

Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 328 pp. ISBN 978-0199371846. \$65.00 (cloth)

Penultimate Draft for publication in Journal of Nietzsche Studies (please do not quote without permission)

Maudemarie Clark is best known amongst Nietzsche scholars for two monographs, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and *The Soul of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), the second co-authored with David Dudrick. The focus of these works was metaphysical-cum-epistemological, in the first instance distinguishing Nietzsche's views on truth from the (at the time) popular association with post-modernism, in the second providing an "esoteric" re-reading of book one of *BGE* in an attempt to rebuff central aspects of naturalistic readings like that of Brian Leiter (*Nietzsche on Morality*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 2015). The present collection of fourteen essays surveys Clark's views on a different range of topics under the heading of "Ethics and Politics". Whilst there is something of interest in each chapter, this review will consider three of the most thought-provoking contributions.

Chapter 3, "Nietzsche's Contribution to Ethics," (originally published 2010) begins by examining how we should understand Nietzsche's self-characterization as an "immoralist" in a way which can make sense of the fact that his writings provide ethical recommendations. It is now fairly commonplace that if we are to resolve the issue of the "scope" of Nietzsche's critical project, a distinction has to be made between the morality he is opposed to and some alternative ethical outlook he is in favour of. However, something which remains problematic is how to define morality in the sense that Nietzsche is opposed to it. Here Clark engages with Leiter's influential reading which specifies the critical object as "morality in the pejorative sense" (MPS), a piece-meal tapestry of substantive normative commitments such as the promotion of happiness and the avoidance of suffering, and argues that Nietzsche's fundamental objection to MPS is the way in which the norms characteristic of it are inimical to the flourishing of nascent higher-types (cf. Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 58-61, 91-110). However, Clark suggests that there is the potential for a gap to emerge between some of the norms characteristic of MPS for Leiter and certain *prima facie* features of morality as traditionally understood. For example, MPS is said to promote the norms of avoiding suffering and promoting

happiness, yet this is not obviously true of the ascetic morality Nietzsche describes in *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

Clark's alternative is to provide a "historical account of morality" (65), which finds some of the components of the phenomena Nietzsche is opposed to in the three essays of the *Genealogy*: the evaluative framework of slave morality, a moralized form of bad conscience involving guilt, and the ascetic ideal. However, one worry is that this approach might exclude from Nietzsche's "critique of morality" ethical standpoints not obviously involving these features (and certainly not the conjunction of them all). For example, one might think of utilitarianism or Aristotelianism, which are lambasted as instances of "Morality as Timidity" in section 198 of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Presumably it is the sheer variety of ideas that Nietzsche brings under the umbrella of his critique of morality which motivates a heuristic definition like Leiter's.

Finally, Clark's own suggestion concerning Nietzsche's objection to morality is that he considers it "not adequate medicine for the sickness it was meant to cure" (5). The "sickness" Clark is referring to is that of socialized human beings no longer able to freely express aggressive instincts – that is, the "bad conscience" of *GM II*. Morality, under the direction of the ascetic priests, offers a solution to this, re-directing those aggressive instincts against the self, and using the notions of guilt and responsibility to provide such activity with meaning. However, once the notion of a divine being is introduced, and as a consequence one's nature is interpreted as inexpiably guilty, any lasting resolution to this "sickness" is rendered impossible; one is "sick" *by nature*. Now, this might be Nietzsche's view about the way in which moralization intensifies the psychological mechanisms of bad conscience. But that it is his *ultimate* objection to morality is not so clear. Recall his claim that despite the fact that the ascetic ideal made such suffering "deeper, more internal, more poisonous ... it brought all suffering within the perspective of guilt...man was saved, he had a *meaning*" (*GM III* 28). So, if at least part of what Nietzsche thinks man "suffers" (his "sickness") is a lack of meaning, then for those "slaves" who lack the strength (and historically lacked the means) for alternatives, morality does provide something of a medicine, albeit a bitter sweet one. In this sense, morality *per se* might not be "good" for the slaves but it is a less bad alternative for such types than "not willing anything at all" (*GM III*: 28).

Chapter 4, "Nietzsche on Free Will, Causality, and Responsibility" (published here for the first time), attributes to Nietzsche a type of compatibilism about free will and moral responsibility. The main body of the essay provides a reading of section 21 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, arguing against Leiter's claim that this passage supports his view of Nietzsche as a non-libertarian incompatibilist (cf. *Nietzsche on Morality*, 69-

81). Clark begins by agreeing with Leiter that in this passage Nietzsche rejects as erroneous any libertarian conception of free will. But she proceeds to discuss what Nietzsche could mean when he says that we should also do away with the notion of an “unfree will”, and that this notion involves a “misuse” of cause and effect (*BGE* 21). Here Clark rejects Leiter’s claim that this can be explained by Nietzsche’s commitment to neo-Kantian skepticism about causation, according to which causality is an *a priori* category of cognition which we bring to objects, and not characteristic of “things in themselves.” Clark argues against this, claiming that the “in itself” in this passage should be read as referring to the empirical world contrasted with the world of values, emotions, and so on, rather than the Kantian “thing in itself”. Once we accept this, Clark claims that the “reification” of cause and effect Nietzsche claims to be typical of belief in an “unfree will” is in fact indicative of a view of causation as *necessary connection*. The point of this is to attribute to Nietzsche the Humean claim that belief in determinism does not involve belief in necessary compulsion, such that the fact that our actions are caused does not mean they are *forced*. So when we think that the causal determination of behavior rules out freedom and responsibility, we are implicitly holding the wrong picture of causality (88).

