

The Agonist

A NIETZSCHE CIRCLE JOURNAL

Volume II
Volume II
Issue II
July 2009

The Agonist

A NIETZSCHE CIRCLE JOURNAL

Volume II

Issue II

July 2009

Publisher
Nietzsche Circle, Ltd.

Editor in Chief
Rainer J. Hanshe

Review Editor
Yunus Tuncel

Editorial Board
Rainer J. Hanshe
Yunus Tuncel
David Kilpatrick

Art Production
Tim Syth

Logo Design
Liliana Orbach

Advertising
Andre Okawara

Donations
Katie Creasy
(Donations can be made at
<http://nietzschemcircle.com>)

Nietzsche Circle Event Poster Design
Doerthe Fitschen-Rath

Nietzsche Circle Website Design
Hasan Yildiz
(<http://designkillsme.com>)

Letters to the editors are welcome and should be emailed to: nceditors@nietzschemcircle.com.

The Agonist is published Oct, January, April, July by Nietzsche Circle, Ltd. P.O. Box 575, New York, NY 10113, U.S.A.

Website: <http://nietzschemcircle.com>.

For advertising inquiries, e-mail Andre Okawara: ncinfo@nietzschemcircle.com.

Contents © 2008 by Nietzsche Circle, Ltd. and each respective author. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from Nietzsche Circle, Ltd. After one year, all rights revert to the respective authors. If any work originally published by the Nietzsche Circle is republished in any format, acknowledgement must be noted as following and a direct link to our site must be included in legible font in a conspicuous place: "Author/Editor, title, year of publication, volume, issue, page numbers, originally published by *The Agonist*. Reproduced with permission of the Nietzsche Circle, Ltd."

Board of Advisors

Dr. Christa Davis Acampora

Cem Aydogan

Dr. Babette Babich

Dr. Nicholas Birns

Dr. Arno Böhler

Dr. Tony Brinkley

Dr. Thomas Brobjer

Mark Daniel Cohen

Dr. Véronique Fóti

Dr. Terri J. Gordon

Dr. Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei

Dr. Susanne Granzer

Pierre Hadot

Dr. Lawrence Hatab

Dr. Horst Hutter

Dr. David Kilpatrick

Joseph Kosuth

Donald Kuspit

Dr. Laurence Lampert

Vanessa Lemm

Linda Lewett

Paul S. Loeb

Dr. James Luchte

Tali Makell

James Mangiafico

Dr. Benjamin Moritz

Hermann Nitsch

Dr. Kelly Oliver

Lance Olsen

Dr. Graham Parkes

Keith Ansell-Pearson

Dr. Philip Pothen

Dr. Timothy Quigley

Prof. Alan Rosenberg

Dr. Ofelia Schutte

Dr. Gary Shapiro

Dr. Walter Sokel

Dr. Joan Stambaugh

Mark Strand

Dr. Yunus Tuncel

Dr. Gianni Vattimo

Paul van Tongeren

Kim White

Colin Wilson

Patrick Wotling

Dr. Irvin Yalom

John Bell Young

Gérard Zuchetto

Exegeses of Nietzsche for *The Agonist*

To further practice reading as an art and to foster rumination, what Nietzsche believed “modern man” has not properly cultivated, *The Agonist* is seeking exegeses of Nietzsche’s texts. “An aphorism, properly stamped and molded,” Nietzsche urged, “has not been ‘deciphered’ when it has simply been read; rather, one has then to begin its exegesis, for which is required an art of exegesis” (GM: P §8).

The Agonist is interested in exegeses of individual aphorisms, bearing in mind that they fold into Nietzsche’s entire corpus and are not entities that one can consider in complete isolation. We are particularly interested in exegeses of aphorisms from *Morgenröthe* and *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, two of the more neglected books of Nietzsche’s oeuvre, but welcome exegeses on all the published works as well as the *Nachlass*. In this act of ruminating on individual aphorisms within the orbit of Nietzsche’s entire philosophy, we want to promote careful philological reading, the art of “reading well, that is to say, reading slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers” (D: P §5). If Nietzsche demanded for his work “only perfect readers and philologists,” it is incumbent upon us to learn, as he insisted, to read him well. For a section strictly devoted to exegesis, we seek work that strives to fulfill this task.

“A book like this, a problem like this, is in no hurry; we both, I just as much as my book, are friends of *lento*” (D: P §5).

For all submissions of exegeses, the editors can be contacted at:

nceditors@nietzschemcircle.com.

ESSAYS

Zarathustra and the Children of Abraham

James Luchte

7-30

INTERVIEW

with Babette Babich

interviewed by Nicholas Birns

31-47

REVIEWS

book review: *Nietzsche and the Rebirth of the Tragic*

edited by Mary Ann Frese Witt

reviewed by Maria João Mayor Branco

48-51

book review: “*The Pious Origins of Nietzsche’s Immoralism*”

Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief written by Giles Fraser

Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith written by Bruce Ellis Benson

reviewed by David van Dusen

52-61

book review: *Aesthetic Transformations: Taking Nietzsche at His Word*

written by Thomas Jovanovski

reviewed by Hugo Drochon

62-71

book review: *Pandora’s Senses: The Feminine Character vin the Ancient Text*

written by Vered Lev Kenaan

reviewed by Vèronique M. Fóti

72-75

book review: *On the Seventh Solitude: Endless Becoming and Eternal Return in the Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*

written by Rohit Sharma

reviewed by Katrina Mitcheson

76-79

book review: *Nietzsche and the “English”: The Influence of British and American Thought on His Philosophy*

written by Thomas H. Brobjer

reviewed by Martine Prange

80-88

“Ein andres Abzeichen des Theologen ist sein *Unvermögen zur Philologie*. Unter Philologie soll hier, in einem sehr allgemeinen Sinne, die Kunst, gut zu lesen, verstanden werden,—Tatsachen ablesen können, *ohne* sie durch Interpretation zu fälschen, *ohne* im Verlangen nach Verständnis die Vorsicht, die Geduld, die Feinheit zu verlieren.”

Nietzsche, Der Antichrist § 52

“Another mark
of the theologian is
his *incapacity for philology*.
Philology is to be understood
here in a very wide sense as the art of
reading well—of being able to read off a fact
without falsifying it by interpretation, *without* losing
caution, patience, subtlety in the desire for understanding.”

Nietzsche, The Antichrist § 52

Zarathustra and the Children of Abraham

by James Luchte

Zarathustra's Nietzsche: From Guilt to Innocence

Despite the fact that Nietzsche and his family considered his *magnum opus* to be blasphemous, and feared a backlash from the religious and political establishments, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*¹ was never banned. Indeed, not much notice was taken of it until well after Nietzsche's collapse.² In our era, this idiosyncratic work seems to stand in a paradoxical place, all its own. On the one hand, it is a work that is very well known and referenced with respect to some of its most famous phrases and words, such as 'God is dead', the 'Last Man', 'Overman' and 'eternal recurrence of the same.'³ On the other hand, it is a work that is little studied, either in literary, theological or philosophical contexts. The present essay seeks to redress this neglect through an exploration of the polemical context of Nietzsche's charge of nihilism against monotheistic religions. Such a focus will allow an intersection of literary, theological and philosophical perspectives in a broader interpretation of the significance of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a challenge to both traditional, and radical, religious orthodoxies.

It could be suggested that Nietzsche appropriates the name of Zarathustra in a vain attempt to subvert and go beyond Zoroaster, the inventor of good and evil.³ This attempt is vain, in a

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Walter Kaufman, (New York: Penguin, 1978).

2 Since its publication, the work itself has travelled a rather crooked path, being a cult classic for the likes of Stephen George, the 'Nietzscheans' of the Dreyfus Affair, a companion to German soldiers, a text of the death of god movement in theology, and a manifesto for post-structuralist philosophy. To this day, the work is still homeless as it sets in an uneasy relation to not only the dominant philosophy of our era, but also to religious, theological, and literary studies. Indeed, it could be suggested that its style and content exhibits an ambiguity that challenges our clear and distinct divisions of intellectual labor. Cf. *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Before Sunrise* for a volume of contemporary essays on the philosophical significance of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. J. Luchte, (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2008).

3 It is well-known that Nietzsche chose Zarathustra, in one instance, since, as a historical and mythological figure, the latter is attributed with the original articulation of the severance of good and evil. For even though we can retrospectively witness the ossification and nihilism of his progeny, his act was that of a creator – even if only a creator of nothingness. We can begin to understand the significance of his choice if we consider, for instance, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J.Hollingdale, (New York: Penguin, 1988), p.18, or of the ranting of the madman, in the *Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1974) that "God is dead!" —these texts seek neither a mere repetition of the teachings

mocking challenge to the preacher of Ecclesiastes, as it asserts that there is something new under the sun, or at least that this something—novelty—is at least possible—beyond a metaphysics of an eschaton. For Nietzsche, the monotheistic eschatons⁴ unfold, each as the self-same suppression of Life, as repetitions of the erasure of the moment of becoming. In this way, Nietzsche will not only risk this vanity in an attempt to think differently,⁵ but will also affirm the possibility of a transfigured existence of radical innocence. It is an affirmation of innocence which displaces the disciplinary regimes of radical guilt. Indeed, ‘guilt’ is the crux of each of the eschatons; yet, guilt is only a moral interpretation of the phenomenon of life which remains merely upon the surface. Nietzsche gives us a clue to his strategy of displacement of these masques with his intimation of a deeper, hidden bind that ties life together (the Dionysian). Zarathustra sings in ‘The Other Dancing Song’,

One!
Oh man, take care!
Two!
What does the deep midnight declare!
Three!
I was asleep—
Four!
From a deep dream I woke and swear:
Five!
The world is deep,
Six!
Deeper than day had been aware.
Seven!
Deep is its woe;
Eight!
Joy—deeper yet than agony:
Nine!
Woe implores: Go!
Ten!

of the “Old Wise Man”: C.G.Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934-1939*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 282, nor a project to resurrect or retrieve an *originary* oneness or unity prior to the beginning of duality.

4 I have written *eschaton(s)* in the plural not only to underscore the divisions between the various monotheisms, but also to intimate the pluralising event of the ‘death of God’ which will no longer allow for a conception of a metaphysics of presence in terms of a universal notion of the divine witness or of a logic of a one that is other.

5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (London: Penguin, 1979). The old sin against the regime of guilt is pride, self-love – vanity. Yet, such brings light, it discloses the terrible truth of innocence. “God is a crude answer, a piece of indelicacy against us thinkers—fundamentally even a crude *prohibition* to us: you shall not think!” (p. 21)

But all joy wants eternity—
Eleven!
Wants deep, wants deep eternity.
Twelve!⁶

This is an instance of one of Zarathustra's many evocations and gestures of reversal and revaluation: that the 'truth' of existence must be intimated in the hidden recesses of life. The depths when brought to the surface become disfigured by the procedures of disclosure, by which the intimacy of the singular and its self-interpretation and expression is assimilated within the theistic devaluation not only of the depths, but also, of life and embodied existence. Intimate, indigenous expression is displaced, crowded out by the grand narrative of the eschaton, by the Word of God. For Nietzsche, in this light, the most difficult task is the attempt to go under into the depths. If truth loves to hide, we would destroy her if we forced her to stand naked in the panopticon of our inspection regime. If we do indeed love the truth, we must travel into the hidden—forbidden—so as to find her there—in her truth. She must speak for herself.

For Nietzsche, and later for Bataille⁷, Blanchot⁸ and Irigaray,⁹ and others, it is poetry, music and 'detours' which facilitate a descent into the depths, giving glimpses of truth in her own domain. It is poetry of the dithyramb, as well as music, which can go under into the depths, and which will express the hidden tie that binds together the knot of eternity. Poetry attempts to bring truth into the Open without turning her into ashes. With the implosion of the antithetical regime of consciousness and existence, of subject and object, of concept and intuition (and of God and Creation), we find that poetry, even if conceived as a type of conceptuality, is, for Nietzsche, a self-expression of the phenomenon of life.¹⁰ The poets were removed from the Light of the polis

6 *Zarathustra*, Part Three, "The Other Dancing Song."

7 Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone, St. Paul, (MN: Paragon House, 1994).

8 Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, translated by Lycette Nelson, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

9 Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

10 There is a long development from Nietzsche's earliest writing to his latest which traces a poetic and artistic thread, that is, from his earliest poems to his last "mad" (is it as mad as Hugo Ball?) scribbling—and including all that emerged in-between. We can trace this thread from one of his first poems (1858) "Birthday", through to "On Truth and Lying in the Extra-Moral Sense," again through *The Birth of Tragedy*, and in light of the period of reflection and experimentation in *Human All Too Human*, *Daybreak* and the *Gay Science*, the emergence of Zarathustra as a work of philosophical (and historiographical) creativity in *Zarathustra*. It is noteworthy that Nietzsche to some extent seeks to hide the *lowly origins* of his work—his selection procedure is well known—as is the constructed character of his works. Nietzsche hides his own depth through a strategy of limited revelation. He does include poetry in his works—but not all of his poetry, some of which stands as a counterpoise to Nietzsche's self-portraiture as a *hard man*—a *radical aristocrat*. For instance, there are many instances of grief and sadness, of tears and anguish, of suicidal despair, which rarely surface in the published works—or at least, only in *Zarathustra*. His poem about his father's death, 'The Homecoming', while intimating the death of God, is far from the laughter and dancing of a festival celebrating a marriage of light and darkness. It resembles more closely the rantings of the Madman or the Soothsayer, of a passionate, anguished soul.

by: James
Luchte

in that they implored the people to remember the song of the earth resonating below the regimentation of the polis. Plato charged that poets lie too much—that they spoke in ways which made the true false and the false true—that poetry itself was merely the idle chatter of the ephemeral realm, a logos of untruth. However, Nietzsche reminds Plato in the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* that his attempt to create a ‘Good in itself’ is a self-negating attempt to deny perspective, to refuse Life—in other words, that his lust for an otherworld is a duplicitous attempt of escape, of nihilism—indeed, a lie, a mask for a will to power. Zarathustra laughs, agreeing that the poets do lie too much—but he tells the troubled youth on the mountainside, “Zarathustra too is a poet.”¹¹ It is perhaps in his use of poetry, of art, a lie, which is uniquely suited to tell the truth, that Nietzsche’s challenge to theoretical philosophy and theology is at its most subversive. For, not only does he throw off the protocols of science and logic, but writing in a style that resembles each of the three monotheistic texts, Nietzsche not only intimates the all-too-human creative root of each of the texts, but also sets forth an alternative teaching, a doctrine which seeks, by returning to the roots of the trajectory of our own era in Zoroaster and Abraham, to counsel human beings in their own self-overcoming of nihilism.

Zarathustra and Abraham: The Destination of the One

Zarathustra, that personage straddling the precipice of history and legend, stands at the *beginning* of a long line of quite familiar religious assertions. He is reputed to be the “first”, not only to posit the distinction betwixt good and evil, but also to describe the significance of the world as a *moral* event. In terms of the mytho-theology of the Avesta, the war between good and evil first emerged as a diremption of an archic deity, Ahura Mazda into Vohu Manō and Angrō Mainyush. In this way, the specific horizons of his assertion of difference, and of his remembrance of an *originary unity*, Ahura Mazda, describe a world constituted not only by an “ethical”, but also a “metaphysical” opposition between contradictory principles of existence. It is in this

At the same time, however, not all is hidden—even Nietzsche’s musical composition and song writing have always been well known—though seldom heard. Despite Nietzsche’s secretiveness, it is simple to apprehend that his poems, such as the ‘Dionysian Dithyrambs’ and ‘Wit, Tricks, and Revenge’, provide the lost horizons and contours—indeed, the birthplace of Nietzsche’s philosophy. For a complete English translation of Nietzsche’s poetry, cf. *The Peacock and the Buffalo: the Poetry of Nietzsche.*; a bi-lingual edition is forthcoming from Continuum in 2010.

11 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, translated by Walter Kaufman, Penguin, p. 127. It is well known that Nietzsche also—or primarily, as some may contend—wrote poetry — and composed music. Indeed, with a reading of his poetry, we find that it is indeed a hidden garden, mountains and desert, of his entire work. While one could describe his aphoristic writings, as they were etched into notebooks during his wanderings, as a *typology* of poetic writing, Nietzsche has left a labial body of poetic work which lies far beyond the domain of contemporary philosophy. Never abandoning the original kinship of poetry and philosophy as offspring of *poiesis*, Nietzsche includes poetry in most of his major works—never however disclosing the wellspring of his hidden poetic enterprise. Indeed, it is his poetry which may provide the clues to his broader thematic directions and pre-occupations – his work is not organized according to logical and analytical criteria—but, as indicated, by a *poetic topology*.

way that the *makeshift* regime of good and evil constitutes the fundamental reality and *raison d'être* of the world. Such a regime is neither an endless Heraclitean opposition, nor an alchemical marriage. For Zarathustra, or Zoroaster as he is also known (and still finds hundreds of thousands of adherents to this day), the specific metaphysical opposition is not stagnant. It is a war of attrition, in which, amid the heat of battle, ground, territory, is gained and lost.¹² Yet, for Zoroaster, this war exhibits a singular destiny, which is an eschatological overcoming of evil by good—but a purely ethical good that would have no need any longer for the ladder of metaphysics. In this manner, the ultimate destiny of the world, made manifest by Zoroaster, is its mystical transcendence *as such* through the dissolution of the metaphysical antithesis of which it was constituted. This antithesis, and the world it manifests, must, moreover, be overcome by man himself as he affirms his own destiny. For Zoroaster, this destiny achieves its eschatological and post-historical fulfillment by means of an explicit affirmation of one principle over another, good over evil, as counseled in the *Avesta*¹³ in the prescription of “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds”. For Zoroaster, the meaning and destiny of the world is accomplished by a retrieval of the originary state, of Ahura Mazda.

Islamic thinkers in Iran have questioned Zoroastrian ‘duality’ with respect to the status of the two principles, especially with regard to Ahraman, the deity of evil. As is affirmed repeatedly throughout the Qurān, there is only one ultimate principle, that of Allah, who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent (merciful). From this perspective, the dichotomist schema posited by Zoroaster, even though not originary, not only constitutes a blasphemy against the power and unity of the divine, as is the case with the Christian trinity (*a monstrous blasphemy*), but also raises the implicit possibility that an alternative principle of ultimate “reality”, that is evil, is at least possible. Zoroaster may rejoin that while he begins with such a metaphysical opposition amid phenomenal existence, the eschaton of this conflict would be similar to that of the standard monotheistic equation. Amidst the discord of the world, Zoroaster seeks to retrieve an originary unity of the Good, of the One.¹⁴

The Islamist contends that Zoroaster errors in giving metaphysical independence to evil in the constitution of the world, and freedom to created, temporal beings in the fulfillment of the eschatological destiny of the world. Indeed, one gains the strange impression, in the Qurān (and the Torah, as in the story of Job), that Allah (or God) is deploying evil as a weapon and a test, as a dissimulation. In the Sura, ‘The Cow’, the angels of Allah, who refer to themselves as ‘We’,

12 Cf. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Protracted War*, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1967).

13 James Darmesteter, trans., *The Zend-Avesta (Sacred Books of the East)*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

14 Indeed, considered from the perspective of the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus, for a moment, it could be argued that evil is such a state of indeterminacy that it can never properly be designated a principle, and can never therefore *be* an alternative to the Good or the One. Zoroaster himself would be shoulder to shoulder with the Islamists, especially in the context of the question of evil, an assessment, in the context of the fundamental decision of one principle over the other, of the remembrance of the one over the other. Zoroaster seeks the re-integration of Ahura Mazda in a transcendence of the world. All things, as the story goes, will return to Allah.

close the ears and seal the eyes of the unbelievers—hardening their hearts, and thus assuring their doom. In their response to the one who does not believe and obey, evil, hardly an independent or threatening force, is simply a temporal worldly phenomenon, deployed against the unbeliever and even encouraged for those who are, within this scenario of pre-destination, beyond hope and mercy. The angels taunt the unbeliever—go ahead and enjoy your unbelief—run riot in the time you have left, in ignorance and blindness—for, in the end, everything and everyone, shall return to Allah.

In the end, Zoroaster shares, with the three monotheistic assertions, a logic of the One, of an eschaton, which, whether it be the ‘End of Days’ of the Jews (Numbers 24:4), the Apocalypse of the Christians (Revelations), or the Last Judgment of the Muslims (Qūran), signifies the end of the temporal world as a fallen state in which good is opposed by evil. In this way, Zoroaster, as the father of the conquest of evil by the good, of the world of many by the eternal return to God, stands in a remarkable situation of resemblance to Abraham¹⁵, who remains the official patron of faith of the one God by each of the monotheistic assertions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, each portrayed by Nietzsche as typologies of nihilism. Indeed, Zarathustra shares much ambiguity with Abraham in that each is a transitional figure who had to enact violence in order to create a place for his new assertion. And, while other spiritual formations such as Buddhism, Bahai, and modern day Zoroastrianism do not regard Abraham as their point of departure, from the perspective of Nietzsche’s genealogy of religious nihilism, there is a deep metaphysical kinship between all these assertions, one which constitutes, to borrow from Wittgenstein, a distinct family resemblance.¹⁶ In this way, it is Abraham who may serve as an archetype for any metaphysics of nihilism.

Abraham, as the name given to Abram in the wake of his unambiguous demonstration of faith, stands or could stand implicitly, as I have suggested, as the exemplar of faith for any eschatology that sees its fulfillment in a destination toward the One. Indeed, this trajectory is exhibited in the practical metaphysics of Abram in his unquestioning submission and commitment to the will of the one God. In the narrative of Genesis, one that is explicitly shared by each of the monotheist assertions, Abram is portrayed as having a longstanding relationship with the divine, one that began implicitly, as a Child, when he smashed the idols of his father, telling the latter when

15 On the historical interaction and possible influence of Zoroastrianism upon Judaism, see Charles David Isbell. “Zoroastrianism and Biblical Religion,” *The Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 34, Number 3, (July-September, 2006), Jamsheed K. Choksy, ‘Hagiography and Monotheism in History: Doctrinal Encounters between Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity,’ *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. Vol. 14, No. 4, (Carfax Publishing, October 2003).

16 Conversely, it could be suggested that Wittgenstein may have borrowed this phrase from Nietzsche as he speaks of the ‘spell of definite grammatical functions’ in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Part 1, Section 20:

The singular family resemblance between all Indian, Greek and German philosophizing is easy enough to explain. Where there exists a language affinity it is quite impossible, thanks to the common philosophy of grammar—I mean thanks to unconscious domination and directing by similar grammatical functions—to avoid everything being prepared in advance for a similar evolution and succession of philosophical systems: just as the road seems to be barred to certain other possibilities of world interpretation.

asked, that the idols had fought amongst themselves. Such a faith is sufficient in its incipience for Abram to deny the traditional polytheistic faith of his ancestors. Abram is willing to confront his father and mother and deny their religion—indeed, to break with all that has come before and to begin a new genealogy. Abram was approached by his new God, who initiated a series of tests of faith for him, the first being to leave his traditional home. This was the beginning of the New Covenant in which Abram, in exchange for his faith, was promised a new homeland and the protection of his offspring. After the passage of years and growing aged, however, Abram worried that he still had no children. He was told by his God that his aged wife Sarah would bear him a son. This prophecy aroused an incredulous laughter in Abram and his wife. The laughter soon ended, however, as the seemingly impossible happens, and the faith of Abram grows stronger. At the same time, the rejection of the traditional divinities and homeland of his family, although important for the latter day adherents of monotheism, does not in itself constitute the act which is sufficient to merit the change of name sufficient to found a new genealogy, and to complete the New Covenant. The act which serves as the culmination of his test of faith is not parricide and matricide, but his willingness to sacrifice his own son Isaac. Kierkegaard speculates in his *Fear and Trembling* on the various scenarios which could explicate the meaning of such a divine command for Abram, as the latter himself does not say a word in response to the demand for the sacrifice of the son given to him by his God. With an attitude of religiosity, he simply hears and seeks to obey. Abram makes ready for the sacrifice and sleeps one last night in the knowledge, the pre-monition, that with the daybreak he will sacrifice his only son. With the return of the dawn, he departs with Isaac to the altar on the mountaintop, again without a word to his son or to his wife Sarah. In response to a question from Isaac as to the location of the sacrificial lamb, Abram responds reticently that God will provide. As the narrative is fulfilled, Abram places Isaac upon the altar and raises a knife over him—Isaac witnesses the terrible truth—but at that moment beyond decision, the angel Gabriel intercedes telling Abram that he need not act—he is let off the hook as the narrative becomes a comedy (the laughter returns).¹⁷ Abram has passed the test of faith, and with his new name, Abraham, is promised progeny who will outnumber the stars. Through his demonstration of faith, Abraham has allowed a new world destiny to be born. The same story is retold, but at a higher level, when God sends his own son into the world as a sacrificial lamb. Through the death of Jesus, God undertakes that which he does not even demand of Abraham.

But, what is the philosophical significance of this eschatology, of this destiny of the One? As diagnosed by Nietzsche, such a destiny is that of nihilism, or, in other words, it is an eschatology which seeks, with its purported lust for the annihilation of the world, to deny the myriad and creative diversity of Life. With his valuation of the ephemeral character of temporal existence, Abram would willingly sacrifice his only son for his God—none of this is sufficiently real to

17 I mean the word ‘comedy’ in the ‘minor’ sense of that which seeks an escape from the tragic double bind, or in the ancient sense, as that which ends a narrative with a happy ending.

matter, he would perhaps whisper. Yet, for Nietzsche, God is dead—he dies with Abram’s whisper—God is stillborn, in his admission that the creation itself is without value—it is nothing at all in relation to the God who has been established as the seat of all value. This new god resembles a Saturn who swallows his children—and chokes to death on them. Such a transference of the seat of value into the negation of this world of temporal existence is a flight into the Otherworld—it is a nihilism that fails to see world and earth as the only topos of affirmation, as the place of the artwork and of lived existence, of life...

It will happen, however, that the adherent of such a destiny will, in good faith, question Nietzsche’s diagnosis of nihilism. He will respond to Nietzsche, this physician of culture, with the demand for a second opinion. How, he will ask, is such a reversal possible by which the exemplar of faith is turned into its opposite, into the very annihilation of all affirmations of value, by which a faith in the invisible, in the transcendent, in God, is transformed into nihilism, an inner void of mere nothing? Indeed, was not Abram’s seminal submission and commitment to God not in fact the extreme opposite of nihilism or any seduction to the powers of nothingness? Is not the divine itself the fount of all being, value, of all meaning, radically other to this fallen world of fragmentation and decay? Who would dare to suggest otherwise? How is it possible that the hope for a Kingdom of God is a symptom of nihilism? Such an adherent would regard any such suggestion as simply preposterous.

