

Book Reviews

Donovan Miyasaki, *Nietzsche's Immoralism: Politics as First Philosophy*

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Donovan Miyasaki, *Politics after Morality: Toward a Nietzschean Left*

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Reviewed by Jeffrey Church, University of Houston

Without a doubt, Nietzsche's political philosophy is one of the most elusive and ambiguous features of his corpus. How else can we explain the dizzying, even contradictory, variety of interpretations of Nietzsche's politics? Some read him as anti-political or a liberal skeptical of state power. For others, he is an aristocratic radical, obsessed with using state power to entrench a new class of *Übermenschen*. For still others, his thought is most compatible with democracy, as his defenses of perspectivism and agonism are best realized within a democratic political system. Finally, some other scholars throw up their hands and say that Nietzsche's political thought is incoherent.

In this two-volume work, Donovan Miyasaki enters this fray with a distinctive defense of the democratic Nietzsche. Two features distinguish his view from others. First, it provides a novel grounding of Nietzschean democracy—what Miyasaki calls Nietzsche's "metapolitics." This grounding is examined in the first volume, *Nietzsche's Immoralism* (hereafter *NI*). Second, it offers the most radical political vision of a left Nietzschean form of Nietzschean socialism. For Miyasaki, socialism follows from Nietzsche's fundamental commitments, rather than the aristocratic radicalism that Miyasaki sees Nietzsche inferring—wrongly—from his own commitments.

This extrapolation from Nietzsche's "metapolitics" is undertaken in the second volume, *Politics after Morality* (hereafter *PM*). I discuss each of these contributions in turn. In general, I found Miyasaki's work to be clear, perceptive, and bold in their interpretations. That said, with a book that critiques so much of the Nietzsche scholarship and offers such a radical take on Nietzsche's politics, I have some potential objections to raise.

Nietzsche's Metapolitics

Other interpreters of a left Nietzsche ground their reading on what they take to be Nietzsche's radical epistemological views: either his perspectivism or his anti-essentialism. This was a popular approach for the postmodern and agonistic readings. By contrast, Miyasaki grounds Nietzschean democracy in a completely different way, on his metaphysics, particularly his determinism and "hard incompatibilism" (*NI* 25). On Miyasaki's view, Nietzsche denies that freedom and determinism are compatible and hence also that any kind of moral responsibility or moral agency is possible. This is the meaning of Nietzsche's "immoralism." For Miyasaki, Nietzsche's alternative ideal is to engender a particular feeling, namely, the love of this determinism or *amor fati*.

This thesis of hard incompatibilism leads Miyasaki to some sweeping critiques of scholarship on Nietzsche's ethics. Against the many recent interpreters who develop a Nietzschean view of freedom, Miyasaki argues that freedom is impossible in a deterministic world. Against the perfectionist and constitutivist interpreters of Nietzsche's ethics, Miyasaki argues that ethics requires the freedom to improve or fail, and such freedom is impossible. At the same time, Miyasaki admits that Nietzsche at times appeals to and even defends freedom. Yet he explains that what Nietzsche is after in these passages is not freedom, but only the "feeling" of freedom (*NI* 49). Miyasaki is driven to some strained interpretive moves, such as when he argues that higher individuals' feeling of freedom is enhanced precisely to the degree to which they have abandoned the "illusion of freedom" (*NI* 49). How can I have the feeling of something I have come to see as an illusion?

It is true that Nietzsche critiques the traditional metaphysical notion of the freedom of the will on the basis of his naturalism and determinism. Yet in recent years, scholars have argued that Nietzsche defends a novel conception of freedom that is compatible with determinism, akin to what we find in Spinoza. On this view, freedom is defined in terms of agency rather

than a power or faculty of choice. A free agent is a creature whose internal drives are structured in a hierarchical fashion, such that their activity is the causal result of this drive structure. An unfree agent is one whose internal drives are in disarray, such that their activity is the causal result of external forces. Note that this view does not assume that agents are, as Miyasaki puts it, free “in any deep way . . . than the animals they are bred from” (*NI* 36). It also helps make better sense of the passages such as the “sovereign individual” passage (*GM* II:2) Miyasaki appeals to in this context. The more a human agent’s internal drive structure becomes integrated and structured on analogy with a work of art, the less arbitrary and the more intentional this agent’s actions become. Miyasaki’s assumption that this line of scholarship commits Nietzsche to freedom in a “deep way” misreads the scholarship, which represents a missed opportunity for bolstering his own case, as I will suggest.

