

BEYOND THE FREE SPIRIT TRILOGY

Werner Stegmaier in discussion with the editors

You have recently published a monograph on the fifth book of *Gay Science* called *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie: Kontextuelle Interpretation des V. Buchs der 'Fröhlichen Wissenschaft'*.¹ What do you think this book adds to the first, pre-*Zarathustra* version of *GS* published 5 years earlier?

After considering alternatives, Nietzsche decided to publish the 40+1 aphorisms² which he had completed after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond*

¹Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012. Title translates as: *Nietzsche's Liberation of Philosophy: A Contextual Interpretation of the Fifth Book of the Gay Science*

²On Nietzsche's love of numerology see Wolfram Groddeck, *Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Dionysos-Dithyramben': Bedeutung und Entstehung von Nietzsches letztem Werk* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991) and Henning Ottmann, 'Kompositionsprobleme von Nietzsches *Also Sprach Zarathustra*,' in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Also sprach Zarathustra*, ed. Volker Gerhardt, *Klassiker Auslegen* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), 35–51.

Famously, the number forty has a great deal of meaning in the Bible: after their escape from Egypt, the Jews wandered through the desert for forty years; Moses waited for forty days on Mt. Horeb to receive God's commandments; Elijah spent forty days on the road to meet God on Mt. Horeb; Jesus went into the desert for forty days to find himself, and appeared on the earth for forty days after his resurrection. Every time, a new, great reorientation was initiated. Nietzsche often alludes to the bible using the number forty. For example: *KSA* 7:5[85] ('One must go forty weeks in the desert: and become skinny'); *HH* 253 ('It is sound evidence for the validity of a theory if its originator remains true to it for forty years'); and *Z*:1 'On the Teachers of Virtue' ('Ruminating, I ask myself, patient as a cow; what then were my ten overcomings? And what were the ten reconciliations and the ten truths and the ten laughs to which my heart treated itself? In this manner reflecting and rocked by forty thoughts, sleep suddenly falls upon me, the unsummoned, the master of virtues.').

Good and Evil as a supplementary book to *Gay Science*. One of the reasons for this was the theme of the death of God, originally found in the third book (§125), entitled *The madman [der tolle Mensch]*. Nietzsche opens the fifth book with this theme. It is restated and revalued in the following way: the statement that ‘we have killed God’ now means – more soberly put – that ‘that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable’ (§343). Now the consequences of this are considered. The tone softens, the text becomes denser, the style finer, and the joyfulness [*Fröhlichkeit*] of the new science begins to sound more tragic. In the fifth book, Nietzsche continually examines the ‘long, dense succession of demolition, destruction, downfall, upheaval that now stands ahead.’ ‘Nihilism’ – a concept only mentioned once before, in *BGE*– is presented here as forcing us to glance into an abyss of instability and disorientation that we had previously shrouded with religion and metaphysics. But here Nietzsche is not speaking of the concept of an eternal return, which he had presented at the end of the first edition of *GS*, and now he also leaves aside the concept of the *Übermensch*, which he left to his figure Zarathustra to teach. Instead, Nietzsche tells a new story in his own name. It is the intervening story until the time when ‘the tragedy begins’ (§382) or ‘the parody begins’ (Preface §1). Both will be possible, and what will happen to individuals or the community as a whole depends on whether one can both understand and live with nihilism. This interval and, as the fifth book suggests, only this interval can yield a joyful science which has freed itself from the chains of a metaphysical morality and of moral metaphysics, allowing us to meet the challenge of creating stability in thought and life on our own. Nietzsche follows these themes, which relate to this ‘fragile, broken time of transition’ (§377), very closely and with a new philosophical depth. At this time he is now at the height of his aphoristic art, and uses this to write with greater concision and, through implication and gesture, makes the unspoken speak as loudly

The 41st aphorism (§383) is the ‘epilogical farce’ [*Nachspiel-Farce*] in which ‘the spirit of my book’ assumes its independence and, like a ghost over him, the author, swoops down to chase away the ‘raven-black music’ that *GS* at last gave voice to with the new ‘the tragedy begins...’. We must remember that Nietzsche described the fifth book of *GS* as ‘Dionysian’ in the sense of the Athenian festival of Dionysus, in which three tragedies were followed by a satyr play. The ‘mirth’ of the fifth book is tragic in that it has limited time before the news of nihilism reaches a wide audience (§343) and the tragedy is unleashed.

