

*Kwansei Gakuin University*  
*Humanities Review*  
 Vol.19, 2014  
 Nishinomiya, Japan

Our conclusion, then, is that political society exists for the sake of noble actions, and not of living together.

Aristotle, *the Politics* (III)

...even if the typical character types of liberal democracies *are* bland, calculating, petty, and unheroic, the prevalence of such people may be a reasonable price to pay for political freedom.

Richard Rorty 1991a: 190

## All Roads Lead to Hegemony: Nietzsche's Critique of Reason-based Consensualism

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### Abstract

This paper looks at Nietzsche's critique of consensualism, a contractarian political project based on the notion that the intersubjectively-rational "will" of the subject is the source of legitimate authority of the state and social justice, with specific reference to two prominent philosophers, John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. According to consensualists, coexistence is inevitable and a peaceful coexistence is desirable since it is the only way to guarantee an equal liberty for all. Peaceful coexistence is only possible through rational consensus, and rational consensus is possible because human agents have the capacity for reasoning, which yields a legitimate authority and justice. Nietzsche would question the "triadic formulation" of political consensualism that "rationality" leads to "consensus" and "consensus" leads to "legitimacy" and "justice". First, Nietzsche's concept of "will to power" (a will to domination and expansion) questions the premise that rational capacity makes consensus not only possible but also inevitable. Second, it disputes that free-rational will automatically yields

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legitimacy and justice. According to Nietzsche, a free-rational consensus in a plurality of wills to power is not only unfeasible but dangerous too, because seeking political consensus among the mass leads to cultural degeneration and human decline. This paper concludes that Nietzsche's socio-political theory can be best characterised as a critique of modernity, not a viable alternative to the current political consensualism. Nietzsche's philosophy merely exposes the tacitly coercive nature of "rationalised consensus", which is the basis of legitimacy in modern politics.

**Key Words:** Nietzsche, Rawls, Habermas, Consensualism, will to power, rationality

### Abbreviations:

The following published and translated texts of Nietzsche's works are cited throughout the paper by short abbreviations. Also, instead of page number, the sections are cited with the symbol (§) and followed by each section number.

**AC**     *The Anti-Christ*, Translated by R.J. Hollingdale

**BGE**    *Beyond Good and Evil*, Edited by R.Horstmann & J. Norman (tr. Judith Norman)

**EGP**    *Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays*, Translated by M. Mugge

**GM**     *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Edited by K.Ansell-Pearson & C. Diethe

**GS**     *The Gay Science*, Edited by B. Williams (Translated by J. Nauckhoff)

**HAH**    *Human, All Too Human*, Translated by R.J. Hollingdale

**TI**     *Twilight of The Idols*, Translated by R.J. Hollingdale

**WP**     *The Will To Power*, Edited by O. Levy (Translated by Anthony M. Ludovici)

## I. Introduction

Madness of reason, a contradiction in terms, does not sound as absurd today as one might have thought back in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, particularly among the Enlightenment philosophers. Certainly, when one looks at the amount of suffering caused by Reason, from the industrial scale massacres of people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (that goes on to this day) to the systematic destruction of nature in the hands of the privileged, one can only point a finger at the technological weapons and instruments as well as institutional apparatuses and values Reason has provided the powerful to inflict such misery on the powerless and devastation on nature. Today, in the hands of liberal consensualists, Reason is being used as a levelling tool, eroding individual differences and cultural diversity, all in the name of

equality. We are not the first to realise the destructive power of Reason in the hands of the powerful. In fact, it was a 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, who effectively exposed the dangers of modern obsession with championing Reason above everything else.

Due to his posthumous association with the Nazism and his rejection of Plato-Christian tradition of "truth-seeking philosophy", Nietzsche remains a controversial and ambiguous figure within the Western political philosophy. Nietzsche argued that the Enlightenment's Reason had become an instrument of power. With Reason at its disposal, power could tame humans as well as create its own truths. Nietzsche belonged to the counter-Enlightenment tradition of aestheticism (and loosely romanticism), where instincts, feelings and imaginations were given primacy over the rationality of the Enlightenment tradition of Kant and Fichte. However, unlike other romanticists, Nietzsche's philosophy is not a total rejection of a rational and instrumental world. Instead, he wanted to utilise Reason to build an aesthetic life around genius and high culture through "aristocratic radicalism" as a political system that would replace the egalitarian politics of emancipation, freedom, rights and justice. He wanted artists and cultural geniuses at the helm of political and social institutions, not politicians, bureaucrats or technocrats.

