – one that must have ideally outweighed their egoistic aspirations. We can therefore infer from this that individuals would, *of their own accord*, rein in their personal ambitions were they to come into conflict with the ends of the state. Obviously, this requires the inculcation

of, and widespread submission to, the moral authority of the state – just as Grote thought the democratic *Wettkampf* relied on there being “*constantly present, to the mind of every citizen [...] the conditions of a pacific society*” and a thoroughgoing respect for “constitutional morality”. This does not necessarily vitiate the idea that every Greek also secretly yearned to tyrannise over the particular agons in which they participated, or even over society as a whole. The agonal Greeks may well have been characterised by a degree of cognitive dissonance as their egoistic and social concerns fought for psychological priority. However, the supposition of the above texts is that the latter would usually win out in the event of a serious clash of such interests.

These findings, which illuminate the persistent importance of *self*-limitation within Nietzsche’s early agonism, decisively undermine the validity of the counterbalancing model; yet, it would be erroneous to conclude from this that our study stands in support of its opponent, the respect reading. While my exegesis has revealed a model in which subjects adjust their own aspirations, this does not occur in the way described by either Hatab’s or Connolly’s Nietzsche-inspired accounts of agonal moderation – that is, due to contestants acknowledging a particular ontology of difference and accordingly respecting their opponents’ right to participate. It is rather a mode of self-restraint that emerges *as a result of social inculcation*; moreover, though I would argue that we should conceive of this self-restraint as marked by the affect of respect, this is a respect for one’s *community* and the religious traditions of that community, *not respect for one’s adversary*.

### 2.4.2.3. THE LATER NIETZSCHE ON EQUALITY AND SELF-RESTRAINT

Given the critique of collective morality and law that Nietzsche develops during his middle period (and which is already thematised in UB III<sup>216</sup>), it should come as no surprise that, as we move into the mid-1880s, the need for a religious and patriotic moral framework is no longer posited as a precondition of agonal conflict.<sup>217</sup> However, the same cannot be said for self-restraint and equality, which are essential to his later notion of agonal struggle.

We should first consider how Nietzsche characterises the will to power in JGB 22, namely, as “gerade die tyrannisch-rücksichtenlose und unerbittliche Durchsetzung von Machtansprüchen”. According to this *Weltanschauung*, “[zieht] jede Macht in jedem Augenblicke ihre letzte Konsequenz”. At first glance, there seems to be no ontological space for agonal self-restraint within this formulation of the will power. The only possible source of moderation would appear to be approximate *de facto* equality of power. Nonetheless, in JGB 265, Nietzsche indicates that where equal forces are opposed, they do in fact exhibit *self*-restraint. This is what we have already seen Nietzsche describe as the “eingebornen himmlischen Mechanik” according to which even stars (“Sterne”) act with “Feinheit und *Selbstbeschränkung* im Verkehre mit ihres Gleichen” (my italics). But how can there be what he refers to as an egoistic “Austausch von Ehren und Rechten als Wesen alles Verkehrs”, which “zum naturgemässen Zustand der Dinge gehört”? Is this not, as was indicated above, a manifest case of the anthropomorphic fallacy? Surely celestial bodies are not capable of granting rights to one another? Though this may partly be the case, I will now suggest that through a close reading of JGB 22 and 265, we might be able to elucidate Nietzsche’s somewhat abstruse hypotheses.

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<sup>216</sup> See UB III 1.337. See also Herman Siemens, “(Self-)legislation, Life and Love in Nietzsche’s Philosophy”, in I. Wienand (ed.), *Neue Beiträge zu Nietzsches Moral-, Politik- und Kulturphilosophie* (Fribourg, CH: Academic Press Fribourg, 2009), pp.67-90 (pp.73ff).

<sup>217</sup> N.B., however, that Nietzsche speaks affirmatively of the need for religion in JGB 61.

