

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Arnulf Zweig and Thomas E. Hill Jr. and trans. Arnulf Zweig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 193 [4:392]. Bracketed numbers indicate volume and page in the standard Prussian Academy edition.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 203 [4:402].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 222 [4:421].

<sup>4</sup> See Bruce Aune, *Kant's Theory of Morals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 28–34, 41–43.

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Michael Steven Green, *Nietzsche and the Transcendental Tradition*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

This is one of the most important recent books on Nietzsche. Green focuses on the oft-ignored influence of the neo-Kantian thinker Afrikan Spir on Nietzsche's views, in particular his error-theoretic claim that all our judgments are false. If Nietzsche's grounds were that "the world is substantially different from the way we think it is," then Nietzsche would be claiming "knowledge of the world as it really is" and so would contradict himself (9). However, Spir supposedly provides Nietzsche with an alternative based on Kant's antinaturalist theory of judgment. Empirical judgments turn out to be necessarily false because of "contradictions that can be drawn out of our everyday idea of an empirical object" and "it is these contradictions that show that our beliefs about the world are false, rather than some comparison between the way we think about the world and the way the world is" (10).

Given the ascribed antinaturalist theory of judgment, Green's Nietzsche cannot stop with the error theory. "Kant and Spir argue that the only way an objectively valid judgment about an object is possible is if the qualities attributed to the object are *unconditionally* united in the mind, that is, united in an atemporal and necessary manner" (96). Thoughts, and the subjects that have them, must be timeless. There must also be a "necessary connection between thought and its object" (96). Reality, on the other hand, isn't timeless: there is change, or becoming—this is Nietzsche's naturalism. Thus, the connection between thoughts and reality fails, there is no timeless subject to have thoughts, and so: "We do not think" (12). It follows that there are no thoughts to be false—no error theory—and naturalism itself "cannot be thought" (7). Green calls this Nietzsche's "nongnognitivism" and concludes that the contradictions between Nietzsche's naturalism, error theory, and nongnognitivism mean that he "did not have *one* considered epistemological position" (163)—a rather mild way of putting it.

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Obviously there are many balls in the air—too many for a short book. Textual evidence for ascribing the error theory is persuasive; however, the evidence for ascribing his specific antinaturalist theory of judgment to Nietzsche and Spir is not. Green takes Henry Allison's interpretation of Kant as a starting point (some indication that Allison's Kant is not uncontested would be appropriate). This Kant, including a particular interpretation of the concern with "objective validity," leads Green to see Spir as focusing on the puzzle of how the "timeless unity of apperception *connects* with the temporal flow of sensation" (47). This is the fundamental "tension between the apperceptive and phenomenalist elements in Kant" (43) that Green, and supposedly Spir, thinks "Kant tries unsuccessfully to bridge through the transcendental schematism" (47). There is no resolving the tension and so "the only objectively valid judgment that is possible is about an atemporal and absolutely simple unity" (48). The cited Spir texts are unresponsive: association by itself cannot explain judgment and logical laws are different from physical ones, but there is no fundamental failure of reference because of the necessity, timelessness, and unity of thought.

The misreadings arise from ignoring Spir's phenomenism. Given Green's interpretation, he naturally insists that Spir is not "a sort of neo-Kantian phenomenalist":<sup>1</sup> "Given that Spir entirely denies the role of sensation in our knowledge of the world, the *last* thing that he can be called is a phenomenalist" (176 n. 5). This seems hasty at the least and much depends on what we mean by "the world"—I suspect that Green, influenced by Allison, is simply assuming that no "two world" view is in the offing here.<sup>2</sup> Spir asserts, again and again, that "that which we cognize as body [*Körper*] is really nothing other than our own sensations".<sup>3</sup> However, "the concept of bodies and their content [*Inhalt*] are two different things" (1:123). The *content*, namely our sensations, does not exist independently of us even though, unlike say pain and pleasure, we think of them as foreign and external (1:74). Furthermore, these sensations obey laws that the cognizing subject has no control over (1:16, 2:68). These sensations are in flux but they hang together in certain groups.<sup>4</sup> The cognizing subject "conceives of a connected group of sensations as *a* substance, as *a* body" (2:73). Thus, "we cognize our sensations as something which in truth they aren't at all, namely as a world of substances in space" (2:73) independent of the subject (1:123). "This independence of existence lies in our concept of objects itself" (1:123).