Nietzsche's philosophy tried to answer the question: 'what we have come to be and what we have it in us to become?' (*HAH*, Richard Schach's Introduction: xvi) or 'what humankind ought to become' (Conway, 1997, p. 3). He concluded that human *genius* and high culture could not flourish within modernity, because its institutions emphasised too heavily on shaky moralised notions such as good, right and obligation (Gray, 1995, p. 148). This impotence of reason-obsessed modernity to adequately fill the moral vacuum left by "god's death" (*GS* §343) would inevitably lead to nihilism, a conviction that life is absurd (*WP* §1-3). Now the rise in religious and market fundamentalism, political apathy and scepticism towards democracy and non-realisation of justice and legitimacy as optimistically hoped by contractarians seem to resonate with Nietzsche's prediction. And most importantly, Nietzsche philosophy explicates the charge of cultural imperialism levelled at Reason-driven modern liberal socio-economic system that is actively engaged in eroding nature and cultures of their diversity and differences.

In contrast to Nietzsche's hierarchical politics, consensualism represents a politics based on unforced and non-coercive rational agreement. This tradition goes back to the contractarian tradition of Hobbes and Rousseau, where "will" of the subject is the source of political legitimacy. What distinguishes consensualism from traditional contractarianism is its notion of two distinctive types of rationality: instrumental (selfish) and inter-subjective (altruistic and reciprocal).

Rawls and Habermas, the focus of this critique, root their consensualism in inter-subjective rationality, claiming that they have solved the problems of justice-based political coexistence within a plurality of conceptions of the good, without surrendering the equality in the rights and liberty of each individual. Although Rawls and Habermas have different ways of coming to such a conclusion, their premises and conclusions are the same: “rational agreement” solves the problem of “justice”. On the one hand both have rejected the metaphysical foundation of Reason, as *a priori*, independent of experience, arguing that inter-subjective reason is rooted in individual agency. On the other hand, both argue that the rational capacity of the subject remains *a priori*.

Nietzsche’s critique of the Enlightenment rests on his critique of Reason, which can be reconstructed to apply to political consensualism since both (the Enlightenment and consensualism) are conterminous, as they both give primacy to Reason and the “will” of the people. First, this paper will examine Nietzsche’s philosophical critique of modern reason through his concept of *will to power*, as it questions the consistency of the reason-consensus analogy. Second, it will look into Nietzsche’s politico-normative critique of legitimacy and justice as implausible and unfeasible objectives of politics. Finally, it will reflect on Nietzsche’s own political paradox of will to power and its application and implications. This paper will conclude that Nietzsche’s theory of will to power provides a robust critique of consensualism, without providing a viable alternative.

## II. Critique of Subject-Centred Reason

The European Enlightenment thinkers of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries hailed modernity as a dawn of human civilisation, where Reason was to emancipate mankind from religious dogmas and the individual from the injustices of traditions. Nietzsche was the first philosopher to effectively question this optimism about reason-based modernity (Gray, 1995, p. 164 & Hill, 2005, p. 1). Nietzsche argued that life is a chaotic dynamic process without any stability or direction; therefore, there was no reason to believing in “sense” or “value” of life, since accepting them implies that there is an “objective” and “natural” purpose for life, which there is not (*BGE*: xvii). The Enlightenment replaces religion and the truth of god with the truth of Reason. For Nietzsche the death of god was not the end of a quest to seek truth; instead of religion, philosophers turned to rationality-based science to establish truth (*GS* §108). The modernity project is based on values inherited from the Christian tradition and unified “under the aegis of a rational reconstruction of morality” (Gray, 1995, p. 163). For Nietzsche, modernity’s search to discover an objective and universal truth resonates similarly

to that of a religious search for God (*TI* "Reason in Philosophy" §6).

[Insofar as the word] "knowledge" has any sense, the world is knowable; but it maybe interpreted *differently*, it has not one sense behind it, but hundreds of senses... It is our needs that *interpret the world*, our instincts and their impulses for and against. Every instinct is a sort of thirst for power [will to power]; each has its point of view, which it would ... impose upon all the other instincts as their norm. (*WP* §481)

Nietzsche counters the issue of truth with interpretation. By arguing that one interpretation is stronger, it counts as 'power' and it is not separate from power (*GS*, ix). To see truth, as "the ultimate authority", is to see it as a "divine power", therefore confirming its religious origin (*GS* §344). Countering this, Habermas argues that if every truth is an interpretation and its validity claim cannot be objective, therefore, Nietzsche cannot admit his own theory of power to be true (2002, p. 125). Nietzsche, however, suggests that his theory of power is one of many interpretations and context-dependent, and subject to contestation. In the introduction to *BGE*, Rolf-Peter Hortsman argues that Nietzsche's theory of the truth claims that truth is defined by an incomplete context, thus every truth is partially true (or true depending on your perspective)(xxii-iii), so one cannot claim an objective true to be true for every one and context-independent. Modernity's rationality-based search for a single, universally-applicable truth is flawed, and a disguise for creating and preserving a hegemonic politics.

Nietzsche's notion of will to power is Darwinian in essence, a chaotic and uncertain world where the sole motivation of an individual is to grow and expand its power and domination, through coercive means or through Reason. In *WP* §636 he explains:

My idea is that every specific body strives to become master of all space, and to extend its power (its will to power) and to thrust back everything that resists it. But insomuch as it is continually meeting the same endeavours on the part of other bodies, it concludes by coming to terms with those (by "combining" with those), which are sufficiently related to it – *and thus they then conspire together for power*. And the process continues [*italic in original*].

