

On the other hand, the question necessarily arises as to what Gschwandtner's master plan might be sacrificing in its insistence on an all-too-neatly arranged synthesis. The isomorphism between Marion's philosophical and theological work, which implies a parallel univocation between faith and reason, might be seen as undermining the asymmetry (insurmountable for Kierkegaard) between finitude and infinity. Is not the exception to the logic of phenomenality, which the phenomenon of Revelation should be allowed to constitute, undermined and does not the gift offered to *l'adonné* become thereby devalued?

Reading Jean-Luc Marion is, however, far more than an historical monograph on the work of one of France's leading philosophers. Gschwandtner's commentary offers to the reader a lesson on philosophical apprenticeship as it chronicles the advances of Marion's thought and traces the detours of the complex dialogue with his predecessors. More importantly, this is an apologetic work insofar as it answers confidently, and one hopes conclusively, to the recently growing number of critical voices. This study is valuable not only to understand one of France's leading thinkers but also the direction that Continental philosophy has taken since the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

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Dialogue With Nietzsche

Gianni Vattimo

Translated by William McCuaig

New York: Columbia University Press, 2006; 247 pages.

Of the numerous (all too numerous) books on Nietzsche that appear every year, there are not a great many that one would describe as necessary reading for anyone with a serious interest in this figure. I can think of only a handful of exceptions to this; David Allison's *Reading the New Nietzsche*, Alexander Nehamas' *Nietzsche: Life As Literature*, and Walter Kaufmann's classic *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* are a few of them, but it is a short list. To this list I would add Vattimo's *Dialogue With Nietzsche*, which is a translation of the Italian text of 2000, *Dialogo con Nietzsche*. Vattimo endeavours to engage in a dialogue of sorts with Nietzsche, one that does not limit itself to exposition of

Nietzschean themes—never a straightforward matter in any case, of course. In doing so, Vattimo's Nietzsche occupies something of an intermediate ground between recent "French" interpretations that accentuate the aesthetic-literary dimension of his thought and currently less fashionable political interpretations.

The current ascendancy of the "French" Nietzsche, Vattimo argues, ultimately has less to do with the texts themselves than with sociological conditions of the present: "The reasons for the (not quite total) oblivion into which the political Nietzsche of Deleuze (and of Foucault and perhaps Lyotard as well) has fallen as compared to the aesthetic one are external to theory and have to do with the general sociology of culture. I am referring to what...we in Italy called '*il riflusso*' (the reverse flow) and a Hollywood film baptized 'the big chill': the end of the hope that a radical transformation of the capitalist system was imminent, the end of the (Chinese, Cuban) revolutionary dream. The current premium on the aesthetic Nietzsche seems to me to reflect this changed cultural climate more than anything else." (201) It is an intriguing hypothesis that the spirit of our time, or perhaps of a certain generation within it, is what has brought the "French" Nietzsche into being, at times in accordance with what is found in the texts and at times in spite of this. Vattimo mentions in particular the "high politics" for which Nietzsche appeared to call in his later writings, especially in the notes for *The Will to Power*.

Whether this untimely thinker has at long last become very timely indeed or whether, as Vattimo maintains, he remains untimely is one of the questions at stake in this "dialogue." As the author reminds us, "Nietzsche wanted to be the 'dynamite' of culture and indeed believed that he was. Are we really to imagine that the height of his ambition was nothing more than to theorize an artist's metaphysics, whether conceived in the form of Derridean deconstruction...or in that of the invention of redescriptions of the self and the world, as in Nehamas and Rorty?" (204) A synthesis of sorts between the aesthetic and political—albeit "not political in the strict sense"—readings is what Vattimo attempts. (204) That there is no "insurmountable gap between the aesthetic Nietzsche and the political one" is his hypothesis, although he insists that he has "caught no more than a glimpse" of this in the present text. (207)

The book's fifteen chapters, all but one of which have been previously published, cover an assortment of topics, from nihilism to truth, interpretation, aesthetics, the avant-garde, wisdom, and the *Übermensch*.