In JGB 22, Nietzsche seeks to reconceptualise nature as an interaction of *active* forces. In doing so, he aims to contest the idea of natural law as conceived within the mechanistic worldview – that is, the idea that all natural events “obey” the dictates of nature in the sense of being merely the reactive response to exogenous causes in accordance with preordained natural laws.<sup>218</sup> By contrast, Nietzsche’s active vision of nature conceives of natural events as being the result of a plurality of actively striving power organisations that obey no law, yet, in their maximally striving against one another, exhibit necessity (“Notwendigkeit”) and predictability (“Berechenbarkeit”). But if all activity is the result of an endogenously initiated, active striving, and not mere reactivity to external causes, then there must, Nietzsche tells us, be action at a distance. The reason for this is that, as will be further explicated in Chapter 4, a will to power organisation must be able to assess the relative power of that to which it is opposed before actively striving to overcome and assimilate it.<sup>219</sup> Thus, Nietzsche claims that even “[i]n der chemischen Welt herrscht die schärfste Wahrnehmung der Kraftverschiedenheit” (NL 35[58] 11.537).

What we can discern from JGB 265 is that a will to power organisation does not set out to overpower an opposed organisation that it perceives as roughly equal to its own strength – hence the apparent celestial order. Within Nietzsche’s account, the heavenly bodies *actively* restrain themselves. Moreover, their acknowledgement of the equal power of their counterparts should not be conceived as a concession made in the face of an insurmountable obstacle, but as a *positive* affect of reverence, whereby entities recognise and honour their *own strength* in the other: “sie ehrt sich in ihnen und in den Rechten, welche sie an dieselben abgiebt.” Rather than generating a relation free of tension, this leads to a mode of non-destructive and non-exploitative contest – a “Wettstreit”, as Nietzsche describes it in NL 11[134] 9.491.

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<sup>218</sup> See also NL 40[42] 11.650: “[D]ie einzige Kraft, die es giebt, ist gleicher Art wie die des Willens: ein commandiren an andere Subjekte, welche sich daraufhin verändern.”

<sup>219</sup> See NL 12[27] 10.404-5: “Die Wirkung des Unorganischen auf einander ist zu studiren (sie ist immer eine Wirkung in die Ferne, also ein ‘Erkennen’ ist nothwendig allem Wirken vorher: das Ferne muß percipirt werden. Der Tast- und Muskelsinn muß sein Analogon haben:).”

Thus, even at a cosmological-metaphysical level, what we might refer to as agonal conflict involves some form of self-imposed measure, which emerges from the *perceived* equality (*Gleichgewicht*) of an opposed entity.

It should be pointed out that the experimental verifiability or falsifiability of this hypothesis is not what is of philosophical importance (indeed, it will be seen in Chapter 4 that the will to power is not a falsifiable theory). What matters is whether it can account for the same observable phenomena as effectively as, or even better than, the passive, mechanical model of nature. And needless to say, Nietzsche does indeed think that his hypothesis is better able to describe the “intelligible Charakter” of the world (JGB 36). Thus, if this is the case, and we are given a choice between the two, then Nietzsche thinks it worth our while choosing the active vision, since the reactive notion of mechanism supports a plethora of philosophical prejudices that negatively impact upon our practical life. Indeed, Nietzsche claims that the mechanical theoretical worldview betrays “ein artiger Hintergedanke, in dem noch einmal die pöbelmännische Feindschaft gegen alles Bevorrechtete und Selbstherrliche [...] verkleidet liegt” – namely, the Christian-democratic notion of universal “Gleichheit vor dem Gesetz” (JGB 22).<sup>220</sup>

By demoralising nature, and thereby de-essentialising the idea of universal equality, Nietzsche thinks we can open up a logical space of possibility for novel modes of social agency. Indeed, Nietzsche’s thoughts on social organisation can be viewed, at least in part, as an attempt to envisage modes of living together that affirm and embody the world as will to power to as great a degree as possible. An apposite place to begin our inquiry into how his theoretical conception of the will to power cashes out practically is with his polemical description of the society of the blond beasts. As was emphasised in Chapter 1, we should not read Nietzsche as advocating the murderous behaviour of the blond beasts; nonetheless, his portrayal of the

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<sup>220</sup> See also NL 7[54] 12.313: “Werden als Erfinden Wollen Selbstverneinen, Sich-selbst-Überwinden: kein Subjekt, sondern ein Thun, Setzen, schöpferisch, keine ‘Ursachen und Wirkungen’. [...] Unbrauchbarkeit der mechanistischen Theorie — giebt den Eindruck der Sinnlosigkeit.”

sources of their social stability is illuminating and elaborates upon many of the themes he develops in MA and WS. Thus, he describes the community of blond beasts as being composed of individuals who are

[...] so streng durch Sitte, Verehrung, Brauch, Dankbarkeit, noch mehr durch gegenseitige Bewachung, durch Eifersucht inter pares in Schranken gehalten [...], die andererseits im Verhalten zu einander so erfinderisch in Rücksicht, Selbstbeherrschung, Zartsinn, Treue, Stolz und Freundschaft sich beweisen (GM I 11 5.274).

