

On this score, the Nazis were thoroughly Nietzschean. Rather than pushing for a recognition of the mutuality of human interests, as Western liberal capitalists had been doing for much of the nineteenth century—and rather than seeking reasonable and peaceful diplomatic solutions to the normal collisions of international politics—the Nazis committed fundamentally to war as their primary means of self-regeneration and dominance over the rest of the world.

38. Authoritarianism

A fifth and final set of themes link Nietzsche with the Nazis. Both were anti-democratic, anti-capitalistic, and anti-liberal.

The Nazis were not friends of democracy, but they were extremely effective players of democracy. They announced from the beginning, in their 1920 founding Party Program, their authoritarian principles. Nonetheless, finding themselves in the democratic system that was the Weimar republic, they played mostly by the rules and out-democracied the other political parties. They used democracy to achieve anti-democratic ends.

Nietzsche's political views are less developed and more ambiguous, but it is clear he favors some sort of aristocracy. "What is serious for me," Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil*, is "the 'European problem' as I understand it, the cultivation of a new caste that will rule Europe."¹³⁰ Again, while Nietzsche is unspecific, he does not necessarily mean an official political aristocracy—he more likely means the *de facto* rule by an exceptional few, whatever the formal and official political



"Be true to the Führer"

¹³⁰ BGE 251.

structures are. In this way, even though Nietzsche despises the impulses that give rise to democracy, he does not worry much about the actual political dominance of democratic forms of government. Those forms of government, he believes, will simply become instruments through which the exceptional individuals, most likely from behind the scenes, will achieve their goals. As Nietzsche puts it, democracy will be a tool of “a master race, the future ‘masters of the earth’ ... philosophical men of power and artist-tyrants” who will “employ democratic Europe as their most pliant and supple instrument for getting hold of the destinies of the earth.”¹³¹

Nietzsche is not programmatic about what form the new aristocratic class will take or what specific goals it will pursue. He believes that will be up to the overmen themselves—they will create their own values and shape the vehicles of their realization. And Nietzsche did not think of himself as an overman—merely as a herald of their coming. But Nietzsche is extremely clear that any social method, however brutal, will be legitimate should the new aristocrats desire it. A healthy aristocracy, he puts it forcefully, “accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings, who, for its sake, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves, to instruments.”¹³²

That is certainly anti-liberal and fits well with Nietzsche’s self-assessment that he is “not by any means ‘liberal’.”¹³³

In addition to dismissing liberalism, Nietzsche dismisses capitalism as a dehumanizing economic system¹³⁴ and rejects individualism when it comes to matters of marriage and procreation. Marriage, he thought, should not be based on “idio-

¹³¹ Note for *BGE*, quoted in Hunt 1991, p. 39.

¹³² *BGE* 258.

¹³³ *GS* 377.

¹³⁴ *D* 2 6.

syncrasy”—that is, upon love and personal sexual attraction.¹³⁵ Rather, he suggested, marriage should be state-organized for breeding purposes.¹³⁶

On all those points, the Nazis can and did find inspiration in Nietzsche.

39. Summary of the five similarities

Again to summarize: we have five significant connections between Nietzsche and the Nazis:

1. The Nazis were strongly collectivistic, and Nietzsche, with some qualifications, also advances strongly collectivistic and anti-individualistic themes.
2. Both Nietzsche and the Nazis see zero-sum conflict as inescapable and as fundamental to the human condition.
3. Both are irrationalists in their psychological theories, downplaying radically the role that reason plays in life and emphasizing the power and the glory of instincts and feelings.
4. Both Nietzsche and the Nazis accept willingly—even longingly—that war is necessary, healthy, and even majestic.
5. And finally, both Nietzsche and the Nazis are anti-democratic, anti-capitalistic, and anti-liberal—and so, come the 1930s, the Nazis were in fundamental opposition to those nations to the West that were still broadly committed to democracy, capitalism, and liberalism.

¹³⁵ *TI* 9:39.

¹³⁶ *BGE* 251.