

4-2010

Book Review of, Nietzsche and the Transcendental Tradition

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Citation Details

Hill, R. Kevin, "Book Review of, Nietzsche and the Transcendental Tradition" (2010). *Philosophy Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 10.

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Review of Michael Steven Green, *Nietzsche and the Transcendental Tradition*, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2002. 216 pp. ISBN 10: 0252027353. Cloth: \$29.95

(US), in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 39, 1.

As the title of the book suggests, Michael Green reads Nietzsche as deeply embedded in Kantian and Neo-Kantian patterns of assumption and argument. The argument proceeds in two stages. The first stage of the argument is to show this textually by tracing many of Nietzsche's characteristic philosophical concerns to his early encounter with the Neo-Kantian Afrikan Spir. Though one could argue from the same evidence that other Neo-Kantians, e.g., Kuno Fischer and Friedrich Lange, are equally important in shaping Nietzsche's thought (and a thorough historical study of this sort, which to my knowledge has not yet been attempted, would be a welcome addition to the Nietzsche literature), Green's emphasis on Spir is far from misplaced, for it is from Spir that Nietzsche appropriated arguments against the transcendental ideality of time (along with much else besides), and on the basis of which Nietzsche made his first move from a kind of transcendental idealism to the naturalism that would characterize his thought from this point forward.

Green also argues that naturalism, when combined with a Kantian epistemology of judgment, leads to the impossibility of true judgments, a position Green calls "noncognitivism" on an analogy with emotivist metaethical theories. To see why this is so, recall that for Kant, the attempt to vindicate non-empirical concepts like causality without providing a Lockean empirical genesis for them or taking them as brute innate

ideas, depends upon their special relationship with the Kantian categories. The Kantian categories can be understood as syntactical forms (forms of judgment) which, when imposed upon the data of sense and the stuff of thought, yield fact-like truth conditions and sentence-like thoughts for them to correspond to, and it is only in this way that elements of thought can function as referring expressions and collections of sensory states can function as objects of reference. Without all this, there are neither facts nor thoughts to correspond to them, and hence no (empirical) truth. Yet the idea that the construction of, for example, causal connections and judgments about them can take place in time is difficult to make sense of. Fortunately for Kant, having already argued for the transcendental ideality of time, the idea that the data of sense are received and operated upon by the understanding atemporally in some sense is at least intelligible. Unfortunately for Kant, Spir argues quite persuasively that the transcendental ideality of time makes little sense itself.

At this juncture, a Neo-Kantian persuaded of the plausibility of both the Kantian account of the categories in the Transcendental Deduction and the implausibility of the Transcendental Aesthetic (at least as regards time) would appear to have two choices. The first choice would be to abandon Kantian epistemology in favor of some form of empiricism (though one might continue to regard some naturalized version of Kant's cognitive psychology as an empirical hypothesis). Though this option would allow Nietzsche to continue to write as if he regarded Kant as possessing some genuine insights into the workings of the mind, by strictly speaking abandoning Kant as epistemology, it would allow Nietzsche to avoid thorny questions of self-referential incoherence. For if it

is true that the Transcendental Deduction reveals the necessity of an atemporal synthesizing self as a condition of the possibility of true empirical judgments, and naturalism is true, so that there cannot be any such self, then it is true that there is no truth. The second option is to say that Nietzsche bites this bullet and regards truth, even merely empirical truth, as a kind of illusion. If we take this path, judgments of fact will turn out to be surprisingly similar to moral judgments as seen by emotivists: their surface grammar would misleadingly suggest that they are fact-stating when actually, they are merely expressions of attitude, the products of our "drives."

Green embraces this latter alternative, and argues quite convincingly that Nietzsche is precisely such a global "nonsensitivist." And it is the case that Nietzsche, even very late in his authorship, extensively in his unpublished notes but occasionally in his published works as well, writes as if there is some sort of deep problem with our truth-claiming practices. What is more, most of Nietzsche's discussions of this sort do seem to wear a Kantian ancestry on their sleeve, not least in their choice of terminology. Since Nietzsche did not, on the whole, publish the notes in which these reflections take place, it may not be necessary to choose between these two options as a matter of intellectual history: Nietzsche himself may have been quite uncertain about the implications of his commitments, and may have been in the process of trying to sort out what to do with them when madness descended and he fell silent. However that may be, we are greatly indebted to Green for opening a discussion of this long-neglected "transcendental" side to Nietzsche's thought. One hopes that this will be but the first of many studies exploring it.

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