Nietzsche argues that this process of circular power struggle and consensus building is *eternally recurring*, or never-ending, only agents changing. The agreements reached through such process ought not to be rational, but rather

organic, a temporary conclusion of the power struggle itself. Thus, there is nothing noble in the consensus reached, it is merely a process that is shaped by power and that it repeats itself eternally. This means that rationalised consensus does not entail political legitimacy and justice, because a universal system that guarantees such status for all is impossible. It is rather a group of individuals who are either bound by some commonalities or forced into a unity by external forces who come together to create a system of justice. It is by no means free from internal or external power struggles. It is temporal and culturally exclusive, not universal and inclusive beyond a given society.

For Nietzsche epistemology of truth is a political battleground between the strong and the weak (Glenn, 2004, p. 582). It is not simply that one is true and the other is false, but it is power-relation that makes one true and another false, e.g. by wielding one's power of argumentation or through physical coercion. According to Nietzsche, with the aid of rational science and technology, modernity strives for predictability and certainty in human life, almost to a 'faith' level (*GS* §347). This shows that modernity is afraid of uncertainty in human life; therefore, one can conclude that reason-based modernity does not believe in the emancipation of humanity but rather tries to devise effective ways to predictably control human life. Logic and certainty calm and give confidence (*GS* §370). He exposes the 'physiological self-contradiction' of modernity. On the one hand it promotes individual freedom, (*TI* "Expedition" §41), while on the other hand uses the same rational methods to control individuals within groups. He saw modernity as a project of mastery over nature through science and over humanity through truth (both derived from the same rationality). Devigne believes 'Nietzsche feels trapped by the modern quest to use political and technological power to overcome natural differences and hierarchy' (1999, p. 694).

For Nietzsche, subject-centred rationality cannot be the basis of morality, because "rational" subjects are "self-referential". In other words, rationality was developed as a tool for understanding in order to dominate either the natural world or other humans for one's own benefits. He explains:

The object is not "to know" but to schematise, - to impose as much regularity and form upon chaos, as our practical needs require. In the formation of reason, logic, and the categories, it was a *need* in us that was the determining power: not the need "to know" but to classify, to schematise, for the purpose of intelligibility and calculation. *The adjustment and interpretation of all similar and equal things, - the same process, which every sensual impression undergoes, is the development of reason!* [Italic added] (*WP* §515)

Here Nietzsche's analysis of human knowledge and objectivity is similar to Kant's Copernican Turn, where he argued that the objects should conform to our knowledge of them. Kant's epistemic quest was to make objects fit our knowledge of them but Nietzsche's ontology argues that our selfish needs force such regularities and schematic understanding of them. Nietzsche's notion of Reason is developing and *becoming* while Kant's metaphysics 'condemns us to freedom'<sup>1</sup> via Reason, with *being* as *a priori*, which means we cannot choose to be unfree, if we desire to be so. Nietzsche argues that this process of regularisation and schematisation of objects also changes man himself. But for Nietzsche, Reason itself is developed through this process of schematisation and adjustments of objects based on selfish needs rather than being altruistic and reciprocal. In consensualism, Reason is part of man, *a priori* not developed through experience. For Nietzsche regularities in human life emerge, out of chaos, as a result of the experience of *becoming*. Will to power is the motivation that creates reason (s) and values. Here, Nietzsche elaborates:

The utility of self-preservation ... stands as the motive force behind the development of the organs of knowledge. ...the measure of desire for knowledge depends upon the extent to which *will to power* grows in a certain species: a species gets a grasp of a given amount of reality, *in order to master it, in order to enlist that amount in its service*. [Italic in original](WP§480)

Contrary to consensualists' beliefs, Nietzsche argues that 'there are no such things as mind, reason, thought, consciousness, soul, will, or truth' beyond human's need and experience (WP §480). Metaphysical foundation of Reason and truth do not exist prior to experience. But humans need *exactness* and *regularities* in life, which are the cause of development of those apparently "solid" phenomena. For Nietzsche the truth of rationality remains entirely subjective; the source of rationality is individual subject with will to power, which questions the claim of epistemic certainty that political theorists seek. The knowledge of rational subject is problematic for Nietzsche. Connolly (1988) argues that for Nietzsche humans are neither born to be subject of a political system, where they decide the legitimacy of such system, nor they contain an inner quality that draws them towards 'stasis and subjectivity' (p. 157).

It implies that agents *become* subjects or they can be turned into one's

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<sup>1</sup> This is a quote from Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), the French existentialist philosopher who stated that we could not escape responsibility because we are condemned to be free.

subjects through coercive power. Connolly (1988) further states: 'To be a subject is to be made into a calculable, uniform, promising being, capable of being held responsible for deviant conduct and deserving of punishment for irregular acts' (p. 157). Under this observation, there is a dichotomy of right and duty, as duty comes prior to rights. That is the duty to be rational on the part of the subjects, before they are able to transfer their wills to the justice system, which in turn provides them with rights.

