

Review of THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO NIETZSCHE

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by Peter Berkowitz

The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche

ed. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins

Cambridge University Press, 1996. 403 pp.

This collection of essays fairly exhibits the diversity of opinions about and approaches to the study of Nietzsche within the contemporary academy's influential and far flung Nietzsche establishment. Notwithstanding the absence of feminist interpretations of Nietzsche (for which the editors offer an apology) and despite the omission of chapters that take seriously Nietzsche's debt to the ancients, critique of the spirit of democracy, defense of a rank order of desires and souls, recurring articulations of an aristocratic politics, attack on the morally and politically debilitating effects of professional scholarship, and persistent celebration of the philosopher as the highest human type, this book will prove useful to amateurs and professionals alike.

In Part 1, the editors introduce and provide a valuable overview of Nietzsche's writings. Briefly considering his books in chronological order, Magnus and Higgins identify major themes, unresolved tensions, and enduring questions. In so doing they perform the valuable service of displaying some of the often overlooked continuity and complexity of Nietzsche's philosophical explorations.

In Part 2, "The Use and Abuse of Nietzsche's Life and Works," Jörg Salaquerda's essay, "Nietzsche and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition," is especially noteworthy because it brings into focus a neglected dimension of the background that formed Nietzsche's thought and highlights a crucial and often ignored feature of the framework within which Nietzsche philosophized. Salaquerda goes beyond a restatement of Nietzsche's blistering attacks on Judaism and Christianity to examine the limits of Nietzsche's critique and the importance he attached to religion in the development of the human spirit and the fostering of human

excellence. However, to understand how Nietzsche's fundamental philosophical tendencies give expression to Christian longings and how his central ideas remained entangled in Christian categories, one must turn from this volume to Karl Löwith's powerful and still unsurpassed reflections on the religious dimension of Nietzsche's thought.⁽¹⁾

The essays in Part 3, "Nietzsche as Philosopher," seek to show that Nietzsche's break with the philosophical tradition of the West is not as drastic as is often argued. Richard Schacht instructively discusses a considerable number of passages Nietzsche wrote while he was at the peak of his powers. Schacht demonstrates that perspectivism for Nietzsche does not stand for a denial of the world's intelligibility or the repudiation of the very idea of truth, but, quite to the contrary, represents a method for achieving what had long been understood to be philosophy's goal, knowledge of the basic character of existence. Viewing objects from many angles as perspectivism prescribes allows the complex and multivalent character of things to come to light. And such philosophical inquiries for Nietzsche, Schacht persuasively argues, were governed by a moral intention: the accurate determination of "the order of rank" of values and forms of life.

Against the fashionable view that Nietzsche's explorations "mark the end of philosophy," Schacht suggests instead that Nietzsche's thought represents philosophy's "coming of age." Schacht associates this maturity with the abandonment of the quest for "certain or absolute" knowledge in favor of the effort to appreciate why the philosophical quest must remain incomplete. Perhaps, however, it would be better to speak of *modern* philosophy's coming of age. Although the repudiation of "certain or absolute" knowledge may make Nietzsche's thought unCartesian, such a view of philosophy is of course consistent with characteristic features of Socrates' practice and his paradoxical boast to knowledge of ignorance.

In their separate contributions Robert Pippin and Alexander Nehamas stress how Nietzsche confronts and deepens certain philosophical problems of modernity. Pippin takes issue with Jürgen Habermas's one-sided characterization of Nietzsche as a thinker who "bids farewell" to Enlightenment and rationality. In such crucial instances as Nietzsche's quest for reassurance that creativity can be more than imitation or the reflection of necessity and in his account of the nobility displayed in forgiving and indeed loving one's enemies, Pippin finds Nietzsche giving expression to the typically modern concern for "'recognition' by the other." In agreement with Pippin, Alexander Nehamas argues that Nietzsche's view of modernity is "complex and divided." Briefly but effectively, Nehamas takes Habermas, Richard Rorty and Alasdair MacIntyre to task for eliding elements of Nietzsche's ambivalence toward modernity. However, Nehamas himself elides an element of Nietzsche's ambivalence by insisting that aestheticism--the ambition to take the objects the world offers up and make them part of a great work--is what essentially underlies Nietzsche's aversion to "absolute

rejections" and "absolute distinctions." This is one-sided because Nietzsche's aestheticism is itself a consequence of his love of truth, indeed an imperative that he infers from the insight he believes himself to have won into the basic character of existence.

In a passage from *The Gay Science* called "*How we, too, are still pious*"-a passage that is cited to good effect by Nehamas (238-239) as well as Pippin (263) but left undeveloped by both-Nietzsche declares that he is driven by a "metaphysical faith" and proclaims himself a seeker after knowledge: "we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine." This affirmation of faith or declaration of conviction suggests that Nietzsche's confrontation with modernity is in important respects driven by a view of the good that both precedes and transcends modernity.

In Part 4, "Nietzsche's Influence," Ernst Behler's essay, "Nietzsche in the Twentieth Century," is particularly helpful. It reminds that both right and left have found ample resources in Nietzsche's thought for the support of their partisan positions. To appreciate that the many political appropriations of Nietzsche have in every case been misappropriations that suppress or distort vital elements of his thought is to make progress in understanding that the partisans for whom Nietzsche wrote were partisans of the truth.

Peter Berkowitz

Harvard University

1. Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, trans. David Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 369; "Nietzsche's Revival of the Doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence," in *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 214-222; *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. J. Harvey Lomax (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).