The Death of God: The Seeds of Its Own Destruction

If we consider the obverse perspective of Abraham as the archetype of faith in light of his commitment to a logic of the One, to an eschaton of negative alterity, we are struck by another Abraham, one who tore the mythological tapestry of Pagan sacred affirmation into threads. From this perspective, Abraham is the great destroyer. Born from the cutting of ties with his family and gods, Abraham is the first, or, a first—he is an initiator of a discursive formation, a beginner, an Adam. All future history, moreover, will be merely the unfolding of his essence, which is projected as the limit of the past and the horizon for that which will be. He abides in-between, holding this undecidability within himself—even in his decision for the One. The openness of ambiguity, of the ambivalence of a truth event remains traced in his decision. Abraham is privy to the mystical foundation of authority in his declaration of independence from the Pagan world, an event which is simultaneously an unambiguous assault on the world and religion of his father and mother. He destroys so as to found a new beginning, a new world order. Just as he looks into the abyss, however, he covers over and supplants, with his artwork, the undecidable, this openness of temporal possibility. The phenomenon of the mystical foundation is suppressed, displaced via spectacles, events, and histories.

If a beginning in violence cannot completely and intensively erase the last trace of its

violent [origin]¹⁸, any such attempt at eradication will merely provoke a repetition of this trace. This violence, as with the shadow, is inescapable—the irrepressible repetition of the project of eradication does not serve the ostensible program of erasure, but of a repetition of this situation of conflict, through which this project and program are reproduced and augmented. The program becomes an alibi, one that is cultivated for its own sake. It is not foremost significant that a cycle of violence becomes repeated and maintained for the good, but that a repetition of violence is itself the metabolism of a violent ‘good’. A beginning in violence must live violently if it is to live at all—it must ceaselessly repeat this ‘event’ of its catastrophic [origin].

The trauma of the violent destruction by Abraham of the gods and goddesses of his ancestors, the idols of his father and mother, becomes repeated not only in his own willingness to sacrifice his late-born son Isaac, but also in the trajectory of his offspring, who in this covenant, countless as the stars, exist in the repetition and perverse fulfillment of that original trauma. More deeply considered, this event of trauma in the midst of Abraham is itself only a repetition of that more original trauma of the expulsion of Adam [and Eve] from the garden of immortality and delight. Miranda has suggested that the creation myth of Adam and Eve was itself a redaction which served as the founding myth and genealogy for Abraham himself.¹⁹ In this way, the transgression by Abraham against the gods of his family is provided a mythical alibi and re-inscription in the narrative of the Fall. This event of transgression by the Adam and Eve inaugurates the passage from innocence to guilt, from grace to punitive expulsion, and thus, erects an archetype, which serves to define the essential character of ‘human nature’. How could Abraham have acted otherwise?

Amid the perspective of this reversal, the polytheistic religion of the father and mother of Abraham is re-branded as a condition of idolatry and transgression against the one true God of Abraham. Moreover, the seed of transgression, although facing the onslaught of Divine wrath, remains alive as the trace or taint of original sin. One has sinned and has been punished, but due to the basic existential character of the human being after the Fall, one will sin again in the perverse fulfillment of human nature. History is composed of the anecdotes of sin. Indeed, this feature of the divine ordination of sin emerged with an erotic twist with the Heresy of the Free

18 I have placed the term 'origin' in brackets, in the manner of Husserl, so as to underline the problematic character of the term—and in the present context, to intimate the violence inherent in the founding act of an authoritative truth regime. For a detailed discussion of the violence of the founding act of law, see Derrida, Jacques (1992) "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, edited by Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson. For a complementary discussion of the murderous intent and religiosity of Abraham in relation to Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, see Derrida, J. (1995) *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Wills, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

19 José Porfirio Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, trans. John Eagleson, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974). Indeed, this pattern of trauma and repetition intimates a deep narrative logic not only for *Genesis*, and on throughout the Hebrew Torah and the Christian Old Testament, the Christian New Testament and the Muslim Qūran. Moreover, it is the triune of transgression, punishment, and atonement, established in *Genesis*, which lays out the *modus operandi* of the fragmented monotheistic dispensations.

Spirit who incorporated sexual acts into their remembrance of the Last Supper, a celebration of the God of Love. Of course, in keeping with the strategy of trauma, these heretics, such as *Marguerite Porete*, were burned at the stake.²⁰ It is the Fall and its inexorable repetition, which implicates a naive self-interpretation of the phenomenon of human existence within a regime of guilt. Before the Fall, there were no humans. There was no before...

The taint of original sin, this seed of transgression, plays itself out throughout Genesis in myriad ways. There is the overwhelming question, in the first instance, of incest in the augmentation and perpetuation of the line of Adam. While some would wish to give deeper esoteric meanings to the fables in Genesis—or to de-mythologize these texts altogether—it is instructive to read off the implications of a text in situ—a text which, we must recall, still serves as a fundamental source for the very constitution of world-time, world history, and political history. While there is explicit reference to incest in the case of Lot's daughters after the destruction of Sodom and the death of Lot's wife, there is an implicit indication of incest with the question of the identity of the wife of Cain. Who was she... but Eve herself (if not Lilith, who does not make it into the final proofs of Genesis)? A daughter is born to Adam, but very late. While this alternative explanation would not itself escape from the labyrinth of incest, the basic implication of Genesis is an incestuous relationship between Cain and his mother Eve. In light of the irresistible resemblance to Oedipus in the play by Sophocles, the subsequent humiliating fate of Cain intimates the tragic destiny and terrible truth of human existence—as creatures of the Fall. This trajectory of sin plays itself out in the subsequent trajectory of the genealogy of Adam in its eventual corruption in the time of Noah. In this case, the One God decides to destroy all humanity and every living creature except for the family of Noah and the animal and seed stock that Noah is instructed to preserve on the Arc(he). The state of wickedness of human beings is given a more specific content with the punishment and annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah and in the divine strikes at the Tower of Babel. In the former case, that which offends is the subversion of the sexual archetype of Adam and Eve as the progenitors of humanity. The latter case demonstrates the impossible desire of the one God to maintain his hegemony in the face of his creation at any cost. Lucifer, his prize creation, had already revolted against Him, a rebellion that not only sets a precedent for alterity to the logic of the One within the biblical narrative itself, but also harbors the trace of the terrestrial suppression and erasure of the Pagan ethos, the religion of the older gods. This trace of the terrestrial usurpation of the idea of the Holy remains submerged, however, within and without the narrative of guilt—of transgression, punishment and atonement.

The supplantation of polytheism by Abraham et al. is suppressed within and by the genealogy of Adam, through a displacement of the hubristic deed in an act of concealment. Terrorism dwells in a narrative of original Fallenness. One can blame oneself, one can detect in oneself an original sin and capacity for transgression, but the root of this original evil, after Abraham, is located not in the supplantation of the gods, but in the narrative of disobedience to the one God. In

20 Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993).

Volume II — Issue II — August 2009

other words, the act of supplantation of the Holy, of the gods does not implicate the one God—the guilt of transgression is instead projected upon his enemy, and the fallenness of creation, but in a way that falsifies and shreds this founding act. From the perspective of the ancestors of Abraham, this event is the death of the gods. Abraham has committed mass deicide. Abraham gives birth to evil. But, simultaneous with this child of evil, is the distortion and re-presentation of its origin—it is re-branded as its opposite—it is hidden in the counter-offensive of accusations of primordial guilt, original sin. God becomes the good, the gods become, if anything at all, demons within the new myth. From this perspective, Abraham’s God is an event of truth, beauty, and good.

One will recall the diatribe of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra that the old gods laughed themselves to death in the face of this God who claimed that he was the only god. For Nietzsche, it is laughter that will free us from the unlimited bondage of a “divine” which is an imposture and mask of a will-to-power, which is disguised as a will to nothingness. Yet, such laughter is most difficult amidst the lacerations of the whip, shackle and the stake. One will remain a convalescent or aspire to exist in such a state of convalescence. These wounds run deep, the scars of the surface remain burned upon my soul. Psyche²¹ crouches in her own excrement in the tunnels and chambers of an old, dark castle—her visitors decipher tattooed narratives and symbols sliced across her skin. We are condemned to read these inscriptions as well—but, upon our own souls, to decipher not only our own inscription by the logic of the One, but also to fathom the destruction of the Pagan ethos and the culture built upon this event.

In the face of all stands an imposture, a mask, of the one God who is other. The sins of the father become replayed, re-activated—repeated—in the children as they seek to maintain this regime of discipline and surveillance—purification, cleansing, life-negating power—the heritage and legacy of their ancestors. Abraham supplants his own ancestors, his mother and father, but with his displacement and re-presentation, he re-appropriates the Law of the Ancestors—however, with the proviso that he himself is the First of a New Covenant. One must understand that through the labor pains of Abraham, humanity is born again. While this supplantation of the old gods resembles the recurrence of overthrow in the Mycenaean tapestry, that of Ouranos by Kronos, and the latter by Zeus, the destruction of Abraham stands at a radical distance from the threads of kinship of dynastic succession exhibited in the mythological tapestry of the Pagan gods. This radical distance is constituted by the assertion of Truth by Abraham in his destruction of the gods of his father and mother. This assertion of Truth supplants any indigenous criteria or scenario of transfiguration of an existing mythos. “Truth” brings Abraham and his monotheistic genealogy onto the tenuous ground of historicity. Again, “God” resembles Saturn. Yet, it is not clear if he will vomit up the other gods and goddesses.

History begins, the story goes, amid a radical breach with traditional mythological narrative. This breach need not however imply that such a position, that of history, escapes from the

21 Alberto Savinio, ‘Psyche’, in *The Lives of the Gods*, trans. James Brooks and Susan Etlinger, (London: Atlas Books, 1995).

by: James
Luchte

domain of mythos, but will and must, from the standpoint of its own rhetorical assertion, proclaim the death and irrelevance of myth. As Bataille suggests, however, in his collection of essays on surrealism, *The Absence of Myth*,²² such a historicity, which feeds on the death of myth is indeed the greatest myth. At the same time, while history may be merely mythos in drag, the logic of the One and the rhetoric of Truth, abiding in its origin and genealogy, disrupt the evolving tapestry of traditional mythology and inaugurate a strategy of displacement and substitution. Even if the breach has for its *raison d'être* the establishment of another mythical principle and narrative, it deploys a strategy and rhetoric of Truth which ostensibly defines itself as non-mythical or even anti-mythical. Such a radical positioning is often touted as the intellectual advance of an “ethical monotheism”. However, such a denial and suppression of the play of mythical existence threatens a metaphysics of nihilism, of a desire to transcend the double bind of the world and earth—the noumenon dies as it is cut off from its life in the phenomena. One could extend, in this light, Nietzsche’s contention in the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* that Christianity is ‘Platonism for the people’ to the entire Abrahamic genealogy in its ultimate valuation of a domain that is other than the visible and ‘fallen’ existence of the All. With Plato and Augustine, Abraham seeks through his New Covenant, to establish his own polis, his City of God. In this sense, Abraham becomes the Philosopher King, the legislator of the respective status of the visible and invisible realms. In the midst of the destiny of this theological and political eschatology, Abraham is not merely Judge and King, but also, with Al Farrabi, a Priest. That which binds his respective roles together is faithfulness to the one God. Yet, as we will see, with his act of faith, and the claim of the truth of his god, he has unleashed a trajectory which will incite further revolts and founding assertions of the One and of Truth in his terrible children, Christianity and Islam.

However, despite the relative success of the genealogy of Abraham, from a terrestrial-political perspective, it is the very strategy and rhetoric of the One Truth, which, simultaneous to the founding act of the monotheistic conjecture, plants the seeds of its own destruction. Indeed, the mere possibility of its success would at once sound its own death knell. This Will to Truth, abiding deep within its hidden recesses a primordial will to power, will be, in its victory, compelled to turn this Will to Truth onto itself. In times of peace, the warlike man turns against himself. Not only has the death of the old gods set a precedent for the death of the ‘immortal’, but also the very logic of supplantation, as a Will to Truth, already and inescapably sets out the primal scenario for the death of God. From this perspective, Abraham himself becomes the ugliest man. His very assertion of the primacy and exclusivity of his God was at once the murderous blow against his God. If you wish to destroy a cause, become its most excessive advocate. The monotheistic assertion, in its objectification of God and in its proclamation that God is Truth, provokes the flood of oblivion that will return this god to its own primal fate, back amongst the gods who laughed themselves to death. The trace of this original breach, the ceaseless and inexorable fragmentation

22 Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, ed. Michael Richardson, (New York: Verso, 1994).

of the tragic assertion of the One, is disseminated as the narrative and congregational discordance of the progeny. The very tools of the trade associated with this Will to Truth, moreover, become targeted upon the assertion of the One, but only in the auspicious Moment of its triumph. That which is exposed in the Socratic maxim of the ‘theoretical man’ that the unexamined life is not worth living is the assertion that the One itself rests upon a mythos that stands, as Nietzsche contends, opposed to life. The razor of historical criticism begins the self-lacerating project of unearthing its own roots. In its enactment of an inherited Will to Truth—it kills God.

Reiner Schürmann counseled that the death of an idea always takes much longer than its birth.²³ It took almost two millennia for the God of History to be subjected to the procedures of historicism, methodologies, which were born alongside itself as its spear and shield. We have killed God. We are the Ugliest Man. But, we have killed him with the gifts that he himself has given us. The triumph of the essence of this God of Truth is at once his fulfillment and death. The Will to Truth that destroyed the old gods, honed and refined over eons, turns upon itself in a final project of self-examination and annihilation. But seeing nothing but itself and its ubiquitous historical actuality, it finally denies that there is any truth upon this earth. Indeed, it is always already elsewhere. In keeping with this otherworldly disorientation, it decides that this life is not worth living, and thus, it seeks its own annihilation—it seeks to fulfill the implications of its own exposed untruth. The God of History dies because He is exposed as merely historical. The God of Truth dies in that His will to violence pales in the face of the impossible task of constituting Himself as the only Truth, as the totality of existence, as I am that which is. The world and earth is always His shameful, embarrassing remainder, reminder, always His poison chalice.

Novelty under the Sun: Two Notions of the Will and Will to Power

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes would have us believe that a creative life is lived in vain, that there is nothing new under the sun. Indeed, any assertion of novelty in this world of finitude is vanity in light of the homeless fate of such expression and exertion. The Master and Slave are each fated to Death—the one is no more significant than the other—they meet in the End. All works perish or are appropriated by the latecomers. All is vanity. There is nothing left to do but drink a little wine and pass the time with one’s fellows as this is our God-given portion. Amidst this double bind of finitude and hope, one need, and can only wait - for Death... for God.

At the end of the day, the ‘metaphysics’ of this Preacher is the same as that of Abraham. That same dichotomy persists between this visible world of decay and fragmentation and that eternal, invisible Otherworld. For both of these figures, it is the latter which holds all value and

23 Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, (Indiana University Press, 1987). He writes: “When questions are raised about principles, the network of exchange that they have opened becomes confused, and the order that they have founded declines. A principle has its rise, a period of reign, and its ruin. Its death usually takes disproportionately more time than its reign.” (p. 29)

abides all hope. The willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his late-born son Isaac is, as I have suggested, merely a repetition of his own fateful supplantation of the earthly gods of his father and mother. His faith is given to a god that is out of this world, in the facelessness of which this world is without value, the only significance of which is its own insignificance. Yet, even as this world is, with Zoroaster, something that is to be overcome, it remains, as with the barren island of Delos, the birthplace of Apollo, the point of departure and negative image of the destination of the invisible. This faithful Abraham would find a kindred will in the willingness of the Preacher to forsake any earthly project or destination as vanity. Both Abraham and the Preacher close their ears to the song and dance of the earth: each abandons the vanity of earthly things, gods and works—each harbors a will that seeks its own ultimate reason and purpose—its highest value—in a beyond or behind of things—in the transcendent, in the No-thing. This Will to Nothing, as it finds no ultimate meaning in the world and thus does not resist the void that stalks at the perimeter, is the soil for a ‘metaphysics’ of antithesis and hierarchy, for a ‘logic’ of the one. Indeed, for Abraham and the Preacher, this Will to Nothing is but one overwhelming Will—that of God—a Will that is already always expressed in the inscriptions of a revealed logos upon the old law tablets.

The Will of God is the a-topos for the expression of this revealed Truth, which explicitly asserts that It is the only True Will, one that is elsewhere, beyond this fallen world, there in that No-thing. In light of his resistance to a trajectory of the One, Nietzsche proclaims that this Will to Nothing is a radical attack upon, and falsification of, the phenomenon of Life. He juxtaposes another narrative of Will in Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* in an incessant unbinding of the strands of the exclusivity of the One God, One Will. While we will fathom that the Will in Schopenhauer is singular and alone—and thus, another variant of the logic of the One (hence, his ethical conclusions)—the very possibility of such a Will immediately disrupts the exclusivity of the monotheistic assertion. The Will, a primal power, is explicitly conceived as the raging heart of the world, as the non-conscious striving of Life. For Schopenhauer, it was not through the clarity of the concept or the light of another world, but instead through music, poetry and dance that the Will is intimated, disclosed. In its insatiable emanations, or objectifications, the Will seeks to satisfy its overwhelming desire for self-knowing and self-expression. While Schopenhauer will, through his ethical pessimism, ultimately expose himself as a nihilist, closely aligned with Abraham and the Preacher, he has nevertheless disclosed the existence of an alternative conception of Will, as a Will to Life, existence, survival, a will to expression and self-understanding. Even if Schopenhauer prescribes a pessimistic negation, this Will, or that which is indicated with this sign, exhibits an intense resistance to the Will to Nothing. Just as the persistence of the trace of memory of the destruction of the Pagan ethos by Abraham germinates the seeds of the death of god, the antithesis of a Will to Nothing and a Will to Existence explodes the pretension that there can only be the one Will. It is in this context that Nietzsche, speaking through Zarathustra, moves beyond the various logics of the One to the pluri-vocality of the will-

Volume II — Issue II — August 2009
Volume II — Issue II — August 2009
Volume II — Issue II — August 2009
Volume II — Issue II — August 2009
Volume II — Issue II — August 2009

to-power.

Each of these notions of the Will indicates a great longing. Yet, even in their apparent opposition, both of these positions imply, for Nietzsche, a radical rejection of the possibility of an affirmation of a creative Life. For Abraham, this world is not properly Real—its actuality, he would emphasize, discloses that everything solid melts into air. One can be clear and certain only in God and his New Covenant. For Schopenhauer, the very futility of the bad infinite disclosed in the Will to Survival, while an adequate description of existence in specific respects, serves to refute life and the world—which for Nietzsche seeks not to survive—it already has that—but power and creativity, health. The system of needs and the radical absence of satisfaction underlines, for Schopenhauer, the pointlessness of exertion and expression which only achieve the persistence of a state of unsatisfied desire. Schopenhauer judges, as did Mani, that our only response to the futility of life must be the silencing of the Will in ourselves through an ethical—and reproductive—negation of individuality. The world of the ego, as with Buddhism, is a world that is not properly Real, it persists as a house of cards of borrowed thoughts and vague self-awareness. The ego, which is the mask of the Will, must be broken apart in order for the Will to be detected and then silenced. The striving and suffering of the Will must be denied, if there is to be oneness and repose. Both of these doctrines, each in its own way, set out a temporary metaphysic of duality, as with Zoroaster, that, in its strategic polarity, reveals an eschatology of the One, and in both cases the eschaton lies elsewhere from the World—this topos of illusion, futility, and our impossible insurrection against nothingness. The One need only acknowledge the Other as long as the creation remains alienated as Other. In and of itself, the World has no meaning, it is as the skin shed by a snake, of no consequence, not left behind—but, secretly assimilated, eaten as forbidden fruit.

However, a voice of distress calls out in the Night about the Earth, our fair Sister. This voice declares, in opposition to the previous assertions of will, that We must remain true to the earth. The voice of yet another Other, of an insurrection against not only the regime and aroma of Nothingness, but also against mere Survival, against unsatisfied, frustrated expression, indicates a willing that is anterior to the incestuous wills of negation and repetition. In the face of this will to annihilation sounds the voices of impossible striving, which although subjected and suppressed, still ceaselessly exist, inexorably creating beyond themselves, playing out this dice game of chance.

Yet, with this proliferation of Wills, each seeking to be All, we sense that we must step back from this notion of ‘will’ as it is itself merely a veil that has been cast over all things, another fiction that dances over myriad events, tying, suturing them together, in order to fashion a singular fiction—this world. It has chased the poets away with its edifice of Truth, but it has also exposed itself as ‘only a fool, only a poet’.²⁴ If these wills collapse into the same, it is the striving amidst the earth that remains for Nietzsche that which exceeds and explodes the bridges and

24 *Zarathustra*, p. 300.

by: **James
Luchte**

fences stretched across her skin and her rivers. The persistence of the trace of resistance to the grand narrative of any conception of the will shatters the aura of a monocratic explanation of Ultimate Reality. With the utter fragmentation and deconstruction of the nomenclature of the Will as a Unity—whether God, primal surge or ding an sich—there emerges the other event(s) that indicate the intimacy of an impossible insurrection against Nothingness and Survival, a willing that is Other than Will. Or, in other words, the genealogy of the Will, that Great Lie that almost fooled everyone, becomes traced to a deeper origin in the more primal events of creation and transfiguration. Zarathustra exclaims in ‘On Self-Overcoming’,

Indeed, the truth was not hit by him who shot at the word of the ‘will to existence’: that does not exist. For, what does not exist cannot will; but what is in existence, how could that still want existence? Only where there is life is there also will: not will to life but—thus I teach you—will to power.²⁵

That which has characterized the operation of the monotheist assertion is, in tandem with the state and the military, the suppression of all that is heterogeneous.²⁶ For the former, it is the other gods, specifically female goddesses (and their devotees) and the erotic ontology of sensuous existence. Monotheism, in other words, has already operationalised the aspirations of its own, masked, will to power, a will that is couched in the rhetoric of Otherworldly desires, in an ultimacy that is elsewhere. It has fulfilled its longing at the cost of sacrifice—of Life, and of affirmation of all that gathers together as World and Earth. It denies new creation in its lust to be the last of all creations—it is the black snake in your throat. It even denies its own responsibility and capacity for creation as its laws and its very historicity are attributed to Revelation. It forbids all will to creation and thus camouflages its own will to power as the negation of all will to power. Yet, its hatred for the world and flesh reveals its desire for the Same (although it always awaits the End, in one form of the other). It substitutes Repetition for Creation. It seeks to put a halt to the possibility of new creation as any novelty would stand as a question mark over its claims to ultimacy. Novelty screams as an exception to its privileged status.

The truth of the monotheist assertion is exposed in the final sentences of Nietzsche’s posthumously edited and published fragments, *The Will to Power*, “This world is will to power—and nothing else besides? And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing else besides.”²⁷ In its duplicity, the monotheist will to power postures as being a will to no-thingness, a will which seeks to transcend power, to annihilate will, to return to a God who is beyond the world and earth. Yet, as it does not act quickly to vacate itself from the face of the earth, to die at the right time, or let a new world be born, this rhetoric of beneficence is exposed as merely a masque for a specific type of will to power that seeks merely to perpetuate itself as long as it can.

25 Ibid., p. 115.

26 On the distinction between homogeneous and heterogeneous forces, see Bataille, ‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism,’ *Visions of Excess*, (University of Minneapolis Press, 1992).

27 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufman, (Vintage Books, 1967), p. 550.

However, as intimated, the cost of such a perpetuation of its own will to power, especially in its bad faith, is the sacrifice of any new will to creation, of any differing will to power, and more specifically that which is an eruption of this innocence of becoming, this Dionysian power of life, death and rebirth. The power of life is the power of creation, a power of creative effervescence that gives forth novelty under the sun. Zarathustra exhorts the crowd in the marketplace—he is a madman shouting:

I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have that chaos in yourselves.

Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the last man.²⁸

It is precisely this chaos that the monological assertion seeks to suppress, to eradicate, annihilate—the rattle of this dice throw of chance must be silenced, the very possibility of creation in this realm must be destroyed. But, as every act of destruction is also one of creation, that which is created via the destruction of the Dionysian power of life is the Last Man, the nihilist, the impotent consumer incapable of new creation or self-overcoming, much less self-sufficiency—he is suppressed, contained, and anonymous in his anonymity—he forgets just as soon as he thinks, chewing his cud in blissful ignorance. But, this ignorance is sculpted via burned flesh—not simply a tabula rasa, but a complex construction of a simulacrum and discipline—via the fire the Last Man learned to say ‘I will’—but not as a will that is an affirmation of will to power, to new creation, but as a submission to a will that is other, to a stratagem of torture, indoctrination and regimentation—he wills in that he is willed, in that he should, in his obligation—for after all, he is woman, he is guilty. That which in a previous epoch was worshipped as the irrepressible power of the fertility of life in a ceaseless dance of novelty is given a new status, a new value, devalued, destroyed via the violence of a radically other repository of significance. The Otherworld is the latest fashionable delicacy of the Last Man. New creation becomes at best a mere vanity amid an expendable world of utility—at its worst, new creation is heresy, evil... New creation is a threat to the regime of monocratic assertion. New creation, and the very physiological possibility of such new creation, must be annihilated. Possible creators of the future must be made sick, so that they will be able only to serve the legacies of the past. Their innocence must be turned to guilt, their health to disease, their strength to weakness. Order and form suppress the Dionysian power of life and inaugurate the conditions of weakness, which will be expressed as a will to nothingness, as a will that has been made weary by its own regime of suppression. The suppression of this chaos in one’s soul in the monotheist assertion sings the same tune as the excess of order and of morality not only Plato’s Otherworldly hypothesis, but also, as a microcosm, via the discipline,

28 *Zarathustra*, p. 17.

regimentation and surveillance of the 'theoretical man'. It is bad enough that those who sought to articulate this power of life, the poets, were excluded from the city—on the grounds that they lied too much—but it is worse that this entire arrangement of the polis rests upon the precipice of a Noble Lie—the Big Lie. The order of the polis will be maintained at all costs, the unity of the One is to be pre-eminent to any of its many parts or to anything that shall be excluded in the limit situation of its founding arche. Music and song become suspect—poiesis is only cultural, never having the status of praxis.