as the spoken. Nothing here is extraneous: seemingly incidental remarks, parentheses, interrupting dashes, and ellipses can be pivotal in understanding the whole. The mirth that matures into serenity, joyfulness primed by tragedy, and the stylistic brilliance of the fifth book of the *GS*, and, most of all, its stunning new philosophical discoveries led me to attempt a complete interpretation of an aphoristic work. It is the first since Peter Heller began a complete interpretation of *HH* in 1972, before he gave up in exasperation. The fifth book contains some of the most important aphorisms in Nietzsche's entire corpus: for example, on the devotion of scientists to the belief in truth (§344), on the rank of philosophers in regards to their power to face up to problems (§345), on nihilism (§346), on the freedom of a free spirit (§347), on the origin of consciousness in communication (here Nietzsche defines his own philosophy as 'real phenomenalism and perspectivism') (§354), on the origin of cognition in the endeavour to find reassuring certainty (§355), on the origin of the 'free society' in play-acting (§356), on 'Europe's longest and bravest self-overcoming' by the transformation of the Christian conscience in a scientific one (§357), on the traditional alternatives of European art and philosophy and Nietzsche's new alternative which he claims 'Dionysian Pessimism' (§370), on 'the question of being understandable' (§371, §381), on the 'music of life' (§372), on the ultimate consequence of perspectivism (§374), on the homeless 'wanderers' who know how to find stability in instability (§377), and finally, in §382, on the 'alternative ideal' of free spirits, with which they can be prepared to counteract tragedy.

Nietzsche refers to The Free Spirit Trilogy as his 'yes-saying' period. Do you think this yes-saying disappears after the Free Spirit Trilogy or is it still an important aspect of Nietzsche's project for the remainder of his philosophical career?

The sense in which 'yes-saying' is meant is itself a problem. For a start, yes-saying and no-saying go together. To say 'yes' only makes sense if we can also say 'no', and in his first aphoristic work Nietzsche said a firm 'no' to metaphysics, morality and the kind of science [*Wissenschaft*] that these give rise to. Furthermore, saying 'no' only makes sense against a background

of saying 'yes'. By this time Nietzsche had even learnt to affirm nihilism, and eventually reaches *amor fati*, the all-encompassing affirmative thought. Even when his attacks become more fierce in his later work, yes-saying does not disappear. Therefore Nietzsche's distinction between yes-saying and no-saying requires more subtle understanding. In *Ecce Homo*, where he uses it emphatically, he also says 'I contradict as nobody has ever contradicted before, and yet in spite of this I am the opposite of a nay-saying spirit' (*EH* 'Destiny' 1). A no-saying spirit habitually says 'no', and says it out of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche says 'no' to *this* no-saying, saying 'no' not *out of ressentiment*, but *to ressentiment*; and therein is he a yes-sayer, and, what is more, a liberating yes-sayer. Nietzsche calls this liberating yes-saying a no-doing. Equally, Nietzsche finishes *BGE*, with which, according to *EH*, the 'no-saying' part of his 'task' began, by sketching a vision of what he calls 'noble' people. And, in the middle of his most aggressive, no-saying work, *The Antichrist*, we see the most yes-saying moment in his writing: his redemptive understanding of the redeeming type, whom, nonetheless, he designates with the word 'idiot'. Nietzsche's entire philosophy, a campaign against the 'spirit of the gravity', and the restrictive and oppressive nature of European metaphysics and morality (or at least this is what he intends), is waged on behalf of yes-saying; he only says 'no' in order to liberate new yes-sayers from their chains. This he does by force after *BGE*.

Thus, in my opinion the boundary should not be taken too seriously, given that the conventional division of Nietzsche's philosophy into three phases is questionable. Nonetheless, and without attending to the distinction between yes-saying and no-saying, I think it very worthwhile to study the aphoristic works, which have for so long been overshadowed by *TSZ* and the later works, on their own terms. For here Nietzsche experiments in all directions, without committing to certain doctrines, and in so doing is he often at his most exhilarating. We can in turn understand *TSZ* as an experiment, after limitless explorations in new areas of philosophical thought, in concentrating his thoughts and presenting them as doctrines which can be taught – but still not in Nietzsche's own name; rather, in the parables of Zarathustra. But the teachability of a thought presupposes that it can be transferred from one consciousness to another without corruption, something which Nietzsche finds thoroughly contentious. Therefore, these

teachings must be understood as anti-teachings.

What, for you, most prominently differentiates the middle from the later Nietzsche?

