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Nietzsche on the Decadence and Flourishing of Culture, by Andrew Huddleston. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xiv + 194.

Those of us who see the historical figures we work on as sources of philosophical insight, rather than merely of historical interest, will sooner or later run up against the question of how to handle those parts of our chosen figures' views that are morally objectionable. Those of us who work on Nietzsche, and consider him to be a source of significant philosophical insight, face this problem in an especially troublesome form. It is not merely that Nietzsche's views, when they are objectionable, are particularly egregiously so (though this is probably true), nor merely that such objectionable views occur within the texts with an especially high frequency compared to other figures from the history of philosophy (though this is probably also true). Rather, the difficulty is that Nietzsche's objectionable views are—in various different ways—very intimately bound up with what is most genuinely important and interesting about his work. Nietzsche is the self-described 'immoralist', indeed the 'Anti-Christ'; the central thread of brilliance running through his work, from start to finish, is his vehement and multifaceted critique of morality. In 1981, Bernard Williams wrote that '[i]t is certain, even if not everyone has yet come to see it, that Nietzsche was the greatest moral philosopher of the past century. This was, above all, because he saw how totally problematical morality, as understood over many centuries, has become, and how complex a reaction that fact, when fully understood, requires' (Williams 2014, p. 183). Williams may ultimately be right here, but his way of putting it paints a picture of a rather more sober Nietzsche than the texts themselves sometimes suggest. For Nietzsche's 'complex reaction' to the problems of our inherited morality includes, among other things, bizarre and horrendous theories about racial difference, the regular use of anti-Semitic tropes, suggestions about 'removing' the weak and sick from society, and the advocacy of slavery. And, of course, Nietzsche's work also stands under the ever-present shadow of his later appropriation by the Nazis.

It is one of the great merits of Andrew Huddleston's book that he attempts to think seriously about these issues. In presenting us with Nietzsche as a 'philosopher of culture', as someone concerned throughout his work with the

nature and value of culture, Huddleston inevitably comes face to face with some of the darker aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy. Huddleston does not shy away from these parts of the text, tackling Nietzsche's (seeming) call for the elimination of 'the weak' from society, as well as his views on slavery. As a result, *Nietzsche on the Decadence and Flourishing of Culture* is admirable in its attempt to face up to and navigate the difficulties of a philosopher whose enduring philosophical legacy can never be fully disentangled from the world-historical horrors that followed him. Huddleston is not, I think, always fully successful in this endeavor. Nonetheless, it is a bold and impressive endeavour, and leaves us with much that is of value in helping us to think about Nietzsche, and to understand what is of deep and lasting importance in his work.

The book's eight compact chapters cover a set of interrelated themes connected to the notion of culture within Nietzsche's philosophy. For the most part, each chapter can stand alone as a treatment of its particular topic; together, they form a sustained presentation of Nietzsche as a 'philosopher of culture'. Officially, Huddleston's opponent in the book is the 'individualist' reading of Nietzsche. On this view, Nietzsche from the mid-to-late 1870s onwards is concerned primarily with the flourishing of certain 'great' individuals, rather than with culture. The story—a very familiar one in the contemporary literature—is roughly as follows. The Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* has high hopes for a glorious cultural rejuvenation, inspired by the 'tragic culture' of the pre-Socratic Greeks, and brought about through a new mythology born from the music of Richard Wagner. After a falling out with Wagner, however, these hopes are crushed, and Nietzsche loses faith in the possibility of cultural regeneration. Instead, he turns his attention towards great individuals as the main locus of value, and from this point onwards, to the extent that Nietzsche retains an interest in culture, it is primarily with a view to how a given culture either helps or hinders the flourishing of these higher types.

Huddleston, in fact, accepts quite a lot of the basic ideas that motivate these individualist readings. He agrees that 'Nietzsche does appear to give up hope for this sort of integrated society, united by a shared form of life and realizing a magnificent collectivist culture', and acknowledges that, as a result of this, 'when it comes to more recent cultures [...] Nietzsche emphasizes the role of a few great individuals as the isolated pillars of the culture' (p. 55). Given this concession, I think it would be a mistake to see Huddleston's overall point in this book as fundamentally one of *opposition* to these individualist readings, for he doesn't really deny what might be thought the individualist's most important claims. (An exception might be in relation to Brian Leiter, whose analysis does seem committed—as not all broadly 'individualist' readings are—to the idea that Nietzsche's mature cultural criticism is really concerned *only* with the question of whether or not a culture promotes the flourishing of 'higher types' (Leiter 2015, Chapter 4).)

