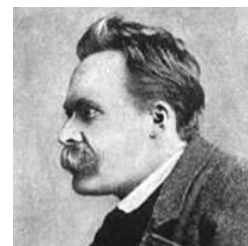


The End of Nietzsche Studies

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The purpose of this polemic is to trace the trajectory of Nietzsche studies in the post-war United States. I shall give a pseudo-Hegelian account of this history, since I shall describe the development in terms of monumental shifts in opposing directions, ultimately ending when these differences are *aufgehoben*—synthesized, canceled, overcome. I see this end to Nietzsche studies as inevitable, and only hope to hasten its arrival, since I shall argue that the forces accounting for this its initial organization and progression have been exhausted. Nietzsche studies will churn on, no doubt, but the core concerns that have been driving its development thus far have reached their logical conclusion.

The end of Nietzsche studies has far-reaching consequences. The synthesis I anticipate promises to bridge an increasingly growing gap in the Nietzsche literature and philosophical studies generally between those who consider philosophy to consist in the analysis of very specific problems or puzzles (and either solving or dissolving them) and those who consider philosophy to consist in identifying and vivifying the grandest, most intractable, but most significant problems that human beings can ask. The *end* of this history suggests some ways of combining the approaches of those driven to *naturalize* philosophy in every way possible with those who are inclined to see philosophy as in some respects like literature or art.

There are, of course, many ways in which one could tell this history, and I do not presume to have identified the *real* story of what has transpired in American Nietzsche studies during the past fifty-five years or that the past fifty-five years are all that matter, or even that I have identified all of the relevant players (for surely, I have not). But I do think that I have isolated

several of the indisputably influential thinkers on Nietzsche, whose works have shaped the publications and teaching concerning Nietzsche in the United States and many other places in the world during the second half of the twentieth century. There is, I think, some inherent relation between these tensions, and the particular point that Nietzsche studies has reached is, at least to some extent, reflective of the preceding struggles. The major players the particular account I offer are: Walter Kaufmann, Arthur Danto, and Alexander Nehamas. In listing these as the prominent figures, I do not intend to suggest that the works produced by these authors are equivalent in their quality or influence, but each crystallizes a particular approach to Nietzsche studies characteristic of a great variety of studies that have appeared in print since. I shall briefly describe the positions of these three, focusing particularly on their treatment of the significance of literature for Nietzsche studies, and then comment upon some more recent developments in Nietzsche studies, particularly the push to force Nietzsche's work into the framework of contemporary naturalism in order to make specific points about philosophy, reading, and scholarship that bear on the direction I anticipate as the end of Nietzsche studies.

In brief and retrospectively, I characterize Nehamas's work as marking a certain end to the development of a line of interpretation that was introduced by Kaufmann and opposed by Danto in Anglophonic Nietzsche studies. I then consider the trend after Nehamas to caricature the literary Nietzsche (as well as the use of literary methods in philosophy more generally), as threatening both moral and epistemic enterprises. In particular, I focus briefly on the efforts of Brian Leiter to oppose Nehamas while improving upon Danto, and I consider this project to be a dead end. I anticipate a final end to this development as I consider a different path we might take *after* Nehamas that could potentially satisfy reasonable critics, informed and responsible readers, and philosophers eager to consider the future relation between philosophy, literature, and science.

I. Kaufmann

In his 1950 classic *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Walter Kaufmann elaborates Nietzsche's faith in a certain kind of human freedom achieved through *transcendence*. Because Kaufmann recognizes that Nietzsche's view of transcendence is necessarily distinct from the kind associated with traditional metaphysical views of will, which he criticizes, Kaufmann emphasizes the realization of freedom in transforming human *physis* as an artistic practice akin to the creation of literature. Chapters two through four of Kaufmann's *Nietzsche* trace the influence of modern German philosophy and literature on Nietzsche and his methodology. In particular, Kaufmann emphasizes Nietzsche's rejection of systematic, axiomatic philosophy, and ties this to his efforts to draw on a variety of literary devices and styles that would be appropriate to the experimental questioning in which he was engaged.