Toward those excluded from their community, of course, the blond beasts unleash their will without restraint. But what are the internal sources of measure that allow the blond beasts to socially cohere and displace their aggressive pathos onto foreigners? In this text, equality is clearly functioning as a fundamental source of measure. First, we can infer that a type of equality analogous to that of the *Gleichgewicht* described in MA is operating in this society: members mutually perceive, or *recognise*, one another as *pares* and accordingly exercise *self*-restraint towards their apparent equals (e.g. “Verehrung”). Yet Nietzsche also portrays these individuals as *mutually* restraining one another: it seems that despite the prevalence of self-limitation, they are nonetheless always pushing to overstep their bounds, but, due to their being roughly equal in their *Eifersucht* (i.e. there is “Eifersucht inter pares”), they are alert enough to identify and actively thwart one another’s attempts to attain predominance.

In keeping with his description of the will to power, this idea of acting with a customary reverence (“Verehrung”) towards one’s equals is not understood by Nietzsche as a heteronomous act of subordination to the mores of one’s society; it is rather conceived as active and egoistic in kind. To exercise the “Sitte” of one’s society is not the same as “Sittlichkeit”, the passive submission to the morality of one’s milieu.<sup>221</sup> This is manifest in his characterisation of the sovereign individual

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<sup>221</sup> See also NL 9[145] 12.419, where Nietzsche directly associates *Sittlichkeit* with passivity and obedience: “Das Unvermögen zur Macht: seine Hypokrisie und Klugheit: als Gehorsam (Einordnung, Pflicht-Stolz, Sittlichkeit...) als Ergebung, Hingebung, Liebe”.



in GM II 2, whom he describes as “das autonome übersittliche Individuum”, adding that “‘autonom’ und ‘sittlich’ schliesst sich aus”:

Der “freie” Mensch, der Inhaber eines langen unzerbrechlichen Willens, hat in diesem Besitz auch sein Werthmaass: von sich aus nach den Andern hinblickend, ehrt er oder verachtet er; und eben so nothwendig als er die ihm Gleichen, die Starken und Zuverlässigen (die welche versprechen dürfen) ehrt [...]. (5.294)

We might be tempted to equate this with the Kantian ideal of autonomy; however, there are critical differences. In the first place, there is the fact that Nietzschean sovereignty is not the result of rational reflection, as is conformity to the categorical imperative; it is rather the culmination of a lengthy pre-history of social conditioning, which fashions humans in such a way that they are left inclined to act customarily without need of external compulsion: “der Mensch wurde mit Hülfe der Sittlichkeit der Sitte und der socialen Zwangsjacke wirklich berechenbar gemacht”. Moreover, this freedom is *embodied* – i.e. “in allen Muskeln [zuckend]” – as opposed to being purely intellectual in kind. It furthermore does not result from counteracting the instincts; rather, “Verantwortlichkeit, [...] dieser Macht über sich und das Geschick hat sich bei ihm bis in seine unterste Tiefe hinabgesenkt und ist zum Instinkt geworden, zum dominirenden Instinkt”. It is by means of custom, legal institutions and disciplinary practices that this tenacity of will has been bred into the human animal. Instead of being a mere slave to his momentary instincts, the fruit of this long labour of breeding – i.e. the sovereign individual – can now resist his desires, and his drives are organised firmly enough for him to be able to fulfil his promises, without being diverted by caprice. But whereas Nietzsche previously valorised the capacity to resist personal whim insofar as it enables individuals to better serve the higher goals of their community (as in CV 5), this aptitude is now exalted for enabling the sovereign individual to realise *his own* projects. He is in no way answerable to the moral authority of the community, but “[dürfen für] sich gut sagen [...] und mit Stolz, also [dürfen] auch zu sich Ja sagen [...]” (GM II 3 5.294-5).

