

Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to Philosophy's Future, edited by Richard Schacht. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

All the essays in this volume, save the editor's, were presented at the conference, "Nietzsche's Philosophical Thought and its Contemporary Significance," at the University of Illinois Allerton in October, 1994. Schacht's essay was intended for the conference, but wasn't completed in time. In the introduction, Schacht claims that all the essays "have to do in one way or another with reconsiderations of Nietzsche's thinking and efforts relating to the two undeniably central tasks of his 'philosophy of the future' as he both preached and sought to practice it: (re-)interpretation and (re-)valuation." There are a couple of very interesting essays here (especially Schrift's and White's), as well as a couple of throw-aways (Soll's and Solomon's). Further, the picture of Nietzsche that arises from some of these works (most notably, Schacht's and Conant's) is unrecognizable. This is a Nietzsche who not only has had his teeth pulled, but who is nearly so bland, in line with traditional philosophy and "common-sensical" that one begins to wonder—if this is what he's *really* saying—why he's worth reading at all. Fortunately, this reading of Nietzsche is hardly more tenable than that of the Nazis or the most radical postmodernists.

In "Nietzsche on the Illusions of Everyday Experience," Ivan Soll traces Nietzsche's thinking about the appearance/reality distinction, a thing in itself, and our "distortion" of the world and everyday experience. He reports Nietzsche's eventual abandonment of a distinction between the world as we experience it and a "true" world in favor of the idea of the world as a flux and our constructions or distortions of that flux in order to be able to grasp and understand it. Oddly, Soll discusses this aspect of Nietzsche's work as if it were something terribly controversial, as if it took some act of deep interpretation, when it is in fact fairly plainly stated by Nietzsche himself.

In "Masters Without Substance," Rüdiger Bittner argues that there is a conflict between Nietzsche's denial of substance and his doctrine of will to power, since he equates will to power with something subduing something else, while both somethings certainly would seem to have to be substances. Bittner's solution is to jettison the idea of will to power, believing that it's not necessary in our understanding of life as activity.

Alan D. Schrift, in his interesting essay, "Rethinking the Subject: Or, How One Becomes-Other Than What One Is," discusses Nietzsche's profound influence on 20th century discussions and reevaluations of the subject, and suggests that by interpreting the concept of the *übermensch* through Nietzsche's becoming thesis we come to a richer understanding of Reason Papers 26 (Summer 2000): 105-108. Copyright © 2000

the subject: the *übermensch* is subject, but not as an ideal or a final product, but as the very process and activity of self-overcoming in which one's life consists.

Alan White argues that "The Youngest Virtue," *Redlichkeit*, cannot accurately be translated in Nietzsche's work as "honesty," and particularly not in the sense of truth-telling. It's best to keep in mind that the root of the word is "*reden*," German for "to speak or talk." The virtue consists in the realization that, since each individual thing is utterly unique, there's no possibility of seeing, understanding or naming something definitively. Consequently, as Nietzsche says, what a thing is called is of greater importance than what it is. The virtue, then, "requires insisting on the absence of utterly reliable stabilities or identities. But it requires as well denial that life in a world without instabilities must be horrible."

In "Morality as Psychology, Psychology as Morality: Nietzsche, Eros, and Clumsy Lovers," Robert B. Pippin discusses the way that Nietzsche exposes the motives behind religion, philosophy and morality, and that this sort of philosophical investigation Nietzsche calls "psychology." However, Pippin says, this drive for knowledge, according to Nietzsche, is itself evaluative. Like Plato, Nietzsche sees philosophy as erotic, as a desire for a possibly better life. However, unlike Plato (the way that Nietzsche reads him), for Nietzsche, while philosophy is erotic, the sophisticated lover of wisdom at the same time accepts the unstable ground and the transitory nature of existence and so doesn't demand respite from the anxiety and uncertainty of erotic attachment. Pippin thus uses Nietzsche's conception of philosophy as eros to understand better the latter's critiques of traditional religion, morality, metaphysics, etc.

