

NIETZSCHE'S LABYRINTH(S)

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With the following special issue on Nietzsche, we introduce the theme of the critical approach in philosophy and value theory, which will also play a central role in the next issues on Kafka and Derrida. Nietzsche's critical approach takes the lead here, both because he has had a decisive influence on contemporary thought, including Kafka and Derrida, and because he raises key issues such as the "revaluation of all values" and the labyrinth of thought/soul, which are of central interest to our journal. "Decisive influence" may sound like a cliché, but there is hardly another philosopher who has influenced and transformed not only philosophical thought to such an extent, but also sociology¹, psychology², art and literature³, and even pedagogy⁴. Almost all the major names in contemporary philosophy refer to Nietzsche. Heidegger, Jaspers, Deleuze, and Derrida have even devoted entire monographs to his work.

Even during his lifetime, Nietzsche's influence was so great that Max Weber is said to have declared in a discussion with Oswald Spengler that our world is "largely a world shaped by Marx and Nietzsche" (Baumgarten 1964, 554-555). Ferdinand Tönnies wrote several studies, which were also published as a book under the title *Der Nietzsche-Kultus* (Tönnies 1990). The question soon arose as to what this Nietzsche hype was all about. In his review of Tönnies' book, Paulsen gave the following explanation:

Intellectual anarchism is the reaction of the subject against being talked down and corrected for so long in school and church, in society and in the state. The effect of long disciplining is that the correct thoughts about all things, historical and political, religious and moral, literary and linguistic, for which we are trained by long schooling and many examinations, by public opinions and private rebukes, by patriotic celebrations with eternally ruminating eloquence, by enticements and threats, finally seem to us so insipid and tasteless and unbearable that we tear everything down and

¹ So for example Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel, Max Weber.

² Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, A. Adler and Ludwig Klages should be mentioned here.

³ The list would be far too long if we were only to enumerate all the writers and artists. Rainer Maria Rilke, Georges Bataille, Heinrich Mann, Tomas Mann, R. Musil, Albert Camus, Hermann Hesse and Pierre Klossowski are just a few examples.

⁴ For more on this, see Hoyer 2002.

throw it away, [...] celebrating the feast of the revaluation of all values.
(Paulsen 1903, 56-57)⁵

Considering the period after the revolutionary wave of 1948, the wars, the creation of nation-states, and the great upheavals of the 19th century, this explanation seems rather plausible, though not necessarily sufficient. Whether Nietzsche can be called an anarchist, to put it bluntly, remains questionable, but there is no doubt that he had a significant influence on anarchist movements (see Miething 2016). But Nietzsche has also been placed in very different contexts. He was sometimes seen as a "philosopher of capitalism" (Tönnies 1990, 103; Mehring 1987, 77), who paved the way for fascism and Nazism, even if he cannot be compared philosophically and intellectually with the primitiveness of a Rosenberg (Lukács 1981, 9, 355, 380), sometimes as a representative of the "conservative revolution" (Mann 2002, 341; cf. Kaufmann/Sommer 2018), then again as a signpost of the "great style" and "great politics" (Heidegger GA 43, 195-196) or even as "the last anti-political German" (Bergmann 1987). In a letter to his mother, Franziska Nietzsche, dated October 10, 1887, Nietzsche himself complained about the constant labeling to which he was subjected:

[...] sometimes I am glorified as a "philosopher of the Junker aristocracy", sometimes derided as a second Edmund von Hagen, sometimes pitied as the Faust of the nineteenth century, sometimes carefully set aside as "dynamite" and a monster. (Nietzsche 1970, 165).

His texts were also not understood or misunderstood. In the same letter he writes about the criticism of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*:

I found here together what has been printed in the German magazines about my last book: a hair-raising motley of ambiguity and aversion. Sometimes my book is "higher nonsense", sometimes it is "diabolically calculating", sometimes I deserve to be sent to the stocks for it [...]. (ibid.)