Nietzsche's rejection of Reason as *a priori*, however, does not entail irrationalism; instead according to Owen, a Nietzschean scholar, by idealising an ascetic life as a good life, Nietzsche tries to provide a *telos* for human existence (solving the problem of nihilism), which requires realisation of one's rational self by overcoming one's irrational physical and cultural desires (1995, p. 52). This is unfeasible in a compossible way consensualists offer, since rights and freedom to become genius is only possible in a hierarchical society. This also refutes Habermas's claim that for Nietzsche Reason and unreason are indistinguishable (2002, p. 125). Nietzsche believed that evaluation of tastes and good are subjective, thus no inter-subjective validity claims are justifiable, because Reason is not *a priori* and solidly available or given. In fact it evolves through experience and cultural contexts. Therefore, subject-centred reason always strive to be instrumental and strategic and selfish, not a force to emancipate mankind or create equality among them. It rather chains some by others; it either coerces them by force or through rationalised truth claims.

### III. Critique of Inter-subjective Reason

In response to Nietzsche's critique of Reason, both Habermas and Rawls argued that there are two distinctive types of Reason. Habermas acknowledges Nietzsche's contribution in the understanding of rationality used instrumentally by some (state, private firms and interest groups) to dominate others, but disagrees with the claim that rationality is *only* instrumental. He argues that there are two distinctive types of rationality, which he calls: instrumental rationality and communicative rationality. Habermas states: "The nihilistic domination of subject-centred reason is conceived as the result and expression of a perversion of will to power" (Habermas, 2002, p. 95). Habermas disagrees with Nietzsche's conclusion that the Enlightenment project is doomed to failure, because instrumentality of its reason makes it corrupt. Instead, he envisages a state of *ideal speech situation*, where rational individuals communicate to solve their differences through rational deliberation, not through the unchallenged influence of power, discursive or physical (1984a, p. 16). Rawls, too, argues for an



agreed justice system, where reasonableness plays a major role in establishing an *overlapping consensus* (1993). Both Habermas and Rawls make distinction between two types of rationality: subject-centred & inter-subjective. Both argue that it is the second type of reason, inter-subjective, that brings about consensus, legitimacy and justice within a polity.

Habermas elaborates himself on the link between communicative rationality and consensualism:

The communicative rationality recalls older ideas of logos, inasmuch as it brings along with it the connotations of a non-coercively unifying, consensus-building force of a discourse in which the participants overcome their at first subjectively based views in favour of a rationally motivated agreement (2002p. 315).

Unlike Habermas's Marxian origin, Rawls's notion of *overlapping consensus* is based on the old notion of non-coercive agreement within the liberal contractarian tradition but modified in response to the modern pluralistic setting with diverse conceptions of the good. For Rawls the purpose of political liberalism is to create, as he called a well-ordered society by means of Reason and reasonable notions of the good life. Rawls's argument is similar about the inter-subjective rationality:

Reasonable persons, we say, are not moved by the general good as such but desire for its own sake a social world in which they, as free and equal, can cooperate with others on terms all can accept. They insist that reciprocity should hold within that world so that each benefits along with others (1993 pp. 48-50).

There are differences between the two thinkers. Habermas argues for an inter-subjective rationality, which can determine what justice ought to be. In other words, Habermas (1996c) does not presuppose that humans have the capacity to justice as such, but through rational argumentation and deliberation a consensus on what justice ought to be can be achieved. Rawls (1971), on the other hand, argues that humans possess the sense of justice prior to consensus and this is seen through everyday intuition. He terms this intuitive practice as reflective equilibrium, a state of balance reached as a result of a deliberative process among differing set of beliefs through mutual self-adjustments, on moral or non-moral issues. Furthermore, Rawls, adapting Aristotle's view, argued that consensus through reasonableness can be constructed (and nurtured) within a political

culture as a virtue. By this he meant that the current context of modern liberal democracy was the very setting that could develop and harness reasonableness and consensualism. Habermas's theory of communicative action leaves an open end to the terms of agreement, but only argues that given the ideal speech situation, individuals, with however diverse conceptions of the good, can reach a rational agreement. Habermas's theory is proceduralist, based on presuppositions and designed to guarantee the impartiality of the process of judging' (Habermas, 1990, p. 122). It leaves the substantive agreement on principles of justice open to the procedure of public deliberation. He believes that his theory holds truth in every human society; therefore, it is context-independent and universally binding (Habermas, 1984, p. 287).

However, despite their difference, their premise and conclusion are the same. The objective of a consensual politics is to achieve equal rights and liberty for individual subjects. Thus the pursuit of equal liberty or justice presupposes the foundation that humans are equal as *a priori* and inequality should be overcome. De Olivera argues that 'Both Rawls and Habermas have adapted Kant's cognitivist, universalist and emancipatory conception of moral autonomy so as to attempt at an original understanding of publicity and political culture' (2000p. 583). Both agree on the triadic formula of consensualism: Reason → consensus → justice.