Nietzsche claims that it is precisely this obsession with 'unity'—or what could be described as an attempted annihilation of the Dionysian by aesthetic Socratism—is itself already a symptom of weakness, a weariness of life. It longs for that which is radically other as it cannot stand this life. It calls for a sacrifice to Asclepius as death will heal it from its sickness. Yet—and this is where we clearly see the will as a masque—even its will to no-thing is still an expression of its will to power—its perverse and repressed 'affirmation' of this life. The Dionysian power of chaos that tears through life, shattering the household in the tragic event, will no longer be allowed to run amok amid the polis. It will be rooted out in a realm of a pure Good in itself, one in which this perspectival character of life, innocent, before good and evil, will be annihilated. From the enforced, and thus universalized, perspective, tied inside the panopsis of the Good—the Dionysian power of life, the chaos at the heart of the creative act, is renamed "Evil". But, as with Schelling, Nietzsche warns that such an uprooting will serve ironically as the death-knell of such a project of purification and unification. Zarathustra awakens the youth on the mountainside,

But it is with man as it is with the tree. The more he aspires to the height and light, the more strongly do his roots strive earthward, downward, into the dark, the deep – into evil.²⁹

In the masquerade, Life itself will be poisoned, postponed—any trace of this power of life will slowly suffocate under the weight of Repetition, this ceaseless re-assertion of that logic of the One. It is the Overman, who resists this will to a destitute future, who will bite the head off the snake which eats its own tail. Nietzsche poses the question in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: Who will be the one who will grasp hold of chance, in the moment, and exclaim, 'Thus I willed it'? If this is not to be the faceless repetition of the arche, and if it is to be an opening which gives, makes or takes space for new creation, it must be the creator, the Child, who affirms this legacy of accidents as it finds these amidst an innocence of becoming. With the event of lightning, light that shatters the old law tablets, the creator erupts into the aura of the creative event. In this ecstatic openness of possibility, novelty erupts under the sun.

29 Ibid., p. 42.

Eternal Recurrence of the Same: The Affirmation of the Overman

If the willingness of Abram to sacrifice his son Isaac indicates a metaphysics of nothingness, nihilism, the innocent creations of the Dionysian power of life, of the Overman, intimate an affirmation of the eternal recurrence of the Same. Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions emphasize truth as the criterion for their overthrow of the polytheism of their fathers and mothers. Yet, truth became a hydra, its many mouths biting into the supplanter. Not only does “science” subvert and displace its own myths, but its own methods, such as hermeneutics, are turned on the creator—upon religion and its historicity. With the displacement of the hegemony of the One, there opens a topos for the self-expression of many voices. If truth is no longer to be conceived in a positivist, but in a mytho-phenomenological sense, the meaning of affirmation after the death of [God] exhibits its specificity in the letting be of this Dionysian power of life. It is this power of life that is the eternal recurrence of the Same, and this is the *umwelt* of the affirmation of the Overman.

The Dionysian annihilates himself and destroys the household which contains his destiny, as he knows that he will be born again as the Same. The Christian flees from this power of life as his kingdom is not of this world. The death of Jesus the Nazarene, as told by a Christian, such as Paul, is the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic eschatology in that the Son of God—God himself—becomes the sacrificial lamb. The son, unlike Isaac, is sacrificed, no angel is there to save him in the end. He will rise again, but only to return to his father, to himself. The metaphysics of alterity is re-affirmed and completed, as the sacrificial lamb is reborn as the Other. The death of Jesus, as told by the Dionysian (certainly not the story related in the New Testament, which Nietzsche abhorred), is that of the Bacchanalia, the dismemberment and rebirth of the power of Life, of the Same, in the dramatic exposition of a Dionysian pantheistic polytheism.³⁰ This will to destruction is creative in the sense of a first-born attempt—an affirmation amidst the overwhelming powers of Life, which, as with Origen, are independent of meaning. In this alternative scenario, the first attempt of affirmation of the hidden powers of life, of Love, by a Dionysian Jesus, clears the space for the birth of the creator, for the Overman. Yet, the Overman, despite such an imposing designation is simply the Child. The Child, whom Jesus did not send away, affirms the play of life without sacrifice, as a gift. The Child is the one who can be laughed at without any provocation of shame. It spurs him or her on in escalating play. Laughter is the echo of an excessive affirmation. We are pressed and shamed to take the monotheistic allegory seriously—and this seriousness is enforced by the proliferating cults of the one god. Yet, the Overman, the child of Zarathustra, can be a fool—an idiot amidst this event of affirmation. He

30 This tentative formulation arises out of exchanges with Deirdre Daly and Graham Parkes at the Conference on Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* at the University of Wales, Lampeter on 14-16 November 2008. The intent behind this suggestion is the inscription of the narrative of Jesus into the mythological tapestry of Dionysus, in light of not only the affirmation of all that was and is implicit in the notion of eternal recurrence, but also, the poetic freedom unleashed in the notion of a creative future.

by: James
Luchte

provokes laughter without intention. This is the topos where his excessive power seethes, this un-self-conscious creator innocently destroys that which seeks to curtail his own creativity. [God] no longer has a patent on creativity.

While Nietzsche attempts, in his posthumous fragments, *The Will to Power*, to lay out a cosmological articulation of the eternal recurrence of the same, it will be illuminating to distinguish this exoteric surface of recurrence from that which can be discerned as its esoteric depth. If there is a finite Kosmos, and if an eternity of time has already elapsed, and if there is another eternity beckoning from the future, and if the gateway of the Moment indicates a mere Circle, a gathering into a Same of bad infinities, then how could this specific event of my life not have been repeated eternally? On the face of it, this story presents a seduction to the lonely one in that it gives a cosmological *raison d'être* for its destiny in the framework of a purposive teleology, or even as a rival eschatology. However absurd, the lonely one is given meaning in the enigmatic, though seemingly logical, proposition of eternal return. If we think along with this conditional, syllogistic, reasoning, and if we accept its premises, then, perhaps, we could regard this proposition, this conjecture, as a real possibility—perhaps as a ‘theory’ of temporality. It is entirely possible that even the most intimate and intricate simplicities of our lives have been eternally repeated. Yet, such a seemingly logical system, despite its paradoxes, is merely one interpretation, variant of the eternal recurrence, an assertion of a specific will to power. The question still hovers as to that which is absent, erased via this purposive teleology of eternal repetition. Indeed, following Otto, we could, on the contrary, affirm eternal recurrence as a possibility of dysteleology, ‘in’ the moment (*Augenblick*).³¹

The esoteric meaning of the eternal recurrence, on the other hand, a meaning which remained unsaid in Nietzsche’s writings (perhaps it was whispered to the goddess Life in “The Other Dancing Song” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) implodes the entire edifice of the exoteric interpretation of a temporality of return. Eternal recurrence as the unhistorical opens as a playspace for the singularity of the free, very free spirit. Such an emphasis upon the esoteric dimension of the eternal return plays out as a counterpoise to such higher men as Blanchot,³² who is shattered by the proliferation of thought without a present, inexorably repeated and infinitely mirrored in his language. As if death, through him, distracted itself. The notion of eternal recurrence, in its

31 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, (New York: Penguin, 1959), p. 79.

32 Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, pp. 11ff. There is much to be praised in *The Step Not Beyond* which could contribute to an exploration of creativity as a multi-voiced phenomenon. At the same time, however, it is precisely such a ‘temporality of return’, of repetition, that is, following Klossowski’s *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, (Continuum, p. 55), unmasked as a mere parody, simulacrum, ape, of the dominant narratives of the *eschaton*. In this way, it could be argued that Blanchot remains upon the seductive surface of paradox. Eugen Fink, in his *Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2003), also seems to remain on the surface as he seeks a theory of time in Nietzsche’s doctrine. The difficulty is that neither he nor Blanchot (and others) seem to understand that phenomenologically, the ecstasis of the future is not annulled for the questioner, regardless of the seeming necessity of a future that has always already been dissolved at the level of the surface, of the exoteric. In this way, creativity or the novel is not annulled by the eternal recurrence, even if that of a mere fluctuation of impulses, if considered from the perspective of its esoteric depth.

exoteric interpretation, is another of Nietzsche's jokes, mocking the eschatologies of nihilism. Zarathustra is the spider who has woven an exquisite web, a game, his cave, to ensnare the Higher Man. Yet, once they are there in his cave, Zarathustra wishes nothing better than to get some good air. He steps beyond the cave—outside - among his animals and the earth and sky—into the open air of a starry night, to become what he is. Time itself is imploded in this affirmation of a singularity of be-ing here, of an innocence of becoming—becoming this dice throw of chance, a self-propelled wheel. Zarathustra, in the final section, 'The Sign' becomes one with that which is, with his animals, with the lion, as his face turns to bronze. He is the premonition of the type that which be fulfilled with the event of his children.³³ We must first traverse the pathway to this event, to this final act of affirmation so that we can descend through the exoteric mask into the esoteric truth of the abyss of singularity. It is the Child in its singularity who affirms the Dionysian general economy of life as it 'is'. Ostensibly, this is the meaning of the eternal recurrence of the Same.

With the fulfillment of the esoteric singularity of existence, the exoteric snakeskin will be shed, left behind as an artifact of self-overcoming. The notion of the eternal recurrence places great demands upon Zarathustra. The great weight of the idea shatters, crushes him in his own attempt to make the greatest affirmation of existence. He sits as a convalescent, waiting for the sign which will beckon him to not merely articulate, but effectuate, the teaching of the eternal recurrence. Zarathustra laughs and calls his animals fools as they chatter on about his destiny as the Teacher of the eternal recurrence of the Same. The animals only know the exoteric story. Zarathustra laughs as he knows that his fate is not to be a mere teacher of an exoteric doctrine, but that he must seek to give birth to novelty under the sun, that he must become a Child. He must attempt that which is most difficult—he will give birth to himself.

The exoteric formulation of the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same, if considered detached from any question of its cosmological significance, discloses for the singular mortal being a topos of decision—it stands as the Gateway of the Moment. Everything will return, each in its singularity, exactly as it is and has been eternally. Such a narrative forbids any novelty in its assertion of the monotonous circle. Yet, from the perspective of the esoteric variant of eternal recurrence, the tale of the animals of an endless circle dissolves as, for the free, very free spirit, the future is revealed as the undetermined, as the agon of contestation, as the place where

33 In her insightful article, 'Sensing the Overhuman' (JNS, 30, Autumn 2005, pp. 102-114), Jill Marsden questions whether anyone can ever become the *übermensch*, but instead suggests that which we can achieve is the experience of the *übermenschlich*, of that which she translates as the *overhuman*, an ecstatic (though disinterested) experience which she likens to Kant's aesthetic discourse upon the sublime. While this comparison is illuminating, it may be a limited perspective as it would seem that Zarathustra is seeking, as a Dionysian, other humans with which to share his transfigured state of being, and thus to achieve a way of life that falls prey to neither the Last Man (technology), nor to the recurrence of those seeking an escape (religiosity). In this way, as with Schopenhauer's revisionary consideration of the sublime in *The World*, the body and our way of life becomes the site for a *very interested* hermeneutics of existence, and thus, in Nietzsche's dissident sense, for an affirmation of a new body and an *ethos* that, as a way of being for a community, remains true to the earth.

by: James
Luchte

novelty can be, or—and returning to the joke of the exoteric reading—anything we choose to do is legitimated simply as it has already happened eternally. In this way, too, am I innocent, even if I kill my father and marry my mother. How could it have been any different?

Returning to the esoteric perspective, the dys-eschatology of eternal recurrence, as it intimates the ecstatic openness of the future, does not incite the repetition of the monotheistic conjecture. Yet, in his affirmation of the Dionysian power of life, Life sets forth an ordeal which must be confronted and fulfilled by Zarathustra. The moment of decision (Augenblick) of the exoteric doctrine is the gateway to the possibility of a deeper affirmation of existence. It provides the singular mortal being the possibility and actuality of free creation, an event of affirmation that seeks to overcome the historical malady of nihilism and guilt, a conjuring of the possibility of an unhistorical transfiguration of life. This, I suggest, is akin to the moment of anticipatory resoluteness (vorlaufende Entschlossenheit) in Heidegger's *Being and Time*³⁴ or the revolution of the heart, in Kant's *Religion*, in which a decision is made for the *eigentlichkeit* of existence—over against the generic homogeneity of everydayness. Yet, for Nietzsche, such a moment of vision is a necessary prelude to a turn to the deeper esoteric affirmation of eternal recurrence, a letting-be of creativity. The Augenblick, and the decision that it provokes, in this way, is not sufficient for the affirmation of the Child.

We dread the repetition of the Same, in its exoteric formulation, as we are burdened by that which has been, and by that which is—and never will be. If a single thing is chanced, or if there is a wish for any single thing to be different, then all is cast into question. Conversely, if one ever affirmed any single thing, then she must affirm everything—as All is caught in the Stoic web of continuum. But, where is Ariadne's thread which will lead us from this labyrinth of repetition? For we must, in the exoteric scenario, affirm all that which is, seeking to complete, to give meaning, to take responsibility for, all that which has been, is, and will be—and even this future always has already been. That which is is to be affirmed in all of its *minutae*. No escape, no exit, will be permitted, no nirvana, no outside—the actively nihilistic intentionality of this exoteric assertion plays itself out as a mockery of eschatological doctrines of escape, sleep, death, the One. Yet, the comic, exoteric shell, skin, of eternal return falls away as one ascertains that the scenario of eternal repetition is absurd. Far from the farce of eternal repetition, and the unexamined assertion of this repetition, is the disclosure that such a fatalistic scenario of repetition implodes amid a *topos* of silence, in this instant of chance. From a purely logical perspective one could question an eternal Repetition in that, after the death of God, there would be no external vantage point that could determine the discrete identity of repeated cycles. Indeed, this is the ground of a farce in which any and all acts would be blessed as innocent (or at least as necessary). This redemption by the comedian (in the burst of laughter) clears the space for the affirmation of an innocence

³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

of becoming. From the esoteric perspective, Zarathustra calls us to affirm by becoming creators who will laughingly play amidst chance as a child.

The Sisyphean gesture of the exoteric interpretation of the eternal recurrence serves as a litmus test for any metaphysical doctrine of transcendence. Despite this absurdity of his destiny, Sisyphus does not paralyse himself in otherworldly hopes. He is guilty. However, with the implosion of the farce of the metaphysical arche of existence, there is disclosed an esoteric significance to this doctrine of repetition. If it is impossible to distinguish one life from another via the illusory vantage point of an abstract observer, then, it is necessary to assert that there is only one life. The most difficult thought is not that of eternal repetition, but of the singularity of chance. The geometric form of the circle subverts the possibility of an authentic future, and thereby, annihilates the chance of the affirmation of the Child. The exoteric form of the doctrine is merely an electuary, a spoonful of sugar, but one which turns bitter with the disclosure of the terrible truth. Sisyphus does not escape, he does not leap down the other side of the mountain to freedom. He does not rebel from his predicament, as it is only the auxiliary narrator who says that he is unhappy and without joy.

The affirmation of an eternal recurrence, of singular and creative existence, has been prescribed as the medicine for the malady of nihilism, for the metaphysics of nothingness diagnosed as an array of symptoms. As with the other metaphysical doctrines of escape, eternal repetition removes the singular mortal from the hook—it gives meaning to existence in a meaningless scenario of Repetition. Such a possibility removes the singular mortal from the moment of risk, from the tenuous space of self-understanding. The evocation of eternal recurrence, understood esoterically, however, is a call to the singular mortal to become what one is, to fathom itself out of its own genealogy and life, and to liberate itself from its topos of origin through the ecstatic innocence of new creation. The call invokes the singular mortal to return to this truth of life, and to attempt the unhistorical, to become untimely, to be a creator. With the dawn of an awakening to this singular chance, the mortal begins to understand the urgency of a life on death row. The Overman, who has undergone convalescence from the malady of nihilism, is the one who is unthinkingly prepared to affirm this most difficult thought. This is not a detached speculation of a sculptor who hammers out his piece and then goes to sleep for the night. The sculptor is able to walk away. The task of self-overcoming, an affirmation of all that which is, is a situation of violent intimacy – affirmation is a task of wakefulness. This singular chance of existence erupts amidst the not-yet of demise – we exist as free, very free spirits, awake to the terrible truth of existence, but awake also to the voluptuousness of the abyss. Yet, while we can bear this burden, we can laugh amidst its terror, we can affirm our fate with the cry: ‘Thus I Willed It... (followed by laughter)’ Such an affirmation celebrates a festival of free existence which, amidst an imperative of death, is awake to its own dangerous possibilities. Zarathustra exhorts us to follow ourselves—while we are set free to create the future, we must also affirm that which has made us what we are. As very free spirits, one task is necessary—to overcome ourselves as mere conva-

by: **James
Luchte**

lescents of nihilism in an excessive affirmation of life that ecstatically creates novelty under the sun, a novelty of innocence that has overcome the violence and duplicity of the logic of the One. This is our Fate, which we should and can love as the next page of the story has not yet been written.

James Luchte is Lecturer of Philosophy and Director of Research at the University of Wales, Lampeter, UK. His other publications include Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: A Reader's Guide, Heidegger's Early Philosophy: The Phenomenology of Ecstatic Temporality, Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Before Sunrise (all Continuum), and a translation of Nietzsche's collected poetry, *The Peacock and the Buffalo: The Poetry of Nietzsche* (to be reprinted by Continuum in 2010). He has also published numerous articles on various topics in European Philosophy.

Volume II — Issue II — August
Volume II — Issue II — August
Volume II — Issue II — August
Volume II — Issue II — August
Volume II — Issue II — August

Advertise in:



The Nietzsche Circle is a philosophical organization devoted to the study of Nietzsche and aesthetics, and *The Agonist* is the heart of the Nietzsche Circle website.

The site is now getting an astonishing 150,000 unique readers every year, and the number of readers has been growing exponentially every year.

For book publishers and conference organizers, these are exactly the readers you want to reach — intelligent, thoughtful, discerning readers, faculty and students interested in the arts and philosophy.

The Agonist is where you want your ad to be.

Please contact Andre Okawara for ad rates and further information at:

ncinfo@nietzschecircle.com

Between Impossible Wishes: An Interview with Babette Babich

by Nicholas Birns

*B*abette Babich is one of the most exciting and exacting philosophical commentators at work today. At once a reverent student of tradition and an explorer willing to assume the risk of a rapprochement with challenging ontologies, Babich is equally at home with architecture and textuality, in ancient Greece, modern Germany, and postmodern America; in the ruined temple and the networked seminar room. An extraordinarily knowledgeable commentator on Nietzsche and Heidegger, she is yet blown forward, like Benjamin's angel of history not abiding in merely reverent homage to past master thinkers, Babich's *Words In Blood, Like Flowers; Philosophy and Poetry, Music and Eros in Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger*, published by SUNY



Press in 2006 ([link to my review](#)), is one of the best books of this decade and *The Agonist* contacted Babich in the hope of discussing her ideas further. She generously agreed and the interview below is the much-appreciated result.

NB: When you compare Nietzsche and Heidegger, does Nietzsche's training as a philologist make his approach to 'truth' or its negation different?

BB: Nietzsche's philological training certainly makes all the difference here, but the key difference between Heidegger's approach to truth (or its negation or its "untruth" or the negation that is the lie for Nietzsche), turns upon Heidegger's philosophical formation. At the same time, Nietzsche's approach to truth shares with Heidegger a certain resolutely critical orientation, stemming in Nietzsche's case from his own philological formation. Here I am not merely referring

to Nietzsche's reliance on Gustav Gerber's *Die Sprache als Kunst* in composing his "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," but Nietzsche's reflections on truth throughout the course of his philosophy. In addition it matters that from very nearly the start of his philological academic career Nietzsche wanted to be, as it were, a philosopher. This cross-disciplinary ambition is not as presumptuous as it might appear: in classical philosophy a philological formation is often, although this is regrettably waning, interchangeable with a philosophical formation and Nietzsche concluded his inaugural lecture at Basel with a confession of his own philological faith which he identified for his listeners as an inversion of Seneca: "what was once philology has now been made into philosophy." If Seneca's original "what was once philosophy has now been made into philology" exemplifies the spirit of classical philology, Nietzsche's inversion may be heard in a definition Hans-Georg Gadamer once offered of philology and philosophy. The two were indistinguishable save where one or the other failed in its task. And Nietzsche's book on *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (which Eugen Fink prized so very highly), does not depart from this convertibility. Philologically, Nietzsche would always attend to the question of "personality" or personal style; philosophically, Nietzsche posed the question of truth not only formally, as any scholar or scientist might do, but also and always reflectively or, as Heidegger would say: thoughtfully.

To go back to the question as you have framed it, of Nietzsche's philosophical relevance with respect to Heidegger (and to philosophers in general) by referring to 'truth' or its negation, a good, rhetorical handbook of grammar and style (say a text dating from the mid-twentieth century, or else a 19th century German handbook like Gerber's, or in English, like Fowler's 1906 *The King's English*), can be of use, as Wittgenstein especially saw this, to philosophical discussions of logical analysis. In the case of philology, such broadly philological handbooks outline the limitations of 'truth' as Nietzsche explores the notion but one quickly moves beyond the boundaries of philology proper inasmuch as for Nietzsche the contrast between truth and lie was to be coordinated to a broadly 19th century question. Consequently Nietzsche did not separate the question of truth and lie from the broader question of the origin of anything at all out of its opposite. This includes the origination of the living from the dead, or put in the scientific, geological and evolutionary (and theological context of his times), the organic from the inorganic, or else and on the conceptual level, the genesis of science out of myth, or the progress to truth from lie as the development of scientific rationality as such is also the heart of epistemological evolution. Heidegger's *aletheic* truth on the other hand, even if rejected by certain philological temperaments (and endorsed by others at least in Heidegger's time,) likewise depends on Heidegger's own fundamental philological skills as a philosopher in a German context, where, and this remained true until recently, one could not study philosophy without a large bit of both Greek *and* Latin—when I was in Tübingen and Berlin in the mid-eighties, one only needed a great bit of *either* Greek *or* Latin, but now I think one can get by with neither.

Interview

More generally, given questions of influence, Nietzsche's critical, philological approach would seem to have affected Heidegger if it is fairly patent that Heidegger's question of truth, which to be fair to Heidegger is one of the more rigorous in his philosophy as it is indeed the core of his engagement with language, takes Heidegger on his own philosopher's way, and that means with (but also away from) Nietzsche as from Hegel, Kant, Aristotle, etc.

NB: Wow, a feast of questions can arise from that . . . but most immediately, does this shared philological outlook have a consistent valence (I am not talking about the linguistic education of philosophers, which I assume was pretty consistent from the Scholastic era on) that goes back beyond Nietzsche to say Kant and Hegel, or did Nietzsche's philological training—which I assume was greater than any predecessor except possibly Hegel's) inflect a tradition and Heidegger was then able to turn this in a more idiosyncratic way? (You are saying that Nietzsche's philological mode was *more* connected to the way the establishment was doing it, right?)

BB: I should clarify a bit here inasmuch as what Nietzsche does with his philology is fairly radical and was perhaps for that same radical quality not well received. This is in part because Nietzsche's own philological formation reflects several divergent trends as these coalesced at the end of the 19th century, trends which have only been vaguely transmitted to us in Nietzsche's case in terms of the Ritschl/Jahn controversy—which is usually reported as an issue regarding collegial egos and stepped on collegial toes. But Nietzsche was influenced by both Ritschl *and* Jahn and philology for Nietzsche included both historical/linguistic as well as cultural dimensions.

Almost half a century ago, William Arrowsmith tried (and arguably failed) to revive the relevance of coordination for his own generation. In his own time, Nietzsche conscientiously emphasizes both the historical/linguistic as well as cultural and technological dimensions. Philological fashions were moving towards what the 19th century establishment regarded as a more "scientific" (we today might say: objective) kind of philology, which could be broken down into linguistics but also textual history, on the one hand, and archaeology (which Nietzsche, following Jahn also emphasized along with music and ancient technology), on the other hand. This sundering remains the rule and recent years have seen less and less grammar and metric analysis (there are professors of classics today who eschew grammar in favor of what they call "history"). And of course philosophers have long been able to write dissertations on Aristotle or Plato without reading Greek as indeed many Nietzsche scholars write on Nietzsche without reading German. For me the question remains: why did Nietzsche have so little impact on the course of his own discipline? Some have argued that Nietzsche's first book almost had to fall, as it is popularly expressed, not a little bit after Hume's own author's complaints about his own book as falling, "dead-born" from the press, but I think it could have gone either way just because "success" in the very social world that is the academic world depends upon the reception of a book by one's colleagues. Indeed several readings of the quarrel surrounding *The Birth of Tragedy* suggest that Wilamowitz was a

interviewed by:

Nicholas
Birns

kind of hatchet man, sent out (by others, or imagining himself to have been so commissioned) to do the work of taking Nietzsche out of play and thereby instituting a kind of normal philological science. Wilamowitz was breathtakingly effective at this elimination and Nietzsche's exclusion from classics endures to this day. As today's media-savvy politicians know: *calumniare fortiter, et aliquid adhaerebit*, sling mud, some will stick. Today's philologists look at Nietzsche as a literary figure not a philologist. Hence, with rare exceptions, classicists believe they have nothing to learn from Nietzsche.

NB: Is the principle thrust of this tradition backward, as it were, or forward (using inevitably Hegelian imagery)....

BB: I think, without being too, too Hegelian, that the thrust, at least on Nietzsche's side is *both* backward and forward. Backward in that Nietzsche is fairly convinced that, as it he puts it in his notes, we stand before a lost world to touch the barest part of which would be an extraordinary privilege—a privilege not to be had in this lifetime, no matter one's history, no matter one's archaeology. A little awe Nietzsche thinks can do us a world of good—hence he considers the relevance of such “history” for life, that is, for the future.

NB: And in terms of Greek and Latin... Both thinkers seem to pay far more attention to Greece than Rome, see Rome as a corruption of Greece and even philosophy—is this a simplification? Have we been too influenced in this respect by books like Butler's *The Tyranny of Greece Over Germany*? Did studying Latin and Latin philology have an influence on either Nietzsche or Heidegger? A lot of Heidegger's terminology is Scholastic, of course...

BB: This is a great question, though your question on Latin philology is too complicated to answer otherwise than to say, yes: especially for Heidegger but, on Nietzsche's own account of it, for Nietzsche as well. The issue of Butler's *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* concerns, of course, a very specific (and not at all accidentally Anglophone and even very British, it was first published in 1935) perspective on Germany—although my German friends swear that it has truth on its side. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger approach the question historically—how are we to understand a Greece we tend to approach through the Latin world that transmitted not only the idea of Greece and its philosophy, myth, history, etc. to posterity but the grammar books and schematic order of scholarship as such? It can be tempting from the vantage point of the 21st century to look at Greece and Rome as of a piece (maybe even—some survey courses do this—adding in the Egyptians as well as Chinese and Mayan culture, etc.) But this is a fairly imperialist (and that is not at all incidentally Roman) perspective. The key here is not the (German-imposed) tyrannizing of Greece over Germany as much as it is Milman Parry and Albert Lord and the trouble has everything to do with understanding how very, very alien to us the ancient Greek world would have been, and that is at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the day! What kind of culture, what world invents tragedy and invents it as a competitive festival, as a glut of tragedies, over

several days, with one musical-tragic performance after another, as long as the light lasts, only to give oneself over to burlesque, and when the next day dawns to do the same thing all over again? All the while, as Nietzsche emphasizes, telling only the same story in variant upon variant? With sculpture, architecture, epic poetry and tragedy, and indeed philosophy and law, Greek society also and Nietzsche always emphasized this, included, better said, *depended upon* not only slavery but an understanding of the role of women in society which amounted to slavery. And as for the Presocratic favoring, the very language of the “presocratic” tells us that the favoring is already at work from the outset: it is Socrates or better said, Plato and his students who set the agenda for philosophy and for what should count as philosophy. We can still use a return to the pre-platonic thinkers, again and again, until we can begin to approach them on their own terms.