Nietzsche sees himself further diverging from the Kantian notion of moral autonomy insofar as he thinks Kantian morality demands that one treat everyone as equals.<sup>222</sup> Conversely, the way in which Nietzsche's sovereign individual acts towards others depends on his particular evaluation of the specific individual in question. Hence, he honours ("ehrt") his equals while having contempt ("Verachtung") for those beneath him. Furthermore, he honours his equals not out of fear of them, or from passive submission to an external moral authority, but out of his personal, active and affirmative assessment of such equals according to his own "Wertmaass".

Although it may appear as though mutually perceived equality is sufficient to induce agonal self-restraint according to Nietzsche's later agonism, this is not the case. This self-restraint is based in a feeling of reverence or veneration ("Verehrung") for one's equals, and it is important to recall that a predilection for this kind of response to the perception of equality is impressed by means of custom (i.e. "Sitte" or "Brauch") and institutional inculcation. The perception of such quality alone in no way entails self-restraint. On the contrary, perceived approximate equality *can* be the grounds for destructive conflict. Take duels, for example, of which Nietzsche says, "Gleichheit vor dem Feinde — erste Voraussetzung zu einem rechtschaffnen Duell. Wo man verachtet, kann man nicht Krieg führen; wo man befiehlt, wo man Etwas unter sich sieht, hat man nicht Krieg zu führen" (EH weise 7 6.274).<sup>223</sup>

This is where the cosmological notion of an "Austausch von Ehren und Rechten" departs most radically from his notion of society as a collective founded

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<sup>222</sup> See JGB 187 and 188: See also Tom Bailey, "Nietzsche the Kantian?", in Ken Gemes and John Richardson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.134-59 (p.151).

<sup>223</sup> Compare FW 13. See also NL 8[9] 10.331: "Voraussetzung der Blutrache ist zunächst, daß sie eine Familien-Angelegenheit ist: die Gaugenossenschaft oder der Staat mischt sich zunächst nicht ein. Aber sie setzt die höhere Organisation schon voraus: es ist Zweikampf zwischen Gleichgeordneten, Einem Ganzen Zugehörigen. Die Feindschaft gegen die Familie des Blutschuldigen ist grundverschieden von der Feindschaft gegen alles, was nicht zur höheren gemeinsamen Organisation gehört. Es fehlt die Verachtung, der Glaube an die tiefere Rasse des Feindes: in der Blutrache ist Ehre und Gleichberechtigung."

on *Verehrung* and *Ehrfurcht*: at the cosmological level, there is no need for the institutions and cultural mores that are demanded at the social level. Looking back to his thoughts on Schmidt, we can see that Nietzsche, like the Greeks in Schmidt's analysis, considers the virtue of *Ehrfurcht* or *Aidos* as one that must be *cultivated*: "Zur Ehrfurcht erziehen, in diesem pöbelhaften Zeitalter, welches selber im Huldigen noch pöbelhaft ist, für gewöhnlich aber zudringlich und schamlos [...]" (NL 26[244] 11.214).<sup>224</sup> He also tellingly describes the Greek disdain for hubris as follows: "es ist die Verletzung des Aidos ein schrecklicher Anblick für den, *welcher an Aidos gewöhnt ist*" (NL 7[161] 10.295; my italics). *Ehrfurcht* is a matter of *Erziehung* and *Gewöhnung*.<sup>225</sup>

Though ostracism has now dropped out of the picture, the interconnection of self-restraint, education and some form of conventional morality evidently have not – and in this sense, Nietzsche's later thought still reverberates with that of Curtius, Burckhardt and Grote. This shows that even in the later works, Nietzsche still does not view agonal measure as grounded in a counterbalancing of aspiring tyrants (*pace* Siemens). It is rather by virtue of various educational practices that, when individuals identify those of equal standing, they agonally adjust their disposition towards their counterparts.<sup>226</sup> In a manner echoing Burckhardt, therefore, education is the means by which the self-restraint of contestants' ambitions is engendered. Again, this continence is not elicited by a sense of positive regard for the other; rather, in honouring their *semblables*, individuals egoistically honour *themselves* ("sie ehrt *sich in ihnen*" [JGB 265; my italics]). This, then, is the chief motivation for honouring one's equals. Though Honig notes the need for institutions