Nietzsche disagrees with the distinction between different types of reason and also rejects a foundational equality-claim in reasoning capacity of all subjects as *a priori*. Nietzsche questions the solidity of the consenting agency by arguing that the nature of the world is *becoming* not *being*. Thus, ontologically, will to power of each individual as a unit does not allow inter-subjective rationality to develop, simply because the driving force for each subject is to grow. Therefore the equal participation in the consensus process is not to create equality and justice but sway others for one's own benefits. Epistemologically, the knowledge of the subject as solidly rational, a never-changing entity, is also flawed.

According to Habermas, the notion of inter-subjective rationality comes from the necessity of coexistence, and it is universal because it is *unavoidable* (1985p. 196). Rawls and Habermas rely on the same notion of the subject's rational capacity, similar to subject-centred rationality, which both reject as strategic and instrumental. So how is a self-interested and instrumentally-rational subject turned into a cooperative and communicatively rational agent? For Rawls, it can be constructed given the kind of society and political culture we live in and also in his presumption that the sense of justice is part of human beings. Habermas's dialectics sees agreement inherent in rational argumentation and everyday action, if certain rules are followed, mainly non-involvement of coercive power during the

deliberation process. So both argue that inter-subjective reason has a different quality from that of instrumental rationality. And it affects all and is unavoidable given the pluralistic and diverse society we live in. However, according to Nietzsche, will to power is the architectural base of rationality and pure inter-subjectivity or reasonableness cannot be detached from power. In other words, power-neutral discourse is impossible and the claim of its existence hides a deceit.

The critique of the Enlightenment's subject-centred reason can also apply here, since the subject of both subject-centred contractarianism and inter-subjective rationality of consensualism is the same. There has not been fundamental change in the characteristics of the subject as far as Reason and self-interest are concerned. Nietzsche argues that the essence of Reason is power and will to power. To claim that in a given time every individual has the same amount of rationality (therefore power) within a social context to come up with a fair consensus that could become the basis of justice is to presuppose that society would never change. And all individuals are identical. In Nietzsche's philosophy power is a relational concept, often a zero-sum game. To separate Reason from the circle of power is a futile enterprise and the world is an irreconcilable and "recurring" struggle of powers for freedom:

In the first stage, one demands justice at the hands of those who have power. In the second, one speaks of "freedom," that is to say, one wishes to "shake oneself free" from those who have power. In the third stage, one speaks of "equal rights" – that is to say, so long as one is not a predominant personality one wishes to prevent one's competitors from growing in power. (WP§86)

Nietzsche, also, rejects the epistemological notion of a rational agent as a solid entity. Power shapes the rational being and its capacity for reasoning. Relying on a notion of rationally capable agents of consensus presupposes the individual as solid, with certain capabilities and definitions. This not only contradicts the notion of the autonomous individuals who are different from one another and subject to change and growth, but also assumes that subjects have *equal* capacity to develop the right kind of rationality and fairness, given the right environment. Nietzsche disagrees with this robotic notion of the individual and argues that truth (of the subject) is created through the criterion of power (TI "The Four Great Errors" §5). In fact this notion of a one-dimensional rational being is seen as agent of consent, as if only capable of such a thing and nothing else.

Will to power as a force of self-growth and self-expansion does not necessarily

converge non-coercively. This makes free consensus problematic if it is only possible on the basis of rationality. For Nietzsche the divergence of wills to power can only be solved through coercion and domination, or deceptive apparatuses. Since, for Nietzsche, the aim of a political coexistence is cultural greatness and nurturing of artistic genius, coercion comes as a natural method of control :

... if [a body] is a living and not a dying ... will have to be the embodiment of will to power, it will want to grow, spread, grab, win dominance, — not out of any morality or immorality but because it is *alive* and because life is precisely will to power... 'Exploitation'... belongs to the essence of being alive, as a fundamental organic function; it is a result of genuine will to power, which is just the will of life.(*BGE* §259)

Will to power is not simply an instinct of self-preservation, but mainly it seeks to free its power from any constraints. Owen sums up Nietzsche's notion of truth that it "... is not independent of our cognitive/affective interests. On this account, our best standards of rationality are a complex of effectually ranked cognitive interests' (1995, p. 44). This entails that our knowledge of the subject with rational capacity is not separable from our will to power and interest. Thus it is implausible to claim that the sense of justice is present in individual agents (as a metaphysical fact). Also, the argument that rational capacity can be cultivated given a liberal democratic culture is a value, not truth as claimed by consensualists.

#### IV. Critique of consensualism

Nietzsche believes that establishing a legitimate *authority* that protects *autonomy* is not only an unfeasible project but a dangerous enterprise too. His critique of political consensualism centres around two important issues: (1) not everyone is equally rational (i.e. powerful) and (2) democratic consensualism as a levelling system entails mediocrity. Also, by promoting universal equality, it rejects otherness (including cultural differences) and degenerates individual creativity and genius.