NB: You said classical languages were no longer as much a part of philosophical training in Germany now as when you studied twenty years ago . . . is this because a certain generation has died off? Americanization? EU standardization? Or is it the delayed effects of everything Heidegger in his lifetime seemed to fear about technology?

BB: Ah! I would love to say the latter and blame everything on technology but I think more soberly (if, to me, still rather surprisingly) a kind of admiration of the American university system inspired the transformation of higher education in Germany (and the rest of Europe). This does not of course mean that Europeans now follow the American curriculum. Indeed: by the time an American student has earned a Bachelor’s Degree, age-wise, the average European student will have been fast-tracked to a Master’s Degree, and, speaking as an educator, I do not think that this parallel (or “globally” competitive) happenstance is anything like an accidental outcome of the reform. But this has little to do with the historical fact that both Nietzsche and Heidegger enjoyed a rather more extensive formation in Greek and Latin than we today think necessary (even in classics) and that this made a difference for Heidegger’s discussions of truth, of language, and indeed Being/beings. The difference for Nietzsche goes without saying. Your original question though, as I recall, had to do with the relevance of Nietzsche for Heidegger on this and related themes and I think such relevance can plainly be seen throughout Heidegger’s lectures on Nietzsche and in his later writings.

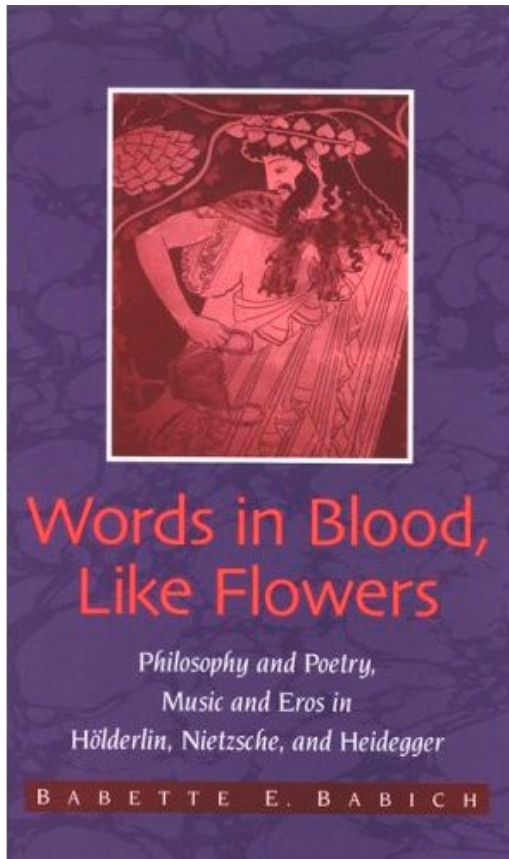
NB: I totally understand about Nietzsche and Heidegger both rescuing it from a normativizing scrim—I have just been teaching Greek drama (in one class) and Homeric epic as well as Hesiod (in another) and it has struck me that, for all the rhetoric about their cultural centrality, very few people actually care about them, and perhaps this oddness and the asymmetrical relationship between Greek perceptions and our own is to account for them, but still—and this may be a question I am asking particularly *in propria persona*, or *he auto prosopon* as Nietzsche and Heidegger would prefer, although they would want my Greek better—is there a way to have the otherness, oddness without the ‘grounding’ that so much Philhellenic rhetoric does, as if Greek is made

interviewed by:

Nicholas
Birns

some sort of obligatory cultural *Ursprache* (and Americans now are as or more guilty of this than Germans, or have been) . . . can we have the wildness, the otherness, the uncanniness without the “Greeks are the best” rhetoric . . . also, I take your point about Latinizing tendencies being imperialistic, but I also think of Paul de Man saying in “Literary History and Literary Modernity” that the past always embodies the modernity we think we have, or T.S. Eliot’s dictum that we know more than the past, yet the past is what we know—is not the mediation provided by cultural imperialism, even if it is just the temporal imperialism of ‘presentism,’ part of our perception of the Greeks? Do either Nietzsche or Heidegger show the way here?

BB: I take the distinction you are making and I couldn’t agree more. I think however that Nietzsche is supposing, and Heidegger too, that emphasizing otherness (although both Nietzsche and Heidegger will use hierarchical language) can help us here, precisely where one can often use the quite valid points that de Man and Eliot make as an excuse not to be bothered as it were. I am also somewhat influenced by Butterfield’s reflections on the danger of reading our present into “our” past (not to lose the points you have made) not as the royal road to history but to prevent us from imposing our politics as much as everything we “know” on the past which, for the most part, we ourselves have written. And of course both Heidegger and Nietzsche (and Hölderlin too) are fairly clear that we are on our way in such an engagement with the past not to the *past* but to *ourselves*—maybe, perhaps, or indeed not even that.



NB: In *Words in Blood*, you talk about what Nietzsche got from the Greeks stylistically as being both “extreme freedom and extreme constraint,” and then, presumably with respect to the latter, about his commendation of Sallust in *Twilight of the Idols* . . . could you expand on this a bit?

BB: The image of “dancing in chains” is for Nietzsche emblematic of Greek style and the contrast between Greek restraint and Roman concision is, I think, what stands behind his allusion to Sallust, and goes back to his early lectures on Greek rhetoric. There is a metric point here, that is to say, a point of measure and tempo, but I think the difference between the Latin ideal of concision and rhetorical order (which inspires not only Nietzsche but also Kant, as Willi Goetschl shows quite convincingly in his *Constituting Critique*) by contrast with the very different Greek ideal of

Interview

rigor, is musical. And it is in the dance, literally so because as spoken, Greek is, as Nietzsche says, to be enacted: thus movement (in the meter) is of the essence. Where the Latin stylist composes sometimes (especially in the case of Sallust) *for the eye* (think of the importance of anagrams), the Greek as Nietzsche makes this distinction in his early philological notes (repeating this emphasis in his *Zarathustra*), writes *for the ear*, a coordinate contrast that would include, as Anne Carson has rightly reminded us, the shape of the letters themselves but also and here we have a bit of metonymic synaesthesia, their contrasting colors, the back and forth of the dance.

NB: Does parataxis come in here, with dancing in chains and the tempo? You mention parataxis with respect to what Heidegger saw in Parmenides . . .

BB: Heidegger in Parmenides, Adorno in Hölderlin (and obviously, so too: Hölderlin in Sophocles) . . . So yes, I think so. To understand Nietzsche's notion of dancing in chains requires, I think, an understanding of parataxis and hypotaxis and that also means, as we can understand this today, the silences where there are no words. Here Heidegger's emphasis of Hölderlin's caesura will be essential. Adorno, and this is in spite of his antipathy to Heidegger, hears the attention to the Greek voice in Hölderlin's use of paratactic phrasing: thus Hölderlin, in practice, in translating Sophocles, illustrates what Heidegger has claimed (and been mocked for claiming) about the relationship between the German language and the Greek. Reiner Schürmann once remarked in a letter to me that Heidegger's claims, linguistically regarded, are not in error. I like to think that Schürmann's personal reasons for emphasizing this have everything to do with his experience of the very rustic Greece he cultivated for his sojourns there: without electricity and without, this I have only on hearsay, running water. This would be a very physical encounter with the sea, with the earth, with the sky. But I am mixing in my own memories here.

NB: When you said Kierkegaard was a television evangelist *manqué*, were you, among other things, saying he was insufficiently paratactic?

BB: That's an amusing way to put it and I think I take your point but I am not demanding parataxis above all . . .

NB: And is parataxis simply a challenge to verbal hierarchy and stratified ordering, or is there some sort of relationship of 'imitative form' between language and thought? Can the two be disarticulated?

BB: I am inclined to think of parataxis as a challenge as you say, although I think that Heidegger, at least in his later writing on language, may have come to the latter suspicion. Your second question is very difficult—and it all depends. Of course there is a relationship of "imitative form" between language and thought but if one adds Heidegger's emphasis on Parmenides, an understanding of the still point is also needed, the nothing that nothings for Heidegger, infuriating for Carnap and for those of us today who insist on the factive literality, the flat reality of an trivially

interviewed by:

**Nicholas
Birns**

identifiable referent. But, and once again to speak of Hölderlin's caesura in connection with Heidegger's musical sensibilities, this will also take us to Heidegger's silence.

NB: What about music? Can one speak of parataxis in music? And is Nietzsche's interest in music—his own compositions and his views on music in general—analogueous to his interest in language?

BB: Yes indeed. I think Adorno would also say that one can speak of parataxis in music though perhaps, as he also emphasized not everyone would 'like' such music. This would be, I think, Schoenberg, Webern or Berg but also some Messaien and a good deal of so-called postmodern music works or—better said—*plays* paratactically. So too indeed the very Greek interposition of the spoken word, already musical as it may have been, at least to our ears, with instrumental tonalities. The second question you pose regarding Nietzsche's interest in music along with his compositions and so on, is very, very important, hugely complex on several levels, and unfortunately today's studies of Nietzsche and music don't begin to raise this question and, in my view, this is not merely because of the life-historical and biographical challenge it presents but and to-date simply because Wagner (or for other tastes, Bizet, but this is really the same issue, and other composers work in the same way) can tend to block the issue. I have always thought, though this is by its nature impossible to test and so to refute or to confirm, that it would make no little difference to our understanding of Nietzsche's take on music to have heard him play, to have heard him perform: be it his own compositions or else his interpretations of the works of others. I think that such active performances or musical interpretations would have to be counted as a great part of Nietzsche's own relation to music. The musicologist's idea of performance practice helps us here, but even with this musicological notion one assumes a standard, one-size-fits-all sort of conventionality. Using Nietzsche's notion of personality, I have always thought of it as varying from one player, as it were, to another, not only varying in different times or cultures, with differing conventions, but also from person to person, with differing sensibilities, or a different ear and so on. Nietzsche was said in his day to have been a remarkable performer and the reports we have consistently emphasize his skills, the uniqueness of the same and so on. How to take that is precisely the question that one has, it seems to me, to leave open and to leave it open means not to forget it or close it off . . .

NB: Also, does Heidegger have much to say about music, and did he have much interest in it?

BB: Heidegger is famous, according to some commentators, for having had little or nothing to say about music. This is, like most things that get repeated in the wake of a commentator's dictum, not entirely true. He invokes music, he offers a famous, perhaps one of his most famous lectures, *Gelassenheit*, translated as "Discourse on Thinking," in honor of Conradin Kreutzer, a local composer, where Heidegger emphasizes that one best honors a composer not by giving a lecture but by allowing his works "to ring forth" in song and "in opera and in chamber music." In

other words one needs to hear music. I try to take this seriously and read Heidegger's reference to the ringing forth in sound of Kreutzer's compositions as of a piece with Heidegger's reference to ringing stillness, to silence and his invocation of song with respect to language.

Apart from language, where Heidegger's musical allusions can be esoteric, Heidegger's more direct references to music are often straightforward and there are dissertations and essays written on Heidegger and music. Bill Richardson invokes musical metaphors to speak of Heidegger, both at the start of his own book on Heidegger and also his musical parsing of the *Beiträge*. Nor is Richardson the only one to use such metaphors.

Perhaps the most important dimension of music in Heidegger may have to do with his effort to read Hölderlin and, taken as this effort should be with respect to the George Circle, that means, again, that Heidegger speaks of song. But here Heidegger has, as it were, the poet's word in his mouth and those who are interested in as it were, to speak with Plato (not precisely a friend of music in all its modalities), the song itself, will note that poetry however *melic* is not music. But the metaphors can trip one up and I am not sure that Nietzsche would go in such a direction. Not indeed given Nietzsche's beautifully doubled reflection on the quantitative or structural analyses of music then nascent and wonderfully graphic in the Chladni sound patterns: to speak of the "music" in music is to ask after the spirit of what would go missing in such a graphic analysis. Indeed, and to return to Heidegger on music, Heidegger is quite careful to emphasize the "heard" dimension or performative dynamic of music just as Nietzsche does, indeed as Schumann was famous for having done, responding to someone who asked him, so I have heard it told, to explain the meaning of a piece he had just performed, by sitting down and playing it again. This is why Heidegger began his *Gelassenheit* lecture as he did, by saying that whatever he might have to say in honor of Kreutzer the composer, the best way to honor a composer is to hearken to the tones themselves: to let them sound.

NB: So, in other words, it is not just not knowing how Nietzsche would perform music, but a subordination of the entire performative aspect of music to the compositional? (This of course goes back in the Western tradition at least to Boethius). And this is an aspect of post-Platonic, for lack of a better word, "logocentrism"? Are Peter Kingsley's ideas on the pre-Socratics relevant here?

BB: Peter Kingsley's work is exciting and enormously interesting. It is regrettable that in his books (following his first book which is the reason one reads his subsequent books) he utterly ignores the many scholars who, of course, initially lent him the insights he develops. Nor does he discuss the work of those who speak on related matters and not even those who have taken up his ideas. Perhaps and given the academic or university culture of contemporary classical philology, there may be no other way than the shaman's way but it is instructive that Peter himself followed no "Peter Kingsley" to acquire his insights and it is regrettable that he eschews dialogue in favor of cultivating followers. These days, in stark contrast to his first impeccably scholarly research

interviewed by:

Nicholas
Birns

work, Kingsley invokes the mantle of scholarship but fails to cite or engage any. And he brooks not only no disagreement but no new ideas or notions. This was evident at a lecture Professor Peter Manchester organized for him at Stony Brook (where Kingsley stood while speaking but sat down to take questions afterward, with the result that students who came to him to ask questions, knelt down to do so). Given the healing tradition he describes, I asked him about Nietzsche's Zarathustra (sleeping as if dead, etc., etc.), I note that my question about a possible parallel had been raised during the talk by David Allison as well as Tracy Strong. They wondered too, Kingsley did not. I argued that Nietzsche's Zarathustra might connect not only Empedocles, whom I hold that Nietzsche reads with Heraclitus, but Parmenides as well. Kingsley who studied what philosophy he did read with analytic teachers, has a very analytic (non-)reading of Nietzsche and consequently refused the question. This compounds the problem for me, as Kingsley's formation (and the limits of the same) may mean that he does not know what he is saying no to. As a result he may overlook a key connection between his philological work and the work of a similarly maverick philological forbear. But where Nietzsche, I believe, sought companions like himself rather than disciples or followers, Kingsley is rather expressly (in his recent work this has become *thetic*) on the lookout for acolytes, complete with money offerings to the Kingsley Foundation and so on. I mean this less as a criticism than a reservation and I am happy to say that the Kingsley Foundation is flourishing. For my own part I cite Kingsley's work and recommend it to my students. I am simply saddened, this is the best word, by Kingsley's own lack of engagement with current scholarship. The conversation is over before it begins.

NB: Right now, we have a lot of Greek sculpture available to study, but no Greek music. If you would reverse the situation, and have all the sculpture vanish and somehow have copies and performance texts (obviously not recordings) of the music, would this 'exchange' be worth it—losing the sculpture, gaining the music?

BB: There are no "performance texts" extant the time Nietzsche refers to and it is unclear that there are any references in later texts to any such lost earlier texts. In my reading, Nietzsche takes his point of departure from the assumption that there weren't any apart from the spoken Greek itself. In other words, and originally, there were no "performance texts." This is I think the heart of Nietzsche's attention to the literal birth of tragedy out of folk song but this folk tradition, the *oral* tradition, is not a text tradition. The development of a written language corresponds to the *development* of the performance text, inasmuch as a dynamic and interactive development with the folk tradition presumes a tradition of practice at the same time as it engenders a tradition of performance texts. The musical texts, this is Nietzsche's insight but archaeological (the point is there is no historical record) musicologists will support this, only come later and are thus either re-creations or re-constructions of a no-longer living oral tradition. Patently, in a non-literate culture, there are, because there can be, no performance texts—it is the gulf between the oral tradition and the text tradition that intrigues Nietzsche and should continue to intrigue all of us. But

to your question, *ceteris paribus*, would I personally trade the sculpture, of which we have in fact scant remnants compared with what all evidence suggests to have been the astonishing profusion of sculpture in so many media and in such a diverse range of sizes—I have a special interest in life-sized bronze sculpture—no, I personally would not. The physicality of the sculpture, even a ruined fragment, “speaks” to us. A score, by contrast, is sheer potential, sheerly to be realized, but to do so presupposes a “tacit” world: this tacit dimension includes the whole tradition of its realizations in the past, so that when one has a score one has, in the absence of that same tradition, very little indeed. On the other hand, I’d love to have a recording, but I think, if I can choose between impossible wishes, I’d prefer, *per impossibile*, a time-travelers’ music-video, given the importance, as Nietzsche emphasizes it, of the dance, that is to say, the importance of one’s legs, the feet, for Greek music, tragedy, poetry.

NB: I want to turn to issues of technology. Heidegger is famous for being very heavily engaged with the issue of technology, although quite antagonistic to it for the most part. Before turning to that issue—what does Nietzsche have to say about technology? Is it an issue for him?

BB: Nietzsche has a surprisingly large amount to say about technology especially in his early work. He associates it, unremarkably for a man of the 19th century, with modernity and particularly with modern nihilism. He also attributes a certain mind-numbing quality to mechanical technology, which can seem prescient but more likely reflects his generally mandarin and Graecist’s sentiments with regard to banausic or mechanical or “real life” work.

NB: Can one distinguish between a mandarin anti-technology and a more subversive brand? I presume you would put Heidegger in the latter category, but what about somebody like Jacques Ellul?

BB: That is a subtle question. Jacques Ellul meant to be as subversive as he could. He certainly wrote enough books. I am not sure that Heidegger ultimately shared the whole of this concern, or least not for Ellul’s reasons, reasons that were also shared, after all by Heidegger’s student, Herbert Marcuse. But by saying that I only mean that I see no reason not to take Heidegger at his word when he claims that it is more than technology alone and as such that concerns him. That is: Heidegger’s question even with respect to technology was indeed the Being question. On the other hand, Heidegger saw with extraordinary clarity the all-pervasive, world-changing implications of modern technology for our way of being human and of being in the world. Still, what may turn out to matter most is being in the world, and here with the focus on the earth, Heidegger and Nietzsche do come together, if Heidegger found it more useful (i.e., to his own ends) to characterize Nietzsche as one who advocated something other than loyalty to the earth.

NB: So it is not just a ‘humanistic’ objection to technology? Heidegger is not just deploying technology as one side of a binary? This is one of the aspects I thought was extraordinary about

interviewed by:

Nicholas
Birns

Words in Blood, your refusal to sentimentalize nature as either something decisively separated from humanity or something to be appropriated by human design, all the while still being aware of the desperate ecological circumstances we are now in . . . how can we refine a Heideggerian perspective on technology from the Ellulian-Marcusian critique of technology for let us say its one-dimensional expertise?

BB: I wonder if one can? I say that with an appreciation of the nuances you are highlighting. And I am aware, increasingly, that scholars writing on technology from Jean Baudrillard, very ironically to Paul Virilio, very complicatedly, but much more directly such as Gianni Vattimo, Langdon Winner, Slavoj Žižek and Jean-François Lyotard, to emphasize a calculatedly appropriate, instrumentally anthropological approach to technology. But this often means, and Baudrillard and Virilio, like Ellul, Marcuse, and Winner, will be the exceptions here, that the scholar can get to criticize technology while celebrating its liberating potential.

Where Heidegger catches us up in this enthusiasm for taking from the technological condition just what we wish and for finding ourselves in the technological works we have made is, I think, in his reflection on the all-absorbing power of technology. Thus even as academic committees point to the limitations of citation frequency to judge a colleague's credentials, or the raw numerical results of student evaluations, we academics—I mean by that, we who supposedly 'know better'—turn around and do just the same. Consumer reports or reviews of technology work in the same way. And this was Heidegger's remark almost a century ago, namely that the quantitative becomes the qualitative. Heidegger's point is that the distinction is elided while we pretend to ourselves that we are merely using the numerical value as a cue without depending on it. Almost all the social sciences have been redesigned to thematize such quantitative, numerical analysis. And why not? If political science and psychology are already there, philosophy too might also be on its way to becoming a quantitative discipline except that it has to borrow from (social) science to get its measures (or results). Thus I have a junior colleague who, deeply impressed by social science methodology, earnestly suggests that philosophical questions be solved by survey: this would be, I imagine, the wiki-approach to philosophy. *All* you would learn however is a range of popular responses to philosophical questions, in other words: one would have generated the basis for an *argumentum ad populum*. My colleague is serious and a great deal of analytic philosophy is factoid-struck in this way. But for Heidegger the questions themselves remain.

NB: My big question on Heidegger and technology is, what would Heidegger have thought of the Internet, would he see it as less objectifying and inimical to truth?

BB: This is a big question in many ways. I don't believe that Heidegger could have predicted the internet—even if he does at times lament the transformation of academic publishing (the pitch for the latest, newest material, the tendency to value only what has most recently appeared, neglecting all the rest). And he might have seemed prescient in certain respects as he points to scholars

who no longer need libraries and who are always on the move, thus he may have had some sense of where we were headed, just as Benjamin surely did.

If I hear you right, it is popular among today's academics to emphasize the fluidity and flexibility of the internet (I've already referred to Lyotard and this was the spirit of his very modern, post-modern faith in technology: free internet access for all!). But I am less sanguine than Lyotard (or Haraway or Vattimo) and turn rather more to Adorno and to Baudrillard on such questions.

At the same time, I think Heidegger would fear the patent inauthenticity of the inherently **flat**, mono-dimensionality of the medium and its peculiar catering to self-stimulation on almost every level. I also think philosophers should be a bit more engaged with the question of the internet, as the question concerning information technology in general.



Far more than television about which Jerry Mander once wrote [to almost no response from the academic community—Neil Postman was more successful but at the same time more inclined to pull his punches], the internet *is* Plato's cave. Gamers in particular exemplify the voluntary servitude of living life in front of a screen, with reference to a screen even when one is away from it (and mobile technology is already undermining the very idea of being "away" from the internet), tessellating identities, chained by patterns of light and sound, a cartoon-like identification with virtual selves (sometimes these are called avatars, sometimes sims, and other names are doubtless in the coining), as comrades and friends and lovers.

Authenticity of a Heideggerian or even a Sartrean kind is an increasingly empty notion (what would one be appropriating, what existence would one be making one's own? is there any time at all for boredom for those who have learned to wait longer and longer until one's computer comes to life, until a web page loads, until a text prints, until one finds the little virtual keypad to dial out on the iphone)? I am speaking of the same people who feel compelled to spend every spare and not-so-spare moment typing into their phones. Hence although my students express their reservations and offer sometimes devastating reports about its impact on their own lives at the

interviewed by:

**Nicholas
Birns**

same time, they simply cannot imagine living without the internet, or without texting, or without talking on the phone in the care, on the subway, the sidewalk, at the beach, etc. The virtual world has become at least for some of them, and perhaps for no group more than the youngest among them, the real world.

In other words, how could the internet, if I may rephrase your question, be any *more* objectifying and inimical to truth than it is? The internet, this is in part wiki- political correctness, in part the predominance of only certain voices, rather than the infinite melodies that one might imagine, tends to show very specific profiles, the cheap correctness that for Heidegger is already a first alarm. Thus one needs a certain savvy, maybe even a certain wisdom to negotiate the internet, but even there, like anything virtual, anything unreal, the internet depends on hype and it depends on faith: that stuff is (really) there, that one *needs* to find it. The internet, a fiction, depends on fictions.

NB: Is there any way out of this half-matrix, half-cave? Does Heidegger suggest a way?

BB: Although I myself have doubts about a personal access to “Being,” I do think Heidegger suggests a way in his complex notion of *Gelassenheit*, provided it is thought, I think, together with his critique of the subject. On the other hand, I am not sure that the issue today is due to an oversight on our parts, as if all problems might be resolved with a certain mindfulness alone. When Heidegger emphasizes in a techno-political context his Introduction to Metaphysics that “no one can jump over his own shadow” (shades of both Hans Christian Andersen and Nietzsche’s more Greek image of the soul as a wanderer, here one can also think of Rohde’s *Psyche* which includes, as mention of the soul as shadow always does, the resonance of death), Heidegger points to something of this complexity, which I hear along with his reminder in *The Question Concerning Technology* “that there is no such thing as a man who, solely of himself is only man.” To my mind, what Heidegger says here has everything to do with the thinking the project of the overman—which is to say the post-human—precisely in the sense in which Nietzsche had suggested that the human being might best be thought as something to be overcome or gotten over rather than to be redeemed or saved, preserved, advanced.

NB: Is the Heidegger of the formal writings ‘the same’ Heidegger as that in the correspondence with Arendt?

BB: That is a very searching question and you touch on so many things by posing the question as you do. The first problem to be noted in addressing it is also a problem that has, in my view, not faded in the current day. Women, even women academics, tend in general not to be taken seriously, not even by good friends, but least of all by their teachers, even when as in the case of Heidegger and Arendt that student-teacher relationship turns to love, and even those still rarer cases where, as in the case of Arendt and Heidegger, that love lasts a lifetime. If the durability of

that love says something about both of them, it is significant that it does not mean that Heidegger finds Arendt more of a thinker but sees her, as men often see their lovers, their wives, as adjunct or as complement, as helpers, etc., rather than regarding them as thinkers in their own right. There is an awful story about Einstein's relationship with his first wife, Mileva Maric, whom he met when they were both students. Einstein's own letters to her confess, quite explicitly, his dependence on her mathematical skills and scientific genius and intimate family stories confirm her status vis-à-vis his own scientific powers, emphasizing her importance for his work. In addition, as if this were not enough, it is reported that Einstein's first articles as sent to press arrived bearing both their names, but that his wife's name was immediately elided. This story was suppressed for years, but even after being reported it is hardly the official story. That's why I call it awful. The established scholarly world finds the idea of Einstein needing *anyone*, especially his Serbian, mathematician wife, simply impossible: preposterous. Similar accounts (with similar debates) attest to the influence of de Beauvoir in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. But if all of this, *hin oder her*, as the Germans would say, seems irrelevant: the pattern is the same. If, and I am pretty sure of this, Heidegger did not read Arendt's writings, a disregard for her work that would have nothing to do with his appreciation of Arendt herself or his affection for her but would confirm both his own otherwise well-known absorption in himself as well as a perfectly routine scholarly prejudice contra women, Arendt for her own part read Heidegger's works and corresponded with the concerns of these same texts in her own writings. Thus I have argued that some of her footnotes in *The Human Condition* were composed for Heidegger's own benefit. If I am right, there is a certain ironic misappointment in this very same difference between them. On the other hand, if one finds little philosophy in Heidegger's letters to Arendt one does find evidence of affection or love. And this is arguably also the case with Heidegger's letters to Jaspers. And maybe this is what was important to Arendt—if we read their letters as they exchanged them, as we do, we have to remember that the letters are not addressed to us, as readers, as published writings are, nor are they composed with the expectation that posterity will find them of interest.