Instead, what Huddleston offers is a sort of useful corrective: in focusing so much on Nietzsche's interest in great individuals, as scholarship has done in recent years, we have missed a very interesting and important facet of his work. For even in his mature work, Nietzsche remains deeply engaged with the topic of culture in its own right—if nothing else, 'he still maintains this cultural flourishing as an ideal, against which we compare unfavourably' (p. 125)—and we will lose sight of something of deep value in Nietzsche's work if we do not acknowledge and reflect on this fact.

The book begins with *The Birth of Tragedy*, and the 'existential' conception of culture we find therein (Chapter 1). At this point, according to Huddleston, Nietzsche's understanding of the value of culture for humanity is primarily a functional one: culture is good because and insofar as it helps us to deal with existential suffering and despair. Huddleston traces this conception of the role of culture through Nietzsche's later work, drawing on the parts of the *Genealogy of Morals* that understand Judeo-Christian morality and asceticism as providing such existential solace—albeit at great cost. But this is not the conception of culture that Huddleston is most interested in. Instead—after an illuminating discussion of the concept of *Bildung* in Nietzsche's thought (Chapter 2)—Huddleston presents us with an alternative conception of culture, the 'collectivist' conception (Chapter 3). Here the idea is that a culture 'is the form of life of a people, looked upon as if it were a work of art' (p. 45); it is in a way 'a kind of *Bildung* writ large', with something like the sort of unity and vitality that one sees in a great individual now manifested at the macro-level within a whole culture. In this way, culture is seen by Nietzsche as something valuable in its own right—and indeed valuable in part due to certain quasi-aesthetic features, in particular the 'unity of artistic style in all the life expressions of a people' (*Untimely Meditations* I:1—all translations of Nietzsche's texts follow those used by Huddleston).

Here and elsewhere in the book, Huddleston's emphasis on lesser-known and primarily early works from Nietzsche's corpus is both a strength and a limitation. It is certainly good to see some of the oft-overlooked *Untimely Meditations* receive such careful and sustained attention. (The 'David Strauss' essay forms the basis for Huddleston's account of the collectivist conception of culture, and 'Schopenhauer as Educator' plays a key role in his revisionary take on Nietzsche's position on slavery later in the book—on which more later.) We are also treated to some very interesting discussion of Nietzsche's 1872 lecture series 'On the Future of Our Educational Institutions' (in the *Bildung* chapter) and his unpublished 1871 essay 'The Greek State' (again, in the slavery chapter). I found these parts of the book very enlightening, and can see them laying the groundwork for plenty of future research fruitfully tracing connections between these comparatively neglected early works and Nietzsche's more mature thought. At the same time, the intense focus on works produced in the years 1871-74 tempers somewhat the impact of Huddleston's claim that the collectivist conception of culture not only

persists but becomes ‘increasingly central’ (p. 27) in Nietzsche’s thought. The textual evidence given for this claim is drawn primarily from the final sections of *The Antichrist*, in which Nietzsche discusses in turn the cultures of the Roman empire, Moorish Islam, and the Renaissance; these sections do seem to indicate a persistence of the relevant idea through to this late-period work. But on their own, these parts of the text do not seem quite enough to establish the *centrality* of the collectivist conception of culture—a conception that, as Huddleston admits, ‘gets its clearest and most succinct formulation’ in the ‘David Strauss’ essay (p. 45)—to Nietzsche’s later work. (One might interpret the final chapter of the book—in which Huddleston considers Nietzsche’s critique of the Christian-moral outlook as a case study of cultural interpretation—as further indirect evidence, in the form of something like a proof-of-concept.)