Nietzsche's central concern, according to Kaufmann, is human existence and its transcendental possibilities. For Kaufmann's Nietzsche there is something of an imperative in engaging in artistic practices of self-transformation: "Nature must be transformed, and man must become like a work of art" (Kaufmann 1974: 156). He claims that this kind of activity is so important that it significantly distinguishes individual human beings from one another to such an extent that "the difference between man and man is more significant than that between man and animal." Nietzsche's interest in the empirical sciences led him to recognize that human beings are essentially animals, but Kaufmann's Nietzsche ultimately arrives at a "supra-animalic triad" of artist, saint, philosopher and in this way transcends his human animality to become "what he called 'no-longer-animals'" (Kaufmann 1974: 176). But for all of Kaufmann's emphasis on transcendence, he maintains that Nietzsche's views are firmly rooted in his "theory on empirical data" (Kaufmann 1974: 207). For Kaufmann, Nietzsche's will to power is essentially an erotic drive to self-perfection. What the greatest human beings crave is "rebirth in beauty and perfection," which "some artists and philosophers come closest"

to achieving "insofar as they may be able to give style to their characters, to organize the chaos of their passions, and to create a world of beauty here and now" (Kaufmann 1974: 255).

II. Danto

Kaufmann's literary emphasis is wholly rejected by Arthur Danto in his 1965 *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. Part of Danto's early effort to prove that Nietzsche was, in fact, a *philosopher* involved separating his *ideas* or *propositions* from his literary *styles*. Since its original publication, Danto has published expanded editions of his work in which he more succinctly describes his original plan. His opposition to literature is both reinforced and retracted in certain respects. Both Danto and Kaufmann agree that Nietzsche poses some kind of danger to his readers, and both see their roles as philosopher-critics as *protecting* Nietzsche's audiences from such ills. In the case of Danto, however, the danger Nietzsche poses arises not from inept reading but rather from genuine insight (even if crudely achieved) into his real philosophical program. While Kaufmann seeks to better equip Nietzsche's readers, Danto seeks to disarm (or, to use his own word, "pen") Nietzsche himself.

In his original edition of his book, Danto claims to be taking Nietzsche "merely as a philosopher," and as sharing the perspective of contemporary analytical philosophy (original preface, included in Danto 2004, xxv). His book was necessary, he thought, "because we know a good deal more philosophy today [than what Nietzsche, or presumably anyone else knew then], [and] it is exceedingly useful to see his analyses in terms of logical features which he was unable to make explicit, but toward which he was unmistakable [sic] groping" (ibid.). Nietzsche's so-called gropings toward logical analyses are "embellished" and "ornamented" (to combine expressions from the 1965 preface and the one that appeared in 2004) with "brilliant images" *but* Danto maintains, "When one lays out the propositions, they stand on their own" (Danto 2004: xviii). Thus, Danto's earlier practice of isolating and combining individual sentences (or even portions thereof from any of his

works) was justifiable, on his view, even if he now also thinks that considering the works as wholes also bears on the significance of the very propositions he seeks to illuminate.

But illumination is not really Danto's mission. Instead, as he makes clear in the latest edition of *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, his aim is one of "disarming one of the most dangerous moral voices of modern times [...] to circle the enemy [...] neutralizing the vivid frightening images that have inspired sociopaths for over a century" and hopefully thereby "save lives" (Danto 2004: xv, xviii). That this humanitarian project might be meant with all seriousness is reinforced by the frame of Danto's new preface, which begins in its very first sentence with reference to the "killings at Columbine," and makes repeated reference to a small group of boys from Pearl River, Mississippi, who went on a murder spree, on their own account after reading Nietzsche in a bookstore. As for what these criminals drew from Nietzsche, Danto writes, "I am certain that Nietzsche meant what he said in the literal way the terrorists of Pearl River High School recognized" (Danto 2004: xviii). I am dwelling on this bizarre claim made by one of the most influential American interpreters of Nietzsche's philosophy because it bears on his thoughts on the artful aspects of Nietzsche's work. It is not simply that Danto thinks that such constitute ornament (although he does think that) or that those who focus on such 'miss the philosophical point' but rather that emphasizing the literary aspects of Nietzsche's works serves to further disempower Nietzsche—an aim Danto champions. Nietzsche's works *do rise* to the level of literature, that is, they have "enough textual architecture to qualify as literary works" (Danto 2004: xvii), and they do deserve to be treated as *literature* (Danto 2004: xvi). The emphasis on literature disempowers, Danto thinks, because, citing W. H. Auden, "Poetry makes nothing happen" (Danto 2004: xvi), "the literary and hermeneutical discussions of Nietzsche's philosophy have made little difference in how his *philosophy* is structured" (Danto 2004: xviii) or apparently in how his *philosophy* is understood. All that such readings have done, Danto thinks, is "transform Nietzsche into a benign

