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REVIEW

Michael Ure, *Nietzsche's Therapy: Self-Cultivation in the Middle Works* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), ISBN: 978-0739119969

Though they are coextensive, three reasons can be distinguished for the relevance of Nietzsche to scholars of Foucault. First, Nietzsche is a key historical figure for Foucault, appearing in the final years of the classical episteme and setting it on fire. He is therefore notable from an archaeological or genealogical point of view. Second, Foucault asserted from his first writings that he worked beneath the sun of the great Nietzschean quest, and re-oriented his project at each stage partly in dialogue with the ideas he found in Nietzsche's texts. This makes Nietzsche a key figure for comprehending Foucault's methodological approaches.¹ Third, Nietzsche symbolised for Foucault the possibility of self-overcoming as a form of ethics, and as the opening up of new personal and political possibilities. The significance of Nietzsche in this regard would lie in his capacity to make possible this work on the self, not solely through the ideas of his own texts but also in the exegesis and interpretations made by Nietzsche scholars.² *Nietzsche's Therapy: Self-Cultivation in the Middle Works*, by Michael Ure, has bearing on the first and second aspects as an insightful analysis of Nietzsche's middle-period texts, and their re-activation and transformation of major philosophical themes from late antiquity. However, above all, it exemplifies the third aspect — the one that, as Ladelle McWhorter has proposed, is the most extraordinary characteristic of Foucault's project³ — even as it critically re-assesses what self-overcoming might mean.

Approaching *Nietzsche's Therapy*, I expected to find a book that aimed to show that Nietzsche's middle works, from *Human, All Too Human* to the fourth book of *The Gay Science*, according to Lou-Salomé's periodisation, were influenced by a Stoic ethics of self-cultivation. In fact, this claim, indeed present in *Nietzsche's*

¹ See Keith Ansell-Pearson, "The Significance of Michel Foucault's Reading of Nietzsche: Power, the Subject, and Political Theory," in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader*, edited by Peter Sedgwick (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

² Foucault felt he owed a great debt in this manner to Klossowski as an exegete of Nietzsche. See Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989, 1991), 150.

³ Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

Therapy is radically overshadowed by a daring move that lies at the core of Ure's approach: the assimilation of Nietzsche's discussion of vanity to Freud's analysis of narcissism, and of envy to the psychoanalytical account of the individuation process. Nietzsche's middle works have, in the main, been overlooked by philosophers, the exception being Ruth Abbey's *Nietzsche's Middle Period*, which is a meticulously careful though somewhat dry work of scholarship.⁴ In contrast, *Nietzsche's Therapy* turns Nietzsche's psychological remarks into a cogent philosophical perspective concerned with the ascesis necessary for accepting the inevitability of loss and the appropriate way to relate to other people. Addressing pessimistic ideas of finitude and loss, the book is animated from its dedication to its final page by themes of grief, yet the tone is gay and rhapsodic. Nietzsche once wrote to Carl Fuchs that he had never been, but always felt he had the capacity to be, "characterized... as a psychologist, or as a writer (including poet), or as the inventor of a new kind of pessimism (a Dionysian pessimism, born of strength, which takes pleasure in seizing the problem of existence by the horns), or as an Immoralist."⁵ Ure's Nietzsche is each of these, except perhaps the last if understood as morally and politically subversive.

Ure's essential task is to oppose the aesthetic reading of self-transformation that he identifies with Alexander Nehamas and Foucault. In the first two chapters, he addresses their interpretations. Nehamas, he argues, understands Nietzsche as proposing that one should live one's life so that it corresponds to a heroic narrative, in which every experience is absorbed into a totalising personal style. Highlighting Nietzsche's representation of tragedy in the middle works, Ure, amusingly, shows that the tragic hero is inconsistent, incapable of restraining and moderating himself. The hero wishes to escape finitude by adventuring in search of a lost plenitude, which quest is in fact a symptom of their inability to grieve. Likewise, to pretend that one has willed the totality of one's being is, Ure asserts, a fantasy of omnipotence. The second chapter, previously published by the author in *Foucault Studies* No. 4 (2007), contends that Foucault does Stoic ethics an injustice by assimilating it too quickly to Baudelaire's dandyism. Whereas Foucault understands the telos of this ethics as a continual call for self-overcoming, Ure indicates that such a restlessness was diagnosed by the Stoics themselves as *stultitia*, a pathological refusal of limits. Foucault's account of the Stoics undermines his argument, since he himself documents their view that saw self-overcoming as produced by the need to adapt the self to the possibility of loss and not primarily as an aesthetic project.