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<sup>224</sup> See also Schmidt (1882), vol.1, p.173, where he recounts how Democritus "[behandelt] die Weckung und Befestigung der Aidos als das wesentlich Ziel der Knabenerziehung". Schmidt also views the state and state institutions as indispensable foundations of social measure. By implication, therefore, he does not think that *Aidos* and *Aischyne* are on their own sufficient explains for the phenomenon of social measure (see *ibid.*, pp.198ff.).

<sup>225</sup> See also JGB 259, where Nietzsche states that "Sich gegenseitig der Verletzung, der Gewalt, der Ausbeutung enthalten, seinen Willen dem des Andern gleich setzen" can *become customary* ("zur guten Sitte werden").

<sup>226</sup> On the importance of religious education in the later Nietzsche's thought, see also JGB 61 and GM II 23 5.333ff.

in the later Nietzsche, she misconceives of these as sites for safely venting pent up aggression or removing superdominant contestants; what we have discovered, however, is that institutions primarily maintain social measure by dint of their capacity for instilling the related virtues of *continence* and *tenacity* (as components of *Verantwortlichkeit*) into individuals.<sup>227</sup>

But how does this analysis bear upon the respect and counterbalancing readings? First, it demonstrates that, contrary to the respect reading, and consistent with his early thought, Nietzsche does not posit equal opportunity as a ground of agonal conflict. Rather, it is two other forms of equality that condition the agon; namely, *perceived* equality of power, which, *contra* the counterbalancing model, evokes agonal *self*-restraint, and approximate equality in the degree to which individuals are jealous (*eifersüchtig*) of one another, which underpins *mutual* restraint.<sup>228</sup> The second point of disagreement between Nietzsche's later agonism and the respect model is that the latter suggests that self-limitation is occasioned by the appreciation of a certain ontology of difference (and the fact that one's own existence depends on the continued existence of one's other). Yet our analysis has revealed that Nietzsche understands such restraint as based on the fulfilment of two quite different conditions: socio-cultural inculcation and the perception of equality. Lastly, we have witnessed that in continuity with his early thought, he does not believe that stronger individuals can treat those weaker than them with agonal respect without jeopardising the vitality of the social body to which they belong.

There is nevertheless a striking problem with Nietzsche's model. First, in JGB 259, he claims that self-restraint can only become customary ("zur guten Sitte

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<sup>227</sup> See also GD Streifzüge 39, where Nietzsche also traces *Verantwortlichkeit* back to social institutions: "Der ganze Westen hat jene Instinkte nicht mehr, aus denen Institutionen wachsen, aus denen Zukunft wächst: seinem 'modernen Geiste' geht vielleicht Nichts so sehr wider den Strich. Man lebt für heute, man lebt sehr geschwind, — man lebt sehr unverantwortlich [...]" (6.141).

<sup>228</sup> In this way, Nietzsche follows Aristotle's notion of *Megalopsychos*, insofar as one is not meant to act towards one's inferiors with a noble disposition, and there is a golden mean or measure dictating the degree to which it is proper to pursue honour. See Tongeren (1989), p.157.

warden”), “wenn die Bedingungen dazu gegeben sind (nämlich deren thatsächliche Ähnlichkeit in Kraftmengen und Werthmaassen und ihre Zusammengehörigkeit innerhalb Eines Körpers).” However, as the texts from MA highlighted, it seems that establishing social bonds and institutions (“Zusammengehörigkeit innerhalb Eines Körpers”) presupposes just such self-restraint from violence. We therefore find ourselves in a circle: self-restraint presupposes social institutions, yet social institutions presuppose self-restraint. Where there is both an absence of self-restraint *and* an absence of institutions able to instil such self-restraint – say in the wake of extended periods of *Vernichtungskampf*, or under the conditions of *bellum omnium contra omnes* – it remains to be seen how Nietzsche thinks this *Ehrfurcht* can be generated.

