Simon ROBERTSON. *Nietzsche and Contemporary Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. 402 pp.

This new book by Simon Robertson reveals an impressive mastery of the subject. His previous research and his teaching as a lecturer at Cardiff University encompass contemporary ethical theories, theories of normativity and, perhaps paradoxically, Nietzsche's thought. He was the co-editor, with Christopher Janaway, of *Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Normativity*, published in 2012 by Oxford University Press, an essay collection whose focus is to explain how Nietzsche's naturalism can be integrated into a normative framework. Looking for possible solutions to what has become known in the literature as the 'Scope Problem', Simon Robertson's own contribution to the volume investigates how Nietzsche defends the normativity and value of his own vision without endorsing a system of morality in the full sense. He suggested in this earlier text that Nietzsche's protest against moral discourse is based on the idea that it frustrates human excellence and flourishing by presenting itself as 'dogmatic'. Robertson argues, therefore, that we should read Nietzsche's normative remarks about 'higher types' as a '"onstitutive statement' about what they are and thus what they must do to fully standout or flourish. Nietzsche, therefore, is deemed to have a coherent account of normativity despite not having a positive moral project in the conventional sense.

This new book by Robertson is single authored, and it is partly an outcome of a post-doctoral project developed at the University of Southampton between the years of 2007 and 2010, entitled "AHRC- Nietzsche and Modern Moral Philosophy". The goal is ambitious: to use Robertson's own words, "[…] this book critically assesses Nietzsche's ethical thought and its significance" (ix). The author's intent is to re-evaluate Nietzsche's project as a source of important metaethical concepts that can prove to be useful to today's ethical outlook. He does not uphold Nietzsche's view, in part because of the author's discomfort with a central characteristic of Nietzsche's thought – his so-called perfectionist project – but suggests using his ideas to contribute to a range of issues central to our philosophical approach to ethics (ix, 2),

The book has thirteen chapters, divided into three parts. The author articulates Nietzsche's project, negatively and positively, following a set of well-articulated questions presented at the beginning of the book: the 'scope problem' ('what is critical target 'morality"), Nietzsche's reassessment of moral value, Nietzsche's positive ideal, and the 'authority problem" (how and why his moral claims are authoritative). The first part of the book is re-description of Nietzsche's criticism of morality, with the rigour of analytical language; the second part deals with Nietzsche's moral psychology; and the third part is the examination of the perfectionist theory of Nietzsche and the contribution that this theory can make to the way we see and treat normativity and metaethical concepts. Some chapters have been previously published in academic journals or collective works but are presented as a consistent whole. The book is meticulously organized, with an overview/conclusion at the end of each chapter and a brief preview of the next. In addition, the closing chapter presents a set of 'concluding remarks', capturing the main ideas of the author's assessment.

The book's organization is unusual, however, because it glosses over the different stages of Nietzsche's thought and ignores its development (Robertson's major

understatement in the book is probably his declaration that he tackles the main themes "[…] not by imputing to Nietzsche an ethical 'system' growing outwards from certain foundational premises, but by presenting his thought as a set of interweaving and mutually supportive ideas" (6).) It is not much of an exaggeration to say that the work not only transforms magnificent (or repulsive) texts into restrained analytical prose, but also dissects the arguments stemming from Nietzsche's works in such a way as to make Nietzsche's own texts almost unrecognizable. As Robertson notes, "[…] undoubtedly aspects of Nietzsche's writing cannot be fully captured within the comparatively sober prose of (analytic, perhaps any) philosophy" (10). The author does, however, show an extraordinary mastery of Nietzsche's corpus and its modern interpretation, including a careful reflection of the three most notable analytic studies on Nietzsche's ethics by Philippa Foot (16-17), Maudemarie Clark (17-20), and Brian Leiter (20-22). However, it is not much of an exaggeration either to say that regardless of the precise definition of the questions, Robertson diminishes Nietzsche's ethical thought to a set of puzzles and mere logical riddles. The concluding remarks of this dense four hundred page-long volume is surprisingly brief (370-376).

In short, the author believes he has solved the 'scope problem' of Nietzsche's critique of morality and the problem of normative authority by providing "[…] something new to our understanding of Nietzsche," namely "[…] the emphasis on his opposition to categoricity" (371). Unfortunately, this conclusion seems rather trivial, as it is already abundantly clear to anyone who reads, to pick just one example, Nietzsche's preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, or the (innumerable) references in Nietzsche's works to Kant and, generally, to dogmatism of the philosophers. What is not clear is what the reader learns from seeing Nietzsche's critique of morality turned into algebraic formulas. In other words, Nietzsche and the ethical analytic tradition diverge in style and substance, not to say they are irreconcilable. He also deems it important that Nietzsche's account of value and normativity emerges from his positive ideal and a set of ethical notions.

The author's own model of normativity assumes a defence (largely unpersuasive, in our opinion) of a sentiment-laden reading of Nietzsche's moral psychology. Even a substantive description of Nietzsche's positive ideal presented by the author – based on self-mastery, psychological integration, autonomy, effective agency, meaningful self-expression – which would allow one to account for the individual diversity of flowering possibilities, dissolves what was written by Nietzsche himself. In the author's own words: "[The] general point […] is that we may be less likely to see where Nietzsche is coming from insofar as our own thought, moral and prudential, is largely inculcated by the kinds of assumptions central to the Socratic and the Pythagorean conceptions – assumptions he doesn't buy but which are woven into the very views of what ethics is that we typically take for granted" (376). So true, but it is still unclear which important metaethical concepts stemming from Nietzsche may indeed be useful to today's ethical outlook.

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