

**Daniel Came**, ed. *Nietzsche on Art and Life*. Oxford University Press 2014. 272 pp. \$74.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199545964).

Nietzsche's about-face regarding the cultural meaning of Richard Wagner is only the most obvious example of sharp shifts in tone, style, and philosophical approach marking rapid conceptual development over a relatively short intellectual life. Yet, as Ken Gemes and Chris Sykes note in their contribution to this volume, 'it is no longer controversial to argue' in favor of Nietzsche's own position that thematically there is a 'deep continuity' between *Birth of Tragedy* and late works such as *On the Genealogy of Morality* (80). Specifically, they explore his core claim that art—not necessarily art-works but consciously created myths or symbolic narratives—'performs the positive task of wooing us back to life' (100) amidst the 'cultural malaise' (101) afflicting Western culture. *Nietzsche on Art and Life* is an eclectic collection of essays, but most contributors share a similar continuity assumption and the belief that Nietzsche's philosophy is best conceived as a unique and complex form of aestheticism. One overall result, exemplified by Gemes and Sykes' contribution, is a wealth of fresh perspectives on *Birth of Tragedy*, particularly on the well-worn questions regarding Nietzsche's intellectual debt to Schopenhauer and Wagner. But this book has broader scholarly significance.

Nietzsche was not taken seriously by Anglo-American philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century because, being closely identified with *Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he was perceived to be more 'poet' than philosopher. Many artistically inclined intellectuals, on the other hand, were not averse to the conceptual imprecisions of the latter books and enthusiastically endorsed a perceived neo-aristocratic vision of rejuvenating a decadent Western culture through an aesthetic re-evaluation of life (based on an appeal to the Dionysian character of Wagnerian opera and the primordial chorus in ancient Greek tragedy). The philosophical perception of Nietzsche changed after Walter Kaufmann judged those two books to be outliers in an *oeuvre* that was far from systematic, but consistently championed Socratic values of truth and rationality. 'Artist' is conspicuously absent from Kaufmann's famous characterization of Nietzsche as 'philosopher, psychologist and anti-Christ'. And he relentlessly tried to distance Nietzsche from any positive relationship to nineteenth century Romanticism, particularly its elevated view of art and aesthetic intuition.

*Nietzsche on Art and Life* further entrenches a dominant revisionism that silently dismisses Kaufmann's work as a dead-ended scholarly detour. Alexander Nehamas took the first big revisionist leap thirty years ago so it is surprising that there is so little explicit engagement with him. In his contribution, Daniel Came suggests why. For one thing, the central theoretical claim of Nehamas—'the later Nietzsche saw the whole world as a literary work' with historical individuals as characters in some over-arching text—is a variation on *Birth of Tragedy*'s extravagant, unacceptably metaphysical 'conception of nature itself as a work of art' (135). And a literary model can scarcely accommodate Nietzsche's enthusiasm for music and dance. More positively, a key Nehamas insight has been so thoroughly integrated into the prevailing approach to Nietzsche's aestheticism that it scarcely needs defending, namely, that within his 'ethical universe, creativity operates much as it does in the more familiar world of the arts' (137). Came then sketches a non-literary view of the artist agent in which Nietzsche's ideal human type transgresses existing ethical conventions in imaginative ways

and, in doing so, embodies new standards to which other agents first conform and then contest, in a never-ending struggle to turn one's character into an original work that beautifies life.

However, Came assesses this view warily because a normative reservation, originally expressed by Nehamas himself, still stands—character must be judged on 'purely formal aesthetic criteria' (140). And outside the Nehamas literary model, Philippa Foot's long-standing charge that, in principle, a beautiful, noble, Nietzschean character can be 'morally repugnant' (*ibid*) gains weight. Christopher Raymond's contribution to the volume adds a related charge. There is a 'continuous thread' (74) in Nietzsche's writings reiterating an unresolvable conflict between morality and tragedy. Hence Nietzsche rejected the very basis of traditional attempts to meet the Socratic challenge of explaining how the tragedies can be morally beneficial. According to Raymond, though, the claim that the insight provided by these plays is different from, and superior to what is available from morality's 'sham worldview' (75) does not arise from detailed analyses of specific tragedies (*à la* Martha Nussbaum). By theoretically privileging the perspective of a final Dionysian affirmation, moreover, Nietzsche effectively excludes the ethical dimension of the audience's aesthetic experience, which resides in the unfolding of narrative as a whole. Raymond agrees with Bernard Williams: tragedies are indeed stark reminders of how lives can be destroyed by undeserved, chance events. But the lesson to be learned is 'that we have to *revise* our expectations about the moral life', not *reject* it (77). So Williams, Raymond notes, is 'only superficially Nietzschean' (*ibid*), and wisely so.