This issue of *Pli* clearly states the decisive points in its *call for papers*: the middle period's detachment from metaphysics, a philosophy orientated around the sciences, and the free spirit who is necessary for such a philosophy – if, that is, we are choosing to maintain the division of Nietzsche's philosophy into three periods – and the concentrating and deepening of the new way of thinking in the later period. This new, deeper thinking involves criticising science for its dependence on metaphysics and morality. But to me this appears to be as much an overcoming in motion as a decisive break. Indeed, only *one* break is clear and unequivocal, one that Nietzsche himself names and constantly emphasises: his disengagement with Wagner and Schopenhauer. But his constant emphasis of this should make us suspicious. For when he announces the future 'Dionysian Pessimism' (§370), he holds onto both the Dionysian, which he celebrated in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he supposed that it would be reborn in Wagner, and pessimism, which here stands for Schopenhauer. When he arrived at his new understanding of both the Dionysian and pessimism, he perhaps wanted to suggest a continuity in his thinking by using the formulation 'Dionysian Pessimism'. This might be the right path, since many interpreters see the whole of Nietzsche already present in *BT* and everything after that as only offering variations on this content. And the significance of the polemical tone to which he inclines in the later work first becomes conspicuous in the 1888 writings. But even here something else appears, something which, for over 20 years, I have called 'Nietzsche's critique of his life's reason'. Just as he previously interrogated Socrates, Plato, Spinoza, Kant and others with his genealogical method, and in so doing asked after the conditions under which they came to express their ground-breaking ideas, he now turns such inquiry upon himself. In this spirit, he asks himself why just he, this Friedrich Nietzsche, gave birth to a thought that he saw as both redemptive and as important to European humanity. In this vein he asks: 'Why I am so wise', 'Why I am so clever', 'Why I write such good books', 'Why I

am destiny' (I emphasise the 'whys'). These questions are neither autobiographical nor megalomaniacal, as a lot of people assume. In *EH*, they are aligned with *amor fati*. 'That you do not want anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity,' as Nietzsche writes in *EH* (*EH* 'Clever' 10), is depicted in *AC* as 'a floating existence awash in symbols and incomprehensibilities'; it is the evangelical practice of his Jesus type. Nietzsche thus concludes his philosophy. And this is also the end of his previous struggle. He now knows that he *is* a fate for philosophy, and now need only wait for this to be recognised, whereupon he will become 'born posthumously' as an author. If we are to divide the development of Nietzsche's thought into phases, we cannot stop at three, but in my opinion must instead talk of four phases where each allows us to view the one before in a new light.

Anglophone literature on Nietzsche contains many unsolved interpretive puzzles (What are drives? Is Nietzsche a naturalist? Is he a compatibilist? and so on). What are the German literature's most important puzzles that are still unsolved?

Generally, continental and, within that, German Nietzsche scholarship, thinks less in terms of 'camps' delineated by 'isms', such as 'naturalism' or 'postmodernism'. It rarely argues for 'positions' with reference to researchers from one or other camp, or re-evaluate them with new arguments. As a result, there are few 'puzzles' regarding, for example, nihilism, naturalism, or perspectivism, with which many could engage and from which a dense discussion could arise – no doubt a very effective and productive form of scholarship. Roughly, continental Nietzsche scholarship works differently: one approaches problems that one has discovered oneself, not in the name of an 'ism'. One does not choose a camp to which one must ally one's opinions like in a political party. Nietzsche created for his philosophy his own names ('Dionysian Pessimism') and he gave those other names that he adopted ('phenomenalism and perspectivism') his own twist ('the actual . . . , as *I* understand it'). Keeping to this European tradition leads to a greater variety and complexity in the themes and styles of interpretation, and, in this way, also fosters creativity. Of course, that does not mean that

continental Nietzsche scholars do not refer to one another, but only that everyone can deal with a different set of puzzles.

