

Book Review

Nietzsche et la question politique by S. Goyard-Fabre (Paris: Editions J Sirey, 1977). 198 pp.*

Reviewed by W. B. Allen

This work is haunted by an imminent contradiction. Starting from a declaration of Nietzsche's political innocence (especially as to his influence upon Nazism), it nonetheless undertakes progressively and always more insistently to reveal the clarity of Nietzsche's political wisdom. An entire emphasis is placed upon Nietzsche's (transcendent) notion of the "philosopher as the doctor of civilization." This argument attains a dramatic if not historic pitch at p. 116, where Nietzsche's immense superiority to other radicals is affirmed: "Ainsi, ni le révolutionnaire, ni le socialiste, ni l'anarchiste ne peuvent être médecins de la civilisation . . ." Conceded: Goyard-Fabre distinguishes Nietzsche's metaphysical politics from genuine *pratique*. Accordingly, "La pensée nietzschéenne ne se développe nullement en *politologie*; elle n'est pas une philosophie pratique; ce n'est même qu'en la transposant dans un registre qui n'est pas le sien que l'on croit lire en elle les thèmes d'une philosophie opérative." Nevertheless, one may remind the author that medicine is not a theoretical science. To proceed from diagnosis is to be *politologue* by necessity.

Any review could give greater place to the manifestly thorough character of Goyard-Fabre's research (following upon her earlier *Nietzsche et la conversion métaphysique*). But this review is sidetracked by her obtuse use of those researches in an attempt to deny the obvious. It is certainly not the case that anyone ever suggested that Hitler, or even his "theoreticians," were good students of Nietzsche. The argument that they misunderstood Nietzsche little exculpates Nietzsche as a cause of some of the excesses of this century. At a minimum one must recognize that it was largely Nietzsche who made it possible for men to speak without blenching of a legitimating, brutalizing will, just as a Machiavelli in his way or a Hobbes in his removed the stigma attaching to motivations of strict self-interest. Hence, it is more legitimate than Goyard-Fabre believes to debate the issue of Nietzsche's responsibility for certain forms of political expression and endeavor in our time.

A good way to begin that debate would have been to defend Nietzsche by refuting the serious argument of E. R. Dodds that Nietzsche is but Callicles in modern wool. Dodds' "Socrates, Callicles and Nietzsche" is not discussed by Goyard-Fabre. Nonetheless, Goyard-Fabre recognized that access to the dizzying heights of Nietzsche's thought "pardelà toute idéologie et toute praxis" depends upon the denial that Nietzsche agreed with Callicles that "force fait droit." So well does Goyard-Fabre recognize the force of this argument that she virtually opens her book with the declaration that Nietzsche's view of life as "a power of conquest," "a powerful dynamism," and a "creative energy," "*ne célèbre point en cela la culte de la force tel que Calliclès. . .*" This very insistence brings the reader to wonder how Nietzsche's celebration of power differs from that of Callicles.

Dodds answers that Nietzsche is indeed a Callicles for the very reason that Goyard-Fabre finds Nietzsche a “doctor of civilization”: that is, Nietzsche’s opposition to Socratic nihilism (Goyard-Fabre) is but identical to his anti-Platonism (Dodds) and thus accounts for his assumption of the anti-Platonic *persona* which is Callicles. One may question whether in politics Callicles is *the* anti-Plato. Goyard-Fabre does not do so other than implicitly. Accordingly, she fails to refute Dodd’s argument that Nietzsche accepted the standard of $\psi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ or nature as *the* standard of opposition to $\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$ or convention. Callicles accepted that standard before Nietzsche. Dodds may be too little sensitive to Nietzsche’s historicism and the failure of the natural standard which led to historicism. That is probably the reason he can recover an “ethics” from the fine distinction between being “beyond good and evil” and being “beyond good and bad.” Nevertheless, Goyard-Fabre is unable to exploit Dodds’ weakness since in order to explain Nietzsche’s transcending morality she liberate his thought from politics as if to shield it from the natural judgment. She too flattens out history.

Nietzsche’s response to Socratic nihilism is the timeless development of will over against reason. Goyard-Fabre takes Nietzsche as uncircumstanced will, uncircumstanced save as to being the first wholly irresponsible will. Hence, Nietzsche is hardly to blame (responsible) for *any* political endeavors at any time by definition. This is an entirely nonhistorical denial (which is not to say refutation) of Dodds’ unhistorical argument from the peculiar force of the history of ideas. “Nietzsche,” Dodds writes, “was . . . the illegitimate and undesired offspring of Plato, as the Nazis were to be in turn the illegitimate and desired offspring of Nietzsche.” Dodds’ closing footnote graciously exonerates Nietzsche from the Nazi claim to his paternity. In doing so he points implicitly to the significant fact that such a claim might be made. This parallels Goyard-Fabre’s account of Nietzsche’s self-proclaimed struggle with Socrates. There is in each case a seriousness apart from the justice of the claim.—W. B. A.

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