NB: I want to ask the same question about the Zollikon seminars I did about Arendt—is it 'the same Heidegger' ... given his supposed disdain for the humanistic and anthropological in his later work, why do we find him so concerned with how philosophy operates on the level of the individual and psychology—does he still care about the human after the *Kehre* (did not mean the pun)?

BB: If one reads Heidegger as a philosopher with an ongoing interest in the sciences, it is indeed the same Heidegger. Heidegger speaks to the psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and psychologists, meaning here physicians and other clinical men of "science," on their own terms: that means that he does not assume what he is speaking to those who, like Arendt and like Jaspers, or even like Medard Boss, can be expected to have read his work in great detail. This illustrates Heidegger's often ignored pedagogic sensibility. If Gadamer at the end of his life rightly or correctly

interviewed by:

Nicholas
Birns

reflected that the difference between the two of them was that Heidegger was less dialogical, that Heidegger's thinking, as Gadamer put it, went step by step, and thus tended to cut the steps into finer and finer transitions, rather than in and in terms of the give and take of a conversation or a dialogue, Heidegger as a teacher always retained a rhetorical solicitude for his audience.

Thus speaking to practitioners of psychoanalysis, including Daseinsanalyse, and even Lacanians, Heidegger could have something to say to them. It is not so much that Heidegger himself is "concerned" as you have noted "with how philosophy operates on the level of the individual and psychology" but rather that these are the concerns of his interlocutors. Does this attention to the level of interest of his audience mean that his own interests have changed or reverted as it were? I don't think so. But if he retains the Being question throughout his life, if Heidegger was able to surprise and quiet Gadamer by asking him only if Gadamer still held that the essence of language is conversation, Heidegger also remains the one who is able to ask in one of the last letters he writes about the nature of the relationship between science and technology. And the men and women who heard his lectures in Zollikon were scientists, as he thought of them. The interest in the question of science and reflection, science and technology, stayed with him, even if he found himself speaking to those whose region of scientific concern operated on the level of the individual, that is: psychology in clinical practice and therapy.

NB: Are you interested in Gadamer at all? Is he an heir of 'your' Heidegger? Is 'your' Heidegger a hermeneutician?

BB: I am very interested in Gadamer—he was not only my teacher, he was the reason, *sine qua non*, that led me to take a PhD from Boston College in the first place. Gadamer is an heir to Heidegger, in my view, just as Gadamer is also to be seen in the lineage of Nietzsche's influence. At the same time, Gadamer follows his own star and. And yes, 'my' Heidegger is decidedly a hermeneutician—why would he otherwise have the concern with questioning that he has or how could he express the meaning of translation in terms of interpretation, almost but not quite as Nietzsche speaks of interpretation?

NB: Who else do you feel is exciting writing about Heidegger today?

BB: I try to read broadly and I try to cite those I read but I am still trying to deepen my reading of Reiner Schürmann and Dominique Janicaud along with Giorgio Agamben and Gianni Vattimo and Slavoj Žižek but, for me, at least, also and very much those who repudiated Heidegger like Adorno and those who do not focus on him like Ellul and Baudrillard and de Certeau. We do tend, as scholars, to get caught up in the latest thing, reading (only) the latest person that every one else is reading, and that tendency is something Heidegger rightly warns us against. In addition, I have to say that the turn to cognitive science has sharply diminished, at least for me, the level of excitement in

much recent work on Heidegger.

NB: And about Nietzsche?

BB: I am a fan of David Allison and the whole array of “new” Nietzscheans (I include Bataille and Klossowski and especially Jean Granier, whose work should be better known) but also Gary Shapiro and so on and I am enthusiastic about anyone who writes on Nietzsche without feeling compelled to use language he never used to refer to philosophical concerns he never had. I mean words like cognitive or naturalist, or realist, etc.

NB: Will these philosophers ever become more ‘popular’ than they are today?

BB: If you mean the new Nietzscheans, this I doubt. If you mean Heidegger and Nietzsche themselves, the answer depends what you mean by ‘popular.’ In a sense Nietzsche could hardly be more popular than he is and although Heidegger can be popularized, the result is lamentable.

NB: Should they be?

BB: I am philosophical enough to think not.

NB: And, finally, when it comes down to it, if you absolutely and unalterably had to choose in a binary, mechanistic way, how would you classify Nietzsche: as a philosopher or as a literary artist?

BB: I can only begin to answer that ‘binary’ question *because* I read Nietzsche as a consummately, radically, epistemological thinker. Thus I cannot but classify him as a philosopher. However it does not do to forget that he is also a literary artist who always uses his extraordinary artistic gifts for very philosophical ends. Nietzsche is thus a kind of bastard or monstrosity, a centaur, as he himself seems to have imagined himself with his talk of the labyrinth. But Nietzsche is always and also a philosopher, hence he chides those who would say that he is a *Schriftsteller*, an “author” and there is a self-teasing turn in the refrain we read, *Nur Narr, nur Dichter*, “Only a fool, only a poet.” Nietzsche was a thinker, a philosopher. By contrast, literary artists such as Wallace Stevens or Rainer Maria Rilke or Friedrich Hölderlin, just to keep to conspicuously philosophical poets here, do not bother with philosophy just to the degree that their genius serves their literary artistry. As philosophers, we can tease all the philosophy we like out of their work. Thus Heidegger reads Hölderlin but this does not reduce Hölderlin’s word to Heidegger’s reading. In the case of the poet, it is that excess that permits a philosophical reading. Given a contest between philosophy and poetry, the poet has the advantage from beginning to end.

interviewed by:

**Nicholas
Birns**

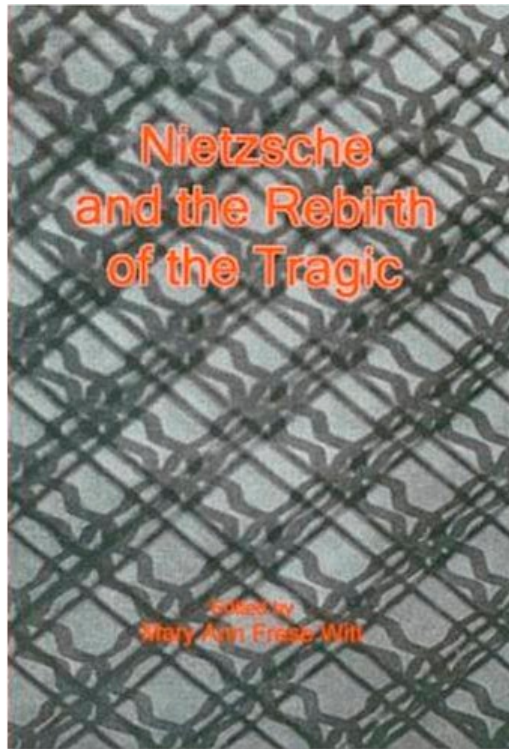
Book Review

Nietzsche and the Rebirth of the Tragic

edited by Mary Ann Frese Witt (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007)

reviewed by Maria João Mayor Branco, (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal)

Nietzsche and the Rebirth of the Tragic is a collection of essays on the legacy of Nietzsche's thought on tragedy. The underlining topic of all contributions is the influence of the Nietzschean call for the rebirth of tragedy in modern artistic and philosophical creations. The volume offers a rich overview of the impact of Nietzsche's conception of tragic and cultural renewal in the works of European and American dramatists, poets, philosophers, filmmakers and writers. In the introduction to the volume (1-39), Mary Ann Frese Witt presents the historic philosophic and aesthetic context of the renewed interest on Hellenism after the re-discovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*, showing that Nietzsche's work was the main source for the development



of theoretical reflection on tragedy and for the practical wish to write modern tragedies in late 19th and 20th centuries. Frese Witt underlines Nietzsche's refusal of the Aristotelian view on tragedy and focus on the main argument of the *Birth of Tragedy*: the essence of tragedy is lyrical (not mimetic or dramatic) and it consists more in *pathos* than in *praxis* (13). The author argues that the *Birth of Tragedy* is not an historical drama itself, but a kind of anti or meta-aristotelic tragedy based on the repetition of an action whose tragic hero is tragedy itself (who dies from suicide as Nietzsche claims in chapter 11 of his book). Moreover, Frese Witt sees a direct filiation between Euripides' realistic and epic drama, which emphasizes action, and naturalist and realist drama of the 19th century, in which Dionysian *Rausch* is replaced by the imitation of everyday life and rational and optimistic resolutions of existential problems. She continues with presenting a genealogy of the influence of Nietzsche's understanding of tragedy in France, Italy, Scandinavia,

Germany, Great Britain and the USA, proving that the Nietzschean hope for a rebirth of tragedy was seriously taken by a variety of artists and thinkers and opened the way for new experiences and understandings of tragic and aesthetic creation.

The general intention of the volume is widely fulfilled showing the variety of the effects Nietzsche had and continues to have over different artists of different countries working with different artistic means. Furthermore, the essays show clearly that Nietzsche's influence on the modern understanding of tragedy does not reduce itself to the impact *The Birth of Tragedy* had, but can also be explained by the effects caused by the reading of Nietzsche's latter works. It should be said, though, that the essays present different levels of quality in terms of philosophical interest, perhaps because some were written by art or literature scholars. In fact, the first three chapters are devoted to the influence of Nietzsche's conception of tragedy in three writers: Strindberg, D'Annunzio, and W.B. Yeats. In the first essay, "*Pausing before Being: Nietzsche, Strindberg and the Idea of Tragic*" (40-71), Michael Stern argues that for the mature Nietzsche tragedy is the collision between inherited narratives and the construction of a narrative of the self which stops before ending, that is to say, tragedy is "the story of the ironic subject of modernity" (43). Focusing on Nietzsche's later works, the author argues that in the absence of God the modern subject must become retrospective, he is the doer who is poeticized back into the deed and creates a "genealogy of self," a "hermeneutic construction based on retrospection" (48) in which the nihilistic self overcomes the vacuum of self-creation ex nihilo interpreting the past in a gesture of eternal return. By means of repetition, parody, and irony the self created must be overcome time and time again. Stern continues with showing the influence of Nietzsche on August Strindberg's novel *By the Open Sea* and on Strindberg's autobiography, *Son of a Servant*, arguing that for both authors the problem of overcoming dual origins was an aesthetic process of selection and description and concluding that for Nietzsche and Strindberg subjectivity was "a pausing before being in the form of a genealogical moment" (64). The following essay, "*D'Annunzio's Dionysian Women: The Rebirth of Tragedy in Italy*" (72-103), addresses the influence of Nietzsche on Gabriele D'Annunzio. The author is the editor of the volume, Mary Ann Frese Witt, and she argues that D'Annunzio understood Nietzsche's writings on tragedy along two main lines: a sexual reading of the Dionysian and the Apollinian, and the refusal mimesis in his own tragedies (72). Focusing on several D'Annunzio's plays such as *La Città Morta*, *La Gioconda*, *La Fiaccola sotto il Moggio* and *Più che l'Amore*, Frese Witt concludes that he rewrites the metatragedy of the problem of re-creating tragedy for modernity believing, as did Nietzsche, that ancient drama represented more pathos than mimesis and that tragedy should privilege the aesthetic over the moral (98). The next essay, entitled "*Lidless Eyes, Stony Places, Vibrant Spectators: Nietzschean Tragedy in Yeats's Lyric Poetry*" (104-125), focuses on the impact Nietzsche had on the poet W.B.

reviewed by:

**Maria João
Mayor
Branco**

Yeats. John Burt Foster Jr. argues that Yeats was deeply fascinated by Nietzsche’s interest on the audience for tragedy (understood as cosmic-metaphysical spectacle) and by the paradox which made possible that tragedy’s sudden revelation of cosmic horror need not result in hopelessness, but could instead create a compensatory mood of emotional vibration or “fulness of life” (105). The author underlines the influence that the reading of *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Genealogy of Morals* had on Yeats and he analyzes several of his poems and parts of his autobiography showing that Yeats was more concerned with an ideal of a tragic spectator who responds to metaphysical terror with fulness of heart than with the possibilities of Irish cultural renewal. The text concludes with the claim that Yeats went beyond Nietzsche witnessing the harshness of time and age and affirming the values of personal warmth and self-scrutiny.

The fourth essay makes a step out of the literary world and takes us to the realm of philosophy. In “*Groundlessness: Nietzsche and Russian Concepts of Tragic Philosophy*” (126-137), Edith W. Clowes focuses on the influence of Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* in Russian philosophy of the 20th century. The author explains how the book was received in Russia by Lev Shestov, Nikolai Berdiaev, Aleksei Losev, and Merab Mamardashvili, claiming that Nietzsche’s work and the concepts of tragedy and the Dionysian were decisive for such authors in spite of their different views on philosophic activity. Bettina Kaibach’s text, “*The Gods are Evil*” (138-158) bring us back to literature, by focusing on the Czech novel *Mendelssohn is on the Roof* written by Jiri Weil (1900-1959) and showing how it abounds with allusions to *The Birth of Tragedy*. Kaibach presents the different understandings of the concept of tragedy in Ricoeur, Walter Otto, George Syteiner, Leon Wumser, and Walter Benjamin and argues that only this concept can enlighten the peculiar situation of the Czech Jews who fell into the hands of the Nazis during II World War. This situation, which forced the Jewish community to organize its own extermination, is portrayed in Weil’s novel where they become “guilty while innocent” (140). Kaibach claims that Weil shares with Nietzsche the idea of the impossibility of a moral justification of tragedy, although the Czech writer refuses an aesthetic justification of the world being, therefore, also close to Walter Benjamin’s conception of tragedy. The sixth essay, “*Nietzsche, Artaud and Tragic Politics*” (159-185), offers a political conception of tragedy. Geoffrey Baker compares Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* and Antonin Artaud’s *Le théâtre et son double*, arguing that both can be understood as models of politically transformative art when read through Adorno’s philosophy of art (160). The author claims that both Nietzsche and Artaud’s main concerns are the problem of knowledge and the criticism of Western systems of representation, and argues that the criticisms that Artaud addresses to narrative and psychologic theater in his book are comparable to the ones Nietzsche makes against aesthetic socratism in the *Birth of Tragedy*. Baker goes on suggesting that Nietzsche and Artaud face the problem of

representation demanding a new symbolic language (music and gesture against spoken or written speech) which would represent a rebirth of theatre with practical, political effects through “a remolding of the foundational structures of culture” (180). The two last essays of the volume focus on “moving pictures” (to use Deleuze’s expression). In “*Nietzschean Neurotheater: Apollinian and Dionysian Spirits in the Brain Matters of Our Town*” (186-218), Mark Pizzato analyzes the different screen versions of Thornton Wilder’s Play *Our Town*, claiming rather ambitiously that they display “a confrontation with particular ghosts, involving Apollinian and Dionysian structures within the human brain that produce ideologically diverse yet interrelated visions of life and death” (189). The author argues that Nietzsche’s Apollinian and Dionysian elements can be read in the light of recent neuroscientific research, and tries to prove that Nietzsche’s insights on tragedy receive confirmation in science and performance. The last essay of the volume presents a more convincing argument about the impact of Nietzsche’s tragic theory on cinema. Ronald Bogue’s “*Tragedy, Sight and Sound: The Birth of Godard’s Prénom Carmen from the Nietzschean Spirit of Music*” (219-248) applies Gilles Deleuze’s idea that in cinema music creates Dionysian images whose relationship with the visual, Apollinian ones is not one of correspondence, to the film *Prénom Carmen* directed by Jean-Luc Godard, concluding that this film is born of a Nietzschean spirit of music. The author shows that Godard’s use of sound and music establishes a non illustrative, non representational relationship with images in which the narrative is suspended and images emerge as “forms of visual music” (235).

Nietzsche and the Rebirth of the Tragic

Nietzsche and the Rebirth of the Tragic

reviewed by:

Maria João
Mayor
Branco

Book Review

The Pious Origins of Nietzsche's Immoralism

Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief written by Giles Fraser

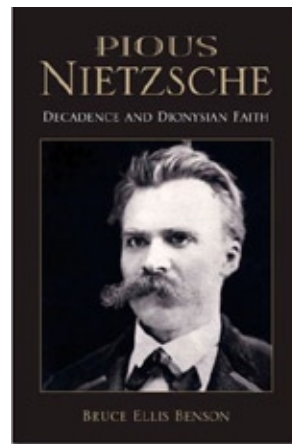
Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith by Bruce Ellis Benson

reviewed by David van Dusen (University of Wales)



Redeeming Nietzsche: On the Piety of Unbelief (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) written by Giles Fraser.

Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008) written by Bruce Ellis Benson



“Germans understand me immediately when I say that philosophy has been corrupted by theologian blood,” and “Protestantism itself is its *peccatum originale*” (A §10).¹ So Nietzsche writes in *The Anti-Christ*, while he prefaces the work: “This book belongs to the very few. Perhaps none of them are even alive yet” (A P). Thus whatever it is in *The Anti-Christ* that is futural or obscure in 1888, it is not the idea that nineteenth-century German philosophy is theologically conditioned. This is clear. Or at least, Nietzsche insists, this is clear *to the Germans*. That this self-recognition is of dubious value since it is suggested by a man who despises them,² or that it may derive from what Nietzsche calls their “theologian instinct” (A §10), is not our question. But it is also not irrelevant to our present concern, since the studies under consideration are alike devoted to Nietzsche’s ‘piety’ or ‘theologian instinct,’ and neither is written by a German.

It would seem that the English and North Americans are still intrigued, if not mystified, when they encounter evidence of this ‘original sin’ in German philosophers. Perhaps this is because even when philosophers such as Nietzsche or Heidegger identify theology as a decisive factor in modern philosophy their interpreters have, on the whole, been inattentive. It is perhaps

1 *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). All citations of *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo* and *Twilight of the Idols* refer to this translation.

2 A §61: “The Reformation; Leibniz; Kant and what people call ‘German philosophy’ . . . I confess it, these Germans are *my* enemies: I despise them for every type of uncleanness in concepts and values.”

this neglect that results in theologically motivated interpretations such as *Redeeming Nietzsche* and *Pious Nietzsche*—a specific ignorance of the history of philosophy seems to invite and justify this sort of work.

That Slavoj Žižek can write³ of *Pious Nietzsche*, that it “clearly formulates what even the most perspicacious readers only vaguely suspected: the subterranean link between Paul and Nietzsche,” obliquely confirms this. Žižek’s praise here is excessive,⁴ and the reference to Nietzsche’s ‘most perspicacious readers’ is vacuous; but it is surely correct that *most* of Nietzsche’s readers have ‘only vaguely suspected’ his vascular connection to Paul—or to Augustine and Dante, Luther and Pascal.⁵ Given this generalized lack of theological (and thus historical) subtlety in Nietzsche-interpretation, there is a sense in which works such as Fraser’s and Benson’s should be welcomed. But this welcome should be critical.

It is imperative that theological interpreters of Nietzsche—and their critics—recognize that their undertaking is not new. Significant works from the twentieth century, such as those of Karl Löwith, should be genuinely consulted and held in view.⁶ This is a failing in Benson’s study that seriously diminishes its usefulness. Despite glances at recent works by Alain Badiou and Julian Young,⁷ Benson develops his interpretation with a basic disregard for his predecessors.⁸ And interestingly, aspects of his reading seem to parallel failed Protestant appropriations of Nietzsche in Germany between 1900 and 1920.⁹ In this regard, Fraser is more circumspect—his first chapter is devoted to a theological reception-history of Nietzsche.

Redeeming Nietzsche and *Pious Nietzsche* both assert a specific continuity between Nietzsche’s childhood (or “prehistory”¹⁰) and his philosophy. While for Fraser this is a concern with ‘salvation’ and for Benson it is a concern with ‘the heart,’ for both it is German Pietism that

3 This appears on the cover of *Pious Nietzsche*, alongside a high commendation by John Caputo.

4 If nothing else, Badiou’s far more original analysis of this connection appeared in his 1997 work *Saint Paul: La fondation de l’universalisme*. See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 55–74, 94–96, 107–111.

5 As a single instance of this: “I do not read Pascal, I love him as Christianity’s most instructive victim” (EH “Clever” §3).

6 Cf. Karl Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1997); *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green (London: Constable, 1964); and “The Interpretation of the Unsaid in ‘Nietzsche’s Word “God is Dead,”” in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, ed. Richard Wolin, trans. Gary Steiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 96–127.

7 There are also desultory allusions to Lou Andreas-Salomé, Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler and Merold Westphal.

8 Benson devotes a page to recent “precedents” for seeing “Nietzsche as *homo religiosus*” (PN 6–7). He cites Karl Jaspers in the text, Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a note.

9 Cf. Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1990* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 205–206. Benson refers to this text (PN 220 n. 13), but misses the parallels.

10 Cf. GS §§348–49; *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). All citations of *The Gay Science* refer to this translation.

reviewed by:

David
van Dusen

provides the original and abiding impulse of Nietzsche's thought.¹¹ Nietzsche's father was of course a pastor, but he died when Nietzsche was very young, and "the decisive influence exerted by Nietzsche's mother" has long been recognized.¹² Fraser and Benson take Nietzsche's mother and his earliest written 'outpourings' as their interpretive points of departure. Benson in particular relies on the latter, and whereas Löwith sees in the "poems written by Nietzsche as a young man," that "from the very beginning his religiosity had something . . . forced about it,"¹³ Benson uses them with a complete lack of critical distance—he displays none of the "ironic resistance" that Nietzsche commends to his interpreters.¹⁴

Neither study gives any real attention to Nietzsche's early essays, which are different in tonality from his adolescent memoirs and verse, or to early theological influences such as Feuerbach and relevant later contacts such as Bruno Bauer and Franz Overbeck. This is highly problematic. Nietzsche is far more theologically sophisticated than his rhetoric can at times suggest,¹⁵ and a decision to interpret his last writings through his earliest—or worse, through a putative reconstruction of his earliest religious experience¹⁶—calls for methodological and material justifications that neither work provides.

But from the beginning, Fraser is alert to dangers that Benson courts. Benson's title alone, *Pious Nietzsche*, promises to sanctify him. And while Benson resists Nietzsche at various places, often *sotto voce*, he essentially delivers what he promises: "I argue that Nietzsche remains a person of faith and prayer" (PN 16). That Benson treats Nietzsche's madness, in the last paragraph of his work, as a virtual *beatification* should indicate how uncritical he is capable of being (PN 216).¹⁷

11 For a sense of the philosophical, rhetorical and sociological diversity that characterized German Pietism at the turn of the nineteenth century, see F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 217–65. Neither Fraser nor Benson seems to possess a "historically valid concept" (p. ix) of the 'Pietism' they foreground in the earliest Nietzsche and claim to detect in his last writings.

12 Löwith, *Hegel to Nietzsche*, pp. 369–70; and in a note, Löwith refers to a series of publications in Germany between 1930 and 1938.

13 Ibid., p. 369.

14 Benson cites Nietzsche in his preface: "It is not necessary at all—not even desirable—that you should argue in my favor; on the contrary, a dose of curiosity . . . with an ironic resistance, would seem to me an incomparably more intelligent attitude" (PN x). This is one of many citations in *Pious Nietzsche* that Benson fails to effectively interpret.

15 Thus, for instance, his polemical formulation "Christianity is Platonism for the 'common people'" quite precisely reproduces Augustine's defense of the *catholica* in *De Vera Religione*. See note 43, below.

16 Benson speaks of "reconstructing the faith of the young Nietzsche" (PN 222 n. 6), but manifestly fails to do so—or rather, it is not clear that he makes the attempt.

17 Certain comments by Löwith may appear to anticipate his remarks on Nietzsche's madness, but on a close reading Löwith is subtler. He writes at mid-century: "Nietzsche's reflection ends in insanity. It is not easy to decide whether that insanity was a senseless, external accident, or a destiny that belonged to him inwardly, or a holy insanity at the onset of which the phenomenon of Dionysian frenzy (to which Nietzsche's first work was dedicated) was embodied in him like lightning, only to expire in idiocy" (*Nietzsche's Philosophy*, p. 10).

Fraser, on the contrary, opens his work by disavowing the impulse to construct a ‘holy Nietzsche’:

from the development of the various Nietzsche cults at the turn of the twentieth century to his becoming a fetish of post-modern credibility, Nietzsche is always in danger from those who most admire him. “May your name be holy to future generations” pronounced Nietzsche’s friend Peter Gast at his funeral. In challenging the ideological purity of Nietzsche’s “atheism” one is not making Nietzsche holy. One may indeed be saving him from an unwanted secular saintliness. (RN 3)

A glance at Nietzschean iconography from the decade following his death—‘Nietzsche with a crown of thorns,’ ‘Nietzsche naked in the mountains’¹⁸—should suffice to kill anyone’s desire to confer an aura of saintliness on him, be it Nordic-Christian or post-modern. Still, the impulse is clearly not dead, and this is particularly intriguing given Nietzsche’s negative fascination with the figure of ‘the saint.’

While Nietzsche is not ‘holy’ for Fraser, he is yet characterized as “obsessed with the question of human salvation” (RN 2)—and this is, *prima facie*, a saintly obsession. Yet that the negative echo in this description (‘obsessed’) is intentional, becomes clear over a hundred pages on, when Fraser calls Nietzsche “a dangerous unreconstructed religious obsessive” (RN 145). The specific sense this phrase has for Fraser is complex, but strictly polemical. The sense that ‘religious’ has here is indicated by the fact that Fraser has just approvingly cited Nietzsche when he writes that “all religions are, at their most fundamental, systems of cruelty” (RN 145).