Miyasaki, however, does not argue that *amor fati* amounts to a quietist acceptance of the status quo. On the contrary, he holds that for Nietzsche politics replaces morality as “first philosophy.” Morality cannot shape human beings because it relies on freedom, but politics can because it does not assume freedom. Instead, politics molds human beings like clay as in Nietzsche’s infamous project of “discipline” and “breeding.” Miyasaki interprets discipline and breeding not primarily in a biological or eugenicist sense, but rather in the much older, ancient conception of politics as a regime that forms, educates, and shapes the souls of their members. I think this is exactly right and is a valuable discussion, deepening Nietzsche’s connection to similar views of political philosophy as soul formation in, for example, Plato and Aristotle.

But what kind of regime does Nietzsche defend? “Discipline” and “breeding” is of course compatible with all manner of regimes, democratic and aristocratic. Miyasaki argues that the best regime is the one that best realizes our will to power, which is what we as natural creatures in a deterministic universe are animated by. As such, his “metapolitics” relies heavily on his conception of the will to power.

Miyasaki critiques what he calls the “quantitative” understanding of the will to power, which is the view that the will to power seeks an endlessly increasing accumulation of strength and influence over the world (*NI* 77). The problem with this view, according to Miyasaki, is that it does not give us reason to love our fate. Instead, this will to power drives us on in an infinite rat race for power without any lasting satisfaction. By contrast,

Miyasaki prefers a “qualitative” notion of the will to power, which aims not to augment the power of the agent but rather to find and experience “resistance” to that agent’s efforts (*NI* 79). It is in rising to the challenge of a resistance to one’s will that one experiences satisfaction of one’s will to power. In this resistance, Miyasaki suggests, human beings engage in the joy of play. Indeed, his preferred example of such resistance is athletic competitions, particularly those that are not lopsided but that involve closely matched competitors (see, for instance, *NI* 88).

This “qualitative” conception of the will to power accounts ultimately for Nietzschean democracy, or indeed socialism. Human beings find greatest satisfaction in a regime in which all experience resistance through mutual play with others, and where no one dominates anyone else. Here we see elements of the “agonistic” conception of Nietzschean democracy, which stems from the will to power and has been developed in different ways by, for example, Bonnie Honig and Lawrence Hatab. Miyasaki’s view is distinct from these in developing a more playful conception of the agon. One could say that less is at stake in Miyasaki’s *agon*, or rather that when our political *agon* turns serious, we begin on the frustrating path of the “quantitative” rather than “qualitative” will to power (*PM* 258).

However, the problem with Miyasaki’s interpretation is that it faces difficulty in making sense of the plain meaning of Nietzsche’s texts. Miyasaki admits as much, saying that the “quantitative sense of power is often endorsed explicitly in Nietzsche’s texts” (*NI* 86). Miyasaki does not mention it, but Nietzsche’s key idea of “self-overcoming” would also seem to rest on a “quantitative” notion of the will to power. The central problem, then, with Miyasaki’s interpretation is that it does not capture Nietzsche’s vision of the world as constant striving, the endless effort on the part of human beings toward the achievement of higher forms of the soul and unique forms of human excellence. An additional, substantive problem is that I am not convinced that the “qualitative” notion of the will to power can be satisfying for most people most of the time. It is true that athletes enjoy competition or “resistance.” But they also like to win. If a top tennis player was evenly matched her entire career against others, but just happened to lose every single one of her matches, I submit that she won’t experience the kind of joyful play Miyasaki expects.