Among the more notable chapters are “Nietzsche and Contemporary Hermeneutics” and “The Wisdom of the Superman.” The former piece finds Vattimo arguing that the significance of the recent surge of interest in Nietzsche consists largely in the incorporation of his thought within contemporary hermeneutics, including hermeneutic ontology. Vattimo’s “radical” view in this regard is that “the only possible way of placing Nietzsche in the history of modern philosophy is to consider him as belonging to the ‘school’ of ontological hermeneutics.” (74)

Making this case involves more than pointing out clear affinities between several of Nietzsche’s theses on interpretation and twentieth-century hermeneutics. Beyond this, it involves the claim that Nietzsche is not only a properly hermeneutic thinker—in spite of the fact that Gadamer himself gave Nietzsche only brief mention in his treatment of the major precursors of philosophical hermeneutics in *Truth and Method*, while Heidegger also did not treat Nietzsche as a hermeneutic thinker—but that “the interpretation centered on hermeneutics comprehends (in the double sense of including and understanding) more aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy than any other and avoids contradictions and ambiguities that undermine all the rest.” (75) Incorporating this figure within hermeneutic ontology carries implications both for Nietzsche scholarship and for hermeneutics, of course, and Vattimo goes some way toward spelling out these implications. Unfortunately, the chapter does not go as far as one would like, and is one of the book’s shorter pieces at ten pages.

“The Wisdom of the Superman” is another short chapter, of eight chapters. This one finds Vattimo discussing “the art of living and an ideal of wisdom we could use in today’s world”—a large topic, and one of which the author again provides a very interesting, if brief, account. (126) His argument here is that the *Übermensch* provides a model of wisdom appropriate for the times, with the rather un-Nietzschean qualification that this “will only be possible as a ‘mass overman,’ a new subject who does not stand out against the backdrop of a society of slaves but lives in a society of equals.” (132) If Nietzsche himself would strenuously resist this collectivised and egalitarian appropriation, this troubles Vattimo little or indeed not at all. Vattimo’s “mass overman” takes the idea of the *Übermensch* “with radical seriousness,” he insists, even while speaking “against the letter of Nietzsche’s text.” (132) Here one is reminded of the book’s title; this dialogue with Nietzsche is less an exposi-

tion than a creative interpretation and application, against the author's intentions if need be. Ours is indeed an age of nihilism, Vattimo maintains, and in such an age what is needed is a symbol of wisdom not unlike Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, or Vattimo's domesticated *Übermensch*. This is "an ideal of life and wisdom that ultimately sees the goal of moral refinement as a 'plural' subject capable of living his/her own interpretation of the world without needing to believe that it is 'true' in the metaphysical sense of the word: grounded in a secure and steadfast foundation." (131)

Other chapters find Vattimo arguing along similarly novel lines, often to good effect. Whether in the end one shares his interpretations or not, the book makes for compelling reading and may be recommended rather highly. Readers should be aware, however, that Vattimo's work on Nietzsche here as elsewhere, as he puts it, "has never been a straightforward exercise in the philological clarification, explication, or 'objective' reconstruction of Nietzsche's thought. If this implies that the essays collected here are limited in certain ways, that is something I am quite prepared to accept." (ix)

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Doing Philosophy: A Practical Guide for Students

Clare Saunders, David Mossley, George MacDonald Ross, Danielle Lamb

New York: Continuum, 2007; 184 pages.

The goal of *Doing Philosophy: A Practical Guide for Students* is to provide an introduction to and present useful strategies for doing philosophy. The book is intended for students who have never taken philosophy before, that is, primarily first-year undergraduates. While it does introduce some useful techniques for all undergraduates, this book is definitely for the serious student.

The book is divided into chapters on reading, note taking, writing, discussion and resources. Throughout the work, the authors not only provide methodological tips but also explain how these particular methods will aid in philosophy studies. While the introduction claims that the book is not a "how-to" manual (1), students will expect just that. The