In Chapter 4, Huddleston turns to the relationship between the ‘great individual’ and his surrounding culture, aiming to show the various complex forms of interaction that are at work here. Leiter, in his review of the book, dismisses much of this chapter as ‘mak[ing] points that no one disputes’ (Leiter 2019), such as that the effects of culture on great individuals can be mixed, rather than solely negative. (The ‘slave revolt’ of the *Genealogy of Morals* made the human being an ‘interesting’ animal, for instance.) But here again it is useful to see the book’s goal as less oppositional in its argumentative structure than Leiter’s response suggests. The main purpose of the book, as I see it, is more to highlight and re-centre aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy which, even if they are not outright *denied* by other scholars, have nonetheless tended to remain underappreciated in the literature’s intense focus on the nature of the great individual. Huddleston’s discussion in this chapter is a useful reminder that, in various different respects, the very question of the nature of the great individual cannot be fully understood separately from the emergence of that individual from within, and their continuing interaction with, the cultural situation that surrounds them. To be great is, in part, to be great *relative* to one’s surroundings; to create original and innovative art depends in certain familiar ways on what came before. And the particular form that one’s greatness takes will get its concrete content from the cultural backdrop: one could not properly grasp the greatness in Beethoven’s music, for example, without understanding it as shot through with the cultural themes and symbols of Christianity. Perhaps no one denies, or need deny, any of this. But it is helpful nonetheless to have it made explicit, to help us see how Nietzsche’s interest in great individuals is not, itself, something that stands independent of the interest in culture that Huddleston is seeking to bring more clearly into view.

It is in Chapter 5, focused on the theme of *décadence* in Nietzsche’s work, that Huddleston begins his engagement with some of the more unappealing aspects of Nietzsche’s writing, including the later appropriation of these themes by the Nazis. The endgame of this chapter is to put Nietzsche’s

(seeming) remarks about the ‘elimination’ of the sick and weak elements of society into an interpretive context that avoids a problematic ‘white-washing’ (p. 5), while at the same time undermining at least some of the uglier readings that these passages suggest.

The chapter begins with a tightly argued analysis of the notion of *décadence* (the italicized and accented form is treated by Huddleston as a sort of technical term in Nietzsche’s work) via Nietzsche’s case-study of Socrates. Socrates’s *décadence*, argues Huddleston, consists in his conception of his ‘lower’ animal drives as not really a part of himself, and his attempt to subdue or extirpate these drives through the tyranny of the faculty of reason. In general, *décadence* in the individual is ‘characterized by a particular self-destructive pattern’ (p. 81): it begins with an experience of rift within the self, and the scapegoating of a certain part of oneself as the source of the problem, leading the *décadent* individual to seek an extreme solution through self-tyranny or attempted extirpation of the scapegoated part. But these extreme solutions are, themselves, expressions of *décadence*; the problem is thus made worse. By contrast, the non-*décadent* individual will seek neither to tyrannize over nor to remove such parts, but rather to transfigure and reincorporate them into the self.

With this model of the *décadent* individual in hand, Huddleston is able to draw on the previously established micro-macro relationship between individual and culture to argue that those passages in which Nietzsche appears in favour of the eradication of certain groups of ‘weak’ or ‘sick’ people are, at any rate, not properly compatible with his own best view of the matter. For, as we have seen, the drive to extirpate a ‘problematic’ part of oneself is, itself, a characteristically *décadent* reaction; the same holds true at the level of a whole culture. In offering this treatment, Huddleston aims to acknowledge the parts of Nietzsche’s text that appear disturbingly congenial to the Nazis’ ‘Final Solution’, but also to move towards delegitimizing such a reading. For Nietzsche’s own commitments about the nature of *décadence* either undermine the reading on which he is, in fact, advocating the extermination of groups of people, or in any case show that he *shouldn’t*, given these other commitments, have advocated such. (Huddleston floats both interpretive options, leaving it open which we should prefer.)

As criticisms of the Third Reich go, the charge that Huddleston’s Nietzsche is in a position to make—that it was problematically *décadent*—is perhaps not as pointed nor as to-the-point as we might hope. In any case, it is far from clear that Nietzsche’s preferred non-*décadent* solution, that of ‘incorporating’ the problematic element, is really much better. For at least one form that such cultural incorporation should take, according to Nietzsche, is for these people to function as a slave class, with their labours ‘creat[ing] the material and spiritual conditions that make cultural achievement possible’ (p. 111). It is to Nietzsche’s thoughts on slavery, then, that Huddleston turns in Chapter 6.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche infamously claims that '[e]very enhancement of the type "man" has so far been the work of an aristocratic society—and it will be so again and again—a society that believes in the long ladder of an order of rank and differences in worth between man and man, and that needs slavery [*Sklaverei*] in some sense or other' (§257). 'A good and healthy aristocracy', he writes, '[...] accepts with a good conscience the sacrifice of untold human beings who, *for its sake*, must be reduced and lowered to incomplete human beings, to slaves [*Sklaven*], to instruments' (§258, emphasis in original). From these passages, admits Huddleston, 'an unsavoury picture can emerge of Nietzsche as a defender, indeed a champion, of exploitation of the worst sort: Nietzsche appears to praise a world in which a small elite enhances itself through the subjugation of the rest of mankind, who bear this yoke of servitude and get nothing in return' (p. 97). But this, suggests Huddleston, is something of a misreading. And although his aim in this chapter is primarily exegetical, nonetheless he hopes 'to suggest that Nietzsche's remarks about slavery are somewhat less odious than they can seem, even if they ultimately leave us unsettled' (p. 98).