## 2.5. CONCLUSION

We have now rebutted the idea that Nietzsche should, in general, be thought of as a thinker who sanctions destructive, unmeasured conflict. It has been demonstrated at length that in both his early and later writings, Nietzsche endorses a measured species of conflict, which I have referred to as “agonal”. This type of conflict has been shown to be measured insofar as it excludes both PDC *and* tyrannical struggles of exploitation (though it was shown to emerge from, and frequently descend back into, these forms of conflict).

However, there were three problems that we faced us in our endeavour to clarify Nietzsche’s conception of agonal conflict: first, it was unclear whether such conflict is intrinsically measured at all, or whether it is in fact inclusive of certain forms of PDC; second, if it is indeed a measured form of conflict, it was ambiguous what social scope this measure has – there was evidence for and against the idea that he was in favour of a socially inclusive form of agonal struggle; finally, exactly *how* agonal measure is concretely achieved was unclear: is it secured by dint of

counterbalancing tyrants against one another, or by virtue of some form of endogenous self-limitation on the part of contestants?

In trying to overcome these three obstacles, the writings of Nietzsche's contemporaries were found to be of indispensable value. Indeed, it should now be plain that his notion of agonal struggle does not emerge *ex nihilo* but rather stands in a relation of continuity with the historical conceptions of the Greek agon put forward by Curtius, Burckhardt, Grote and Schmidt. This said, in each instance he makes a highly selective appropriation. For example, he rejects Curtius' expansive use of the term *Wettkampf* in favour of Burckhardt's Hesiodic distinction of war and *Wettkampf*. However, the relation of dependency that Nietzsche identifies between aristocratic social order and the *Wettkampf* is looser than in Burckhardt, even though both similarly affirm a socially inclusive notion of the agon. Finally, Nietzsche reprises Curtius' and Grote's conviction that stable agonal conflict requires an authoritative and institutionalised moral order, be this juridical or religious in kind. Indeed, it has been taking these sources as a starting point that has enabled us to avoid many of the errors into which previous interpreters of Nietzsche's conception of agonal conflict have fallen. Situating his writings on the agon within the context of nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft* is therefore vital if we are to soundly reconstruct his notion of *Wettkampf* from the scant texts that explicitly deal with the theme. But let us now briefly recap how we resolved the three aforementioned problems

In response to the first problem, it was demonstrated that in both the early and the later writings, Nietzsche defines agonal conflict *in opposition to* murderous forms of conflict. To be sure, though, it was found that these two concepts of conflict have certain qualities in common. For example, competitors' in both are driven by a desire for predominance and a desire to give vent to their aggressive affects. Nonetheless, the two refer to mutually exclusive states of affairs. Whereas Nietzsche praises *Wettkampf* as a form of culturally productive conflict that spurs individuals to self-improvement and great deeds, he censures the *Vernichtungskampf* as a culturally harmful species of conflict that incites individuals to strive for the physical destruction of their adversary. Nonetheless, we should not lose sight of what was

ascertained in Chapter 1; namely, that Nietzsche often conceives of PDC as an *Urfaktum* of human existence, and that under some circumstances it can even be culturally beneficial.

Despite the *conceptual* disjunction that I establish between Nietzsche's opposed notions of agonal and destructive conflict, we nonetheless identified a strong *genetic* relation between these two forms of struggle. Agonal conflict is born out of *Vernichtungskampf* insofar as it is constituted by means of bridling the affects that, in their uncontrolled originary state, drive the latter. Hence, there is no strict dichotomy or dualism between humanity's higher capacities and its natural state. The relation is rather one of uncanny doubleness (the "unheimlich[.] Doppelcharakter" of the human being [CV 5 1.783]). Commentators have mistakenly held Nietzsche to confound *Vernichtungskampf* and *Wettkampf* on account of the fact that they fail to remark that in CV 5 he valorises the artistic affirmation of PDC *as a means of transforming such conflict into agonal contest*, and not because he himself celebrates such PDC (along with the agon).