Fraser’s text breaks down into two introductory chapters, followed by three descriptive and three polemical chapters. The polemical chapters are slovenly, and at its worst *Redeeming Nietzsche* is simply inane. Fraser writes, for instance, “Shit is a sacrament of ultimate seriousness” (RN 125). In the preceding chapters, however, Fraser is relatively methodical and discriminating. In this, *Redeeming Nietzsche* provides a contrast to *Pious Nietzsche*, and those who are attracted to the latter would be better served to read first five chapters of Fraser’s work.

One reason for this is that Benson is dishonest. It is important that ‘dishonesty’ here signifies a lack of transparency, rather than intent to deceive. Indeed, given the philosophy faculty that Benson chairs, his intent is presumably to tempt a new generation of fundamentalists into the open—which is to be commended.¹⁹ But regardless of motives, he does not confess his faith. Benson’s own piety can only be inferred from allusions to the gospels and Augustine, which clarify nothing (PN 15–16, 20); or from an incongruous use of Jean-Luc Marion on “idolatry,” when Bacon’s *Novum Organum* is the pertinent (and radically different) reference (PN 35); or from his habit of naively appealing to “orthodox Christianity,”²⁰ and using only post-Nietzschean

18 Cf. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy*, plates 3, 10.

19 Benson is Professor and Chair of the Philosophy Department at Wheaton College in Illinois, a vanguard institution of twentieth-century American fundamentalism.

20 And while Nietzsche may seem to be similarly culpable here—namely, of reifying ‘Christiani-

reviewed by:

David
van Dusen

theologians to articulate it (*PN* 136).²¹ Numerous other instances could be adduced, but since theological prejudices inflect and deflect Benson's exposition throughout, *Pious Nietzsche* could only be a respectable study if he stated them.

Fraser does. He addresses himself to Nietzsche as a philosophical theologian—as a Christian—and this decision has consequences.²² It immediately allows him to face Nietzsche without the overly subtle indirection that onto-theological discourse affords certain interpreters: “What Nietzsche hates, above all, is the cross . . . it is precisely the crucified God that is the source of all the trouble” (*RN* 21–22).²³ Fraser coolly insists that “for a conservative Protestant scholar . . . to claim that Nietzsche attacks a degenerate view of God” is “absurd.” Nietzsche leaves no doubt “that he believes the principle agent of theological corruption was not Plato, or Aristotle, or St. Thomas, but St. Paul” (*RN* 22). With this, Fraser also rejects the “possibility of Nietzsche as *ancilla theologiae*” (*RN* 20–21), negatively citing a Merold Westphal essay that Benson praises in his notes.²⁴ And thus, when Fraser proceeds to stress “the question of salvation” in Nietzsche and to suggest that “much of his work is driven by an attempt to expose the pathologies of Christian soteriology and re-invent a very different soteriological scheme which . . . leads to genuine joy” (*RN* 30), his hypothesis at least does not provoke the suspicion that Nietzsche is being cleaned up for theologians.

Fraser's descriptive thesis can be summarized by way of the following claims, all of which rest on his assertion that “Nietzsche is obsessed with the question of salvation” (*RN* 30), coupled with an important question: “Nietzsche was unquestionably an atheist—my question is going to be: of what sort?” (*RN* 30). Chapters 2 to 5 of *Redeeming Nietzsche* argue that:

Nietzsche approaches “the question of God” with the instincts of his Lutheran Pietistic upbringing. . . . [And] from this perspective the “first question” of theology is not “Does God exist?” but rather something like “How are we saved?” (*RN* 30)

Nietzsche is unreservedly hostile to any conception of salvation that means trading in our humanity for a stake in the hereafter: “do not believe those who speak to you of super-terrestrial hopes!” he insists. (*RN* 74)

ty’—he is not. See, for instance, A §58 on Christianity as a *type* of religion, “I mean the corruption of the soul through the ideas of guilt, punishment, and immortality.”

21 Pages 152 and 153 of *Pious Nietzsche* are excruciating. Benson docilely cedes Tertullian, Augustine and Aquinas to Nietzsche, cavils at his reference to “the closure of the public baths” in Córdoba (A §21), and then to “counter Nietzsche” appeals to the life of a twentieth-century Catholic nun. Either Nietzsche lived in the wrong century or Benson's Christianity emerged in the last century.

22 Fraser is an Anglican priest and a former lecturer in philosophy at Oxford University.

23 Fraser is correct here, but Badiou is no less correct when he writes in *St. Paul*: “In reality, the core of the problem is that Nietzsche harbors a genuine loathing for universalism. . . . What Nietzsche—on this point remaining a German ‘mythologue’ (in Lacoue-Labarthe's sense of the term)—cannot forgive Paul for is not so much to have willed Nothingness, but to have . . . formulated a theory of a subject who, as Nietzsche admirably, albeit disgustedly, puts it, is universally, ‘a rebel . . . against everything privileged’” (p. 62).

24 The essay is Merold Westphal, “Nietzsche as a Theological Resource,” in *Nietzsche and the Divine*, ed. John Lippitt and Jim Urpeth (Manchester: Clinamen, 2000), 14–29. See *PN* 241 n. 19.

Salvation, for Nietzsche, is about healing . . . Humanity suffers from a disease brought about by . . . the imagined comforts of Christian redemption. (RN 87)

Nietzsche seeks salvation in an inverted version of Lutheranism; that is, by urging his readers to undergo, in reverse, that process by which humanity came to hate itself in the first place. (RN 101)

Fraser takes up the first, less contentious claims successively in chapters 2 to 4. The last is taken up in chapter 5, commencing with Fraser's interpretation of the "Three Metamorphoses" in part 1 of *Zarathustra* and culminating in his discussions of eternal recurrence and "the invocation of eternity" (RN 119) in part 3 of *Zarathustra*.

Though he is not cited, Löwith anticipates chapter 5 in its basic outline²⁵ and indeed devotes *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same* to the constellation of questions that Fraser surveys here.²⁶ But whereas Löwith's exposition is incisive and dispassionate—though he wrote in political exile, during the *Nazizeit*—Fraser's becomes increasingly erratic, and in the last paragraph of the chapter it is hysterical:

Nietzsche's "Yes" is the "Yes" of praise—his own Dionysian Alleluia. But, though a relative of the charismatic evangelical "Yes," Nietzsche's post-Christian affirmation is . . . closer in spirit to something much more sinister—to the highly charged, emotionally intoxicating "Yes" of the Nazi rallies in Nuremberg. (RN 121)

Redeeming Nietzsche never recovers from this lapse in rigor,²⁷ and Fraser's stress on Nietzsche's pietistic 'instincts' and 'post-theistic soteriology' can be seen, in retrospect, to be dubious. Fraser's last, polemical chapters are being prepared by his first chapters—that is, the descriptive thesis of *Redeeming Nietzsche* is itself polemical.

Though Benson, as noted, is more hagiographical than polemical, *Pious Nietzsche* simply modulates the descriptive thesis of *Redeeming Nietzsche*. Benson mentions Fraser early on to take his distance (PN 7), but his debt is deeper than this reference suggests and later objections are superficial (PN 198–200). Of course, Benson shifts Fraser's terminology at every point of the argument that was represented above. Thus, for instance, Fraser's initial claim that "Nietzsche is obsessed with the question of human salvation" (RN 2) becomes, in Benson, "his writings are obsessed with these questions—who or what is god and what does it mean to *serve* this god?" (PN 22). And similarly, where Fraser has, "Nietzsche was unquestionably an atheist—my question is going to be: of what sort?" (RN 30), Benson writes that "once God is dead, the question is: what kind of 'piety' does Nietzsche put in place of Christian piety?" (PN 39).

The only significant advance in *Pious Nietzsche* consists in its stress on the polyvalence or, strictly speaking, the duplicity of the concept of *askēsis* for Nietzsche. Benson suggests the

25 Löwith, *Hegel to Nietzsche*, pp. 193–97, 368–73.
26 For *Nietzsche's Philosophy* see note 6, above.
27 There is a similar but less serious lapse in the last pages of chapter 4; see RN 96–99.

reviewed by:

David van Dusen

distinction between a ‘no-saying’ and a ‘yes-saying’ *askēsis*, the former comprising Nietzsche’s rhetorical “warfare against all that is ‘sick’ in him . . . Socrates, Wagner, Paul” (PN 3–4), while the latter is interpreted by way of a putatively Greek conception of *mousikē* (PN 5).²⁸ To put it crudely, Nietzsche’s negative *askēsis* is philological and critical, while his affirmative *askēsis* is musical and fideistic. Though Benson’s basic insight—namely, the duplicity of *askēsis* in Nietzsche—is incontestable, his exposition is badly flawed. As a single indication of this: *Pace* Benson’s directional logic, in which negative *askēsis* precedes the positive and should be superseded by it,²⁹ Nietzsche’s most destructive works *follow* the lyricism of *Zarathustra*—“after the yea-saying part of my task had been solved it was time for the no-saying”—and an ironically ‘theological’ gloss in *Ecce Homo* indicates that Nietzsche in some way *recoiled* from his affirmative, visionary work (EH “Books” BGE §1–2).

This sort of unclarity is characteristic of *Pious Nietzsche*. Citations from Nietzsche’s corpus and *Nachlass* are highly selective, and yet Benson seems incapable—from the preface on—of seriously interrogating the passages he cites. For instance, Nietzsche consistently refers to his ‘will to truth’—the epochal (and yet ‘moral’) *necessity* of his *unbelief* in “the ‘law’, the ‘will of God’, the ‘holy book’, ‘inspiration’” (A §55)—as his piety. Nietzsche is pious precisely when he refuses Christianity and its god. But what Benson insists is a ‘Dionysian Pietism’ in Nietzsche, is what Nietzsche calls—in the epigraph to Benson’s preface, no less—his *immoralism*. Nietzsche’s immoralism clearly has pious roots—namely, in his *inherited* ‘will to truth.’ But this rhetorical opposition—‘pious’ Nietzsche, ‘immoralist’ Nietzsche—is nevertheless essential,³⁰ and Benson fails to address it as such.

And as he negligently collapses Nietzsche’s pious-immoralist opposition into a ‘Pietism,’ so Benson collapses Nietzsche’s faith-truth opposition into a ‘faith’—which is precisely what Nietzsche excoriates in the New Testament.³¹ In later works Nietzsche of course refers, on occasion, to a Dionysian ‘faith’—but these *occasions* must be interrogated, and they never are in *Pious Nietzsche*.³² Nietzsche far more consistently insists that the “imperative of ‘faith’ is a *veto* on

28 Benson’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s “musical *askēsis*” (PN 11) is unimpressive in its treatments of Greek *mousikē* and music in Nietzsche. For the latter see Georges Liébert, *Nietzsche and Music*, trans. David Pellauer and Graham Parkes (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

29 So that Benson will write, “the crucial question is whether Nietzsche can go *beyond* ‘No-saying’” (PN 206). That this is not a ‘crucial question’—though it is indeed at the heart of *Pious Nietzsche*—will be discussed in a moment. The remainder this paragraph should serve to indicate that it should not even be a *question*.

30 EH “Destiny” §3: “Have I been understood? . . . The self-overcoming of morality from out of truthfulness, the self-overcoming of moralists into their opposite . . . that is what the name Zarathustra means coming from my mouth.”

31 The last sentences of A §46 are of decisive importance for Nietzschean piety: “Do I still need to say that in the whole of the New Testament there is only *one* honourable figure? Pilate, the Roman governor. . . . The noble scorn of a Roman when faced with an unashamed mangling of the word ‘truth’ gave the New Testament its only statement of *any value*,—its critique, even its *annihilation*: ‘What is truth!’”

32 Benson’s discussion of ‘faith’ in the last pages of his work (PN 192–98) is inadequate and confused, and a discussion of this question should have appeared in its first pages.

science,—*in praxi*, the lie at any cost” (A §47), or that “in every age (with Luther, for instance), ‘belief’ has just been . . . a shrewd *blindness* about the dominance of *certain* instincts” (A §39), or that “‘Faith’ means not *wanting* to know the truth” (A §52).³³ Thus, when Benson writes that “Nietzsche ultimately comes to call his own belief system a faith that is ‘the highest of all possible faiths,’ one that he baptizes ‘with the name of *Dionysus*’” (PN 38), he claims precisely nothing—since the words are indeed Nietzsche’s—but the core of what he *implies* is demonstrably false.

Thus Benson insists that “Nietzsche may not be certain exactly ‘who’ Dionysus *is*, but Dionysus is clearly his god” (PN 197), whereas Dionysus is *not* Nietzsche’s ‘god’ but a *name* he espouses. Nietzsche is a theological *nominalist*,³⁴ and (*pace* Benson) he remains godless. Though Nietzsche *values* what the name ‘Dionysus’ signifies and *devalues* what ‘the Crucified’ signifies, he no more *believes* in Dionysus as a god than he does in the Crucified—which is why he can utilize these ciphers as he does, at the end of *Ecce Homo*. Similarly, when Benson insists that Nietzsche’s ‘faith’ is “*founded upon* a dogma—the eternal recurrence that should provoke an *amor fati*” (PN 196), he not only misinterprets Nietzsche but betrays an ignorance of the decisive historical senses of this word, ‘dogma.’ If ‘eternal recurrence’ is to be a dogma, it is certainly not a *theological* dogma³⁵ in the sense that begins to emerge in the fourth and fifth centuries and peaks in the sixteenth or seventeenth,³⁶ and *if* Nietzsche is to be “dogmatic,”³⁷ he is certainly not *philosophically* dogmatic in the sense that comes to new prominence and clarity at the end of the eighteenth century.³⁸

Nietzsche is a theological and philosophical skeptic, and eternal recurrence is a *formal* concept or conceit—indeed, it is an *ascetic* (and *aesthetic*) *formula* that cannot (as such) ‘provoke’ but only detect *amor fati* or its absence. And since the Dionysian involves (as Nietzsche says) a ‘faith,’ then a subordinate sense of this word could perhaps be related to Jacobi’s idea of a pre-reflective faith without which “we cannot cross the threshold, sit at table, or go to bed.”³⁹ That is, ‘faith’ as it appears in the post-Humean *Glaubensphilosophen* could have some relevance. But

33 Later in A §52, Nietzsche turns explicitly on “pietists and other Swabian cows” who “take their everyday . . . lives and, using the ‘hand of God,’ fashion them into miracles of ‘grace,’ ‘Providence,’ or the ‘experience of salvation.’” On the rise of Swabian Pietism in association with the Tübingen *Stift*, see Stoeffler, *German Pietism*, pp. 88–107.

34 EH “Destiny” §7: “I needed a word whose significance lay in challenging everyone.” And see TI “Ancients” §4: “. . . The word ‘Dionysus’ means all of this.”

35 Benson goes so far as to suggest that eternal recurrence constitutes a new *regula fide* or creed: “To replace Christian faith with Dionysian faith . . . Nietzsche needs . . . new sorts of dances, prayers, songs, and even creeds” (PN 12).

36 When Cicero decides to render the Greek δόγμα with the Latin *decretum* at *Academica* 2.29, for instance, it has only a very distant relation to the sense that ‘dogma’ will take on in the ecclesiastical tradition, particularly after Constantine.

37 PN 196: “Nietzsche’s religion *is* dogmatic.”

38 There is of course a whole discourse surrounding philosophical dogmatism in post-Kantian philosophy (Fichte is essential here), and relative to this late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century discourse it is senseless to say that Nietzsche is a philosophical, much less a theological, dogmatist.

39 F. H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), p. 272.

reviewed by:

David
van Dusen

the decisive sense should be sought in a passage of *Beyond Good and Evil* in which Nietzsche reactivates the Pauline “formula” that sets faith over works.⁴⁰ Here, Nietzsche identifies a *real* faith with something like that Johannine vice, the *pride of life*. But whatever it is that Nietzsche espouses as a ‘faith,’ it *cannot* be sought in the gospels (PN 15–16) or by way of a received ecclesiastical virtue that Nietzsche repeatedly analyzes and always eschews.

There is a phrase on the last page of *Pious Nietzsche* which crystallizes (and finalizes) what is fundamentally wrong with this study: Benson suggests the possibility that Nietzsche feigned madness as “the only way to overcome *his own personal decadence*” (PN 216, my stress). And Benson is preoccupied, throughout, with the question of Nietzsche’s capacity or incapacity to “*believe and live out his own doctrines*” (PN 49, my stress)—indeed, he says that this is “the central question” of *Pious Nietzsche* (PN 12). This typically Protestant formulation of a question that is neither philosophical nor historical certainly attests to *Benson’s* strain of piety, but it signally and repeatedly fails to elucidate *Nietzsche’s* driving concerns and most serious insights.

Toward the end of *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche writes:

dismal ideas like hell, like the sacrifice of the innocent, like the *unio mystica* in the drinking of blood . . . *that* is what gained control over Rome, the same type of religion that Epicurus had already waged war against in its pre-existent form. You should read Lucretius to see *what* Epicurus had fought, *not* paganism but “Christianity,” I mean the corruption of the soul through the ideas of guilt, punishment, and immortality.—He fought the *subterranean* cults, the whole of latent Christianity,—at that time, to deny immortality was nothing less than *salvation*. (A §58)⁴¹

Redeeming Nietzsche and *Pious Nietzsche* interpret Nietzsche’s self-confessed piety and concern with redemption⁴² from out of his earliest writings and a variety of German religious life they call ‘Pietism.’ This decision has its validity, but will also predictably yield reductive, indeed *provincial* interpretations. Serious research into the sources and sense of Nietzschean piety will proceed, rather, by way of renewed interrogations of Lucretius and Porphyry⁴³—or of “Christian

40 Benson cites this passage (PN 84)—but overlooks it.

41 Whereas Benson writes, “In the end, Nietzsche does what he accuses Paul of doing: create ‘a pagan mystery doctrine’” (PN 196). Benson should, indeed, read Lucretius.

42 For a sense of redemption in Nietzsche which neither work so much as gestures toward, see EH “Books” §5: “Did anyone hear my answer to the question of how to cure—‘redeem’—a woman? Give her a baby. Women need children, the man is only ever the means: thus spoke Zarathustra”; and TI “Ancients” §4: “In the doctrines of the mysteries, *pain* is pronounced holy: the ‘woes of a woman in labour’ sanctify pain in general,—all becoming and growth . . . There has to be an eternal ‘agony of the woman in labour’ so that there can be an eternal joy of creation, so that the will to life can eternally affirm itself. The word ‘Dionysus’ means all of this.” And there is, of course, a Pauline echo in the latter passage that would be worth interrogating.

43 Löwith writes that Nietzsche’s “own *contra Christianos* was an exact repetition of the *contra gentiles* of the church fathers, with reversed valences. . . . If one compares Nietzsche’s arguments with those of Celsus and Porphyry, it is not difficult to notice how little has been added to the ancient arguments against Christianity” (*Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, p. 119). Löwith’s phrase ‘exact repetition . . . with

agitators” such as Paul, Tertullian and Augustine (*AC* 59)—or of Luther and Bacon,⁴⁴ Spinoza and Hegel and Heine.

And whatever it is in Nietzsche’s anti-theology that is still futural or obscure, it did not originate in his mother’s Pietism and culminate in raptures at a piano, or in Nazi death-camps. It is the question, still, of what conquered *sub hoc signo*.⁴⁵ It is the question, still, of what recommenced with the Protestant revolutions⁴⁶ and commenced with European conquests of the Americas and Africa. It is also the question of pity and terror within the instant which still possesses us of eternity, and will dispossess us of time absolutely.⁴⁷ And here the only piety—and “there is no alternative”—is still this: “I will not deceive, not even myself.”⁴⁸

reversed valences’ is of course inexact, but this passage is highly suggestive. One indication of this is that a fundamental contention of *The Anti-Christ*—namely, that the rise of the Christians caused the decline of Rome—is what aroused Augustine to compose the *Civitate Dei* against those “who now complain of this Christian era, and hold Christ responsible for the disasters which their city endured” in the sack of Rome, in 410. Another indication of this is that Augustine clearly anticipates (if he does not inspire) Nietzsche’s endlessly cited formulation, “Christianity is Platonism for the ‘common people’,” as well as Nietzsche’s insistence on Christian *ressentiment*, with his stress on pagan *invidentia*. (Cf. *De vera religione* 4.6.21–22; and BGE Preface, in *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.) It seems that a serious interpretation of Augustine and Nietzsche in relation has yet to be written—and needs to be written. It would presumably begin with Nietzsche’s reading of the *Confessions* in 1885, in the months prior to commencing work on *Beyond Good and Evil*. (Cf. letter 589 in *Nietzsche Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* 3/3, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982, pp. 33–35.) Nietzsche of course identifies all previous philosophy—in the opening sections of this work—as ‘confession’; and though Augustine is only named several times in the work, a sensitive reading of part 3, on the ‘religious neurosis,’ nevertheless reveals that Nietzsche’s concern with Augustine is far deeper and more diffuse than direct references suggest.

44 EH “Clever” §4: “We do not know nearly enough about Lord Bacon, the first realist in every great sense of the term, to know *what* he did, *what* he wanted . . .”

45 Nietzsche uses the variant “*sub hoc signo*” at GM I §8. Cf. A §51: “This reminds me again of the invaluable words of Paul. ‘The *weak* things of the world, the *foolish* things of the world, the *base* things of the world, and the things that are *despised*, hath God chosen’: *this* was the formula; decadence was victorious *in hoc signo*.—*God on the cross*—have people still not grasped the gruesome ulterior motive behind this symbol?” And for the sense of this *Anti-Christ* passage, cf. GS §353 (which has a reference, be it noted, to German Pietism): “Jesus (or Paul), for example, discovered the life of the small people in the Roman province, a humble, virtuous, depressed life: he explained it, he put the highest meaning and value into it—and thereby also the courage to despise every other way of life, the silent Moravian brotherhood fanaticism, the clandestine subterranean self-confidence that grows and grows and is finally ready to ‘overcome the world’ (i.e. Rome and the upper classes throughout the empire).”

46 Significantly, this is where Nietzsche closes *The Anti-Christ*; cf. A §61.

47 Cf. TI “Ancients” §4.

48 GS §344. Benson cites GS §381—“dance is [a philosopher’s] ideal, also his art, and finally also his only piety, his ‘service of God’”—in a superficial way. The sense here of ‘piety’ as ‘dance’ derives from Nietzsche’s discussion of the “will to knowledge” and “specific gravity” in GS §380, and first emerges at GS §346 in explicit opposition to ‘faith’: “one could conceive of a delight and power of self-determination . . . in which the spirit takes leave of every wish for certainty, practised as it is in . . . dancing even beside abysses . . .”

reviewed by:

David
van Dusen

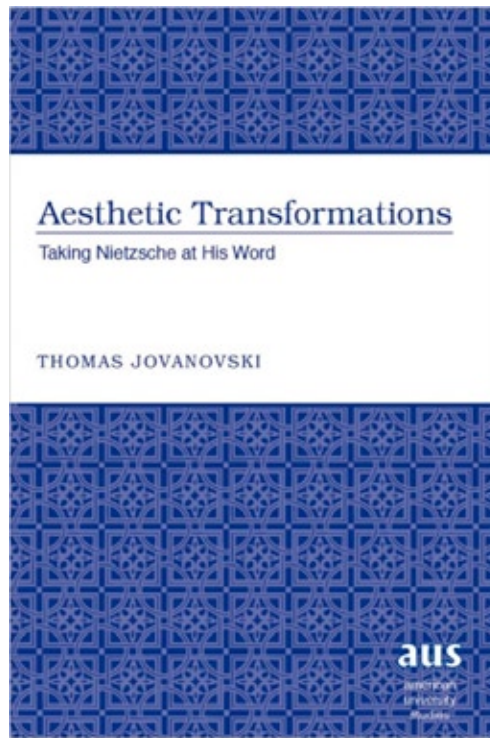
Book Review

Aesthetic Transformations: Taking Nietzsche at His Word

written by Thomas Jovanovski (New York: Peter Lang, 2008)

reviewed by Hugo Drochon (St. John's College, Cambridge)

Nearing the end of his productive life, Nietzsche calls in his unpublished notes for the founding of a “Party of life.”¹ Its role is to fight a “*Geisterkrieg*” against the “Party of peace” of the “last man” for the future breeding of mankind.² Having transformed Nietzsche into an icon of “Euro-American pop culture” (xiv), with its “entertainment first and entertainment last” mentality (19), and its penchant for “universal hyperdemocracy” (92), postmodernists, according to Thomas Jovanovski, have joined the ranks of these “last men.” Mounting a heavy-artillery attack against the “peripatetic literati” and their “cafeteria-style” approach to philosophy (99), Jovanovski’s polemical essay *Aesthetic Transformations: Taking Nietzsche at His Word*, marks him out as one of postmodernism’s most ferocious opponents. Railing against their “politically correct”—postmodernism’s “pathologically suspicious child” (69)—interpretation of Nietzsche, Jovanovski proposes instead to “bring the *Übermensch* to life” (Chapter 4), and against their deconstructive language games, Jovanovski announces his maxim: “Back to the written word!” (xvi).



Ω

Jovanovski’s first and indeed main target is Walter Kaufmann, in particular his “Nietzsche’s Attitude Toward Socrates,” chapter 13 of *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. Jovanovski singles out Kaufmann because “by carefully isolating and emphasizing terms and

1 See KSA 13, 25[1]

2 For a fuller explanation of *Geisterkrieg*, see my forthcoming “Starting with me, the earth will know Great politics” in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 39 (Spring 2010).

passages of central importance to his own reading,” and thus “convincing an entire generation of Nietzsche students to adopt as their starting premise the pernicious idea that Nietzsche likely did not believe everything he committed to paper” (67), he opened the flood-gates to postmodern (mis)readings of Nietzsche. Is this a perfectly equitable judgment of Kaufmann? Whilst one might agree with Jovanovski that Kaufmann “*over-rehabilitates*” (67) Nietzsche in conceptualizing him as a dialectician who organizes all his thoughts around an engagement with Socrates, he does draw our attention to certain positive evaluations that Nietzsche has of Socrates.³ This Kaufmann does in a rather grounded and textual way, and is not guilty of the deconstructive language games which would become the hallmark of the postmodernism Jovanovski wishes to target.⁴

Jovanovski extends in chapter 3 his critique of Kaufmann to Schacht and Nehamas, both of which he accuses of having made Nietzsche, like Kaufmann, “toothless” (67): the first for consciously disregarding Nietzsche’s “more socially disturbing pronouncements” (86), and the latter for turning him into a purely literary figure, fleeing the reality of the *Übermensch* he wanted to create (91-3). *En passant* Jovanovski takes a swipe at “feminist” readings of Nietzsche who want to portray Nietzsche “in an important sense establishing the foundations of a metafeminism” (70). At this point I was inclined to formulate a first overall objection to Jovanovski, which has to do with both his style and manner. Rounding on Janet Lungstrum, whom he patronisingly chides for “attracting a modicum of attention to herself,” he describes her writing style as the “characteristically obfuscating argot of postmodernism” (70). Indeed Jovanovski will consistently belittle the authors he deals with, opening by stating he would have “thus scarcely glanced at any of their literature had its influence within the sphere of our current concern not been as pervasive as it is misleading” (xvii), following up with how their “self-indulgence renders their respective claims eminently forgettable” (71), their being on the verge of becoming “noisy and unruly as unattended children” (72), considers their claims a “nuisance” (78), perhaps a symptom of “socially shared autism” (83), such that we should expend “little ink on any more [their] claims” (76), concluding that perhaps he should simply “smugly dismiss Schacht’s treatise” (86). The arrogance is matched by Jovanovski’s trumpeting of his own work for its “textual correctness and superior dramatic quality vis-à-vis anything hitherto introduced into the Nietzsche scholarship” (103), and declaring that in contrast “to the existing scholarship,” his work is “worthy of being recognised as comprising a radical document” (132).

