



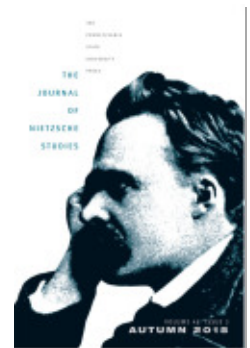
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Nietzsche und die Religionen. Transkulturelle Perspektiven seines Bildungs- und Denkweges by Johann Figl, and:
Nietzsche—Meditationen. Das Kloster, das Meer und die “neue” Unendlichkeit by Johann Figl (review)

Jing Huang

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(Review)

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Richardson suggests shifting how we approach the common by reference to Nietzsche's psychology of types, based upon origins and sources. However, this does not seem to constitute such a radical revision of the common that it would ease Nietzsche's own normative concerns. I feel Nietzsche himself postulates a more severe vision of overcoming the common than Richardson's recommendations, evinced in his lament in *Twilight of the Idols* that we cannot be wholly rid of God while we keep faith in grammar (*TI* "'Reason' in Philosophy" 5). Just because Nietzsche himself uses words to communicate his thoughts, the problem of the common included, does not mean that he would not subject his own communicative efforts to the problem he identifies and expresses.

This wonderful collection offers in each of its featured essays advanced analyses of the fundamental questions at work in Nietzsche's philosophy, as well as innovative arguments for their respective positions. It will therefore be indispensable to any informed discussion of the tensions in Nietzsche's work involving notions of individual and community. Any student or scholar of Nietzsche seeking to explore these complex but important issues would profit from consulting this collection.

Richard J. Elliott
Heythrop College, London
Richard.Elliott@heythropcollege.ac.uk

Johann Figl, *Nietzsche und die Religionen. Transkulturelle Perspektiven seines Bildungs- und Denkweges*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007. 396 pp. ISBN: 978-3-11-019065-6. Cloth, €69.95.

Johann Figl, *Nietzsche—Meditationen. Das Kloster, das Meer und die "neue" Unendlichkeit*. Vienna: LIT, 2007. 134 pp. ISBN: 978-3-7000-0773-9. Paper, €9.90.

"Nietzsche and Religion" is not an unusual topic in Nietzsche scholarship. Yet most studies on this topic limit themselves to his relationship to Christianity or Buddhism. Few people have systematically examined Nietzsche's reception of other non-Christian religions. Johann Figl's 2007 monograph *Nietzsche und die Religionen. Transkulturelle Perspektiven seines Bildungs- und Denkweges* fills this gap. While most recent publications concerning Nietzsche's relationship to religions are philosophically oriented, Figl's book takes a strictly historical approach. It not only is a reconstruction of Nietzsche's knowledge of *various* religions and their influence on his philosophy, but also aims to outline the early history of *Religionswissenschaft* reflected in Nietzsche's *Bildungsweg*. Such an ambitious project requires intimate knowledge of Nietzsche's life and thought as well as nineteenth-century German scholarship in which he was trained. Figl, an expert on Nietzsche as well as religious studies, is one of the few scholars who can take on such a task. The outcome, *Nietzsche und die Religionen* (henceforth *NR*), meets our expectations.

After a short introduction in which Figl explains the aims and structure of his book, *NR* is organized into four chapters. These four chapters can be divided into two main parts. The first part, which includes the first three chapters, offers a comprehensive survey of Nietzsche's extensive occupation with non-European cultures and non-Christian religions, first while he was a school and university student and later as a professor of philology in Basel. As the subtitle indicates, one of Figl's major commitments in this book is that a transcultural dimension is fundamental to Nietzsche's entire philosophical project. In the second part, constituted by the fourth chapter, Figl engages with the issue of how this transcultural dimension is reflected in Nietzsche's published writings, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to his later works. These four chapters are followed by a catalogue of sources and documents concerning Nietzsche's education and reading, a bibliography, and a general index to the book, all of which provide many useful avenues for further study.

Figl is not alone in emphasizing Nietzsche's cultural pluralism. In his 1996 monograph *Orient—Okzident. Nietzsches Versuch einer Loslösung vom europäischen Weltbild* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), for instance, Andrea Orsucci also takes Nietzsche's opposition to Eurocentrism as his point of departure. Both Figl and Orsucci maintain that Nietzsche's understanding of cultures and religions is a product of the intellectual atmosphere of Nietzsche's own age. However, unlike Orsucci, who emphasizes the radical breaks in Nietzsche's thinking about religions, Figl focuses upon the continuity of Nietzsche's development. Although he agrees with Orsucci that Nietzsche's reception of nineteenth-century religious, anthropological, and ethnological research during his Basel years contributed significantly to his anti-Eurocentrism, Figl goes one step further by seeking to trace the transcultural tendency in the high school and university education the young Nietzsche received. This reconstruction, in my opinion, is the most valuable part of *NR*. For this subject is, in spite of its great importance for our understanding of Nietzsche's religious thought (as Figl shows in his book), barely touched on in Nietzsche scholarship.