presence" (Danto 2004: xiii). Danto continues "[T]he spontaneous effort on the part of the learned community, to interpret Nietzsche's writings through various systems of postmodern thought might be an artful measure of penning him, like the Minotaur, within labyrinths it is hoped he cannot escape" (Danto 2004: xiii-iv). Yet, that Nietzsche can still inspire such criminals as the Pearl River High School killers suggests that philosophy has not yet done enough to *mute* "his vivid images and incendiary language" (Danto 2004: xiii). If Walter Kaufmann thought that Nietzsche needed to be *vivified* by scholarly labor particularly of the sort that could bring out the vitality of his literary methods and views on artistic forces, Arthur Danto appears to think that Nietzsche can be *neutralized* by such emphases. But even that is not enough. To truly pen the Minotaur, Nietzsche needs to be further disarmed through philosophical analysis that turns his own statements against him. For Danto, Nietzsche's "incendiary images" are so prone to provoking violent behavior because his *philosophy* is "one of total conceptual permissiveness" (Danto 2004: xxiv), his "is a philosophy of Nihilism, insisting that there is no order and a fortiori no moral order in the world" (Danto 2004: 62).

III. Nehamas

Nietzsche's concern with nihilism is granted by Alexander Nehamas, but he denies that Nietzsche himself ultimately concludes that the human world is destitute when it comes to values. Instead, Nehamas emphasizes, Nietzsche's view is that values are not *inherent* in the world. Moreover, contrary to current portrayals of Nehamas's view (e.g., Leiter 2002), Nehamas disagrees with Danto on the issue of whether Nietzsche is an advocate of a "total conceptual permissiveness"—or absolute freedom of interpretation, complete literary license.

The chief points of focus in Nehamas's 1985 *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* are perspectivism and aestheticism. Nehamas's "life as literature" thesis follows from his emphasis on Nietzsche's perspectivism. Those who rail against Nehamas (and those believed to follow him) do so chiefly because they find

perspectivism untenable—they think it leads to a pernicious relativism and/or utter contradiction. Critics of Nehamas rarely consider his work in any great detail, citing—as they often do with Nietzsche—just a sentence here and there, his assertions and not his arguments. This brief (and polemical) paper will not be able to do much more, although I do point out this practice to emphasize how the views attributed to Nehamas are largely straw-man positions.

For Nehamas, Nietzsche's perspectivism is "not so much a traditional theory of knowledge but the view that all efforts to know are also efforts of particular people to live particular kinds of lives for particular reasons" (Nehamas 1985: 73). Perspectivism does not necessarily entail the view that perspectives (by virtue of being nothing more than perspectives) are inherently false or at best second-rate approximations of the truth. Perspectivism in this sense amounts to the view that perspectives are simply all that we have. This need not result in a pernicious relativism, Nehamas claims, for Nietzsche does not claim that "any view is as good as any other"; rather, he holds that "one's own views are the best for oneself without implying that they need be good for anyone else. [...] New alternatives may appear on their own—that is, as the result of the creations of others. But the greatest achievement is to devise them oneself, to see of one's accord one's previous views as (here the word is perfectly appropriate) *mere* interpretations" (Nehamas 1985: 67, 71-2).