3 That through being ‘*absurdly rational*,’ Socrates saved his compatriots from the mass suicide their condition of pessimism would have brought them to, and that ultimately the ‘Socrates who makes music’ points towards the successful exit from decadent western civilisation, which Socrates himself was the first to understand.

4 Strikingly, Jovanovski makes nothing of the one moment in which Kaufmann most approaches the postmodern dystopia as he wishes to present it. In his discussion of friendship and disciples, Kaufmann claims that to be ‘a “Nietzschean,” ... whether “gentle” or “tough,” is in a sense a contradiction in terms: to be a Nietzschean, one must not be a Nietzschean’ (54). This arrestingly echoes the postmodernist mantra that Jovanovski ascribes to Foucault when Foucault explains that ‘I am simply Nietzschean and I try as well as I can, in a number of areas, to see with the help of Nietzsche’s texts-but also with anti-Nietzschean theses (which are all the same Nietzschean!)—what can be done in one area or another’ (75).

reviewed by:

Hugo
Drochon

Jovanovski admits in his afterword that “I have inclined to treat everyone who has shown any desire to change or rehabilitate any portion of [Nietzsche’s] recorded thought with an air of impatience and annoyance, if not quite derision” (131), and his analysis of Kaufmann, to return to whom we opened with, certainly bears such a mark. Indeed Jovanovski will begin his commentary of Kaufmann with the rather bombastic, and as yet unsupported, claim that “these and similarly dubious inferences compose the sandy and shifting basis of Kaufmann’s vantage” (37). Other examples include: “the first half of the preceding paraphrasis shows Kaufmann grasping for straws—and coming up empty-handed” (46), and “again, Kaufmann presents us with an interpretation of so little substance that a critical reader might be rather hard put to decide how, or whether, to address any of it” (62). Jovanovski will of course go on to address Kaufmann’s claim, but with this tone one might wonder whether his assertion that his “resistance to Kaufmann’s reading of Nietzsche’s Socrates is by no means intended [...] to discount his indispensable contribution to the scholarship” (67) rings a little hollow.

This tendency is exacerbated by Jovanovski’s over-florid grammatical style, making it difficult at times to follow his reasoning. While he describes postmodern scholarship as “a contest of who can best rephrase in the most incomprehensible language established misrepresentations of Nietzsche’s seminal ideas” (111), Jovanovski is not the picture of clarity, and indeed, ironically, at times himself rather *jargonant*. For instance, one might be slightly bemused by the following sentence:

We must not attempt to expand the range and objective of Nietzsche’s chronically astringent treatment of Socrates’ moral and aesthetic principles in order to assimilate the notion that he looks upon Socrates’ reputed character and public intercourse as similarly disagreeable (33).

As the opening sentence to chapter 2, this is rather bewildering. Having reread it a number of times, I, for one, felt obliged to push on without being certain to have understood precisely what the author was attempting to communicate. In fact the apparent stylistic similarities between Jovanovski and the targets of his criticism often give the impression that Jovanovski is engaged in an internal critique of postmodernism, perhaps betrayed by his concluding remark about “even the most postmodernist-minded among us” (138). Indeed his insistence on the “written word” shares the methodological concern with postmodernists about language, and Jovanovski is keen to stress from the very beginning that for him “Nietzsche is primarily a proto-postmodernist” (xiii). This claim, which closes the opening paragraph of the preface, is left unsubstantiated. Jovanovski would later make a similar claim with regards to Nietzsche’s ‘existentialism,’ and while one might deduce that what is meant is that many of Nietzsche’s thoughts anticipate postmodern and existential themes, the reader might speculate whether such use of shorthand would be out of place in a cafeteria setting.

Thus the move away from postmodernism does not seem to be a radical break, but more an esoteric reorientation of how the themes should be worked out within the paradigm. For instance

(109). While the first and last claims might be justifiable,⁶ the second assertion sits rather uncomfortably with Jovanovski's dictum to take Nietzsche literally at his word: since Montinari's discrediting of the editions compiled by his sister and Peter Gast,⁷ we emphatically know that *The Will to Power* as a book is *not* Nietzsche's word.⁸

It is in reality rather puzzling that Jovanovski desires to defend his use of material compiled in *The Will to Power* on the de facto claim that these notes have been so "cited and analyzed" that they are, for "better or worse," part of the "philosophical realm." Jovanovski here seems to be straying dangerously close to committing what he accuses postmodernism of doing. I take his main claim to be that postmodernist thinkers have extracted Nietzsche's thoughts from their original context, and through "deconstruction" (xiii), have made them say the exact opposite of what they were meant to say: thus the "return to the written word" to cut through such unfounded extrapolations. But the notes that make up *The Will to Power* are those that have been the most taken out of their original context, and indeed interpreted in such a way that they became, through Bäumler's edition, the philosophical basis for the Nazi regime. Moreover postmodernism is also part of the "philosophical realm," though, one might imagine, for the "worse" in Jovanovski's case. But surely the thought here was to get away from this realm to return to Nietzsche himself?

Most ironical is the fact that Jovanovski relies on an edition of *The Will to Power* edited by Kaufmann, someone whose scholarship he explicitly criticises. Though Kaufmann had rejected *The Will to Power* as a "book" in his *Nietzsche*, he takes "full responsibility" for the edition, explaining that the text must be approached as a thematically arranged collection of notes, and that his desire to publish *The Will to Power* stemmed from the fact that he wanted to make the "late work available first of all" and that *The Will to Power* "should be made accessible, too, for those who cannot read these notes in the original German."⁹ While this might show up Kaufmann at his most spurious, he does specify that the passages of *The Will to Power* were arbitrarily chosen, and indeed out of their context. Jovanovski is aware of Kaufmann's "context-irrelevant" fashioning of the *Nachlaß*, but proposes that they can be "synthesized" (122). As he does not explicitly indicate how this is to be done, we might presume that it is Jovanovski who will synthesize them himself in the presentation he makes of them for the purposes of his argumentation. But why

6 There are indeed strong links between Nietzsche's discussion of democracy being a "school for tyrants" in *BGE* and the "rise of the justifying nobility" of the late *Nachlaß*. For the importance of the late notes, see below.

7 See the commentary volume 14 of the *KSA*: „Nietzsches Nachlaß 1885-1888 und der sagenannte "Wille zur Macht" (383-400).“ While Kaufmann did consult the archives to try to ensure the notes were as truthful as possible, and did work on the dating, too many discrepancies remain for the work to have scholarly value.

8 Jovanovski is aware of Magnus' argument of *The Will to Power* as a "nonbook," stating that such a view did not inspire in him "the least uncertainty about appealing to any of its notes" in his creation of his focus on breeding the *Übermensch*, and continues by providing the arguments for the use of it as outlined above.

9 See "Editor's Introduction" to *The Will to Power* (Vintage Books: New York, 1968).

race whose sole task is to rule, but a race with its own *sphere of life*” (my italics, 123-4), so as to pursue its own artistic ends and the breeding of the *Übermensch*. The theme of “Great politics,” whose principle it is to found a “Party of life” to breed a new type of humanity,¹⁵ might further have lead Jovanovski closer to being able to talk about a Nietzschean politics, something he seems keen to do (29-30). Indeed his suggestion that Nietzsche “is concerned with politics on a grand scale” (134), seems rather reminiscent of what Nietzsche meant with his “Great politics,”¹⁶ though, as we have just seen, it was not Nietzsche’s intention to “put an end to history as a friction between the different classes” (134).

Beyond these points, Jovanovski’s insistence on reading Nietzsche literally does reach its limits. This comes to the fore in his discussion about how Nietzsche was rather serious when he was referring to the “whip” in the infamous *Zarathustra* passage “On Little Old and Young Woman,” which he uses as a means to disparaging “metafeminist” readings of Nietzsche. But here Jovanovski is perfectly aware that Nietzsche is speaking metaphorically, describing a conversation between Nietzsche and his sister about certain woman needing to have “that symbolic whip over them,” to keep their passions in check (79-80). Thus such a “whip” appears to be more symbolic than real, which suggests that a correct interpretation of Nietzsche has to be found somewhere between taking him literally at every word, and allowing oneself the flight-of-fancies certain postmodern writers allow themselves. Jovanovski’s book is a serious call to bring us back as close to the former as possible.



As someone who is, in Jovanovski’s terms, “sympathetic [...] of the social side of Nietzsche’s philosophy” (63),¹⁷ I was positively predisposed to his attempt to take the breeding of the *Übermensch* seriously. Indeed the merit of Jovanovski’s work is not only to bring this issue to the attention of the scholarly community, but also to engage in a reflexion on it, in terms of the two paths Nietzsche seems to suggest could lead to the emergence of an *Übermenschlich* society, and their respective difficulties. I found especially stimulating Jovanovski’s suggestion of the possible discussion Nietzsche could have with Marx with regards to the former’s advocating the “levelling of mankind”: a route of investigation, as Weber also realised, that still remains one of the most promising today.

I do, however, very much regret the manner in which Jovanovski tackles his opponents, and his continual slights against contemporary western civilisation’s “last men” mentality. The tone is not simply at times frankly unbearable, but furthermore inappropriate for a scholarly

15 KSA 13, 25[1]

16 That is to say the “problem” of “what type of human should be bred” over the “petty” nationalistic and democratic politics of his day (GS, 377; BGE, 208).

17 Again see my forthcoming “Starting with me, the earth will know Great politics.”

reflexions on overpopulation of the “Afterword” were already present in his “Toward the Animation of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*.” Nor does it appear that Jovanovski considerably reworked his articles: I was struck by the fact that while Jovanovski indicates that his abbreviation of *The Gay Science* will be ‘GS,’ in his chapter on Kaufmann it is systematically given as ‘FW,’ *Nietzsche-Studien*’s format, which seems to suggest that Jovanovski did not even take the time to reformat, let alone rework, his article for publication as a book. Here both Jovanovski and his editor have some serious questions to answer, not least how the book adds to the already existing—and indeed Jovanovski’s—scholarship.

I, for one, remain rather unconvinced that it does. To my mind Jovanovski’s main contribution to the literature—his analysis of how Nietzsche believes the *Übermensch* might successfully come about—is much better made, and certainly without the bile which accompanies it in the book version, in the article of 1989. The rest of the book just appears to be a long, and irritating, preface to this point, to which it adds nothing substantially new. Thus the book appears to be the mere strapping of four articles together, without either reworking or adding substantially to them. Is this a good basis for a book? I should think not. While of course most authors might publish versions of their chapters in article format before publication of their book, the latter is supposed to provide something extra which the articles can not. Not only does Jovanovski fail to add any substantive new material or insight, his tone in *Aesthetic Transformations* might have done him a great disservice by detracting from what he had achieved in his “Animation of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*.”

If Jovanovski could claim in 1989 that his discussion of the breeding of the *Übermensch* was “the first [...] in the vast Nietzsche scholarship,”²³ it is uncertain he can still claim such a distinction two decades later. In the meantime other voices will have raised themselves to challenge the postmodern reading of Nietzsche and interrogated Nietzsche’s politics of breeding, including Dombowsky²⁴ and Appel,²⁵ to name but two.²⁶ An engagement with this literature might have preserved Jovanovski from sometimes appearing to be breaking down barriers which no longer exist, and might have shown him a more positive road to follow rather than his continuous diatribes against postmodernism and its supposed relatives. While his advocating the breeding of the *Übermensch* might lead Jovanovski to believe he is a candidate for the “Party of life,” the fact that he drowns such a call in his *ressentiment* against contemporary western academia and society rather marks him out as no better than the opposing “Party of peace.” Moreover I remain rather sceptical that such a call, whatever its value, saves the book, rather than the article,

23 Thomas Jovanovski, “Toward the animation of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*,” *Man and World*, Vol. 22 (1989): 92. I am presuming by ‘scholarship’ he means post-WWII scholarship, previous to that many people were very interested in breeding the *Übermensch*.

24 See his discussion with Alan Schrift in *Nietzsche-Studien*, Vol. 31 (2002): 278-297.

25 Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).

26 See further Ken Gemes, “Post-Modernism’s Use and Abuse of Nietzsche,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 52, (2001): 337-360, where Gemes wants to argue that “Postmodernists are nearer Nietzsche’s idea of the Last Man than his idea of the Overman” (abstract).

as a whole. Perhaps Jovanovski's *Aesthetic Transformations*, to attempt a positive gloss to this conclusion, might best serve us as a landmark: where not to go back (postmodernism's fanciful interpretations of Nietzsche), where to look forward (Nietzsche's concrete plans for the breeding of the *Übermensch* and more broadly the discussion this might entertain with Marx's thought), and finally the tone *not* to adopt when approaching academic scholarship.

Call for Papers Nietzsche in Translation for:

The Agonist
A NIETZSCHE CIRCLE JOURNAL

The Agonist is seeking English translations of any material by Nietzsche not currently available in translation or which demands to be newly translated. Primarily, we are looking for translations of his early and late papers, such as essays, lectures, and lecture notes, as well as translations of his letters and passages from the *Nachlass*. A full list of untranslated works can be downloaded at the website of the Nietzsche Circle (www.nietzschecircle.com).

We are also seeking translations of Nietzsche's poetry that attempt a new approach to reflecting his poetic style. Submissions of translations of Nietzsche's poetry should be directed to *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics*. All other translations of material by Nietzsche currently unavailable in English should be directed to *The Agonist*.

For all submissions of translations, the editors can be contacted at:

nceditors@nietzschecircle.com.

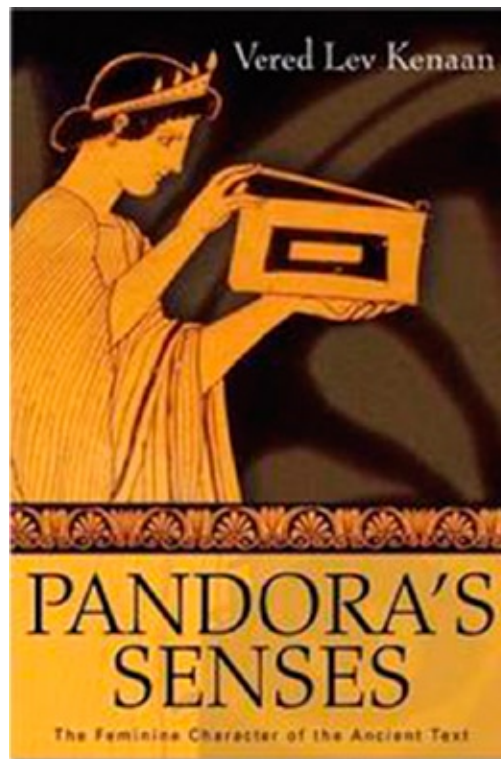
Book Review**Pandora's Senses: The Feminine Character in the Ancient Text**

written by Vered Lev Kenaan (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008)

reviewed by Vèronique M. Fóti (The Pennsylvania State University)

In contrast to readings of Hesiod that focus on the misogyny involved in his two characterizations of the first woman, Pandora (in *Theogony* and *Works and Days*), Kenaan seeks to show how the image of Pandora is formative for the ancient literary text. Pandora, she argues, introduces phenomenality, and in particular visuality, in its love-arousing beauty. Unlike Plato's Diotima, however, Pandora does not seek to orient eros toward a transcendent, non-sensuous beauty but functions rather within the erotic development of the cosmos from barren, primordial Eros to the interpersonal love relationships protected by Aphrodite. The elemental complementarity between Aphrodite and Pandora is worth remarking on: whereas the goddess is born from the primordial powers of sky (Ouranos) and sea, Pandora's originary elements are earth and fire. In that her form is molded from earth and resplendently adorned by Hephaistos, she is also the first work of art, and of art as *technē*; and as such, she introduces luminous visibility into the world which is, however, conjoined with the invisible dimensions of her interiority. Given that Kenaan emphasizes this interrelation of the visible and the invisible throughout, one somewhat regrets that she does not expand her philosophical references to encompass Merleau-Ponty's thematization and explorations of this interrelation.

Pandora introduces not only phenomenality but also alterity into the previously homogeneous world of men; her difference reflects at once her gender, her singularity and hidden interiority, and her being an artifice rather than part of nature. Kenaan moves beyond the feminist critiques of casting woman as Other to develop the idea (first articulated by certain feminist scholars of ancient literature, such as Nicole Loraux) that the feminine figure institutes a reciprocity or interchange between sameness and otherness. This is particularly important, as Kenaan shows,



in *Works and Days* where Hesiod has abandoned the aim of assimilating his discourse to divine utterance (the song of the Muses addressed to the gods) and has, in his myth of the Five Ages, recognized the *hybris* of the human aspiration to symbiosis with the gods. Even in the degenerate Iron Age, however, humans still cling to a form of assimilation: they are blind to the alterity or autonomy of the world. Rather than recognizing the sacredness of the primordial elements, humans now reduce them to mere materials at their disposal (such is, of course, Heidegger's argument in his 1953/54 essay, "The Question Concerning Technology"). A recognition of the world's alterity is crucial for humans to take up their abode in it in a spirit of ethical responsibility.

Although there is, one might recall, no strict similarity even among the gods (Plato, in *Phaedr.* 252b-253c, traces human differences to the particular divinity in whose train their souls followed prior to incarnation), and Kenaan notes that Hesiod rejects human homogeneity as "sheer fantasy" (p.63), sameness remains, on her analysis, nonetheless a longed-for ideal. Hesiod investigates disparity and discord paradigmatically in the fraternal relationship; but the tension between sameness and difference is also at the core of erotic experience (Kenaan links Aristophanes's poignant speech in Plato's *Symposium* to this Hesiodic thought structure). As a signifier of difference, however, Pandora does not merely bring disparity into play but implements the need to extend oneself to the Other in genuine and complex relationships.

In the context of textuality (for which, to repeat, Pandora's figure is formative), Kenaan distinguishes between a "poetics of marriage" that characterizes the didactic text, such as Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (with its boorish censure of feminine adornment), and a "poetics of eros" that allows for the reader's initiative or participation and is characteristic of philosophical texts such as the *Symposium*.

In contrast to the customary thematization of Socrates's maieutics, Kenaan links his philosophical practice to the *hetaira's* art of love. With reference to his conversation, in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, with the courtesan Theodote, she notes that the latter's non-mimetic art of self-presentation and erotic fascination has its source in self-knowledge and in an understanding of eros as oriented toward a beauty refractory to possession. Not only the Platonic figure of Socrates, but also his *logoi*, Kenaan points out (with reference to the *Symposium*) are marked by the duality between outer appearance and inner beauty, so that he reverses the duality that characterizes Pandora as a *kalon kakon* (a "beautiful evil"). Kenaan's point that the Platonic text thus presents itself (and textuality as such) as non-transparent and non-delimited in its meaning will, however, need to be examined more fully with regard to Plato's censure of writing in the *Phaedrus*. He argues there, after all, that the written text cannot provoke or engage in a living interchange with the reader, and that it constitutes a potion that fosters forgetfulness rather than stimulating *anamnēsis*. In the Platonic dialogue, moreover, this censure of writing functions within the wider context of an examination of rhetoric and, indeed, of textuality that cannot be bracketed in an effort to characterize the Platonic text.

Prominent among the gifts with which Pandora is endowed is that of language; she is

reviewed by:

Veronique M.
Fóti

in fact, according to Kenaan, an expert rhetorician. Although woman's speech has traditionally been marginalized and silenced, the Roman poet Ovid makes it, she argues, the mark of his own textuality, thereby positioning his erotodidactic discourse in opposition to a characterization of the Roman love elegy as effeminate or "soft" (*mollis*) and lightweight (*laevis*). He acknowledges Sappho, in particular, as an inspiration for his own *Musa proterva* or "shameless Muse" (even if her Roman identification as *lascivia* obscures certain important aspects of her poetic *persona*). Unlike Sappho, however, Ovid, on Kenaan's analysis, treats love as an essentially language-dependent or textual phenomenon, so that his discourse shifts from an expressive to a metalinguistic modality. Addressing the question of the palinodic relationship between his *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*, Kenaan shows convincingly that his narrative structure is autobiographical, transformational, and cyclical, rather than tracing out a conversional itinerary. The artful cultivation of love and its renunciation as a disabling sickness are not, for him, mutually exclusive, and neither stage or attitude is privileged over the other.

Contradiction, ambiguity, and incoherence are, Kenaan argues, the marks of "a woman's language" valorized as such by Ovid. In this context, she notes that "Ovid includes violence as a requisite component of the seducer's repertoire" (p. 149). She examines the mythical thought structure that traces the emergence of a woman's voice and subjectivity to her sexual initiation, often by the violent act of rape (Persephone being the paradigmatic example). The violated girl's voice, however, is considered "incoherent and unreliable" in view of her supposedly ambivalent attitude toward rape (p. 151). Although Kenaan calls this mythical logic "dangerously familiar" (p. 149), her discussion of it would, in this reviewer's opinion, benefit from a sharper critical edge.

In her highly original and sensitively written final chapter, "Pandora's Tears," Kenaan examines the intimate relationship between femininity, the art of weaving, textuality, and corporeality. The figural weaver (such as Philomela or Helen) in particular imbues her textile with the singularity, the pain, and the bodily dimension of her experience, so that -- moving from textile to text -- the *logos* cannot be abstracted from the density and opacity of the *mythos*. The feminine metaphors and aspects of textuality, symbolized by the figure of Pandora but disvalued in antiquity are, Kenaan concludes, essential to the formation and rich complexity of the ancient (and ultimately of any) text. One wonders nonetheless why these aspects must continue to be characterized as feminine. In the Homeric text, which Kenaan beautifully analyzes, Odysseus' weeping like a woman as he listens to the Phaeacian bard -- and indeed like a Trojan captive dragged away from the corpse of her husband into slavery -- does indeed mediate an alternative and complementary reading response to the masculine *ethos* of the *Iliad*. However, if indeed "death, absence, loss of world, and mourning provide the horizons within which the feminine voice has traditionally reached out for the possibility of articulation and expressivity" (p.170), these horizons are ultimately horizons of human experience as such. Perhaps then, while recognizing the importance of the feminine figure and voice for giving expression to these forms of experience within the

patriarchal tradition, a binary characterization that continues to mark their expression as feminine can now be called into question.

Pandora's Senses
Pandora's Senses
Pandora's Senses
Pandora's Senses

reviewed by:

**Veronique M.
Fóti**

Agonist 75

Book Review

On the Seventh Solitude:

Endless Becoming and Eternal Return in the Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche

by Rohit Sharma (Peter Lang Publishing, 2006)

reviewed by Katrina Mitcheson

Rohit Sharma, in his book *On the Seventh Solitude; Endless Becoming and Eternal Return in the Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*, sets out to demonstrate “that Nietzsche’s poetry is also his philosophy” (p. 26). By providing a detailed reading of Nietzsche’s poetry, from his adolescent years through to the *Dionysian Dithyrambs* of 1888, Sharma hopes to show that key Nietzschean themes, such as the ongoing movement of becoming and the Eternal Return, are not only present in Nietzsche’s poetry, both published and unpublished, but appear in poetic form prior to their development in his prose.

To illustrate that Nietzsche’s poetry is his philosophy, Sharma provides detailed interpretations, poem by poem. To convince the reader of this primary hypothesis he must show both that the poems have philosophical content and that that the expression of this content depends on, or is at least enhanced by, the poetic form. Sharma also hopes to convince us of the particular interpretations he offers; the overarching theme that he draws across the poems is the role of movement, or endless becoming. He also points to the feminine and the role of the poet as recurrent themes. Of the various concepts and key words Sharma locates in Nietzsche’s poetry he makes the boldest claim for the “Seventh Solitude”. His professed aim is to show that all the key terms in Nietzsche’s corpus can, in some sense, be ‘subsumed’ under this notion.

In terms of his meta-aim, illustrating the philosophical character of Nietzsche’s poetry, Sharma is at least partially successful. He certainly brings to attention the presence of key themes within the often neglected poems, and makes a case that these themes are elaborated within the poems in ways that elucidate their meaning. The primary value of this book is to provide an opening to the interpretation of Nietzsche’s poetry and demonstrate that the poems are relevant to



wider Nietzsche scholarship. Notably, Sharma, whilst exploring the poems' philosophical implications, does not ignore their character as poems; taking account of the role of form and structure, philological and metaphorical resonances, and literary references. If we are to bring Nietzsche's poetic writings to bear on our interpretation of his philosophy as a whole we need to approach them as philosophical *poetry*, not simply cherry pick lines to justify a reading derived entirely from his prose. Sharma makes a significant contribution to such a project.

Ultimately, however, the extent to which we are convinced by this book of the philosophical nature of the poems, and their importance for philosophical Nietzsche scholarship, depends on how convincing we find Sharma's particular interpretations of their philosophical content. In terms of the rigour of interpretation the book is unfortunately patchy. Engaging with Sharma's analysis also assumes a reading knowledge of German, as all poems and quotations from Nietzsche's corpus are reprinted in the original without translations, which may limit the readership for the book.

Where Sharma is most successful is in illustrating how the poetic form lends itself to the expression of movement; movement in Nietzsche's own thought, and the endless movement of becoming itself. Sharma shows how the poet's expression navigates the limitations of language, which fixates. Nietzsche uses the poetic form to convey the movement of becoming within these linguistic confines and employs parody and irony to communicate ambivalence concerning the poet's attempt to express truths within language's strictures.

Sharma identifies within the poems various, key themes that operate throughout Nietzsche's thought. That the discussion in *Rimus Remedium* of time and eternity is an allusion to the Eternal Return certainly merits attention. Sharma presents an interesting case for the relevance of this, and other poems, in elucidating this elusive concept. Given, however, the expression Eternal Return [*ewige Wiederkunft*] does not in fact appear in the poem, Sharma's contention that this is its subject relies on a prior understanding of what the Eternal Return is, which he never argues for. The poem can only contribute to an interpretation of the Eternal Return on the basis of a pre-existing interpretation which allows the poem to be connected to this concept. This requires argument and textual evidence that is lacking in Sharma's account. Equally Sharma offers an interesting exploration of the poet's ambivalent relation to truth in *Nur Narr! Nur Dichter!*, but fails to situate this in terms of the different ways in which Nietzsche uses the term truth.