In order to paint a vivid picture of Nietzsche's religious education, Figl delves into a diverse range of primary and secondary sources, which include Nietzsche's school essays, philological publications, and posthumous notations (as the editor of *KGW I*, Figl has extensive knowledge of the entire body of Nietzsche's early writings); the books in the library of Schulpforta and in Nietzsche's personal library that may have influenced the young Nietzsche; the textbooks he used; the yearly reports of the programs of study at Pforta; and the manuscripts of the notes Nietzsche made of the lectures he attended. Believing that the research of Nietzsche's teachers (Karl August Koberstein, Wilhelm Corsen, Karl Heinrich August Steinhart, et al.) was integrated, more or less, into their classes, Figl also draws attention to their academic publications, which cover such topics as comparative grammar and the influence of Asia on the Platonic tradition. The value of these materials, according to Figl, is much more than biographical; they provide information concerning the context of Nietzsche's thought and can sometimes correct previous misunderstandings of him. Figl's historical investigation has revealed, for example, that Nietzsche's first encounter with Zarathustra can be traced back to his reading of Welter's *Lehrbuch der Weltgeschichte* at Schulpforta—much earlier than was long supposed (*NR*, 71–72), and that, contra Montinari's presumption that Nietzsche mentioned Zoroaster (alias Zarathustra) for the first time in 1870/1, the name Zoroaster appeared in Nietzsche's philological notations as early as 1867 (*NR*, 164–65). Without denying that there are racist and Eurocentric elements in the textbooks Nietzsche used, Figl argues that these ideological prejudices are minimized by the image of the world conveyed in the philological-historical research of the nineteenth century that Nietzsche's teachers communicated in their classes (and especially the research in the emerging field of Indo-European studies)—an image of the world in which Eastern culture is rendered of great worth (*NR*, 5). On the basis of an examination of Koberstein's manuscripts and Nietzsche's notes of Corsen's lecture on history, Figl argues that Nietzsche gained some acquaintance with comparative linguistics, and more importantly, with the comparative approach to culture and religion while at Pforta (*NR*, 105ff. and 117ff.).

As mentioned earlier, Figl attempts to locate Nietzsche's engagement with religions in the broader context of the establishment of *Religionswissenschaft* as an independent discipline in the mid-nineteenth century. Figl points out that, contrary to what Andreas Urs Sommer suggests, Nietzsche did use the term "*Religionswissenschaft*," and that as early as 1868, Nietzsche had a clear concept of *Religionswissenschaft*, which was largely shaped by the work of figures such as Georg Curtius and Max Müller (*NR*, 202–14). Inspired by the conception of philology as *Altertumswissenschaft*, Curtius stressed that philology was not aimed at merely studying ancient texts, but designed as the study of the entirety of ancient culture, including ancient religions (*NR*, 218–19). On Figl's reading, the idea that "the plurality of religions corresponds to the plurality of languages" is already explicit and central in Nietzsche's concept of *Religionswissenschaft* (*NR*, 211). From Curtius and Müller, Nietzsche learned how comparative religion, an important branch of *Religionswissenschaft*, models

itself on comparative linguistics (*NR*, 219–27). According to Figl, this comparative approach can constitute a ground for multiculturalism, which rejects a singular understanding of culture.

That said, what Figl offers, it must be stressed, is an oversimplified account of the early history of comparative studies as exemplified by the work of Müller. In fact, Müller's enthusiasm for the common origin of the Indo-European languages is connected with an intense interest in the *Urgeschichte* of the "Aryan" race. And his interpretation of myth aims to highlight the rationality of the ancestors of all European races, which would help to raise them, as Eric Csapo puts it, "well above the contemptible savages who inhabited other corners of the globe" (*Theories of Mythology* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2005], 22). Figl understates these unmistakably Eurocentric aspects of comparative studies. For example, after a several-page description of Curtius's transcultural perspective, only a very brief remark near the end of the second chapter hints at a fuller story, where Figl notes that Curtius used discriminatory terminology to characterize the non-European peoples (*NR*, 224).

NR touches upon several concepts central to Nietzsche's philosophy, such as "eternal recurrence" and "the death of God." Figl's study has made clear that these concepts were not fashioned ex nihilo; they were based on the fusion of various sources. In addition to Greek sources (for example, Heraclitus), there is an Indian source of "eternal recurrence." By referring to Nietzsche's notation 13[3], which includes terms such as "wheel, water blister, hollow curvature" (*KGW* III 3, 393), Figl argues that from his reading of Carl Friedrich Koeppen's book *Die Religion des Buddha* in the early 1870s, years before his intensive occupation with the idea of "eternal recurrence" in 1881, Nietzsche had learned about several Buddhist concepts, among which is the "cycle of existence" (*samsara*)—a Buddhist version of "eternal recurrence" (*NR*, 278–80). Figl also argues that the chief sources of inspiration for Nietzsche's theory of the death of God are, inter alia, Müller's *Essays* and Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (*NR*, 301–4). He is right to draw attention to Nietzsche's references to the death of Zeus, the death of Pan, and the death of Odin, which anticipate the famous statement by the madman in *GS* 125, and to emphasize that the theory of the death of God ties in with ancient polytheisms, as these references demonstrate (*NR*, 304–7). However, the so-called Zagreus myth, in which Dionysus Zagreus was murdered by the Titans and then restored to life, is not mentioned in *NR*, though it has a special relevance for Nietzsche's theory. For Nietzsche, this myth is a representative example of the older conception of gods as mortal, which contrasts with the later picture of the immortal Olympians.