Nehamas directly confronts some common objections to perspectivism and thereby further distinguishes it from relativism. He argues that perspectivism is not inherently self-contradictory, and he elaborates how it leaves room for critiquing perspectives as well as maintaining some senses of truth and objectivity. Perspectivism is a view subject to and defensible through argument. In his later *The Art of Living* (1998), Nehamas clarifies this facet of his conception of Nietzsche's perspectivism as he describes the conditions under which perspectivism could be refuted. A proper refutation of the view that "there is no view of the world that is binding on

everyone" would entail producing a view that successfully demonstrates its own superiority, namely by virtue of decisively laying claim to being binding on everyone. This situation is no different from how any view may be shown to be inferior as it is successfully replaced by a superior one (Nehamas 1998: 147-8).

It is also possible to judge the relative merits of perspectives, that is, to show how some are superior or inferior to others. Perspectives can be evaluated according to their contributions to the lives of the individuals who hold them. All that perspectivism maintains is that there is "no common ground [not that there is no ground at all] that makes what is good for one good for all or good in itself" (Nehamas 1998: 149).

Finally, Nietzsche's perspectivism combined with his view that "untruth" ("illusion" or "fiction") is necessary for life does not entail abandonment of any sense of truth or some possible kind of objectivity. It is different from claiming that everything *is* false (which would involve a logical contradiction if it turned out to be true); rather, it localizes the necessity of illusion:

To recognize that illusion is inevitable is to recognize that the views and values we accept wholeheartedly and without which our life may not even be possible depend on simplifications, on needs and desires which we may not at the moment be able to locate specifically. It is also to realize that though these simplifications are necessary for us and for those like us, they are *not* necessary for everyone. (Nehamas 1985: 61)

Just as we need not give up on truth when embracing the importance of fiction for life, we also need not give up entirely on a sense of objectivity when embracing perspectivism, as Nehamas sees it:

... what he takes as objectivity is ... "the ability to *control* one's Pro and Con and to dispose of them so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge" (*GM*, III, 12). Objectivity so construed is precisely the feature that distinguishes the free spirits of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Attempts to show that objectivity is more than this sort of detachment are for Nietzsche self-deceptive efforts to conceal the partial and interested nature of one's position from oneself. [Nehamas 1985: 84]

Nehamas's emphasis on literature springs from the idea of fashioning our lives in ways that are true to our interpretations, our perspectives—to "fashion our lives in the way that artists fashion their works." Art and literature supply models for understanding the world, as Nehamas reads Nietzsche. These media do not *replace* our understanding of the world. As those interested in understanding the world, we should learn from artists the "powers" of arranging and organizing things into coherent and unified wholes (e.g., *GS* 299). We thus acquire a kind of freedom that is otherwise unknown to us as we acquire "facility in self-direction" (Nehamas 1985: 194-5). Such freedom does not grant us complete license, and we are not free of models that can provide us with direction—there is an abundance of literature that can provide us with exemplary cases of beautifully and ill-formed characters.

IV. The End of Nietzsche Studies

According to Nehamas's account, the importance of human existence and its significance as a prospective work of art could not be greater. And yet Brian Leiter thinks that the emphasis on literature that Nehamas heralds and which abides in various applications of his views detracts from a proper philosophy of human nature (Leiter 2002: 2-3). Against the artful Nietzsche, Leiter pits his *naturalist* Nietzsche. That Nietzsche is supposed to be an improvement over Danto's analytic philosopher Nietzsche in that Leiter supposedly evidences a sensitivity to the context of what Nietzsche writes, including its place within a larger text and the cultural/historical tradition from which it emerges. Leiter frequently refers to his rivals as anachronists and casts them as ahistorical. Via an appeal to authority, he claims that the naturalistic, materialistic, scientific approach to Nietzsche is justified, in part, because that is what Nietzsche's own contemporaries held as a dominant view. Leiter begins his book by asserting a dilemma between science and literature. Either one reads Nietzsche as a naturalist (which in Nietzsche's case, Leiter claims, includes adopting the objects, methods, and

findings of science), or one is "just" doing literature (which presumably has no philosophical merit and makes no contribution to knowledge of the sorts of things in which Nietzsche was interested).