Here you can see the discrepancy between self-perception and the perception of others. While Nietzsche himself feels misunderstood and dismissed with general "aversion", others later speak of a "Nietzsche cult", which they feel they have to oppose.

Much has already been written about the fact that Nietzsche was not understood and that his work was politically instrumentalized, and this continues to

⁵ The following translation, as well as those of the other German texts for which there are no official translations, is mine, Y.R.

be a topic in current Nietzsche research (see Fleischer 1991, 28; Sommer 2019). The question is: why did all the misunderstandings arise?

This question is not easy to answer, at least not unambiguously. If we are to believe Nietzsche himself, it is due to the "besotment" of the Germans:

It seems to me that Germany for the last 15 years has become a regular school of besotment. Water, rubbish and filth, far and wide—that is what it looks like from a distance. [...] for me present-day Germany, however much it may bristle, hedgehog-like with arms, I have no longer any respect. It represents the stupidest, most depraved and most mendacious form of the 'German spirit' that has ever existed. (Nietzsche 1921, 188)

However, this dumbing down is probably not the only reason for the lack of understanding of his works. Even connoisseurs of Nietzsche do not always realize what lies behind the metaphors he forged, as in the case of the expression "Rhinoxera," which Nietzsche used as a parable for the necrosis of the German spirit and against the rising nationalism and anti-Semitism (see Devreese 2009).

As is well known, Nietzsche had already received a professorship for classical philology in Basel after completing his studies. Nevertheless, he did not become an "academic scholar" or an academic philosopher in the strict sense, who systematically and methodically worked through certain questions and problems. On the contrary, Nietzsche was a "master of suspicion" (Ricoeur 1970, 32-33; cf. 1974, 148) who questioned not only general concepts and values such as the true, the good and the beautiful, but also consciousness itself, and was suspicious of the system as such. Nietzsche's words: "I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to system is a lack of integrity" (Nietzsche 2005, 159) is well known. This rejection of systematics, which goes hand in hand with the rejection of the rigid concepts and categories of rationalism in favor of a metaphorical and literary, even partly poetic, language, deprives Nietzsche's texts of any fixed unambiguity and leaves them "open" to the most diverse interpretations. For this reason, his work has often been considered "confused" (Grützmacher 1921, 143), "contradictory" (Jaspers 1965, 10), full of "contradictions" (Müller-Lauter 1971), or "polyphonic" (Derrida 1994, 20-21; Salis 2022). In an interview, Derrida aptly expressed the complexity and difficulty of Nietzsche's work:

I have indeed found it difficult to bring together or stabilize, within a particular configuration, a 'thought' of Nietzsche. By the term 'configuration' I mean not only a systemic coherence or consistency (no-one has seriously tried to identify a philosophical or speculative 'system' in what is called a proper name—more problematic and enigmatic than ever—'Nietzsche'; but

also the organization of an ensemble, of a work or corpus, around a guiding meaning, a fundamental project or even a formal feature (of writing or speech). [...] The diversity of gestures of thought and writing, the contradictory mobility (without possible synthesis or sublation) of the analytical incursions, the diagnoses, excesses, intuitions, the theatre and music of the poetico-philosophical forms, the more than tragic play with masks and proper names—these 'aspects' of Nietzsche's work have always appeared to me to defy, from the very beginning and to the point of making them look somewhat derisory, all the 'surveys' and accounts of Nietzsche (philosophical, meta-philosophical, psychoanalytic or political). (Derrida/Beadsworth 1994, 20)

If we were to use Nietzsche's metaphorical language, we might say that his complete works resemble a labyrinth that contains several labyrinths. This is because we can understand each individual text as a labyrinth, and therefore speak of labyrinths in the plural, something that can be substantiated in several ways by Nietzsche's own views.