A serious point is at stake here. If we elide the distinction Nietzsche draws between *Wettkampf* and *Vernichtungskampf*, we lose sight of the difficult work we have to perform *on destructive conflict* in order to reap the cultural fruit of agonal contest. Fascist readings of Nietzsche's agonism as a promotion of war (such as we find in Bäumler, Ruehl and Dombowsky) neutralise the transformative project before it has even got off the ground – this is because they confuse the starting point of the transformation depicted in CV 5 (i.e. *Vernichtungskampf*) with its goal (i.e. *Wettkampf*). In sharpening the conceptual disjunction and genetic relation of *Vernichtungskampf* and *Wettkampf*, I have tried to underscore the work that is demanded by Nietzsche's analysis of agonism.

The second problem, regarding the scope, or aristocratism, of Nietzsche's agonism was made tractable by paring Nietzsche's notion of the agon in two. On the one hand, he views a socially inclusive form of agonism, understood as the pursuit of predominance through self-improvement, as both possible and socially expedient. In the second place, however, we uncovered a form of artistic agon that added the

goal of glory and eternal fame to the aim of preponderance. This struggle was found to be reserved for a minority of individuals characterised by their superior creative capacity. While this is a socially exclusive form of agon, it is by no means aristocratic in the sense of being restricted to individuals on account of their lineage, nor does Nietzsche envisage this as a struggle for political power – indeed, it was seen to be antithetical to political activity in a variety of different ways. Nonetheless, we also saw that this agon *was* parasitic on an oligarchical form of society (i.e. one in which the few rule) organised around a division of labour. This was for two reasons. First, the values of proper self-cultivation and glory are incompatible with the struggle for material wealth and the realm of necessity. Moreover, individuals must be free from the burdens of manual labour if they are to have the time to cultivate themselves. There is therefore an indirect, practical connection between this higher agon and traditional aristocratic social order. This is an important finding, since, in the advanced industrial, and even post-industrial, societies of today, in which a far greater number of individuals can be freed from the struggle for life's necessities, there seems to be no reason why this higher type of agon cannot become correspondingly more inclusive and detached from aristocratic modes of governance.

We also established how, in his later writings, with the advent of the idea of the world as will to power, power becomes the main stake in the agon. However, Nietzsche still wishes to distinguish the agon from forms of conflict in which entities struggle to instrumentalise one another. Indeed, agonal conflict arises where the other *cannot* be overpowered, or where two opposed entities both *believe* the overpowering of the other to be unfeasible or unprofitable. The agon then becomes a means for opposed entities to discharge excess force and attain the feeling of power without instrumentalising (i.e. commanding) or physically harming their counterparts. In the later writings, agonal conflict also represents a means by which entities and individuals can strengthen themselves in their struggle to exploit *other* entities. The idea of the world as will to power is thus *compatible* with, but not reducible to, the idea of agonal conflict, which is just one form among many that the



will to power can take (including, for example, the struggle to eradicate or exploitatively command others). Although agonal struggle cannot be equated with the will to power, just as a species cannot be equated with its genus, such conflict also cannot be dissociated from exploitative or destructive forms of conflict in Nietzsche's thought – agonal measure can only ever *locally* inhibit, and thereby displace, violent and exploitative modes of struggle. The upshot of this is that it is doubtful how much mileage democratic agonists can get out of the later Nietzsche's conception of the agon understood as an alternative to unmeasured conflict.

With respect to the third problem, I demonstrated that there were two stages to the measure of the agon. The first stage enables the formation of (agonal) culture by freeing individuals and societies from the state of nature. This is based on mutually perceived approximate equality of martial capacity, which motivates the opposed parties to lay down their arms (realising they could not profitably defeat their counterpart in war); instead, they enter into a state of law. This allows the cultural agon to be established in which individuals compete to outdo one another in specific non-violent practices. The question then arose, however, as to how the emergence of excessively strong victors who stifle the competition can be averted. This is the second stage of measure. Within this stage we identified a range of different sources of moderation. There was an approximate *de facto* form of equality that did not rely on third-party judgement, and which engendered mutual-restraint (exemplified in an equally matched wrestling contest). There was then an approximate equality of ability according to the judgement of a third party (exemplified in aesthetic agons). Lastly, there was also ostracism, which could reestablish these forms of equality. However, it was also seen that measure was not only externally imposed on contestants – i.e. through ostracism or the restraint exerted upon them by their opponent – but was also endogenous insofar as agonal opponents can be said to exercise *self*-restraint.