I also do not understand why we need to pick one or the other conception of the will to power. Nietzsche does not himself make this distinction. Moreover, it seems that Nietzsche’s notion of the will to power combines

both quantitative and qualitative features, since it is both other-directed and self-directed simultaneously, as John Richardson has developed in his works on the will to power. Miyasaki folds Richardson's lengthy treatment of the topic under the "quantitative" umbrella in a footnote, but this does not seem to me to do justice to the latter's view (*NI* 86n29). A more thorough engagement of Richardson's and others' views in the body of the text is called for.

Nietzschean Socialism

A great deal of the argumentation in both volumes is directed at the aristocratic Nietzsche. Like many interpreters of a left Nietzscheanism, Miyasaki acknowledges that Nietzsche himself subscribed to aristocratic political views. Also like many left Nietzscheans, Miyasaki argues that Nietzsche did not draw the correct conclusions from his own fundamental principles or "metapolitics." For Miyasaki, Nietzsche's aristocratism is in fact inconsistent with his metapolitics, and so ought to be rejected. (Miyasaki also argues that his aristocratism is odious on its own terms and that Nietzsche gives us little reason why we should accept it.)

By aristocratic politics, many scholars understand Nietzsche to be trying to effect a "reversal of the calamity of the slave revolt in morality" (*NI* 187). Nietzsche, on this reading, seeks to bring back the blond beasts of the past as a ruling class and to enslave the rest of us in service to the noble ideal. Miyasaki does an excellent job of showing why this view is inconsistent with Nietzsche's fundamental commitments. There are two main problems with the aristocratic view. First of all, turning back the clock to an aristocratic society will lead to yet another slave revolt. There is no society in which the aristoi and the people can be sustained in equilibrium, since the people will always be disempowered, thereby discontent, and will seek a revolution in society. The second problem is that Nietzsche's aristocratic radicalism fails to recognize the humanizing development of the slave revolt. Aristocracy seeks to return us to the condition of simple animal brute strength, with our will to power manifested outward. The slave revolt deepened the soul of humanity by showing us that we could turn our will to power inward, exerting power over our own drives. Ultimately, Miyasaki suggests, we can develop an equilibrium where all individuals are empowered to govern their own souls, creating a unity amid the multiplicity of their drives.

Miyasaki's second point, that the slave revolt internalizes our will to power, is an important insight and often overlooked. Miyasaki draws from this conclusion an ideal of human life as a unity out of multiplicity, an ideal that other scholars have noted in Nietzsche. However, I am confused as to how Miyasaki grounds this ideal on his own principles. Why a unity out of multiplicity? Why shouldn't an individual contain multitudes? A multifarious soul could presumably also engage in the kind of playful will to power competitions envisioned here. The ideal of unity amid multiplicity is one grounded, in my view, on Nietzsche's pursuit of the ideal of freedom, in which we construct a self-determining agency that is a single or unified node of causal efficacy in the whole, rather than being a vector of many different determinations. It seems that Miyasaki's view could have benefitted from a grounding on a Nietzschean view of freedom.

In general, Miyasaki critiques well the aristocratic radicalism thesis. However, I doubt that Nietzsche himself subscribed to this thesis. This reading requires us to assume that Nietzsche did not see his own obvious contradictions—between, say, denying that we can roll back time and affirming that we should roll back history, or affirming the benefits of slave morality and then seeking to abandon them entirely. Along with such scholars as Maudemarie Clark, I have been concerned to argue in my own work that Nietzsche's aristocracy should be understood in quite a different way. Rather than the “blond beast” of the past, whose aristocratic excellence was based on physical (or athletic?) prowess, the modern aristocrats base their excellence on spiritual—especially artistic and philosophical—excellence. Nietzsche, on this view, is trying to build a cultural aristocracy including figures such as Goethe. Cultural aristocracy does not dominate the people in the way that the ancient physical aristocracy did, arousing the resentment of the people. Rather, the spiritual aristocracy brings meaning to the people's lives in the way that artistic geniuses such as Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller do. An equilibrium, then, can be created when the people seek to preserve the exemplary individuals in their culture and transmit them from generation to generation. Indeed, we ourselves engage in this activity in writing for the *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, preserving the exemplarity of Nietzsche, making him the focal point of our scholarly lives. In short, then, Miyasaki rightly challenges the wrong interpretation of Nietzsche's aristocratism, but does not engage persuasively with the cultural aristocratic alternative.