The supposed contextual sensitivity aside, this trend in Nietzsche studies (which also has adherents outside of Nietzsche studies, as for example in contemporary ethical theory, e.g., Hurka 1993, and outside of Anglophonic philosophy, e.g., Bittner 2003) is a throwback to approaches to Nietzsche studies that were common prior to Kaufmann's work, and presents as novel an interpretation of Nietzsche's naturalism that is arguably more sensitively and much more extensively developed by Schacht (1983). This is phenomenon is even more confusing when one considers just what such interpretations of Nietzsche are supposed to demonstrate or contribute to considerations of contemporary philosophical problems. If Nietzsche turns out to be an advocate of a crude philosophical anthropology squaring with the empirical science that was common in his day, or if he turns out to be an early advocate of certain ethical frameworks that are substantially superseded by contemporary research, then why should anyone other than the historian take much interest in his work? If Nietzsche provides little more than earlier and rougher versions of contemporary views (and in no truly substantial way provides critical perspectives on such enterprises), then Nietzsche studies would seem to be little more than an exercise in affirmation of the status quo. In this respect, such approaches to Nietzsche studies share with Danto an interest in *taming* or *penning* Nietzsche (presumably, more out of self-protection than as prudent measure against sociopaths).

To make discussions of Nietzsche's naturalism matter (and, I have argued, to fairly characterize his actual views), one must consider the specific nature of his naturalism, whether, and if so, how, it differs from and thus potentially offers a critical perspective on contemporary trends toward the same. First and foremost, a more adequate account would take seriously his critique (not rejection) of science. Failure to appreciate

Nietzsche's critical remarks on causation and other crucial concepts in scientific and scientific discourse is intimately connected to the failure to appreciate the genuine *depths* of Nietzsche's interest in truth (rather than a rejection of truth). Naturalizing cheerfully, as Richard Schacht (1988) puts it, differs from the reductive (and I would argue, *regressive*) naturalism that receives from contemporary empirical science its objects of inquiry and its basic methodology. While, for Nietzsche, the focus of science on naturalistic, observable phenomena is preferable to theology's postulation of unobservable, supernatural, other-worldly agents and entities, it is not flawless.

One of Nietzsche's problems with science—and this is consistent throughout his works, even as his general disposition toward science changes—is that it is replete with metaphysical and theological conceptions that have the ring of the articles of faith he critiques in religion and morality. Failure to give this due weight results in purging Nietzsche's works of their critical force and prospective on-going contribution to a deep understanding of our world and our efforts to explore and find our place within it. It also significantly limits the relevance of Nietzsche studies, restricting it to little more than explication of rudimentary (and largely irrelevant) precursors of contemporary thinking. I am convinced this is a fruitless path to pursue, one that looks back to an earlier stage of Nietzsche scholarship and contributes little if anything to the genuine *advancement* of current philosophical (and scientific) investigations. But my boredom with the naturalist Nietzsche does not necessarily indicate reckless enthusiasm for the literary Nietzsche. Like the advent of conceptual art that led Danto, in a different context, to decry the end of art (Danto 1997), Nehamas's *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* marks a certain end to Nietzsche interpretation that makes it quite difficult to assess the merits and relevance of the many and various Nietzsche interpretations available today. What we have instead might be read as testimonies to the Nietzsche-of-so-and-so (since each interpretation would have to be measured or valued

in terms of its contribution to a particular life rather than its fidelity to a text or to some ultimate reality). Nehamas's Nietzsche is fascinating to behold, and Nehamas's book itself provides a fine example of fashioning one's own Nietzsche, but it remains, nonetheless, *his own*. Like the judgments of the philosophers of the future (*BGE* 43), Nehamas's Nietzsche is *his*, and others are not so easily entitled to it. Thus, I regard endless, further laboring on Nehamas's Nietzsche just as fruitless, albeit for quite different reasons, as the renascent pursuit of the naturalist Nietzsche. In the twilight of Nietzsche studies, I propose an end that focuses on artful naturalism, an integrative interpretative activity that promises to harvest the fruits of both poles of interpretative enterprises. Nietzsche's artful naturalism prospectively orients a largely new approach to philosophical studies that intend to take their direction from and garner their relevance toward the empirical sciences.

