

Book Review*

Nietzsche's Gift by H. Alderman (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1979). 184 pp.

Reviewed by W. B. Allen

"The drama Nietzsche has written is for the future Greeks." This somber note is the tonic both for the major and minor elements of Alderman's *Nietzsche's Gift*. The "drama" refers to *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, the central text in Alderman's interpretation. The intention of placing Nietzsche centrally in the stream of philosophic creation is the minor theme. (I do not mean to suggest that the two are mutually exclusive.)

Alderman's work is self-conscious philosophizing about philosophizing or creating values. It is difficult to interpret it as interpretation of Nietzsche. It were better called a *doing* of Nietzsche. He has rejected the "pretense" of an objective interpretation. His work is "a sharing of a particular vision, a vision gained in the work of interpretation and justified in a creative responsibility to the text." This is a non-hackneyed reading of Nietzsche. It is philosophically demanding. It is thoughtful and sensitive, one might even say soft, in its approach. In addition to *Zarathustra*, four books figure mainly in this study: *Birth of Tragedy*, *Joyful Science*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *Genealogy of Morals*. With due deference to Professor Alderman, the reader may surmise from this list of the "major" works as well as what is said about them that the question of chief importance here is not "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" (the final chapter), but rather, "Who are the future Greeks and what have they to do with the old Greeks?"

The philosophizing which is the chief objective of this work is itself the most doubtful part of the enterprise. Nietzsche's treatment of the old Greeks made philosophizing the central question of philosophy, as Alderman noted. Did it also lay a foundation for philosophizing, for Greeks yet to come? The answer to this turns in part on precisely what it is that Alderman's philosophizing amounts to.

To this reviewer, there seems to be no "right" attitude with which a reader may commence reading a book dedicated to proving the subjectivity of human thinking. This would apply as forcefully to Alderman's works as to Alderman's Nietzsche. To amplify this one may note that there seems to be no foundation for the assertion that resolving universal principles on the grounds of the particular is an option for humankind—no foundation for believing that while "biography is interesting, philosophy is still more interesting." This was perhaps a response to Michael Polanyi's neo-Aristotelian discovery of the study of man, history, as the pinnacle of objective inquiry. In such a context, of course, it is rather the particular than the universal, which is resolved. But it is unclear just how far the study of man can be at all subjective, save on the Hobbesian terms that to know man it suffices to read one's own desires. In that case, one's own biography will always be more interesting than philosophy.

Nietzsche's Zarathustra is a sermonizer who confronts mankind with paradoxical if not impossible alternatives. While philosophizing, building metaphysical systems, yields "a kind of warranty" for pre-existent "value systems," it somehow retains the power to lead "one to see what one does not will to see." This should be impossible on the theory presented. But the possibility opens up in the very nature of philosophizing, "reading the text of one's experience."

There are alternate interpretations of the experience. No particular experience binds anyone. "Necessity of commitment holds only in the relation between one's values and one's metaphysical 'facts'." In short, the value *system* is not chosen, it happens to one, printed off like the sprawl of a linotype. The "freedom to choose" lies wholly in the necessarily infinite range of interpretations of experience.

The retreat from experience, i.e., absolutism, the pretense that men make experience rather than values, "normative nihilism" is nothing less than an irresponsible withdrawal from the essentially human work. It leads to the false distinction of spirit and body, the "flight from the body," which is the ground of experience. Alderman presents Nietzsche's overcoming Cartesian dualism as the straightforward return to the body, albeit the "intelligent body." To the body haters Nietzsche has advised a complete separation, that their bodies "become dumb." In this manner Alderman leaves no place for the recognition that mankind are in fact ruled by the masters of the dumb body, who overcame the Cartesian revolution's attempt to make the mind the sole object of scientific inquiry. Those who follow now, distinguishing the various epistemologies, in fact only distinguish the various ways dumb bodies speak to (determine) one another. The supposed opposition between Nietzschean-Heideggerian existentialism and "normative nihilism" is a superficial gloss over the present philosophical predicament.

Alderman's sermonizing thus yields a sermon based on the theme that Nietzsche is the gallant off to slay the dragons of nihilism. That means, of course, that this is a philosopher who has been subject to more than ordinary misunderstanding. For example, it were child's play, in comparison, to consider Plato a communist. Alderman's case is complicated by the fact that the "true" nihilisms almost uniformly turn out to have been not Socratic scoffing ("Nietzsche often simply misunderstood what Socrates was about"), but rather those common pretensions, absolutist opinions, heretofore regarded as the substance of the human. Now that Nietzsche has set the record straight, mankind need never again, though it probably shall, fall prey to the violence of nihilism. And our new Greeks, inspired by Nietzsche, will be exactly as were our old Greeks, those who will show men that they are ignorant of justice!

Alderman's book is well-written and repays a careful reading. It is highly to be recommended for seminars. Its chief defect is that it does begin, after a time, to sound like a training manual for the ministers of wounded spirits.—W. B. A.

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