The error theory is still there, but it is not just an error theory. The explanation for error is our "presupposition that experience *must agree* with our laws of thought," however:

[W]ith this presupposition the subject is not completely in error. For although the given objects (the sensations) do not *logically* agree with the laws of our thought, i.e. they are not truly self-identical things, are not true substances, they do *in effect* [*faktisch*] fit and conform to the laws. This is because our sensations are so established by nature

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that we can cognize them without real incongruence as a world of bodies in space. In this lies the empirical truth of this cognition (2:74).<sup>5</sup>

Not all phenomenals are alike, but surely this is one of them. Surprisingly Green does not discuss this material. It is hard to fit the supposed centrality of worries about reference with this Spir. It is just a fact that we have representations whose unique essence is to refer (1:64). There is no special problem referring to sensations since they lie within us.<sup>6</sup> Even if Spir is committed to empirical judgments' being false, he does think they can convey information about reality. They manage to because the reality of sensations does "in effect [*factisch*]" conform. Apparently Spir, pace Green, hasn't absorbed Sellars's lessons or Allison's Kant—no surprise perhaps since Allison's targets included most nineteenth-century Kantians.<sup>7</sup>

Since for Spir empirical judgments do convey information despite being false, we can also give better accounts of how Nietzsche could (i) accept an error theory and still emphasize the empirical (as Green admits), and (ii) repeatedly talk of empirical judgments as "approximations" and as useful for "designation and communication" (something Green ignores).<sup>8</sup> This Spir would also not force Nietzsche to an implausible "necognitivism" according to which we simply do not think. Certainly Nietzsche would reject Spir's metaphysical extravagance of the unconditioned and the unitary self. Indeed, the phenomenalist Spir points in the direction that many others, and so perhaps Nietzsche, historically took: neutral monism with the doctrine, as Carnap put it, that "the given is subjectless".<sup>9</sup>

However, Spir is not a source for better error-theory arguments. Two arguments for an error theory perhaps avoid a comparison with sensations: (i) the argument that all true claims have to be analytic (1:166) and (ii) the "fundamental antinomy": the given is not self-identical, thus contains elements that are foreign to the real, but where could something foreign to the real come from other than the real (1:379–80)? Neither of these is better than the arguments Green rejects on philosophical grounds. Furthermore, Spir does not consistently think that empirical objects are contradictory: "The objects of experience are therefore neither identical with themselves, nor logically contradictory in themselves, and they stand neither in contradiction nor in agreement to the fundamental law of our thought" (1:197).<sup>10</sup> Instead he emphasizes our thinking of sensations as unconditioned when in fact they are not—a comparative argument.

Finally, what clearly motivates Green's interpretation is his *philosophical* view that naturalism (and empiricism) cannot account for reference, the normativity of meaning, and the normativity of judgment. His presentation, though, is not clear enough to persuade both that these issues cannot be distinguished and that naturalism fails. He refers to Sellars and Rorty for antinaturalist arguments, but if the interpretation is to rest on the philosophical failure of naturalism then one cannot ignore, as Green does, contemporary naturalist

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projects aimed at providing just such accounts. Indeed, given the admitted empiricist and naturalist strains, naturalism must be so implausible that the principle of charity pushes against ascribing it to Nietzsche. However, neither are naturalist accounts carefully assessed, nor is the antinaturalist account, with its own difficulties central as they are to Green's noncognitivist Nietzsche, assessed for relative philosophical plausibility.

Green's book will make us pay much needed attention to the influence of neo-Kantians like Spir on Nietzsche. The focus on this influence, and on the interpretative relevance of Kantian concerns in general, will ensure that it must be read by any serious Nietzsche scholar.

NADEEM J. Z. HUSSAIN

*Stanford University*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Steven D. Hales and Rex Welshon, *Nietzsche's Perspectivism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 38.

<sup>2</sup> Spir's own interpretation of Kant appears to be of the "intentional object" variety (1:69–70). Cf. Richard E. Aquila, *Representational Mind: A Study of Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, *Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> A. Spir, *Denken und Wirklichkeit. Versuch einer Erneuerung der kritischen Philosophie*, 2d ed. (Leipzig: 1877), 1:113, 1:23.

<sup>4</sup> According to Spir, Kant's failure to recognize this is his fundamental mistake (*ibid.*, 1:16, 1:68–69).

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche may simply have accepted Spir's response to what Green calls "the problem of the flexibility of conceptualization: no matter what the world is like, it appears *possible* for our concepts to accommodate themselves" (18). Spir just declares that the concept of body is independent of our changing opinions and cannot be changed (*ibid.*, 1:124–125).

<sup>6</sup> See 1:11, 1:27–29, 1:37–39, 1:45, 1:64, 1:71–72, 1:82–83.

<sup>7</sup> Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Talk of "approximation" occurs in the very first quote Green uses as evidence to ascribe an error theory to Nietzsche (17). The second quote is from *Beyond Good and Evil*: 21. For Green's Nietzsche one continues to make judgments "because one affirms the self-organization and self-control that stands behind the judgment" (161).

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Carnap, *Der logische Aufbau der Welt, Philosophische Bibliothek Band 514* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1998), §65. Carnap draws the connection to Nietzsche himself. Bernard Williams, "Wittgenstein and Idealism," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 149, points to neutral monism as one attempt, though he thinks it unsuccessful, to deal with the problems for the Nietzschean notion of the self discussed by Green (152).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. 1:191.