Rational and free consensus is an idealised concept and the pretence to achieving it in the presence of will to power, leads to the use of coercive methods i.e. physical violence or through rationalised universal truths within the institutional regimes. The latter differs from a blunt coercion as it is achieved by deploying rational discourse through institutionalised rules. Individuals and groups are inherently unequal in power, money, political voice, and reasoning capacity;

therefore, this so-called free and fair consensus is neither free nor fair. Nietzsche argues that relying on the politics of legitimacy and social contract leads us to *normalisation* because an inter-subjective consensus is not power-neutral; instead it becomes part of the apparatus of discipline by restricting individual freedom within this inter-subjective rationality. Discourse on moral righteousness and legitimacy is not a way of protecting individuals from the existence of power, argues Ansell-Pearson (1999), author of many books on Nietzsche, but also used as disciplining tools (p. 174).

According to consensualists, the notion of legitimacy is an integral part of justice, without which an authority cannot function fairly because its moral authority would be weakened. The assumption of an equally free individual falls apart once he enters into this process of inter-subjective rationality and the individual is *demandé* (rationally coerced) to be reasonable and to have a reasonable comprehensive doctrine of the good, otherwise consensus is not possible. In other words it is institutionalised subjects who are 'educated' to believe in the fairness of the process. Both Habermas and Rawls assume consensus inevitable among the rational subjects, thus liberty of the consenting subject is unconditionally available, meaning that the subject must be free and remain rational. On the other hand, consensualism takes a Kantian self-affirmative and self-dependent freedom, as if man is rationally free prior to authority and justice, as a pre-requisite for their notion of free will to consent.

Nietzsche suggests that since will to good and justice is internal and cannot be seen from the outside (as in the Kantian noumenal realm) it is impossible to be sure if it vanishes one day (1957). Taylor (1975), a prominent communitarian critique of modern liberalism, echoes Nietzsche's argument: 'If the radical freedom of self-dependent is ultimately empty [without purpose], then it risks ending in nihilism, that is, self-affirmation through the rejection of all *values*' (p. 563). The emptiness of free rational will is evident in the notion of the subject of consensus if one argues that the subject is *only* rational; and Reason has the highest authority within an individual, not instinct, emotion or compassion. Nietzsche argues that by imposing a free rational will on the individual, consensualism places responsibility on him, which is indeed used to punish and discipline.

'It is the most egregious theological trick ...to make mankind "responsible". Whenever men try to trace the sense of responsibility home to anyone, it is the instinct of punishment and of the desire to judge which is active. The doctrine of the will was invented principally for the purpose of punishment, - that is to say, with the intention of tracing guilt.' (TI, "The Four Great

## Errors" §7)

The legitimacy crisis of political consensualism lies in its wrong presumption that the subject is a free rational being. Will to power, according to Coole, a Nietzschean scholar, 'defies the notion of political agency, moral responsibility or coherent identity' (1998, p. 354) and there are different and individualised moral and political references.

The notion of the subject and his characteristics – reasoning capacity; fairness and sense of justice (Rawls); the rules of domination-free communication (Habermas) – are universal assumptions and excludes those who do not fit that definition or are not rationally available for citizenship. These are taken as if they are universally true and they can stand in any context. The justification offered is that seeking agreement, is impossible and implausible without certain universally accepted criteria. Also both thinkers limit the application of their theories within a liberal democratic society, where all those values are the embodiment of that society. In principle they both assume that their notion of human agency must be universalised, which can be interpreted as an expansionist theory of liberal values. In other words it is a cultural will to growth and dominance to the detriments of other cultures' values and norms.

By constructing a theory of justice only in the political realm Rawls wants to show that he accepts pluralism (conflicting conceptions of the good) in the private realm but wanted to find a "political consensus" instead. In other words, he wants to construct a political theory of justice, which finds *overlapping consensus* amongst *citizens* of a polity instead of individuals' personal ethics and their conception of the good. But he relies on citizens' *reasonable* comprehensive doctrines of the good to build consensus. Universal reasonableness is a prerequisite for Rawls (and liberal politics) to build consensus. This conceptual assumption leads liberals to a *universalisability* claim, which according to Nietzsche's philosophy puts Rawls back to where he wanted to depart from, as certain prerequisites should be in place i.e. rational capacity, sense of justice, having an agreeable doctrine of the good etc in order to be participants in the process of consensus building. In this way political liberalism picks and choose among "able" subjects, which leaves some outside the proposed criteria, unable to benefit from justice actively, as to make decisions. This universalistic assumption means a rejection of the plurality of the good, which Rawls tries to respond to in the first place. Reasonable consensus is similar to the process of *normalisation* of differences and creating identical society, which is the opposite of political and ethical pluralism. "Their usual mistaken premise is that they affirm some consensus among peoples, at least among tame peoples, concerning certain moral

principles, and then conclude that these principles must be unconditionally binding also for you and me' (*GS* §345)