⁴ Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche's Middle Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 2nd ed., edited by Christopher Middleton (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1996), 305.

Carefully following Foucault's documentation of the Greco-Roman ethics leads Ure's own analysis astray. Like Foucault he does not differentiate sufficiently between the Stoics and the Epicureans as distinct philosophical schools in late antiquity, and tends to neglect the Cynics. Yet, using this account of self-cultivation from late antiquity as a lens through which to understand the concerns of Nietzsche's middle period works, as is Ure's aim in the subsequent chapters, is an undeniably productive move. There are definite resonances of Seneca and Epictetus in Nietzsche's ideas and imagery, making Ure's claim of intellectual influence justifiable. Moreover, reading self-overcoming as primarily therapeutic, and only secondarily aesthetic, permits Ure to harness Freud's work on narcissism, read as an account of plenitude and totality, to Nietzsche's aphorisms on moderation and self-cultivation. The resulting framework constrains Ure's understanding, orienting his analysis towards themes of wholeness and loss, occasionally requiring tendentious readings of particular aphorisms. This is, however, a low price to pay for the psychological and philosophical riches Ure achieves by means of this approach, and the neglected aspects of Nietzsche's thought that it allows him to explore.

'That which in Nietzsche's work has generally been treated in recent decades as the problematisation of metaphysics, Ure reads primarily as the diagnosis of a psychopathology. Like all neuroses and psychoses in the Freudian model according to Ure, it is produced by the circumvention or denial of loss. Chapter 3 conducts an excellent analysis of Nietzsche's overcoming of Wagner and Schopenhauer in *Human, All Too Human*. Both of Nietzsche's early heroes seduce individuals by the promise of access to the undifferentiated essence behind the diverse forms of existence, yet in fact provoke further suffering and sickness through their denial of human finitude. Ure elaborates this psychological diagnosis of metaphysical themes in the subsequent chapter, which ties Nietzsche's account more firmly to Freud's descriptions of narcissism and melancholia.

The final three chapters, 5-7, are directed towards Nietzsche's account of one's relations with others. Ure first addresses the theme of revenge in the middle works. Though Nietzsche is usually understood as demanding immediate revenge for any felt injury, so as to avoid the danger posed by *ressentiment*, Ure argues that any desire for revenge is the expression of the desire to alleviate feelings of narcissistic loss, produced by the intractable reality of other people. He describes Nietzsche's analysis of melancholic humor as a form of self-torture used to express revenge on one's self in the absence of a viable external object on which to inflict one's rage. Yet he also writes of Nietzsche's use of gentle humour, used not to puncture our image of ourselves or the world, but rather to protect the self and the narcissistic resources it needs to function.

Second, Ure addresses the topic of pity. Usually seen as a series of strong arguments in favour of solitude and apathy towards the plight of others, Ure reads these aphorisms of the middle period, convincingly, I feel, as a critique of seemingly

altruistic actions that are actually motivated by a desire to feel powerful and to circumvent envy of the other. The counterpart to this analysis of pity is the account of friendship in the final chapter. Whereas care provoked by pity is incapable of feeling joy for the successes of the other and is indelibly mediocratic and normalising, friendship in Nietzsche's middle philosophy is based on an idealisation of the potential possessed by the other, through the projection of the emotions attached to our own narcissism into the future as a representation of their highest possibilities. This analysis of the positive ethical role that can be played by the emotional yearning for plenitude as fundamental to friendship and self-overcoming is very subtle and interesting.

My major concern with *Nietzsche's Therapy* is that in offering a psychology and an ethics using Nietzsche's middle works, Ure tends to neglect the many aphorisms that present an analysis of the political. Indicative in this regard is his analysis of revenge. Despite using the language of sovereignty and political power to describe the psychological processes involved, Ure addresses revenge only as a psychopathology: "Nietzsche thus conceives revenge, in whatever guise it appears, as a feverish sickness of the soul that demands therapeutic attention." (162) Yet, for example, as Levinas has shown, ethics can aim higher than a mentality oriented towards revenge without pathologising the latter as always in itself impermissible.⁶ The therapeutic framework has been shown by Foucault to often have an association with apparatuses of normalisation, and there is a tendency in this direction in Ure's text. Though profound and insightful as a descriptive and prescriptive text on self-cultivation and relating to the other, *Nietzsche's Therapy* is more quietist than one might wish. Overall, however, my sense is that those of us who, like Ladelle McWhorter, find in Foucault a source of inspiration for our work and our lives, will see Ure's account of self-cultivation as a fascinating and important contribution.

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⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, "Toward the Other," in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, translated by Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963, 1990).