

REVIEW

Roberto Alejandro, *Nietzsche and the Drama of Historiobiography* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), ISBN: 978-0268020378

In *Nietzsche and the Drama of Historiobiography*, Roberto Alejandro takes up the monumental task of chronicling the changes of Nietzsche's sensibilities in the course of his development as a philosopher. The text is an exegetical analysis that seeks to account for Nietzsche's work as a whole with special attention to the development, refinement, and in some cases, abandonment, of themes and concepts. Readers may find similarity between this text and others that attempt to give a systematic account of Nietzsche work, such as Horst Hutter's *Shaping the Future*. *Nietzsche and the Drama of Historiobiography* is episodic, attention rapidly shifts between Nietzsche's texts, other commentators and Alejandro's critical reflections. The result is a substantive and dense exegetical account of Nietzsche's corpus, organized by theme. The purpose of the text is both hermeneutical and exegetical, and Alejandro also provides his own translations of sections from *Ecce Homo*, *Human all too Human* and other writings, *Daybreak*, and *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

The truly contentious feature of the work are the concepts of "epic spirituality" and "historiobiography," which are only fully explicated towards the end of the text. While the text is long and substantive, it suffers from narrow attention to Nietzsche's writings rather than the biographical features of his life. For example, in the discussion of Nietzsche and Plato, there is no mention of Nietzsche's intention to found his own philosophical school, a clear biographical connection between the two philosophers. Instead, Alejandro draws a connection between Nietzsche and Plato through a reading of Plato's *Republic* and Nietzsche's *The Anti-Christ*, finding the textual evidence sufficient to claim that Nietzsche is deeply indebted to a "Platonic paradigm" made up of elitist anthropological assumptions, ascetic regimens and political arrangements.

Historiobiography therefore bears little relation to biography, it is rather a sense embodied in the work, what other scholars have called the soteriological element of Nietzsche's writing. Alejandro calls historiobiography an *event*, "a sudden awareness that one's life contains the code to decipher all previous events and to foresee future occurrences" (293). The lack of attention to biography proposes a unique problem; if this is so, what 'hermeneutic' role does this event play? Do we as readers need to know the circumstances in which this event occurred, is it a late realization or a feature of all of Nietzsche's writing? That much remains unclear.

The real value of the text is the wealth of information that Alejandro has thematically organized for interested scholars, surveying the changes in Nietzsche's thought as they relate to pertinent concepts like genealogy, becoming, responsibility, truth and deception, and tracking these concepts in relation to the roles of the physiologist, philosopher, psychologist, archaeologist, and philologist. Episodic in structure, rather than chronologically organized, with special attention to Nietzsche's consistency, Alejandro does well to situate Nietzsche in relation to philosophy in general, but the lack of other canonical authors is apparent in the comparison of Nietzsche to Plato. Students of Nietzsche seeking a critical assessment of the topics of genealogy, Nietzsche's speculative historical claims, Nietzsche's multiple diagnostics of nihilism, or the relationship between nature and history in Nietzsche's thought should not overlook this text.

Evaluating Nietzsche's consistency, Alejandro focuses on the themes of slave morality, free will, interiority, responsibility, becoming, and how they relate to Nietzsche's claims about truth, actuality and nature. His overall argument is that three themes are central to understanding Nietzsche's work, the "metaphysics of meaning" or the individual's struggle to reconcile oneself with the world, "the unconscious" or the hidden etiology of human action and thought, and "the philosophy of reconciliation". The tension raised by the philosophy of reconciliation can be formulated as follows: if nature or becoming is innocent, how can anyone be responsible or guilty given that human agency is contingent on natural phenomena? Alejandro argues that Nietzsche must engage in fiction as philosophy, in order to provide thematic archetypes such as the Dionysian and Apollonian artistic drives, noble and slave morality, sickness and health, presenting these archetypes in a dramatic narrative that culminates in the life of a thinker. Alejandro writes:

Nietzsche's philosophy is an attempt to endow life with the significance it lacks, through myths, art and genealogical stories, and by posing questions that, for him, are turning points in human history. Unknowingly at times, and at other times utterly self-consciously, he constructs an epic story of his life, which achieves its highest meaning in his conclusion that he is both the awareness of all past missteps and the embodiment of the pregnant potentialities of all of human history (8).

On Alejandro's account, then, "epic spirituality" is a dramatic endeavor which positions a thinker in a position to right the wrongs of the historical record, such that human history takes on a meaning which ultimately results in the life of a single person. Rather than focusing on a few examples of contradictory positions, Alejandro's critical reflections cut to the core of Nietzsche's arguments for constructing a healthy culture, and his prescriptions for becoming an authentic thinker. He points to a great tension that Nietzsche could not resolve between the demands one ought to make in the face of modern nihilistic viewpoints and the responsibility of the individual towards her own development. Given so much attention to the experimental features of Nietzsche's work, Alejandro does not seem to find satisfying the claim that Nietzsche's positions are often strategically opposed to popular sentiments of

his time. Such a conception attempts to bridge the relation between reality and need, something that cannot be done in an attempt to exhaust the works in a thematic unity.

Not to demerit his work, as the claim that Nietzsche is driven by an epic spirituality, while not wholly novel, is convincingly argued. We can think of this claim in the following way: if knowledge of the truth is required for self-cultivation - or, one must not deceive oneself in order to develop one's inner strengths, - the lapses in historical possibility that could have led to cultures with alternative values become sites in which the struggle for self-understanding can be situated. 'Historical errors,' the history of necessary lies, becomes the subject matter through which one approaches philosophy as a kind of self-therapy. Alejandro's conceit is that the unity of self knowledge and universalizable, prescriptive knowledge can lead to reconciliation between historical 'error' and the suffering of the individual struggling to find meaning. But in the author's estimation, does Nietzsche achieve such a goal, or is he merely motivated by it? This is a question I leave to readers of this text, one that will surely be valued by students of Nietzsche for its thorough attempt to expose the inner workings of the tortured philosopher.

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