Even so, we can delineate some general focal points in continental scholarship. First, the study of source material has been given more weight thanks to Montinari and his attempt to organise Nietzsche's thought not only systematically, but also historically. For years, for example, Nietzsche's sources for his knowledge about Spinoza or Dostoyevski, whose ideas he greatly appreciated, were a point of contention, since he never tells us himself. Some scholars let it go at that. However, just because Nietzsche used a source does not necessarily mean he endorsed it. Some, myself included, see in questions of source material study only preliminary questions for potential answers to philosophical problems. For example, for me, Nietzsche left Spinoza unfinished, as an unsolved riddle and, in the end, Nietzsche did not have enough time to read Dostoyevski's most important works. A further example is the magnum opus question: when and why did Nietzsche abandon his much anticipated 'magnum opus', the *Wille zur Macht* [Will to Power] or *Die Umwerthung aller Werthe* [Revaluation of all Values], for which he strived for so long? The answer to this puzzle says much about the character of Nietzsche's philosophising, especially whether or not he aspired to a 'system'. On this side of the English Channel, it is therefore intriguing that in the Anglophone Nietzsche scholarship, which argues so carefully, the compilation *The Will to Power* is used (not by all, of course), when it was in fact fabricated by his sister and Peter Gast out of *Nachlass* material. The fact is, *WP* does not exist as a Nietzsche text. The focal points of continental Nietzsche scholarship certainly include – besides *Z* – the interpretation of the unpublished text *Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, the aphoristic works and especially the later writings from 1888. A further, significant puzzle on which many people work is the meaning of the 'sovereign individual' (*GM* II.2). For the young non-Anglophone European generation of Nietzsche researchers, the motifs of Nietzsche's philosophy become more and more interesting. These include self-referentiality and the paradoxes which can result from it, Nietzsche's style and his many modes of philosophical writing (for instance essays, maxims, aphorisms, speeches like Zarathustra's, dialogues, polemics, poems) and of composing books, and their significance to his philosophy, a

theme on which Nietzsche himself often insisted. Here, German-language scholarship has a clear advantage: it can more easily illuminate the linguistic nuances of Nietzsche's philosophy, which always potentially have an intellectual dimension, than can scholarship by those whose mother tongue is not German. Indeed, Nietzsche says of himself: 'I am a nuance' (*EH* 'The Case of Wagner' 4). This is probably his most dense and precise description of himself.

In my experience, one discovers the 'puzzles' or 'riddles', which Nietzsche himself posed – he called himself a 'guesser of riddles', but was in fact a poser of riddles too – , not so much through comprehensively systematic interpretation as through detailed contextual interpretation of his single texts. These puzzles can be found in the particular position of a certain word or a simple nuance – and what we initially assume to be the natural meaning of an aphorism, what it appears to be saying, can be flipped on its head. Also, Zarathustra's famous teachings of the *Übermensch*, of the will to power, and of the eternal return of the same soon present themselves as riddles. What do they really say? Can one even call them serious philosophy? Whatever the answer, no major philosopher has taken them further. Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism is taken far more seriously. Nietzsche also made a riddle of this in his published writings. Most solutions to the problem of nihilism which are discussed are taken from the *Nachlass*. Nietzsche did not publish them, perhaps because he believed that they were not sufficiently well thought out. Heidegger offered a very simple solution to the problem when he made Nietzsche into a metaphysician, one who surpassed all previous metaphysics. But this went completely against how Nietzsche understood himself. I have, therefore, interpreted those teachings in the context of nihilism as anti-teachings, anti-doctrines, and as such they have – much to my surprise – joined together very precisely. Many young Nietzsche scholars, anglophone and continental, go along with this, while older colleagues, who have presented alternative interpretations, are understandably hesitant.

I am very reticent to talk about *German* Nietzsche scholarship. My reasons for this: Walter Kaufmann, who was very influential in post-WWII American Nietzsche scholarship, also worked extensively in Germany; Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, who also broke with Heidegger's metaphysical

reading of Nietzsche, cooperated closely with Mazzino Montinari; French Nietzsche interpretation lent the German so much suggestive meaning; and the diverse and rigorous Anglophone Nietzsche scholarship, which is so rich in ideas, has had a further and strong influx into German scholarship. Modern continental Nietzsche scholarship was, from the beginning, very much constructed internationally. Almost all continental Europeans speak English, and many French, which they learn in school, but mostly those in the Anglophone world do not read or speak German, French or Italian; you do not find a lot of references to books and articles published in these languages in English-language books and articles. Non-Anglophone Nietzsche scholarship is unfortunately widely ignored in the Anglophone world, and that feeds an ongoing and unfortunate repetitive or double scholarship. But there are of course laudable exceptions, and this interview will hopefully help increase such exceptions. So, we will work on this and should continue working in order to, as we say in German, ‘bridge the gap’ [*den Gap überwinden*].

– Prof. Werner Stegmaier, 5th November 2013

Translated by David Rowthorn and Matthew Dennis

REFERENCES

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