In 2007, Figl also published a pamphlet of some 130 pages with the title *Nietzsche—Meditationen* (henceforth *NM*). Unlike *NR*, which is aimed at a specialist readership, this pamphlet is addressed to the general reader. Figl uses the term "meditation" not in the sense of certain religious practices, but in the sense of "contemplation." More precisely, he applies it to designate "the contemplation of existence and its meaning and purpose" (*NM*, 7). *NM* is subtitled "The Monastery, the Sea, and the New Infinitude," not only because these three themes play prominent roles in Nietzsche's life and thought, but also because they are, as Figl states in the preface, "significant life experiences" for his wife to whom this book is dedicated (*NM*, 1).

Figl divides his pamphlet into two major parts. The biographically oriented first part gives a brief survey of Nietzsche's experiences regarding the monastery, the sea, and infinitude. According to Figl, Nietzsche's six years at Pforta left him with a deeply imprinted understanding of the monastery, which emphasizes order, spirituality, intellectuality, and a combination of contemplative and practical life. Figl points out that Nietzsche, during a stay in Sorrento, established with his friends a kind of community that resembled such a monastery. After showing there is a close relationship between Nietzsche's philosophy and nature by presenting his experiences of the sea in Sorrento, Figl turns to the conception of the new infinitude for which the sea is used as a metaphor. With this conception, he refers to individual life seen from the new perspective of the "eternal recurrence." In the second part of this book, which was originally written for the radio broadcast "Gedanken zum Tag," Figl attempts a very general introduction to Nietzsche's central ideas and seeks to show how fertile these ideas can be for rethinking some serious problems of human existence, such as

the meaning of death. In order to offer a useful resource to accompany his interpretation, after this brief introduction, Figl gives select original texts, which are conveniently organized with respect to the three key themes, in the appendix.

Nietzsche und die Religionen is a substantial contribution to our understanding of Nietzsche. It will be of interest to all Nietzsche scholars and to students of the history of scholarship. And *Nietzsche—Meditationen* is a welcome attempt to write in a manner intelligible to the general reader and to make Nietzsche's philosophy accessible to all.

Jing Huang
Free University of Berlin
jinghuang.berlin@gmail.com

André Martins, Homero Santiago, and Luís César Oliva, eds., *As ilusões do eu—Spinoza e Nietzsche*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2011. 602 pp. ISBN: 978-85-200-1017-4. Paper, R\$62.00.

Ana Claudia Gama Barreto, Danilo Bilate, and Tiago Mota da Silva Barros, eds., *Spinoza e Nietzsche—filósofos contra a tradição*. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad X, 2012. 208 pp. ISBN: 978-85-7478-363-5. Paper, R\$49.50.

As ilusões do eu—Spinoza e Nietzsche [*The Illusions of the I—Spinoza and Nietzsche*] and *Spinoza e Nietzsche—filósofos contra a tradição* [*Spinoza and Nietzsche—Philosophers Against the Tradition*] are products of the second Spinoza & Nietzsche International Congress held at the University of São Paulo during the second semester of 2009. This congress is one of the results of the collaboration between Brazilian and French universities under the heading of the Capes-Cofecub program: "Crises and Anathemas of Philosophic Modernity: Spinoza and Nietzsche as Schisms in the Metaphysics of Subjectivity."

These collections of essays are timely as they contribute to a growing research interest in the comparative study of Spinoza and Nietzsche. The fact that these volumes are collections of essays has the advantage that the reader can find within them interesting articles on a number of important topics in Spinoza and Nietzsche scholarship. However, it also means that there is no single guiding thread running through the books and that not all articles are immediately relevant to the themes announced by the titles of the books. Only a small number of contributions address the question of the relation between Spinoza and Nietzsche directly. This is noted by the editors of *The Illusions of the I* in the preface (15): "The diversity of the texts is intentional and desirable: we do not seek to offer the reader a single interpretation, but, to the contrary, a picture of the effervescence of current academic research."

The Illusions of the I contains twenty-five articles, grouped into three sections. The first section is dedicated to the task of investigating Nietzsche's debt to Romanticism and, more specifically, to elucidating how Nietzsche read Spinoza through the Romantics. In the first article of the volume, Eduardo Nasser places Nietzsche's philosophy in the context of his reaction to Romanticism. The crucial question that Nasser asks is who Nietzsche counts under the heading of Romantics. The answer includes not only the German but also the French Romantics, together with all of German philosophy and even Epicurus and Christ (25). The author emphasizes that the criteria that determine what counts as Romantic are not purely historical, but psychological and physiological. Nasser argues that Nietzsche is indebted to Goethe's distinction and contrast between classical and Romantic art, which he reformulates as the dichotomy between expressions of vital abundance and impoverished life. The complex arguments of this essay set the background for the rest of the essays in this section. Most important for the overarching theme of this book, it provides the context for André Martins's