V. Artful Naturalism

Since I and several others have written about this at length elsewhere (e.g., Acampora 2006 and Cox 1999), I shall just briefly indicate what I have in mind as a direction for the *Aufhebung* in the course of Nietzsche studies I have sketched here—it involves realizing (rather than just elaborating or celebrating) that figure that the early Nietzsche describes as "the Socrates who practices music" (*BT*) or whom he later conceives as the gay scientist. Artful naturalism is not all that new, and certainly not a concept unique to me (in Nietzsche studies, see Cox 1999 and Babich 1994; consult Schacht [1983] as a reader who simultaneously investigates Nietzsche interest in art and concerns that occupy contemporary philosophers; for a more scientific example outside of philosophy, see Root-Bernstein 1989). Oddly, though, it does seem to be rare in contemporary philosophical discussion. Nietzsche is a highly suitable, if not the best, figure for supplying exemplary analyses, critical models, and provocative images that might be developed and fruitfully deployed in such enterprises. Artful naturalism might blend contemporary scientific methodology

and insight with artful appropriation and reformation of the basic concepts and ends that drive it. Nietzsche himself was consistently committed to the idea that science could be *improved* by the integration of certain aesthetic values and interests, not necessarily because such blending would make science more like art, but on account of the fact that he rejected the notion that any inquiry was free of value and because he thought that new areas of inquiry and novel discoveries would require innovative formations of interests and evaluative processes. Nietzsche's own artful naturalism can be seen as in the service of an *even more rigorous* science (cf. what Nietzsche anticipates at *GS* 113 as a "higher organic system").

Such an amalgamation of the scientific and aesthetic would involve a kind of *reciprocal formation* insofar as the aesthetic would be intrinsically involved in the process of interpretation that gives scientific researches their organization and direction. Thus, as I elaborate elsewhere, when Nietzsche emphasizes the significance of art, he is not being *less* of a naturalist, as he sees it, but rather *more* of one. It is this key idea that requires a more thorough accounting in Nietzsche interpretation, and it bears tremendously on the enduring value of Nietzsche's philosophy. In my published work elsewhere (Acampora 2006), I suggest that one of the places to look for Nietzsche's contribution to artful naturalism is in his persistent discussions of *Schein*, sometimes translated as "image," "illusion," or "appearance." What Nietzsche has to say about *appearances* and *image-making* challenges the hard and fast opposition and distinction between *appearance* and *reality* that is operative in a variety of areas in philosophy. (Phenomenologists, of course, systematically develop similar views: Heidegger, in particular, makes this the centerpiece of his critique of the history of ontology and metaphysics and his conception of what he describes as productive logic. But phenomenology might be only one of numerous paths that might be taken following a revision of these basic distinctions.)

Although artful naturalism, as I conceive it, does appear to bend more toward the Nehamas strand of Nietzsche studies

than toward that resuscitated by Leiter, I envision research that might part ways with Nehamas's emphasis on literature. Nehamas's chosen emphasis on literature (in the context of his study on Nietzsche) primarily revolves around narrative fiction. "The world" as an object of our concern and investigation and "our place" within it are both larger and smaller than individual works of fiction or characters within them. Artful naturalism would need to supply concepts and connections among them, as well as whole frameworks for relations that might not conform to the demands and limitations of literary interpretation and criticism. Dance and music, for example, might be more appropriate artistic models in certain circumstances, and a variety of other systematic forms of analysis might be usefully employed.

Since I consider both the literary Nietzsche and the naturalist Nietzsche to have run their courses, it should come as little surprise that I welcome, rather than lament, the end of this dynamic. Like Hegel's end of history, the end of Nietzsche studies might be embraced as a developmental achievement rather than the obliteration of some ideal. But unlike Hegel's ending in absolute spirit, the ending of Nietzsche studies in artful naturalism puts us on a new course that has no ultimate or final end. While it might be the case that what I anticipate *after* the end of Nietzsche studies itself is not the most fruitful path to pursue, I think my polemical account of the history of the development of Nietzsche studies illuminates certain key tensions (e.g., between science and art) in which Nietzsche himself took keen interest. Rather than taking one side and endeavoring to extinguish the other in the search for analytic models of Nietzsche's works, we would do well to more seriously and rigorously investigate the nature of their entwinement, giving it more substance and vivifying it.

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