

Foreword

John Wilcox has made a major contribution to the study of Nietzsche's philosophy. His book is simple in the best sense of that word. The language is exceptionally clear, and the structure of the volume is a model of lucidity. Yet Wilcox realizes—and shows more fully than any previous writer on Nietzsche's theory of knowledge—that Nietzsche's relevant ideas were anything but simple. They are usually lucid in detail and expressed with extraordinary power. But earlier attempts to reduce the multitude of Nietzsche's pertinent reflections to a single theory have oversimplified his thought; and often he has been misrepresented very badly.

Actually, most writers on Nietzsche have more or less ignored his metaethics and epistemology. The problems connected with the question whether he believed his own theories, and especially his own ethic, to be objectively true in some sense—or in other words, whether he was a cognitivist—have been discussed surprisingly little. The Nietzsche literature is vast—the *International Nietzsche Bibliography* lists over 4,000 items, not including encyclopedia articles, book reviews, and introductions to editions of Nietzsche's writings—but very few books in English have dealt seriously with Nietzsche's *philosophy*, and hardly any with the question whether he was a cognitivist. The importance of this problem is obvious; and it has long been clear that a sustained treatment of it would go a long

ways toward building a bridge between Nietzsche and current Anglo-American philosophy.

Why, then, has there been such a dearth of serious attempts to deal with this aspect of Nietzsche? For several reasons. First, Nietzsche's whole manner is so different from the academic style of "doing philosophy" that is in vogue in the English-speaking world that professional philosophers have been slow to take him seriously. There are many signs to indicate that this has changed recently. Secondly, the early English translations of Nietzsche were hardly designed to win the respect and professional interest of philosophers, and some of the more recent versions have begun to change that. Thirdly, Nietzsche never succeeded in working out a theory of knowledge and a metaethics that satisfied him; much of the relevant material has to be gleaned from his notes; and on the face of it no single coherent theory seems to emerge. This has led some scholars to emphasize the inconclusiveness of Nietzsche's relevant remarks while others have gone ahead and attributed to Nietzsche some theory (noncognitivist or even nihilistic), while simply ignoring the abundant material in his writings that did not fit such an interpretation. It will be noted that the issues far transcend such technical labels as "cognitivism." Readers who are not at home in the literature on metaethics, or who do not favor the dichotomy of cognitive and noncognitive, can still read this book with immense profit.

Wilcox deals with the issues in truly exemplary fashion. First, he states the problems clearly. Then, in Chapter I, he assembles a great many quotations from Nietzsche to make out a case for the thesis that he was a noncognitivist. In the course of doing this, he distinguishes thirteen themes, each of which seems to support a noncognitivist position. He takes them up separately, documents each of them, and points out that they are not all compatible. In

Chapter II he deals similarly with the case for Nietzsche's cognitivism and then shows in the next chapter how Nietzsche's critique of Christianity suggests strongly that he was indeed a cognitivist.

The first page of Chapter IV informs us concisely what remains to be done: "The position which will be defended here is that Nietzsche's cognitivism is dominant; there is so much rationalism in his thought and rhetoric, in his avowals and in his polemics, that it cannot be overlooked or explained away. Furthermore, the appearances of noncognitivism are often inconsistent with one another. . . . The strategy here will be to look for an interpretation of Nietzsche's thought that will allow, insofar as possible, a consistent interpretation of all these elements of his thought. The upshot is that many, though not all, of the noncognitivist elements get explained away." This difficult program is then carried out persuasively in the last four chapters.

The importance of this book is at least threefold. First, it fills a real need by dealing so fully with some of Nietzsche's most suggestive ideas and by exploring conscientiously what they add up to. Even a mere glance at this book shows that the author quotes a great deal—much more than is usual in a scholarly book. The point is that it would be easy to document a cognitivist (or noncognitivist) position in Nietzsche if one permitted oneself to ignore all negative evidence. Wilcox goes out of his way to consider the passages that apparently contradict his interpretation. This is not only sound method but also makes readily available to all who are interested a wealth of philosophically fascinating material. While no previous scholar has dealt with these questions in such a scholarly way in English, there are earlier studies of Nietzsche's theory of knowledge in French and German. Wilcox ignores them to concentrate on the primary sources—

Nietzsche's books and notes—but does this in such masterly fashion that henceforth all Nietzsche scholars, including those in France and Germany, will have to take into account this book.

Secondly, the importance of this book obviously extends far beyond its immediate topic. It is a major contribution to the debate about whether Nietzsche's thought is hopelessly inconsistent and self-contradictory, or whether he deserves to be taken seriously as a philosopher—even by academic philosophers.

Finally, by demonstrating the coherence of Nietzsche's views as well as the brilliance of so many of his ideas about questions widely discussed in the second half of the twentieth century, this book should greatly advance the assimilation of Nietzsche by English-speaking philosophers. Those who are beginning to appreciate Continental European philosophy since Kant may be helped by this book to discover who was by far the greatest German philosopher since the early nineteenth century. I have no right to assume Wilcox's concurrence in this judgment, but am grateful to him for this book—not least because I hope that the reception of Nietzsche may make English-speaking philosophy less academic.

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