

Nietzsche Virtual Issue Introduction

The reception of Nietzsche in the Anglo-American philosophical community in the post-war period has been slow, controversial, and multi-faceted. Although his work now plays almost no role in current discussions, the publication in 1950 of Walter Kaufmann's 1950 book, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ, and its postwar 'decontamination' of Nietzsche after his appropriation by the Nazis, was extremely important politically. Arthur Danto's 1964 book, Nietzsche as Philosopher, was also an important if somewhat isolated event, and there finally began to appear in the seventies less well known but high quality secondary literature, like John Wilcox's 1974 book, Truth and Value in Nietzsche, and Tracy Strong's 1975 book on Nietzsche and politics, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration. And when the Routledge 'Arguments of the Philosophers' series brought out Richard Schacht's lengthy 1983 book Nietzsche, the idea that Nietzsche, whatever else he was doing in his books, was making recognizable philosophical claims and devising ways to defend them, was becoming more firmly established. There was and there remains a great deal of resistance to any philosophical attention to Nietzsche. There are a number of bases for such skepticism: the facile insistence that his 'perspectivism' was a self-refuting relativism, that there were no 'arguments' in his work, that it was all 'literary,' that his attack on truth and the value of truth was equally and hopelessly self-refuting, and that whatever few positive ethical claims there were in Nietzsche celebrated cruelty, elitism, and the exercise of power for its own sake. These charges are still discussed but there has now been a great deal of compelling work across several generations showing that the interpretations on which such charges are based is crude, tendentious and blindly uncharitable

Moreover, by the mid-eighties, it was widely known that Nietzsche had become an unavoidable figure in Europe, in France, Germany and Italy especially. Heidegger's lecture courses on Nietzsche in the thirties and forties had been published in the early sixties and an English translation had appeared in the late seventies. Books by Sarah Kofman, Giles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Jean Granier, Pierre Klossowski and Karl Löwith had also claimed Nietzsche as a philosopher but in a much different way than in anglophone work. The latter tended to be organized in the traditional sub-disciplines of professional philosophy and so treated Nietzsche's epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, value theory, moral psychology, etc. The European approaches tended to treat very sweeping issues in what might loosely be called accounts of possible meaning in language and thought (or even 'the meaning of being') and the possibility of meaningfulness in action, and they portrayed Nietzsche as having much more radical positions, not subsumable in the traditional categories of the profession. More importantly, a good deal of the European work took very seriously an aspect of Nietzsche's work that does not play as prominent a role in more conventionally philosophical treatments, and which still to some extent divides the two approaches. This was the 'diagnostic' task Nietzsche seemed to demand of philosophy, an account of something like the 'form of life' animated by Christianity, Christian humanism and the Western inheritance of Greek philosophy. Here the famous claim was that such tradition had collapsed in 'nihilism.' (Roughly defined in one of his posthumous notes as 'Nothing is true. Everything is allowed') The implicit claim was that there were always something like pre-philosophical social and especially psychological conditions for any 'conscious' evaluation of values or conscious philosophical assessment of anything, and that these

orienting conditions would not now permit any such evaluation or assessment. Heidegger made this claim the center of his lectures on Nietzsche throughout the thirties and forties and a great deal of the European philosophical discussion of Nietzsche was indebted to this sort of approach.

The editorial board of The European Journal of Philosophy believes that the articles collected here represent some of the best of the recent philosophical work on Nietzsche, in either sense of ‘philosophical work,’ and many of the articles transcend such distinctions altogether. If nothing else, the collection makes clear the liveliness of the debates about Nietzsche as a philosopher, and the relevance of the issues to both perennial problems of philosophy and a number of contemporary debates.

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