First, for Nietzsche, thought and its verbal realization are something labyrinthine, the reason and foundation of which elude us or remain a mystery: "every thought first arrives many-meaninged and floating, really only as the occasion for attempts to interpret or for arbitrarily fixing it, that a multitude of persons seem to participate in all thinking – this is not particularly easy to observe: fundamentally, we are trained the opposite way, not to think about thinking as we think. The origin of the thought remains hidden; in all probability it is only the symptom of a much more comprehensive state" (Nietzsche 2003, 34)

Second, it is not only the lack of unambiguity, the metaphorical and aphoristic style in Nietzsche's writings that open up the possibility of the most diverse interpretations, but also Nietzsche's view that everything ultimately boils down to interpretation and a question of perspective. Does this mean that any interpretation of Nietzsche's texts would be as good and as valid as any other? Nietzsche himself wanted educated readers, those who were well versed in philology, who studied his works carefully and were therefore able to understand his language games and metaphors, and warned against taking individual sentences from his works out of context and making something up. Few have dared to say how to read Nietzsche. In his book *Within Nietzsche's Labyrinth*, Alan White argues that we should proceed as follows:

Drunk with riddles, not soberly tackling problems; glad of twilight, not longing for Platonic sunlight; lured by flutes rather than harboring Platonic

suspicions of music; not groping, with Theseus, along threads of deductions, but rather guessing and probing, with Dionysus – so must we be and so must we proceed, according to Nietzsche, if we are to understand him; so must we be if we are to hear the "voice of beauty." (White 1990, 13)

Werner Stegmeier also suggests that we embark on the adventure of entering the labyrinth with Nietzsche:

With his art of language, he draws us into a 'labyrinth' in which, without a predetermined principle, without a preconceived method, and thus without the expectation of universally valid results, we must find our own paths alone, on which we will get lost somewhere; he invites us to our own adventures of thought, which are nowhere secure and always lead into the unknown. (Stegmeier 2011, 101-102)

Both authors, as well as others (cf. Brock 2012), use the metaphor of the labyrinth to approach Nietzsche's work, but without delving deeper into the various meanings and contexts in which Nietzsche used it. In this editorial I cannot even begin to deal with this complex topic, so I will only point out that Nietzsche speaks not of one, but of several labyrinths: of the "labyrinth of existence," of the "labyrinth of the breast," of the "labyrinth of the modern soul," of the "labyrinthine man," of the "labyrinth of all who doubt and go astray," of the labyrinth as self-mastery, of the labyrinth as the courage to ask questions and thus to take dangerous and forbidden paths, of the labyrinth of "fixed ideas," of feminism as a "labyrinth of daring knowledge," and, last but not least, of Ariadne as the labyrinth itself (cf. Nietzsche 1988, 125; 2001, 180; 2005, 3, 234; 2007, 59, 64). If you take a closer look at these contexts, it is almost always about self-knowledge and self-empowerment, which in turn brings into play all of Nietzsche's other major themes such as the "will to power", "master morality vs. slave morality" or the need for a "revaluation of all values".

Many of the well-known philosophers have, without necessarily reflecting on the labyrinthine, taken various paths that could lead us through Nietzsche's rich work as an Ariadne's thread. The difference between these paths lies not so much in the questions but in the (methodological) approach and the objective of the respective Nietzsche reading. Heidegger's aim, for example, was to show that Nietzsche's philosophy was a "completion of metaphysics" (Heidegger 1997, 471), which opened up the possibility of a "new beginning", but never realized it (Heidegger 1997, 476; cf. Heidegger 2003, 222). Similarly, Ricoeur attempted to present Nietzsche's philosophy of suspicion as a necessary but insufficient moment of hermeneutics that must be overcome in a further step (Ricoeur 1970, 55-

56; 1992, 11-23). Foucault's aim, on the other hand, was to further develop ideas and concepts such as genealogy, archaeology and the subject in terms of content and method (Foucault 1972; 1977; 1994). These examples show that Nietzsche is often perceived and read from the perspective of one's own philosophical tradition, and that the path through the labyrinth thus seems already prescribed. But one can, like Foucault, enter the labyrinth with Nietzsche and engage in his multifaceted mind game. This special issue can be seen as an invitation to try both approaches.

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