The main thrust of Huddleston's account is that Nietzsche does not think that this 'subjugation' happens at the expense of the slaves' own interests. The idea is that Nietzsche holds that, for a certain sort of person, the condition of being enslaved and labouring for the benefit of some great cultural achievement ('lugging the stones to build the cathedral' (p. 105), for instance) is in fact the best and most meaningful form of life. Under the right conditions, slavery is, in fact, in the best interests of the slaves themselves. In support of this reading, Huddleston draws heavily on 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in which the notion of a person's life gaining value through its being 'consecrate[d] to culture' is put forth.

There are, it seems to me, several issues with Huddleston's approach to this topic. The first problem is that the apparently 'somewhat less odious' view that Huddleston attributes to Nietzsche strikes me as obviously worse—both philosophically and morally—than the (already very bad) position that we started with. To think of slavery as a necessary evil towards some greater good is certainly a very bad thought, and one that surely involves a number of serious confusions. But to think of slavery as itself in the interest of the people enslaved is, it seems to me, to have a view of the matter that is radically and irredeemably corrupted. Huddleston connects the view he attributes to Nietzsche to that of Aristotle, but this association, though accurate, is so much the worse for Nietzsche. (Williams, contrasting the pre-Socratic understanding of slavery as radical misfortune with Aristotle's awkwardly Panglossian account, remarks that the latter shows that 'if there is something worse than accepting slavery, it consists in defending it' (Williams 2008, p. 111).)

The second issue (which perhaps goes some way toward mitigating the force of the first) is that the evidence that such *is* Nietzsche's position is

somewhat limited. In ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’, the idea is that one might choose, of one’s own accord, this ‘consecration to culture’ as a way of living a meaningful life. Huddleston (correctly, I think) sees Nietzsche as eventually losing faith that people will, in fact, be inclined to do this—instead, they tend to be too caught up in their own petty pursuits and mediocre pleasures. But the original point, Huddleston thinks, remains: for some people, the life that is best *for them*—whether they realize it or not, and whether they will freely pursue it or not—is one of sacrifice for the sake of some greater cultural goal. And thus this point should mediate our interpretation of Nietzsche’s remarks about slavery in *Beyond Good and Evil*. In a couple of footnotes, Huddleston points towards sections of *The Antichrist* in which Nietzsche echoes Aristotelian language about slavery (§54 and §57); beyond this, the main reason we are given to suppose that Nietzsche remains committed to the idea that it is in some people’s own best interests to be ‘consecrate[d] to culture’ is that ‘[t]here is no evidence in *Beyond Good and Evil* or elsewhere in this period that Nietzsche’s views on this score have changed at all from the *Untimely Meditations*’ (p. 122). For the most part, however, the later Nietzsche seems largely uninterested in whether the ‘lower types’ have good and meaningful lives or not.

There is an important question in the background here regarding what, exactly, Nietzsche means when he talks of ‘slavery in some sense or other’. (In fact, the German here is ambiguous: it is not clear whether the ‘in some sense or other’ is supposed to attach to the notion of slavery itself, as Huddleston’s translation has it, or to the idea that slavery is needed—‘needed’ in some sense or other—for a great and aristocratic society.) Huddleston does raise the question of what Nietzsche means by ‘slavery’, and suggests that he is actually using the term in a very broad sense. His reason for thinking so is the following passage from *The Antichrist*:

A high culture is a pyramid: it can stand only on a broad base; its first presupposition is a strong and soundly consolidated mediocrity. Handicraft, trade, agriculture, *science*, the greatest part of art, the whole quintessence of *professional* activity, to sum it up, is compatible only with a mediocre amount of ability and ambition. (§ 57, emphasis in original)

