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Book Review of, Nietzsche: Ethics of an Immoralist

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An advantage of the pragmatic argument is that it does not rely on a dubious model of how rational agents would perform under ideal conditions, but it settles for a model that starts from where we are now and tries to establish what is [in McCarthy's words] 'practically indispensable'" (pp. 266-67).

Hoy, in other words, thinks that you can continue to make good use of Enlightenment ideals even after you drop the Kantian attempt to build them into the fabric of something transhistorical. As a good pragmatist, he grants the need for *foci imaginarii* but questions the need for a transcendental justification or explanation of them. The "hermeneutic model" of communication and argumentation which Hoy advocates "does not hold belief hostage to a future that can never be present. It insists, instead, that beliefs are checked only against other actual beliefs, not against some ideal panel of judges" (p. 269).

Since I am a die-hard pragmatist, I cannot even pretend to offer impartial adjudication of the Hoy-McCarthy debate. So I shall confine myself to two remarks. The first is that this is a very useful book to assign when teaching courses in contemporary European philosophy or in sociopolitical philosophy. My students like it a lot. I found that assigning just a little Foucault and a little Habermas plus the Hoy-McCarthy book led to a better understanding of the issues than assigning lots of Foucault and lots of Habermas.

The second remark is that if one prescind from Foucault's antihumanism, as Hoy does when he amalgamates Foucault with the deeply humanist Gadamer, then the remaining differences between Foucault and Habermas seem to *make* very little difference. One reaction my students had to the Hoy-McCarthy book was to ask whether the presence or absence of adjectives like 'unconditional', 'necessary', and 'universal' before the noun 'truth' was an issue worth debating.

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Berkowitz, Peter. *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*.
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995. Pp. 313. \$35.00 (cloth).

Poststructuralists picture Nietzsche advocating the free play of texts and an ethical aestheticism without standards or limits. Peter Berkowitz, in his broadly neo-Straussian interpretation *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*, rightly deplores the occlusion of Nietzsche's elitism. Few philosophers since Plato have been so preoccupied with the nature of human excellence or so stingy in their attributions of it. To place this interest in excellence at the center of his thought, however, forces us to abandon the more anarchic Nietzsche beloved of his more recent readers.

Berkowitz's project is articulated in two parts. First, he makes the case for Nietzsche's commitment to excellence by a careful look at Nietzsche's historical speculations in a section entitled "Nietzsche's Histories." Taking the early essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History" as programmatic, Berkowitz reads three of Nietzsche's books as executing the program of con-

structing histories useful to life. This half of the book is masterfully executed and will repay close reading and rereading.

However, Berkowitz also wishes to do justice to the "anarchy." In the wake of the death of God, "the general rejection of a natural, rational or revealed order independent of human will" (p. 270), we are left with no basis for making the very distinctions between noble and base upon which Nietzsche's critical project depends. This objection, and Berkowitz's related suggestion that perhaps God is not dead after all, underscores two flaws in his reading. First, the death of God for Nietzsche should be understood as the cultural collapse of a supernatural justification for specifically Christian values. Nietzsche subsequently argued that secular justifications for the same set of values cannot survive scrutiny. By characterizing the death of God as a metaethical claim of boundless application, Berkowitz sets the bar too high for Nietzsche or, indeed, for anyone. This, in turn, prevents him from seeing the crucial role of power (creativity, independence, self-mastery) as the human telos. Nietzsche is not claiming that, lacking any telos, we might as well become powerful but that our telos is to become powerful. Such a view is open to numerous objections, to be sure, but not the objection that Nietzsche has not provided any metaphysical foundation for the standards to which he appeals.

Not only does Berkowitz object that Nietzsche's appeal to standards of excellence is unjustified; he claims that it is excessively demanding. Lacking God, we must make ourselves into gods—but this is something no human being can do. Berkowitz's central objection to this demand is not that it is unattainable (after all, social justice, world peace, and countless other uncontroversial desiderata are also unattainable). Rather, it sets people a task that removes them from the community altogether and, in this sense, is politically nihilistic. Plato at least required his philosophers to return to the cave, but Nietzsche's higher types, as solely and intrinsically valuable, seem to leave the cave never to be heard from again. This is an objection with which I have some sympathy. However, we must ask whether it is so unusual a view for Nietzsche to hold. One could find not a few classical liberals who hold similar, although more tepidly expressed, views.

Berkowitz interprets the will to power as sheer self-assertion (so to speak, what is left of liberal notions of the self when law and reason are removed). This leads to a confused understanding of the eternal recurrence as the attempt to master the cosmos despite the incoherence of striving to master anything in a deterministic world. Nietzsche's commitment to determinism and his critique of the notion of free will on both metaphysical and ethical grounds is a remarkably stable part of Nietzsche's evolving view, early, middle, and late. Again, insufficient attention to the notion of will to power leads Berkowitz to miss how Nietzsche reconceived the entire issue of free will as one of activity versus reactivity within a deterministic cosmos. What is at issue in the notion of the eternal recurrence is not the mastery of the world. It is affirmation, love of the world as it is, that Nietzsche believes we must achieve if we are to fully overcome nihilism.

Berkowitz's interpretation here crucially depends upon his interpretation of *Zarathustra*. As in Laurence Lampert's *Nietzsche's Teaching*, Berkowitz goes beyond simply citing Zarathustra's speeches as sources for Nietzsche's views and instead includes consideration of plot, character, symbolism, and other

literary elements of the text to arrive at a richer reading. Although this technique bears considerable fruit in Lampert's work, Berkowitz's reading proves to be far too speculative to support the kinds of criticisms of Nietzsche's thought he wishes it to bear. For example, do we have good reason to believe that Zarathustra's greater age at the beginning of part 4 is symbolic of his deterioration in the wake of sacrificing his intellectual integrity by affirming the eternal recurrence in part 3? Nietzsche did not regard the eternal recurrence as demanding such a sacrifice. In short, too much of Berkowitz's case rests on ad hominem arguments against a fictional character, and the specific complaints about the character are themselves far too speculative to take seriously.

The book concludes with an exegesis of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where the author shows how for Nietzsche the practice of philosophy itself is the highest expression of his conception of excellence. Here, the virtues of the earlier half return, and although Berkowitz continues to draw the same critical conclusions, his interpretation is insightful and repays close attention.

In the end, Berkowitz rejects Nietzsche's thought for being insufficiently justified, inhumane, and excessively demanding. One could say the same about Plato. Although Berkowitz has not done justice to what justification Nietzsche offers, this book will stand as a needed corrective to common misconceptions about Nietzsche's ethics and the beginning of what should prove to be a fruitful debate over its grounds and implications.

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Gutting, Gary, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. xii + 360. \$59.95 (cloth);
\$17.95 (paper).

The *Cambridge Companion* series has as its goal to offer overviews of the major themes and concerns of important thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* fulfills this task admirably and in addition presents several important new substantive perspectives on Foucault's works. This addition is unsurprising, since the authors of the various chapters include almost every major Foucaultian thinker outside of France. (The most important Foucaultian not included that comes to mind is John Rajchman.) I would like to proceed by highlighting various aspects of the book, along the way calling attention to several substantive new perspectives the book offers.

The two requirements on a book of this nature are that it give both overview and treatments of specific themes and that it do so clearly. These requirements are particularly pressing in the case of Foucault, since most of his major philosophical points are embedded in specific historical analyses. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* provides a balance of overview and specific analyses. Representing the former are Thomas Flynn's opening essay mapping the standard periodization of Foucault's works (archaeological, genealogical, and ethical) and Jana Sawicki's discussion of Foucault's