

4-2004

Book Review of Philip Pothen's "Nietzsche and the Fate of Art"

Murray Skees

University of South Carolina - Beaufort, mskees@uscb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/beaufort_humanities_facpub



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Theory and Criticism Commons](#)

Publication Info

Published in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, ed. Jack Zupko, Volume 42, Issue 2, 2004, pages 227-229.

© 2014 The Johns Hopkins University Press. This article first appeared in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42:2, 227-229.

Reprinted with permission by Johns Hopkins University Press.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Humanities at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact SCHOLARC@mailbox.sc.edu.



PROJECT MUSE®

Nietzsche and the Fate of Art (review)

Murray Skees

Journal of the History of Philosophy, Volume 42, Number 2, April 2004, pp.
227-229 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2004.0035>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/54659>

veals in structural transparency, from the freedom of willing in the *Philosophy of Right* to freedom beyond willing in absolute Spirit. The body of this book contributes an excellent new commentary on Hegel's conception of freedom, while in his footnotes Dudley offers a rich counterpoint to his own themes in frequently lengthy excursions on much of the relevant literature.

However, although Dudley notes at the outset (10–11) that Hegel's and Nietzsche's styles are so different as to require a different style of interpretive treatment, he seems to have forgotten this promise by the time he reaches his discussion of Nietzsche. Instead, Dudley breaks arguments down into their various elements, revealing symmetries to obtain between and among these, in the service of a quasi-dialectical method that sees Nietzsche's thought advance by overcoming its own internal inadequacies. Such a method of analysis seems well suited to Hegel, but it is less persuasive in treating Nietzsche's much more amorphous work, especially as any chronological approach to Nietzsche, which might ground such a developmental claim, is explicitly eschewed. Frequent extended quotation of Nietzsche throughout makes that incongruity of styles particularly strident.

Dudley's admittedly Hegelian reading (176) of Nietzsche describes an arc of development in strategies for obtaining freedom: from the enslavement to simple material needs in "disgregation" (a coinage of Werner Hamacher's, apparently, who is cited, but not as the source of this term), through the partial freedom of the moral will, to the self-determined noble will, which itself is *aufgehoben* by the tragic will. The dynamics of this process are complicated, and laying them out constitutes the lion's share of the analysis. One must forge one's own will, we read, by "giving birth to oneself as a living whole," something accomplished by "integrating the chaos that results from the destruction of the moral will." This feat of "integration" is itself first accomplished by giving oneself "customs" which, however, soon become a new form of unfreedom; what ultimately is needed is "a complementary combination of nobility and modernity, of setting oneself apart from and holding oneself open to the chaotic stimuli beyond one's measure" (177). These are just the barest bones on which Dudley hangs a lot of flesh—not all of which appears natural there. Dudley articulates Nietzsche's ideas in sentences like these: "Recall that the sovereign, noble will is the offspring of the genius of giving birth applied by the individual to herself. Now the transformative destruction of this will results from such a reflexive application of the genius of impregnation; the individual transgresses her own measure, going outside herself in search of new material with which she can be impregnated" (180). To my ear, this does not resonate with Nietzsche's discourse. Indeed, one might suppose from such a passage that Dudley engages the rhetoric of gender studies and, given the prevalence of "masculine" virtues in Nietzsche's attitude, his use of the feminine pronoun is certainly provocative. However, neither is this the case; Dudley's usage seems a mere gesture, despite the questions it raises.

In sum, *Hegel, Nietzsche and Philosophy* provides a detailed map of Hegel's thinking about freedom, and a rich and rigorous reconstruction of Nietzsche's thoughts on the same theme, although Dudley's analytical style is better suited to the former than to the latter task. Nietzsche is a dangerous thinker, as history has repeatedly shown, only when he is taken to be offering arguments that must persuade by virtue of the "uncoercive coercion" of rationality. Thus, plausible reconstructions of Nietzsche's "teachings" run a great risk when they are insufficiently qualified by sensitive attention to his style.

PAUL S. MIKLOWITZ

Cal Poly State University

Philip Pothen. *Nietzsche and the Fate of Art*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002. Pp. x + 235. Paper, \$29.95.

Most scholarship argues that Nietzsche grants art a position of vital importance for culture, history, and philosophy. Philip Pothen seeks to challenge this general view of Nietzsche

while at the same time raising new questions about Nietzsche's thoughts on art and how Nietzsche's views on art relate to his philosophical concerns. He does not locate Nietzsche's "deep suspicion and at times hostility" (1) toward art in a specific period of Nietzsche's thought, but instead traces it from the notebooks of the 1870s through Nietzsche's so-called "positivist period" to the very end of his productive life. The result is an honest attempt to recognize Nietzsche's ambivalent and at times hostile attitude toward that which is often times unquestionably admired.

Although the *Birth of Tragedy* is the central text for most scholarship about Nietzsche's thoughts on art, this scholarship does not generally look to contemporaneous unpublished private writings. By conducting a close reading of Nietzsche's first published work in juxtaposition with selections from the *Nachlass*, Pothen shows that even as early as the 1870s, Nietzsche was developing some of the major themes of his subsequent writings on art. Nietzsche had begun to make decisive breaks with conceptual presuppositions inherited from Schopenhauer and the Kantian philosophical framework as well as from Wagner.

Nietzsche's earlier belief in a rebirth of the Dionysian through works of genius such as Wagner's was severely criticized by Nietzsche himself in his 1886 Preface to the *Birth of Tragedy*. The second chapter of this book looks at Nietzsche's criticism of the concept of "genius" and the recognition of the "death of art" in modern artists such as Wagner. Pothen shows that Nietzsche gives a highly naturalistic account of genius, criticizing traditional notions that elevate the genius to a higher status than the merely talented artist.