In "On the Rejection of Morality: Bernard Williams's Debt to Nietzsche," Maudemarie Clark argues that in his earlier work, Williams is more indebted to Nietzsche than readers tend to realize, and that potential problems in Williams's work can be avoided if one reads him through Nietzsche: Specifically, Williams claims that obligation comes from without, from one's relations to other people and to society, while practical necessity comes from within, from one's identity and the goals which follow from that identity, and that morality, narrowly conceived, conflates these two. Clark argues that Williams might avoid the charge that "his critique of morality comes down to a merely verbal matter" by employing a Nietzschean reading of the distinction between obligation and practical necessity: that it is the same as Nietzsche's distinction in the *Genealogy* between the nonmoral phenomenon of guilt or debt and the self-evaluation (or condemnation) which is attached to that guilt in the moralization of that phenomenon.

In a weak and rambling essay, "Nietzsche's Virtues: A Personal Inquiry," Robert C. Solomon claims that Nietzsche, perhaps above all else, dispenses what might be called "moral advice" to his readers in an attempt to get them to change their lives. Solomon argues that this advice might be read as a kind of virtue ethics, and he goes on to list a number of virtues that are

presumably extolled in Nietzsche's writing. Further, he argues that the most important thing about Nietzsche is his approach to philosophy as a way of living a Socratic examined life, built around the virtues. Oddly, however, Solomon argues that it's not Nietzsche, the man himself—who was sickly and very observant of social graces—whom we ought to take as our model; but rather “Nietzsche,” the “philosopher-in-the-philosophy,” the “heroic” figure that Solomon believes Nietzsche is or made himself out to be in his writings. (As a side note, in his essay Solomon unforgivably claims that Plato defines justice as “giving each his due,” without so much as a word that this is a quickly rejected definition in the *Republic*, and not at all Plato's own definition.)

In his “Nietzschean Normativity,” Richard Schacht claims that Nietzsche has a positive moral philosophy, which “extended to nothing less than a fundamental reinterpretation of the general character of normativity,” though Schacht does hedge his bets by admitting that this isn't necessarily *exactly* Nietzsche's own view, but something towards which he was generally aiming. He argues against the common view of Nietzsche's thinking about values, that it was either radically individualistic or reductively biological or psychological. Instead, Schacht argues, all normativity is a produce of what he's calling “forms of life” (“various sorts of sociocultural formations and configurations—institutions, practices, endeavors, and the like...”). These forms of life have their natural biological roots, thus connecting us to our animal origins; but they are mostly “socio-cultural affairs” and thus take us beyond those animal origins. So “Values are engendered within the contexts of such forms of life, and develop with them; and morals...are fundamentally something like partial expressions of various conditions of the possibility of their...preservation, flourishing, growth and development...” If all this isn't controversial enough, then, Schacht claims that all of us—even the *Übermenschen* amongst us—are (for the most part) part of the herd and thus identify with and participate in the everyday herdish norms and moral life. “Higher humanity,” then, doesn't refer so much to great, heroic individuals, as to “a dimension of human possibility or ‘enhanced life’ transcending the commonplace...” Nietzsche's free spirit or his version of the great-souled individual isn't the amoral potential brute he's sometimes made out to be; rather, he's someone who's rooted in the community, but through value creation is able to transcend (briefly and momentarily) that community.

Last, in an almost stunning act of revisionism, James Conant, in his essay, “Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of *Schopenhauer as Educator*,” provides us with a Nietzsche I dare say none of us expected: a radically egalitarian, democratic Nietzsche, who believes that all of us have the capacity to be part of “higher humanity,” and who not only is not an immoralist (in the sense of abandoning morality and moral values in favor of, say, aesthetic values), but who believes that focusing on one's own character and development is (simply) “a prior condition of cultivating the capacity to recognize the moral needs of others.” Conant's focus is the early essay,

Schopenhauer as Educator, and—despite some very good argumentation and close textual analysis of this work—one can't help but get the feeling here that a) if there is even the merest suggestion of anything non-elitist and egalitarian in Nietzsche's work, that it appeared only in these earlier works (the other source Conant primarily points to is *Human, All Too Human*) and disappeared quickly thereafter (just like his adherence to a dualistic metaphysics); and/or b) Conant is as guilty as people like Rawls and Russell (whom he criticizes) of carefully picking and choosing his passages from Nietzsche's later works to support his reading.

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