Let me turn finally to Miyasaki's positive case for a democratic or indeed socialist Nietzscheanism. The socialist regime follows from Nietzsche's core commitments, particularly to his "qualitative" view of the will to power. The only way to satisfy the will to power and create an equilibrium in society is to accord everyone equal resources and capacities to resist everyone else. In this way, this socialism cannot simply be an economic one—equality of resources—since individuals can be unequal in other ways, such as in social status. If we ask, therefore, what kind of equality we find within Nietzschean socialism, Miyasaki answers, with Marlon Brando, "Waddaya got?" (*PM* 242).

This is a radical vision—indeed, the most radically left Nietzscheanism I know of—but at the same time, it is remarkably gradualist in the realization of this vision. Miyasaki admits that Nietzschean socialism must be "tragically realist" and "anti-utopian" because there is no enlightened vanguard or revolutionary elite that can exert agency in a deterministic world. Even if they could, such a revolutionary politics would involve crushing the very individuals whom we need "assistance and cooperation" from, namely, "present individuals" (*PM* 284). I found this all quite reasonable and indeed in the spirit of Nietzsche, who also thinks that "the only available path is so lengthy that we will not live to see substantial improvement" (*PM* 284). Yet if the socialist utopia is so distantly far from our present condition, it seemed to me that Miyasaki could in principle accept the means of a cultural aristocracy to get us there. Exemplary individuals, for example, can help elevate and enhance human freedom, which would all be in line with steps toward socialism.

However, my final worry with the end presented—socialism—is that it so thoroughly turns Nietzsche on his head that it strains credulity even to use the adjective "Nietzschean" before "left." What I have in mind here is Nietzsche's worry, expressed memorably in the form of the "last men" in *Z*, of a human race that has become small-souled and bereft of ambition and excellence. Compare Nietzsche's picture with Miyasaki's vision of Nietzschean socialism: "our reconstructed Nietzschean politics would rather lounge beneath Zhuangzi's useless tree or meander with Marx through a day of fishing, hunting, and afternoon criticism than join the frenzied mob of would-be meritocrats slavishly grubbing and squabbling for ever-greater recognition of ever-greater achievements" (*PM* 233). I cannot help but think that Nietzsche would see a reflection of his worry about the last men in this passage.

That said, Miyasaki is quite clear that he wants to develop Nietzsche's fundamental thoughts in some ways against Nietzsche's own misguided conclusions, perhaps even against the "last men" worry. Fair enough. In his analysis of these fundamental views and his application of them to a Nietzschean (or rather Miyasakian) politics, Miyasaki has given us well-argued, clear, and provocative works. My concern is that I think Nietzsche has more insight to offer us about politics than is developed here.

Bernard Reginster, *The Will to Nothingness: An Essay on Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality*

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Reviewed by Robert Guay, Binghamton University

One might imagine making a rough division between two different modes of modern European philosophy. In one, the way that the world seems to proceed belies the actual ground of things; the task of philosophy is to uncover the sources of our misunderstanding and identify the categories that account for genuinely real processes. The other mode of philosophy questions the determinacy and stability of the categories through which we make sense of the world. Here the task of philosophy is not to settle on the right categories or the actual ground, but to gain some purchase on our confusions and self-deceptions when we try to make sense of things. There may be some philosophers (Hegel and Wittgenstein, perhaps) who try to straddle the divide here. But in general the divide is great enough that if an interpreter mistakes one mode for the other it would be costly: no matter how circumspect the particular claims are, all the interpretive results will be misguided. Something like this, I want to claim, is the case with Bernard Reginster's *The Will to Nothingness*.

There are many detailed discussions in Reginster's book. For the purpose of this review, however, I want to focus on the general critical argument,