This should make it a little clearer just what is at stake if we approach the problem of agonal moderation exclusively from the standpoint of either the respect model or the counterbalancing model. In viewing agonal struggle as based on a

combination of ostracism and the balance of powers (à la the counterbalancing model), we risk overlooking the vital way in which *self*-limitation might contribute to sustaining the agon. Indeed, we also risk neglecting the need to develop educational institutions able cultivate this virtue. Those propounding the respect model, however, risk overlooking the possibility that agonal moderation might be cultivated by means of inculcating respect for one's community – and this may represent a far simpler means of fostering agonal moderation than that of pushing for the acknowledgement of an ontology of difference and the corresponding respect of other individuals.

It is also worth recapping what was uncovered concerning equality in the final section. In the early works, aside from enabling the agon, the principal effect of mutually perceived equality was figured as its ability to elicit envy; in the later works, by contrast, we saw that mutually perceived equality of power played a far greater limiting role insofar as it occasioned *Ehrfurcht*. In both cases, however, perceived equality of *ability* represents a *sine qua non* of agonal engagement. Against the respect reading, then, Nietzsche does not assert the equal opportunity of all to compete in any given agonal contest. He rather holds the realist position that without perceived equality of *ability*, the kind of conflict that emerges is one that naturally leans towards exploitative or destructive modes of opposition. This has severe implications for those that wish to formulate a left-wing Nietzschean politics based on the “agonist respect” of weaker minority groups (such as Connolly or Alan Schrift<sup>229</sup>). For Nietzsche, it is not possible for healthy individuals or social groups to agonistically relate to their inferiors since the conditions of perceived equality of ability simply do not obtain. This does not mean these minority groups are excluded from Nietzsche's agonal recommendations, but that they must cultivate agonism amongst themselves and strive to raise themselves up to, or beyond, the level of their superiors.

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<sup>229</sup> See Alan D. Schrift, “Nietzsche's Contest: Nietzsche and the Culture Wars”, in A. Schrift (ed.), *Why Nietzsche Still? Reflections on Drama, Culture, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp.184-201.

One issue that the fundamentality of equality raises for reading Nietzsche as a primarily agonal thinker, however, is the *rarity* that he increasingly attributes to equality as we move into the 1880s. As he claims in one note, “Ein labiles Gleichgewicht kommt in der Natur so wenig vor, wie zwei congruente Dreiecke” (NL 11[190] 9.516).<sup>230</sup> Congruent with this, Nietzsche becomes increasingly interested in hierarchical organisation – that is, how functional, and particularly organismic, unities are formed through relations of command and obedience and the instrumentalisation of the weak by the strong.<sup>231</sup> Correspondingly, within Nietzsche’s later view of the world as conflict, agonism can account for only a small portion of this conflict. At the same time, as we shall see in the following chapters, the conflict to form and maintain hierarchical organisations does not seem to fit into the category of *destructive* conflict – since it tends to preserve that which has been overpowered, albeit in a position of subjugation. Therefore, as it stands, our investigation into Nietzsche’s thoughts on conflict, which has so far inquired into the nature of destructive and agonal contention, leaves us with a significant gap. As such, the two questions with which we must now concern ourselves in the following two chapters are as follows: is Nietzsche’s thought characterised by another *sui generis* form of conflict? And, if so, what is the nature and value of this distinct form of conflict?

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<sup>230</sup> See also M 112: “Der ‘billige Mensch’ bedarf fortwährend des feinen Tactes einer Wage: für die Macht- und Rechtsgrade, welche, bei der vergänglichen Art der menschlichen Dinge, immer nur eine kurze Zeit im Gleichgewichte schweben werden, zumeist aber sinken oder steigen [...]”. See also NL 11[132] 9.490: “Verschiedenheit herrscht in den kleinsten Dingen [...] — die Gleichheit ist ein großer Wahn.”

<sup>231</sup> See e.g. NL 26[272] 11.221: “Selbst-Regulierung, also die Fähigkeit der Herrschaft über ein Gemeinwesen vorausgesetzt d.h. aber, die Fortentwicklung des Organischen ist nicht an die Ernährung angeknüpft, sondern an das Befehlen und Beherrschen-können [...]”