A serious weakness in Sharma's approach is the use of central Nietzschean concepts such as truth, the Eternal Return and the Overman without an adequate recognition of their contested meanings. Sharma employs them without sufficiently clarifying them, or arguing for the reading he assumes. He may be attempting to allow for a multiplicity of possible meanings but takes up these terms in ways that do make assumptions that are far from uncontroversial. For example, Sharma introduces the Overman, claiming it to be synonymous with the *Künstler-Philosoph*, without any reference to debates in the secondary literature or how and where the term appears in Nietzsche's work (p. 85). Sharma also states that Nietzsche often included Goethe amongst

reviewed by:

Katrina Mitcheson

those he ‘characterised as “Übermenschen”’ (p. 96), without offering any textual evidence for this claim, and squarely ignoring Nietzsche’s insistence that there has never yet been an Overman (Z II: 4, KSA 10: p.374, 376, 471).

Sharma’s close textual analysis of the poems yields some interesting insights. The suggestion, in discussing *Ruhm und Ewigkeit*, that the Basilisk, as a mythical creature that can turn one to stone, connects with the concern that language petrifies is a stimulating one. However, there is a problem with Sharma’s interpretations which is perhaps symptomatic of a difficulty in the entire project. For every plausible reading that Sharma offers there are a multitude of other possibilities available and there is thus an incompleteness, or looseness, in the justification of any given reading. For instance, concerning *Lied eines theokritischen Ziegenhirten* he suggests that “‘shepherd’ is a strong Christian motif, and by characterising the shepherd as “theocritical” Nietzsche assigns it a certain amount of irony’ (p. 106). This relies, however, on a rather idiosyncratic interpretation of *Ziegenhirten*, which would normally be rendered as Goatherd, and is not the German biblical term for shepherd. Its overtones are, rather, Greek and pre-Christian. Sharma also ignores the connection to the pastoral poet Theocritus and thus its pastoral character; an alternative avenue of interpretative exploration.¹

That there is more than one possible interpretation is of course true of various Nietzsche passages but his prose is generally more explicit in its subject, even as it employs metaphor. Sharma has thus set himself a hard task in justifying his particular readings of the philosophical import of Nietzsche’s poems and he often falls short of meeting the standards of justification required by a philosophical audience.

In particular the “Seventh Solitude”, which Sharma identifies as the main site of originality in the detail of his interpretation, remains obscure and the significance he wants to assign to it is ultimately unjustified. The lack of frequency with which it occurs, or an explicit delineation of its meaning, in Nietzsche’s *oeuvre* do not militate against its importance; the same could be said of the Eternal Return or the Overman. The onus still rests on Sharma, however, to interpret what he thinks Nietzsche intended its meaning to be, and the conceptual role it plays in Nietzsche’s philosophy, but he leaves us with a thin concept that fails to satisfy. The nearest Sharma comes to filling out the term or backing up his claim that the “Seventh Solitude” ‘qualifies as *the* Nietzschean keyword’ is its association with other Nietzschean keywords (p. 219). It would seem however, that this topography could be played out with a number of terms in operation in Nietzsche’s thought and its alleged centrality hangs rather on the role it plays; a role that is not fully mapped out by Sharma. A starting point to fill out this role would be to offer a complete typology of the term solitude for Nietzsche and mine the richness of signification that solitude plays in his thinking, an opportunity Sharma fails to seize.

In offering some convincing philosophical interpretations of the poems Sharma does

1 Adrian Del Caro’s translation renders the title *Song of a Theocritical Goatherd*, and draws attention to the reference to Theocritus. *Gay Science: with a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. by Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

enough to show that they merit serious interpretation in philosophical terms which at the same time respects their poetic form. He opens up an important project. The lack of philosophical argument to justify his reading of key and contested Nietzschean concepts, however, leaves the specifics of his interpretations provisional, and many of them unconvincing. For the poems to become central to Nietzsche interpretation requires that they be integrated more precisely with detailed attention to Nietzsche's prose, which, after all, still forms the overwhelming majority of Nietzsche's philosophical expressions. This is a task yet to be fulfilled.

On the Seventh Solitude: Nietzsche

On the Seventh Solitude: Nietzsche
On the Seventh Solitude: Nietzsche
On the Seventh Solitude: Nietzsche

On the Seventh Solitude: Nietzsche

reviewed by:

Katrina Mitcheson

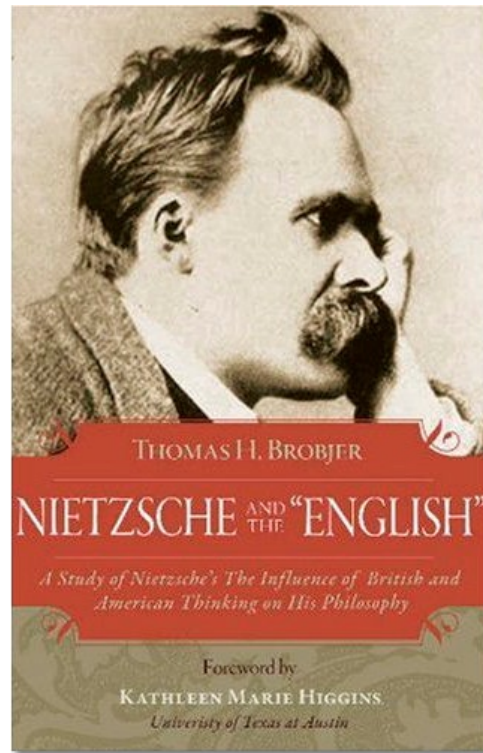
Book Review

Nietzsche and the “English”: The Influence of British and American Thought on His Philosophy

written by Thomas H. Brobjer (New York: Humanities Books, 2008)

reviewed by Martine Prange (University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Nietzsche did not know English well and he never visited the British Isles. He accused ‘the small-spiritedness of England’ to be ‘now the great danger on Earth’ and he dismissed the English for being ‘no philosophical race’ (BGE 252). Nevertheless, in his new book *Nietzsche and the “English”* (which term refers to what we now call ‘Anglo-American’ philosophy and literature), Thomas Brobjer, associate professor in the History of Science and Ideas at the University of Uppsala, sets out to show that such statements conceal the fact that ‘many of Nietzsche’s favourite authors were British and American and during two extended periods of his life Nietzsche was enthusiastic about and highly interested in British and American thinking and literature, and read intensively works by and about British authors’ (12). He further claims that those readings had a much deeper impact



on Nietzsche’s philosophy than recognized so far, in both negative and positive ways. On a more general level, he wants to reveal *how* Nietzsche worked and thought by focusing on his response to his readings. Thus, Brobjer researches what Nietzsche read, when he read it, how seriously he read it, and in which manner his readings influenced his thought.

Brobjer’s claims spur curiosity. Who exactly were those British and American authors that Nietzsche read so ‘intensively,’ besides the familiar ones-Shakespeare, Byron, Emerson, Sterne, Spencer and the Utilitarians ? When exactly were those particular periods of enthusiasm and interest? More importantly, in what ways did those readings shape his philosophy? In other words, what new light does Brobjer’s book shed on Nietzsche? Does it lay bare fresh aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy or add new dimensions to current interpretations?

Brobjer distinguishes two periods in which Nietzsche displayed particular interest in English literature and/ or philosophy: first, 1858 until 1865 and, second, 1875 until 1880-1881. In the

more than average interest. Of Swift and Fielding quite some works are contained in Nietzsche's library, but Nietzsche never refers to Fielding (96), only twice to Swift (106) and to Defoe he only refers three times in a very general manner (89). His reading of and interest in Milton is relatively broad, but mediated by Hippolyte Taine and his reading of Scott above all shows 'that Nietzsche became increasingly French oriented during the 1880s' (99), since his four or five references to Scott are drawn from Stendhal, Balzac, Custine, and the brothers Goncourt. A more prominent notice of British philosophy and science, as explored in chapter six, offsets this minimal interest in British literature (137-152). This chapter spells out Nietzsche's reading of British and American scholarly and scientific works, specifically in the fields of natural science, anthropology, cultural history, and history. The most remarkable names here are those of anthropologists and cultural historians such as John William Draper, W. Lecky, E.B. Tylor and John Lubbock, Walter Bagehot and historian Henry Thomas Buckle. The study of their works reinforced Nietzsche's new interest in anthropology and ethnology, in 1875, triggering his turn away from metaphysics and aesthetics to history (143).

It is from such references to now often forgotten names that part one derives its core value. Who knows the Scottish weaver and philosopher Alexander Bain? Yet, anyone who researches Nietzsche's 'will to power' should look into his reception of Alexander Bain, as Brobjer convincingly argues (58-61). It is also nice to read that Nietzsche's reception of English philosophy was fairly influenced by women and feminism, especially his mother and sister (who, in contrast to Nietzsche, loved George Eliot) and Helene Druscowitz (81-82). In addition, Brobjer reminds us of some noteworthy facts, for instance Nietzsche's lack of interest in Hobbes, and interesting yet overlooked references, such as his reference to Hume in HL, where Nietzsche speaks of return in history in a manner, which seems to foreshadow his doctrine of the eternal return. This reference deserves further tracking, but unfortunately, Brobjer does not venture onto this deeper, philosophical track. Indeed, Brobjer does not always take his chances, which repeatedly results in the suggestion of possible influences rather than the disclosure of true, formerly unknown, influences. For example, we are told that Nietzsche never referred to Christopher Marlowe, although Nietzsche possessed a German copy of his *Doktor Faustus* (115). The paragraph ends with 'without further investigation, it is impossible to determine whether Nietzsche read the work or not.' However, exactly these kinds of investigations could be expected from the current book. One therefore hopes to receive more information regarding any unknown Anglo-American influence in part two, which discusses British and American *influences* on Nietzsche's philosophy.

Many chapters of part two, it must be said beforehand, contain numerous repetitions. This is mainly caused by Brobjer's method, which in the second part is very much like that of the first. The reconstruction of Nietzsche's knowledge and reading of certain articles and books based on what the Nietzsche-library contains today serves as the backbone *and* touchstone of claims concerning influences on Nietzsche's thought. And this is the main problem of the book. Because philosophical analysis (in terms of conceptual analysis and hermeneutical interpretation of both

primary and secondary sources) lacks in most chapters, Brobjer's argument for quite a few influences lack cogency. The empirical materials he has at his disposal, such as the 'hundreds of unpublished and undeciphered book-bills,' are indeed quite unique in current Nietzsche studies (as Brobjer himself often reminds the reader), but such material evidence only leads to *innovative* understandings of Nietzsche's philosophy, when combined with hermeneutical interpretation and philosophical reasoning. The problem is not so much caused by the method or his (strong) claims by itself as by the belief that these claims can be sustained based on this method. This inequity between method and claim infuses a large section of part two. Here, Brobjer thematizes 'Nietzsche's Debt to Emerson' (chapter 7), 'Nietzsche's Positivism and His Pro-British Period' (chapter 8), 'Nietzsche's Relation to Bentham, Mill, Spencer, and Utilitarianism' (chapter 9) and 'Nietzsche's Reading about, Knowledge of, and Relation to Darwinism' (chapter 10).

As a constant source of inspiration, Nietzsche called Ralph Waldo Emerson 'a twin-soul.' However, although 'the influence of Emerson on Nietzsche was enormous,' according to Brobjer, it is also 'difficult to determine with certainty the extent of the influence' (161). Nevertheless, Brobjer promises unknown, specific details, thanks to his research in Nietzsche's library: 'Many have commented on Emerson's importance for Nietzsche's thinking, but most of them have limited their discussions to generalities and have not examined Nietzsche's reading and library' (161). Then something strange happens, however. One expects a detailed account of textual analysis and interpretation of unknown sources from the library, but instead Brobjer sums up the general influence of Emerson on Nietzsche and states that he will limit his account of more particular influence to Emerson's impact on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This particular account first summarizes the general view on the point of Emerson's influence on *Z* by reference to its main sources (e.g. Montinari), and concludes with the statement that not Emerson, but Friedrich von Hellwald was the source of Nietzsche's first reference to the figure of Zarathustra—a reference discovered previously by Paolo D'Iorio (see *Nietzsche-Studien* 1993). Brobjer concludes the chapter with these words: 'This discovery weakens the role of Emerson for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but, in fact, it seems not unlikely that he, together with Hellwald, nonetheless played an important role in Nietzsche's discovery and conception of Zarathustra' (166).

What I would have liked to read here, though, is not an indication of which influence is likely or not, but a sustained and detailed account of how and where Emerson shaped Nietzsche's philosophy, corroborated by detailed textual and conceptual analysis, and then a conclusion, which would formulate how that affects our current reception of the Nietzsche-Emerson relationship and Nietzsche's philosophy. Brobjer seriously accuses other studies on Nietzsche and Emerson for being unreliable, because they offer 'overenthusiastic' rather than empirically evidenced interpretations. However, offering only some selection of empirical evidence, without hermeneutical and philosophical analysis, leaves the *philosophical* reader empty-handed.

Chapter 8 on 'Nietzsche's Positivism and His Pro-British Period' is more inspired and starts off in a far better fashion, drawing in textual evidence from Nietzsche in order to show

reviewed by:

Martine
Prange

when and on the basis of which arguments ('there are no eternal facts just as there are no absolute truths,' 168) Nietzsche turned from metaphysical and idealist to historical philosophizing, to explain why 'the breach between the early and middle Nietzsche [...] lasted for a relatively long period of time' (171) and to show how British and American philosophy helped bring this breach about. Brobjer argues against the general view that situates the breach in August 1876 that 'the truth, however, is that the change in Nietzsche's thinking, and thus the most important part of the breach, had occurred during the spring and early summer of 1875, that is, *before* the writing and publication of *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*' (172). This is important for Brobjer, because this shows to him that 'neither the practical implications of Wagner's cultural reforms nor the influence of Paul Rée can have been the cause that led to the crisis and the change [...] Thus, we stand before the most important change in Nietzsche's thinking without a valid understanding of its cause or causes' (172-173). Surely, this is the most significant claim of the book. Unfortunately, we can only guess that British philosophy played a critical role in the transition from artistic metaphysics to scientific positivism: 'it is difficult to determine with any certainty what caused the change in Nietzsche's thinking during the first half of 1875' (173). But Brobjer points to Nietzsche's reading of Lewes, Draper, Lubbock, and Tylor to show that British scientific influence on Nietzsche preceded Paul Rée's role. Brobjer refers to notes, which show a positive evaluation of science, scepticism and Enlightenment, while reflecting anew on Greek antiquity, also with respect to his teaching Democritus' materialism. In note 5[88] from 1875, for example, we witness an oscillation between historical philosophy and the methodology of the natural sciences, as 'all historical conclusions are very conditional and uncertain' (174). Nietzsche decides to educate himself in the natural sciences, and that Schulpforta was a serious lack in its sole focus on the Humanities (letter to Von Gersdorff, 21 July 1875). This is one of the most interesting and convincing parts of Brobjer's book, as in discussing in chronological and literary detail what is on Nietzsche's mind in the summer of 1875 and which sources he adduces to shape his thoughts, it offers the hermeneutical approach necessary to bring out the full value of empirical evidence for Nietzsche studies (and philosophy in general), thus showing carefully how Nietzsche returns to English literature (this time Walter Scott, Sterne and others), while simultaneously immersing himself in books as Eugen Dühring's positivistic *Der Werth des Lebens* and B. Stewart's book *Die Erhaltung der Energie*. Thus, while true influence is not established, this chapter gives many indications to support the claim that Nietzsche's was much more influenced by 'English' thought and in more diverse ways than generally acknowledged. (Incidentally, Brobjer does mention in this chapter that Nietzsche's successive interest in the English, as exposed between 1876 and 1881, was stirred by his close friendship with moral philosopher Paul Rée, but neglects the *causal* relation between their break in 1882 and Nietzsche's growing explicit hostility towards English moral philosophy from then on).

Chapter 9, 'Nietzsche's Relation to Bentham, Mill, Spencer, and Utilitarianism,' starts with a rather lengthy exploration of Nietzsche's relation to the French philosopher Helvétius

(Brobjer does not mention his nationality, full name, and days of birth and death), whom Brobjer regards as the precursor to Mill's and Bentham's Utilitarianism, which ends with the notion that 'it is difficult to say anything certain about Nietzsche's reading and knowledge of Helvétius (190). To Nietzsche's relation with Bentham, Brobjer devotes only one page, concluding 'that Nietzsche had some interest in reading Bentham, but that in the end he did not do so' (191). More substantial was Nietzsche's interest in Mill and Spencer. Brobjer here shows that Nietzsche did not bother to analyse Mill's philosophy in a deeper fashion, but that he had thorough knowledge of him: 'he read much of Mill, and read it with great attention, some of it at least twice, and he read much about Mill' (193). This has primarily led to dramatic *ad hominem* statements about Mill, which are testimony to Nietzsche's rejection of his moral idealism, superficiality, Christian values and striving for equality and moreover, his mockery of Mill's lack of musicality. Nietzsche called Mill '*Frau* John Stuart Mill,' suggesting weakness of spirit, blaming him for having a 'mediocre mind' and being 'vulgar,' a 'flathead,' and a 'goose.' At the bottom of such expressions, are, however, deeply philosophical and methodological objections to Mill: according to Nietzsche, Mill's reasoning is 'inconsistent,' 'circular,' and leading to 'fallacies.' Brobjer therefore remarks with good reason that 'for Nietzsche, such values [moral idealism, Christian ideals, equality] follow naturally from a superficial personality' (195) and 'this emphasis on the personal is part of his whole *ad hominem* approach to philosophy' (196). In this part on Nietzsche's relation to Mill, Brobjer offers his most extensive, careful, detailed, and philosophical account (192-219), evaluating Nietzsche's statements in the broader context of his ethics and philosophy of life. Needless to say, this part is also the best-written part of the whole book. An interesting point here is that Brobjer shows that Mill assessed people according to their 'utility,' whereas Nietzsche values them according to their 'inner value' (character, nobility). Thus understanding Napoleon wrongly, Mill loses a lot of credit with Nietzsche (197-198). Although explicit discussion with secondary literature on this topic is missing, Brobjer finally makes a more thorough, hermeneutical analysis of Nietzsche's relation with a British philosopher, while seeking to understand Nietzsche's method and moral philosophy in connection with it. He even makes a separate comparative analysis of Nietzsche's and Mill's ethics (202-219), showing that both Nietzsche and Mill's morality are naturalistic and goal oriented, although Mill's is act oriented and Nietzsche's strongly agent oriented (204), and that at the core of Nietzsche's ethics is a 'science of ethics,' which is all about *questioning* morality, forming a 'critique of moral values' (207), i.e. the *genealogy* of morals. The most fundamental difference between Mill's and Nietzsche's ethics is, admittedly, their view of the relation between pleasure and pain. To Mill, the promotion of pleasure implies the reduction of pain, while for Nietzsche pain and pleasure mutually qualify one another. I do not agree with Brobjer's statement that Nietzsche is hostile to 'any philosophy and theory of life that [...] is based on the primacy of pleasure and happiness' (209), because I think that Nietzsche valued aesthetic and tragic joy as the opposite of sheer pleasure as amusement highly. It might have helped here if Brobjer would have taken Nietzsche's aesthetics into account,

reviewed by:

Martine
Prange

in order to distinguish, first, the reasons for Nietzsche to esteem pleasure positively, and, second, to distinguish between ‘pleasure’ (amusement, which is all about forgetting one’s pain and the horrible truth of life) and ‘joy’ (which includes the acknowledgement of the painful truth of life), which corresponds to the ‘poverty’ and ‘richness’ of experiences so important to both Nietzsche’s artistic metaphysics and his ‘gay science’ (compare GS 370). ‘Joy’ could then perhaps even be viewed as Nietzsche’s alternative to Mill’s utilitarian view of ‘happiness’ as directed at ‘all.’

Very promising is Brobjer’s indication that Nietzsche’s rejection of Mill’s ethics relies on three reasons: his problems with the (originally Christian, ‘herd instinct’) value of equality, a Machiavellian and an aristocratic objection to Mill’s practical wisdom (or, as Nietzsche also calls it in KSA 13, note 22[1], ‘English folly’). The latter concerns Mill’s alternation of equality and altruism, which Nietzsche always considered an ‘impossible moral imperative’ (213). Brobjer accurately notes that Nietzsche’s views of egoism and altruism are more complex than generally acclaimed. This certainly deserves (and needs) more explanation, which we shall hopefully encounter in Brobjer’s forthcoming *Nietzsche’s Knowledge of Philosophy*. While allotting much attention to Mill, Spence is treated in a relatively meagre fashion, despite the fact that he is by far the most referred British philosopher-scientist in Nietzsche’s work (48 times, of which 22 times are in notes).

Brobjer finishes with the most appealing narrative of the book, ‘Nietzsche’s Reading about, Knowledge of, and Relation to Darwinism’ (chapter 10). It is convincingly shown here that Nietzsche had a fair knowledge of Darwin, not only at the time of his friendship with Paul Rée (1876-1882), as is often thought, but already at least from 1873 onwards, when it played a major role in his assessment of David Strauss. Nietzsche’s main sources were Eduard von Hartmann’s *Philosophie des Unbewussten* as well as his *Das Unbewusste vom Standpunkt der Physiologie und Descendenztheorie* and Friedrich Lange’s *Geschichte des Materialismus* (344-345). Nietzsche read Lange as early as 1866 and frequently returned to Hartmann’s works in the years 1869-1873. Despite his, in the context of the rest of his readings, restricted interest in Darwin, he never finished reflecting on Darwin’s theory of natural selection and accepted his evolutionary biology. Brobjer here comes to his greatest achievement: he carefully exposes which elements Nietzsche reflected on, accepted, re-pondered and rejected and how these reflections influenced the development of Nietzsche’s philosophy from *Human all too Human* to *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Brobjer chooses the right citations and reveals the most remarkable aspect of Nietzsche’s relation to Darwin, when he states that, first, Nietzsche’s interest in Darwin is always from a *human* point of view rather than from a *biological* point of view and, second, that the ‘will to power’ is indeed an alternative to Darwin’s ‘struggle for survival’ (266). These views are some of the most exciting and provocative views advanced in the book, because here Brobjer allows himself to transform from the meticulous archival researcher that he is into a philosopher.

Indeed, throughout the book Brobjer notes as an archivist when Nietzsche read what and indicates what may have had at least some influence in which period and what can be excluded

for earlier periods, which he does quite well. Yet, while making the strong claim that Nietzsche's philosophy was much more shaped by English philosophy than hitherto acknowledged, he indicates rather than truly shows that this was indeed the case. In addition, his research often leads to the oppositional claim and confirmation of the general view Brobjer seeks to refute. Therefore, in gathering new information on Nietzsche's book possessions, times of acquisitions and readings and similar empirical evidence, Brobjer's book is of invaluable help in processes of falsifying and corroborating interpretational hypotheses concerning Nietzsche's philosophy—but these remain to be done in the future. The most remarkable aspect about his account is that, rather than showing Nietzsche's interest in the English, it underlines the major role of French literary criticism in his judgement of British positivism and the prominent position of German intellectual and literary fashions throughout his philosophy. Most daring and convincing are Brobjer's argument for Nietzsche's pre-Rée scientific positivism and his explanation of Nietzsche's relation to Mill and Darwin.

The book leaves three questions unaddressed. First, what was Nietzsche's knowledge of Anglo-American literary criticism, e.g. Matthew Arnold, a very influential 19th-century critic and Eneas Sweetland Dallas? Brobjer only discusses Matthew Arnold very briefly (88-89), but without any reference to *The Gay Science*, while Arnold advocated the marriage of art and science as 'gay science' in his public writings, and Dallas even published a book called *The Gay Science* in 1866. Second, does Nietzsche's library not offer more news regarding his readings, knowledge and reception of British aesthetics, Burke and Shaftesbury in particular? Brobjer focuses on positivism, psychology, and moral philosophy, but Nietzsche's materialism was never without aesthetic components, e.g. *Lust, Unlust* and the aesthetic translation of bodily powers into artistic style. Third, what about the Nietzsche-reception by 'English' philosophers, artists, writers, and psychologists today? One of the most vital streams in current Anglo-American moral philosophy is built around Nietzsche-interpretation: Anglo-American moral philosophers and pragmatists ranging from Nussbaum to Rorty and Foot to Leiter have discussed intensively Nietzsche's naturalism, moral philosophy, and *On the Genealogy of Morals* in the past fifteen years, and further developed his thought.

Brobjer has a way of stating certain things with a sweeping gesture, which sometimes leads to self-righteousness and claims that are just wrong, as in the case of his assertion that 'Nietzsche's interest in drama has received little attention' (108) and that we did not know about Nietzsche's 'extensive annotations in his copies of Emerson's books' (274). In fact, we knew that already from the very first published register of Nietzsche's books, Max Oehler's *Nietzsche's Bibliothek* (1942) and Rudolf Steiner's testimony that he, while organizing Nietzsche's library in 1896 by order of Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche (listing on 227 pages 1077 books from Nietzsche's library in 19 groups as well as noting down the amount of annotations made by Nietzsche in them; this was the first list of Nietzsche's library ever made), was delighted to find '*ein ganz mit Randbemerkungen versehenes, alle Spuren hingebendster Durcharbeitung tragendes*

reviewed by:

Martine
Prange

ein Emerson'schen Buches (Mein Lebensgang, 1925, GA 28, p. 254f.; cf. David Marc Hoffmann (1991), *Zur Geschichte des Nietzsche-Archivs: Chronik, Studien und Dokumente*. Berlin/ New York: Walter de Gruyter, 184).

Despite its shortcomings, this book will become an essential source for many Nietzsche researchers, if only for its lists of Nietzsche's readings and purchases (it contains some 140 pages of appendices). It would therefore have been a nice gesture to all its future readers, if the editor had paid more attention to the writing style, taken out the many repetitions and added a bibliography with secondary literature (there are so many notes that it is impossible for the reader to retrace all references). But let me not complain. Although it does not exactly do what it promises in its subtitle, once again Brobjer has published a book that is vital for Nietzsche-scholars as a work of reference and a source of inspiration for further research, especially into John Stuart Mill's and Charles Darwin's influence on Nietzsche's philosophy.

*Book
Review*

Agonist 88

ἡ ἀγωνία
A NIETZSCHE CIRCLE JOURNAL



NIETZSCHE CIRCLE

The Agonist
The Agonist

Volume II

Issue II

July 2009