This is a persuasive reading, but worries about Clark’s account arise from how focused it is on this particular passage of *Beyond Good and Evil*, one that, as her debate with Leiter shows, does not wear its meaning on its sleeve. One suspects that Nietzsche’s views in the passage are not fully developed, and that any view which it is possible to extract from it should therefore be attributed to him only on the basis of other supporting textual evidence. Still, if Clark could adduce such additional evidence for her view of Nietzsche as a Humean compatibilist, then that would be a significant result.

Moving on from the “Ethics” section, the most substantive contribution under the “Politics” heading is chapter 9, “Nietzsche’s Antidemocratic Rhetoric” (originally published 1999). Here Clark argues that we should resist reading those passages most pregnant with political implications, like the chapter, “What is Noble,” in *Beyond Good and Evil*, as evidence of Nietzsche’s commitment to aristocratic *political* institutions. She begins with the standard view that Nietzsche rejects both modern liberal ideas and the political institutions that support them, blaming such “democratic politics” for making men “small, cowardly, and hedonistic” (*TI IX: 38*). As a response Nietzsche proposes a future aristocracy, which aims at cultivating the “highest human beings” through aristocratic political institutions that are ruled over by his new philosophers.

Clark argues that none of the relevant passages from *BGE* motivate this interpretation. According to her, Nietzsche does not explicitly claim (a) that philosophers of the future should have political power, (b) that these philosophers should impose their values on society, or (c) that the political structure of this future aristocratic society should be aristocratic.

Concerning (a) Clark provides a reading of section 257 of *Beyond Good and Evil* which distinguishes between Nietzsche's account of what *originally* makes "enhancements" of the human spirit possible in terms of the *pathos of distance* in actual political aristocracies, and what is required *now* for the "enhancement of the type man" (176). Yet, in denying (c) that the political structure of this future aristocratic society should be aristocratic, Clark is claiming something counter-intuitive. After all, what is it that constitutes an aristocratic society if not, at least in part, aristocratic institutions, at least some of which would be political? Clark answers that what makes a society aristocratic for Nietzsche is its "underlying value orientation" (171), and more specifically a belief that "the ultimate value or *telos* of human society lies in the higher types of human being it makes possible" (173). What is said to be problematic about democracy is that it undermines belief in a categorical difference of value between persons, and therefore is inimical to the development of those "highest states of the soul" which require some such *pathos of distance* (*BGE* 257).

Nevertheless, this raises the question of whether democracy does undermine such striving for excellence. According to Clark, Nietzsche is not making the implausible claim that democratic societies stop people realizing excellences *per se*, but rather insisting that a society in which the ideal of democracy, and a certain kind of equality between persons, dominates as ideology (that is, regardless of whether the society itself realizes genuine equality) results in a debasement of "our standards of what constitutes success and excellence" (176). Clark's explanation for this is that a society dominated by a democratic ideology is likely to recognize only those values (and "states of the soul") that are at least in principle achievable (or possibly experienceable) by all (177). On this basis, Clark is then able to suggest that Nietzsche wrote these sections of *BGE* in awareness of a distinction between democratic political institutions, to which he was not explicitly opposed, and democratic *values* or "democratic ideology," which he does think is incompatible with the kind of striving and human excellence he wants to promote.

Overall, this collection of essays presents a comprehensive account of Clark's thinking about a number of issues in Nietzsche's thought. The writing is lucid, and her attention to the detail of the texts is admirable. Whilst I have focused on what I

consider to be the most interesting contributions, there are others that would have also warranted comment – indeed, every essay from the “Ethics” section deserves to be read carefully. However, it bears noting that a number of essays from the “Politics” section have dated. This is not to say the views that Clark expresses in them are any less persuasive – in fact, it might be precisely because her rebuttals to some, at times inane, misinterpretations of Nietzsche are so convincing (see “Bloom and Nietzsche”, “Nietzsche’s Misogyny” and “On Queering Nietzsche”) that these debates are no longer at the forefront of Nietzsche studies.

Two further positive features of this contribution should be noted. Firstly, Clark’s awareness, displayed in every chapter, of the ways in which Nietzsche’s thought develops is exceptional. Secondly, her willingness to re-examine her own previous interpretations, scrutinizing them in just as a much detail as those of other interpreters, exhibits an anti-dogmatic streak that is welcome. In closing, I think at the very least that the chapters highlighted in this review should be read by all with an interest in these debates, and that they will no doubt generate much further discussion.

Jonathan Mitchell University of Warwick - *j.mitchell.3@warwick.ac.uk*