According to Pothen, the decadence of modern art, the deception of the artist, and the "end of art" suggests a type of "sickness" for Nietzsche. Art "represents a suppression of the instincts of becoming" (56). Pothen claims the future of art and its possible "death" are much more severe for Nietzsche than, for instance, Hegel. The challenging conclusion is that Nietzsche, not Hegel, properly announces the "death of art" in modernity.

What, however, of the "monological work of art" that Nietzsche first formulates in the *Gay Science*? By considering the fourth part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a decisive conclusion and not an inferior appendage, Pothen argues that this work "for All and None" illustrates "a radical and perhaps impossible orientation" (9) that the godless artist must take up according to Nietzsche. It is a creative position "in favor of solitude [*Einsamkeit*], forgetting [*vergessen*] and inner strength" (74).

Chapter four of Pothen's book addresses the concept of the "will to power." Pothen argues that it is a "metaphysical principle" of explanation that nevertheless undermines certain other metaphysical concepts such as a unified "subject" as well as traditional aesthetic concepts such as artistic autonomy. Pothen challenges Heidegger's claim that art is the "highest expression" of the will to power for Nietzsche while utilizing Heidegger's insights into art to highlight and question previous themes in the book such as the reduction of art to physiology (117-32).

Chapter five concentrates on Nietzsche's analysis of the psychology of production and his critique of the Kantian themes of "disinterestedness" and the "judgment of taste." The book ends with a look at Nietzsche's final productive year of 1888. In works such as *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche, Pothen suggests, holds decadent works such as Wagner's as representative of all art produced "in the time of the death of God and the revaluation of all values" (169). For Nietzsche, modernity's inability to understand its own time might "herald the death or the end of this art of works of art" (169).

The appendix speaks to the encounters with Nietzsche's "madness" in writers such as Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot, Lacoue-LaBarthe, and Foucault. Pothen argues that these individuals focus on the common theme of madness, which "is intimately bound up with the question of art" (11). However, "it is not Nietzsche's madness that denies the work, but rather Nietzsche's reason" that denies art a place in a future "without God" (218).

Pothen gives us much to consider and reconsider regarding Nietzsche's complex attitudes on art and its production. This book will interest anyone concerned with not only the "fate of art" for Nietzsche, but also anyone concerned with the question of art's "autonomy" in traditional discourses on aesthetics. Pothen compels us to accept that Nietzsche might have in fact *meant* what "what we fear he did mean"; to deny this is to take up,

without pause, the very presuppositions Nietzsche criticized (200). Our task then is to search these new seas, set out for this new horizon, and to reevaluate what in light of Nietzsche's criticism of art he could have envisioned in his "new" art.

MURRAY SKEES

University of Kentucky

James A. Good, editor. *The Early American Reception of German Idealism*. 5 vols. Bristol: Thoemmes, 2002. Pp. 2826. Cloth, \$635.00.

The five volumes of this set reprint an impressive collection of long unavailable texts by five largely forgotten nineteenth-century American authors, each of whom was familiar with at least some aspects of the philosophical revolution that began in Germany with the appearance of Kant's *Critiques* and whose own writings were deeply influenced by German Idealism. Largely due to the efforts of these five authors, idealism began to rival empiricism and common-sense realism as a major philosophical movement in the United States by the end of the nineteenth century and was an important part of that intellectual context from which later movements, notably pragmatism, grew. But despite the obvious importance of these authors and texts for understanding both the American "reception" of German Idealism and the history of American philosophy, they are today virtually unknown and most of the volumes reprinted in this set are exceedingly rare. Every student of the history of American thought must therefore be grateful to Thoemmes Press and to James A. Good for making these important works once again available. Each volume is prefaced by an excellent introduction summarizing the essential biographical and historical facts, the relevant intellectual context, and the immediate and lasting influence of the work or author in question. Good's introductions also include insightful, albeit brief, comments on the philosophical contents and distinctive character of each volume. Indeed, one of the pleasures of perusing these volumes is the opportunity this affords to appreciate the originality and philosophical talent of some of these long neglected authors, particularly Marsh, Hickok, and Everett.

Volume One reprints what would appear to be the first book on Hegelian "psychology" to be published in America: *Psychology; or a View of the Human Soul*, by Frederick Augustus Rauch (1841). Rauch (1806–41) was a German emigrant classicist who became enamored with Hegelian philosophy during his student years and was particularly influenced by the Heidelberg theologian Charles Daub. In America, Rauch became head of the Classics Department at Marshall College, where he also taught theology and philosophy. Described as "the first enthusiastic Hegelian in the United States," Rauch's Hegelianism was of the "Old" or "Right" variety. Despite its title, "psychology" is the topic of only the second half of this volume, the first part of which is devoted to "anthropology." These divisions correspond almost exactly to the similarly titled sections of Hegel's "philosophy of subjective spirit," which is the obvious model for Rauch's *Psychology*. The latter, however, displays none of the dialectical power of Hegel's work and is larded with empirical observations and sundry opinions on a variety of topics. It is perhaps illuminating to discover that American "Hegelianism" can trace its roots to such an eccentric and unrigorous work, which was widely read and even adopted as a textbook by several colleges in the mid-nineteenth century and thus can be described as the book that began the process of "introducing Hegelianism to America."

Volume Two contains *The Remains of the Rev. James Marsh, D.D.: Late President and Professor of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy in the University of Vermont; with a Memoir of His Life*, edited by Joseph Torrey (1843). Marsh (1794–42), who was reputedly "the first American to study Kant," was a polymath who trained at Dartmouth College and at Andover and Union Seminaries as a classicist, theologian, and philosopher and then served for many years as the President of the University of Vermont. In addition to translating Herder and others, Marsh published the first American edition of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*, with an