Sabina Lovibond's discussion of the 'aesthetic sensibility' or 'taste' (201) exhibited by Nietzsche's ideal type results in a third charge. Taste is the consequence of a 'rigorous internalization of a system of rules' that, once second-nature, supports myriad forms of 'effortless' behavior, including emotional and intellectual tone, demeanour, and gesture (203). Lovibond fleshes out the latter through a cluster of attractive Nietzschean virtues—calmness, delicacy, slowness, reverence, devotion, patience, fair-mindedness, gentleness, etc.—so the normative ideal is scarcely defined by 'purely formal aesthetic criteria'. Yet her primary focus is 'Nietzsche's esteem for "distance"' (211). This, Lovibond argues, is actually a dangerous 'exclusionary impulse' (215) that offers a psychological explanation for both Nietzsche's objectionable anti-egalitarianism and his almost solipsistic '*appeal to ... truthfulness as a test of spiritual quality*' made while mounting a '*critique of truth*' (216). "Attuned, Transcendent, and Transfigured: Nietzsche's Appropriation of Schopenhauer's Aesthetic Psychology", a brilliant essay by A.E. Denham, does not directly address these charges. Indeed on one level, it presses (successfully) the seemingly narrow historical thesis that, contrary to Nietzsche's strenuous claims, his 'aesthetic phenomenology' is heavily indebted to Schopenhauer, in particular 'his most central aesthetic concept, viz., that of aesthetic *transfiguration*' (166). Nevertheless, Denham turns that concept into a model for understanding Nietzsche's broader 'project of self-creation' (191) culminating in his ideal type's transfiguration of life itself.

Denham's ambitious interpretation of Nietzsche's aestheticism opens up exhilaratingly positive lines of thought. And it augments a pair of excellent essays—'Art and Affirmation' and 'Beauty is False, Truth Ugly: Nietzsche on Art and life'—by Bernard Reginster and Christopher Janaway, respectively. Both ponder the tension throughout Nietzsche's writings between the intellectual demand to *confront* hard truths with the existential need to beautify life, that is, to artistically *veil* the truth. Reginster tracks a shift in focus, not just away from spectator (in *Birth of Tragedy*) to artist (in later works), but to the discovery that the existential significance of art lies 'less in its *products* than in the *creative activity*' (25) which is not simply a veiling activity. Beauty is *revealed*, and this

‘invites the beholder to look further, engage more deeply’ (32), inciting the desire to create anew in full knowledge that the mysteries of life will never be dispelled. Since the healthy creator requires new challenges and resistances to overcome, Reginster concludes, suffering is now far from an objection to life. Janaway complements Reginster’s account of creative activity. First, he points out that the demand for truth reflects a moral commitment that Nietzsche is in the process of undermining. Its value is subservient to the over-riding normative goal of enhancing life, hence ‘the deliberate artistic shaping of our experience’ (53). Yet, the late Nietzsche also proposes an epistemological reevaluation of truth and Janaway’s argument regarding perspectivism is fascinating. In short, there is a strong commonality between artists uncovering multiple perspectives by ‘simplifying, correcting, and selecting’ and truth-seekers ‘engaging their diverse feelings, finding new interpretations, and moving between them’ (55).

Finally, what about Nietzsche’s aestheticism *vis-à-vis* romanticism? Aaron Ridley’s ‘Nietzsche and Music’ notes that Nietzsche’s philosophy is bound up with conceptions of music that originate in ‘the peculiarly Romantic tradition of theorizing about music’ (227). But there are two unique, distinguishing features. Ridley offers the first largely as an intriguing suggestion—Nietzsche seriously intended his writings to be ‘philosophy transposed into music’ (229)—though it resonates with ‘Orchestral Metaphysics: The Birth of Tragedy between Drama, Opera, and Philosophy’, Stephen Mulhall’s fine, elaborate (thoroughly Wagnerian) case study here. The second is a trademark Nietzsche question: does a work of *music* such as *Parsifal* or *Carmen* express a sick or healthy *life*? Ridley takes the question very seriously, although thinks Nietzsche judged *Parsifal* wrongly. For Wagner explores the allure of a life-redeeming ‘beyond’ but actually rejects it in favor of a non-Christian, non-Romantic, Nietzsche-like ‘immanent transcendence’ (231). In *Carmen*, Ridley adds, ‘the “beyond” is simply *not* alluring’ (233). In sharp contrast, Roger Scruton’s ‘Nietzsche on Wagner’ does not dismiss the question outright. But clearly what counts is Nietzsche being ‘compelled’ to acknowledge *Parsifal* as musical ‘triumph’ (246). So his antagonism toward the ‘emotional logic’ of Christianity embodied in the opera (according to Scruton) is either ‘excusable compensation’ for an ‘invalid existence’ or ‘surrender to all that is most destructive in human nature’ (248). And Scruton ends by mocking Nietzsche’s love of *Carmen*, suggesting that if he had to live with the ‘closed rhythms and catchy tunes’ of a Lady Gaga, he would long for the ‘old-fashioned decadence’ of Wagner.

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