If this ‘broad base’ of ‘mediocrity’ is indeed the same as *Beyond Good and Evil*’s ‘slavery in some sense or other’, then things begin to look somewhat different. If doctors and artists and accountants are to be included, then as Huddleston notes, ‘[t]o be a slave “in some sense or other” [...] needn’t involve being the *literal possession* of someone else [...]. It needn’t, likewise, be a socio-political designation, enforced by government authority [...]. It primarily is a *functional role* that one fills in the cultural whole’ (p. 112, emphasis in original). The problem is that Huddleston doesn’t say more about what this ‘functional role’ amounts to, and without such an account it is far from clear *what* sense of ‘slavery’ is being appealed to such that what

is on the table here is meaningfully described as such at all. Certainly, Nietzsche is not seeking to express the thought that as workers we stand oppressed by a capitalist class, nor the thought that none are free until all are free. Indeed, it is not clear that the sense of 'slavery' that Huddleston wants to attribute to Nietzsche bears any necessary conceptual connections to notions of unfreedom or domination at all. If this is so, then perhaps Huddleston's Nietzsche turns out to be not so horrifying after all: at base, what we seem to be left with is the thought that some people's lives may be meaningful primarily in virtue of some greater whole of which they are a part. And on its own, I do not see that *this* need be thought a deeply problematic idea. But at the same time, it is no longer in any obviously meaningful sense a claim about *slavery*.

Following a brief detour through Nietzsche's metaethical views, or lack thereof (Chapter 7), Huddleston returns in the final chapter to the theme of a culture as a unified entity, akin to a work of art. When this comparison was first introduced earlier in the book, its point was to highlight the way that culture, for Nietzsche, can be a bearer of value in its own right and not merely for the sake of further ends (pp. 48-9). In this final chapter, the idea of culture as akin to a work of art is developed in a new direction. Through an investigation of Nietzsche's critique of the Christian-moral outlook, Huddleston aims to show how Nietzsche's work offers us a distinctive form of cultural critique. By contrast to a 'causal' mode of cultural criticism, which is concerned with the bad *effects* of a culture or cultural phenomenon, Nietzsche's cultural criticism 'involves interpreting social and cultural phenomena, as one might interpret texts or works of art, with an eye toward extracting the meaning or significance of the values that they enshrine, and then attacking them, on broadly ethical grounds, on account of these values' (p. 150). This framing of Nietzsche's project allows Huddleston to make an interesting move: we can (and should) take on board the interpretive tools that this new and powerful form of critique has to offer. But in doing so, we needn't take on board the particular 'ethical grounds' that Nietzsche himself uses in making his evaluative assessments. This suggestion offers an appealingly clear way of cleaving something of deep value in Nietzsche's work apart from some of the views we would better do without. On this account, then, Nietzsche's most significant contribution as a philosopher of culture is one of methodology.

In making this claim, Huddleston's reading of Nietzsche makes a tentative approach towards certain schools of thought that are usually given rather short shrift within mainstream Anglo-American Nietzsche scholarship, at least as it takes place within philosophy departments. Huddleston mentions the Frankfurt School in passing; one also thinks of the uptake, via Foucault, of the notion of genealogy-as-methodology. (Although Huddleston does not talk about genealogy within this chapter, he easily might have done so; plenty of what he says would apply interestingly to this concept too.) This is, I

think, a fruitful direction to take. The so-called ‘continental’ side of Nietzsche reception is already very at home with the idea of a ‘philosophy of culture’, of distinctive modes of cultural hermeneutics, and of Nietzsche as a practitioner and forerunner of such. It is high time that those of us on the more ‘analytic’ side of things began to explore this side of Nietzsche’s work in more depth. Huddleston’s book is a rich and promising first move in this direction.*

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Conscious Experience: A Logical Inquiry, by Anil Gupta. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019. Pp. 412.

This dazzlingly original and ambitious book challenges the epistemological and metaphysical preconceptions of contemporary philosophers on many fronts, and proposes replacements that are beautifully articulated and on the whole quite appealing. Readers will no doubt have reservations about various themes of the book, but I predict that they will react sympathetically to many of Gupta’s ideas and arguments, and will also be grateful for his challenges to the views they decide to retain, feeling that they are in a much better position to understand the nature and value of the commitments they have undertaken.

Although the book has many subordinate concerns, the principal objective is to explain empirical reasoning, and in particular, what it is for such reasoning to be good or rational. Gupta distinguishes this inquiry sharply