The danger of hegemonic politics was at the centre of liberal critique of former communist blocs but now there is a need for self-critique for liberalism. Gray, a former liberal who has turned into a critique of liberalism argues: '[Despite] all the criticisms that it encourages and institutionalises, liberalism enjoys virtual hegemony in modern Western intellectual life' (1995 p. 150). The same can be true of consensualism, since it relies on a liberal society. The sole focus of liberalism on individual liberty and equality has been criticised by various corners, but what makes Nietzsche's critique more important is his sharp consequentialist cultural critique of consensual politics, by arguing that while it is unachievable, democracy or egalitarianism's mere attempt, in its purest form, endangers cultured nobility and the creation of genius. 'If culture really rested upon the will of a people... tearing the wall of culture... desire for justice, for the equalisation of suffering, would swamp all other ideas' (*EGP*, "The Greek state" §7).

Politics is characterised by value creation (*BGE* §285) and wars show the decisiveness of such struggle (Montari, 2003, p. 69). Nietzsche states that social hierarchy is necessary for the cultivation of high humanity and great culture. The objection might be that it is not the hierarchical or egalitarian society, but it is culture itself that promotes genius rather than the social organisation. We can cultivate such virtues in individuals within a democratic setting, as Nietzsche himself grew in a society he criticised for promoting decadence (Welshon, 2004, p. 211). The argument is that social stratification is not necessary for creating genius, as Nietzsche suggested that sometimes genius emerges as a sign of resistance to the hegemonic social values (*TI*, "Expeditions" §44). His response is that the root of injustice is not in society, but in nature and the attempt to correct such injustice is futile (*WP* "preface" §4); therefore, an excuse in the hands of the powerful to control and discipline others and build a conformed society based on their own hegemonic notion of the good.

## V. Nietzsche's Alternative

Nietzsche's critique of consensualism purposefully rests on his own political convictions: promoting culture and art. Ansell-Pearon argues that Nietzsche's politics of the *overman* aims to divide society into dominant and dominated through politically-controlled violence (1991p. 148). Nietzsche's justification for such a hierarchical society is two folds; first, he thinks that an egalitarian politics is dangerous, because the outcome of a rationality-driven system is nihilism. Second, an openly hierarchical system facilitates the ascent of a higher form of

human being, i.e. the overman (*WP* §866). In fact, human society does not exist for harmony and equality, but to produce greatness in order to avert nihilism in a state of purposeless and meaningless human life after the *death of God*: ‘Art is with us in order that we may not perish through truth’ (*WP* §822)

Nietzsche wants *amoral* politics and sees human life as worthless if it has no cultural or artistic benefit to offer. It seems a deeply shocking statement, but Nietzsche harmonises society through power domination and argues that this happens anyway, power-neutral discourse of justice and rights are instruments used to tame and control. Modern political and moral values are created through relations of power (the powerful excreting those values); therefore, morality certainly has weakened man, made him less dangerous through the depressing influence of fear, pain, wounds, and hunger, and it is converted into a sick animal (TI, “The Improvers of Mankind” §2). Nietzsche’s political man needs to be more creative and for him the legacy of humanity lies in its cultural creativity not of living together harmoniously and peacefully. The burden of moral politics prevents its achievement; it holds individuals from being dangerous and creative (*WP* §404).

Nietzsche’s high culture and genius-nurturing perfectionism proposes that will to power has to be reconciled with the conduit of history, otherwise the pure self-defining will to power leads to ‘foolishness and anger’, an impasse (Z, “On Redemption” §161). In other words, will to power in its purest forms leads to resentment and needs to be contained, thus a hierarchical social organisation becomes necessary (*ibid* §163). Taylor also sees the despair of realising freedom and that the self-dependent freedom if not stopped leads to nihilism as Nietzsche suggested (1975, p. 563). Ansell-Pearson, however, somewhat naively, sees the lack of *legitimacy* in Nietzsche’s politics as a deficiency, by looking at legitimacy in a liberal sense, which is derived from the free rational will of the subject (1999, p. 51), while Nietzsche’s legitimacy transcends such will and places it in the project of creating high humanity not justice.

Connolly argues that ‘[will to power] exposes self-deceit involved in the modern pretence that such project of mastery [over the world] could be consummated democratically in accord with liberal standards of rights and dignity’ (1998p. 161). However, he, too, rather optimistically argues that Nietzsche’s politics enables the difference to exist within a Nietzschean democracy Connolly has developed in *Identity/difference* (1991), where difference is not overcome but accepted within the self, so that individuals do not struggle to portray a unity of the self. For him consensualism denies difference by overcoming and eliminating it, but a *politics of difference* “inspired” by Nietzsche corrects that deficiency within a liberal setting by diversifying individuality rather than uniting them. Connolly



bases his argument on the fact that injustice is not only caused by nature as Nietzsche suggested but also by capitalism (Connolly, 1988, pp. 171-5). Thus, he asks for a *radicalised liberalism*, which 'reaches into the subject itself rather than taking it as the starting point for reflection' and also 'challenges the hegemonic economic expansion rather than making a precondition of liberty'. Furthermore it 'accepts nature as a source of difference' and relaxes normalisation to allow the decedent voice to grow'. This *radicalised liberalism* would reach toward Nietzsche as Marx did to Hegel (Connolly, 1988, p. 174).

This reconstruction contains its own paradox, like other post-modern and liberal interpretations of Nietzsche's politics. On the one hand, it argues for more justice through the politics of consensus, which eliminates otherness and difference. On the other hand, he takes Nietzsche's concept of will to power and perspectivism as a starting point that difference not only should be preserved but also actively promoted. Will to power and perspectivism stand on the opposite of consensual justice and consensual legitimacy claim, thus Nietzsche himself rejected justice as a nihilistic value, exposing Connolly's paradoxical solution. Nietzsche does not have a problem with coercing others' wills to power to achieve human greatness.

Those familiar with Nietzsche's politics, agree that a healthy debate between Nietzsche and liberal consensualism might help us to better understand today's political problems in pluralist and multi-cultural societies. As Abbey & Appell, another prominent Nietzschean scholar, declare: 'So long as political theorists dismiss [Nietzsche's] radical aristocratism as uninteresting and trivial, his serious charges against democracy and equality doctrines in general will remain unanswered' (1999 p. 124) Warren, too, suggests that engaging Nietzsche's politics can strengthen democratic politics (1999, p. 126). Nietzsche's aristocratic radicalism has at least a clear vision: creating high humanity and cultural genius, which has been lacking within a democratic political theory. The sole purpose of consensualism is how to overcome inequality and create a legitimate authority that guarantees justice, and this ignores the fact that human society does not only need justice and equality, but also human creativity and cultural triumphs.

Abbey and Appel conclude that Nietzsche challenges us to choose "between democratic equality and cultural entropy on the one hand, and inequality and heightened levels of human flourishing [perfectionism], on the other hand" (1999 p. 124). This dichotomy remains at the heart of Nietzsche's politics, but how to make democratic social organisation to produce the heightened level of human flourishing, while keeping cultural diversity in the presence of equality intact? This is the fundamental question to which present-day politics needs an answer. Nietzsche's will to power exposes the problem, but falls short of providing a full-blown

solution.

## VI. Conclusion

According to Nietzsche's concept of will to power, the consensual claims that inter-subjective rationality lead to consensus, which in turn could be the basis of a justice system is unfounded on both philosophical and political level. Philosophically, there is an inconsistency between rationality and consensus in the presence of will to power. Politically, rational consensus does not entail justice and legitimacy, as rational individuals are neither equal in power-relations nor solid as a rational entity. Habermas acknowledges Nietzsche's critique of instrumental rationality within modernity, that instead of emancipating humanity, Reason has become an instrument of domination and coercion. Rawls, too, has accepted Nietzsche's perspectivism and theory of the good, and that diversity and pluralism makes it hard to agree on the conception of the good life, thus an agreement has to be beyond good and bad. However, despite this penetration of Nietzsche's political thoughts into consensual tradition, the quest for equality remains at odds with Nietzsche's political philosophy. Nietzsche's critique of consensualism offers a good explanation for Euro-centricity and liberal-centred approaches by Rawls and Habermas. Both philosophers have acknowledged their theories are applicable within a liberal setting, which questions the comprehensiveness they presuppose. Nietzsche's critique of hegemonic force of rationality-based modernity delineates the current global predicament that cultural diversity is fast disappearing because of the power of conformity driven by modernisation (which some argue as westernisation) . Its unifying power, rationally or forcefully, is not only levelling cultural barriers but also nature itself by selectively exploiting it.

Nietzsche's critique does not provide an alternative, but it illuminates the hegemonic character of present welfare, citizen and reason-driven politics. Nietzsche represents a different tradition of political thinking to that of consensualism, where all moral and political values derive and end in individuals as equal units within the social as if they equally contribute to moral and political discourse. Nietzsche argued that the death of god was the end of religion and philosophers ought to think of something other than Reason to replace the moral vacuum, countering the Enlightenment philosophers who had predicted Reason to triumph faith. However, from the scale of violence we witness in today's world, due to religious or free market extremism, we need to reflect on the optimism of the early modern philosophers about the liberating power of rationality. It is reason-based science that created weapons of mass destruction, both nuclear and biological. Reason-based technology, while responsible for improving our lives, has

allowed states, corporations and individuals to effectively exploit nature as well as other humans for their own benefits. A very small minority controls much of the global wealth and resources, while a large number of people have little or no means for subsistence in many parts of the world. Perhaps Nietzsche was right that Reason could neither emancipate nor create greatness. It is merely an instrument to control and tame nature as well as humans.

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