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Ithaque : Revue de philosophie de l'Université de Montréal

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Pour citer cet article : **Chaput, E. (2014) « Pippin, Robert (2012), *Introductions to Nietzsche*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 292 p. », *Ithaque*, 14, p. 157-160.**

URL : <http://www.revueithaque.org/fichiers/Ithaque14/Chaput.pdf>

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Pippin, Robert (2012), *Introductions to Nietzsche*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 292 p.

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Introductions to Nietzsche is a collection of essays originally published as introductions to the Cambridge University Press' edition of Nietzsche's works. It brings together introductive presentations from renowned scholars such as Keith Ansell-Pearson, Rüdiger Bittner, Daniel Breazeale, Maudemarie Clark, Raymond Geuss, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Brian Leiter, Alexander Nehamas, Robert Pippin, Aaron Ridley, Richard Schacht and Bernard Williams; the whole being itself preceded by a (meta)introduction – or an introduction to introductions – written by Pippin. The goal of such a collage of introductions is to give the reader a general overview of Nietzsche's philosophical thought.

Because of the peculiar character of Nietzsche's philosophy and the diversity of authors present in the book, this review does not attempt to expose the potential, general argument of the book. Rather, I would like to examine the relevance of such a collection as found in *Introductions to Nietzsche*. In other words, I would like to determine whether such an assortment of previously published independent texts achieves its goal when gathered together as a whole. This critical examination is, however, preceded by a description of the general approach of exposition adopted by most authors of the book, which will be addressed as a “contextual approach”.

Despite his “widespread notoriety”¹, Nietzsche remains a thinker whose legacy is uneasily grasped by scholarly works. In fact, one could say that it is *contra* scholars and academics that Nietzsche

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¹ Pippin, R. (dir.) (2012), *Introductions to Nietzsche*, p.2.

develops a new way of making philosophy. As Rolf-Peter Horstmann reminds us: “[we must] never forget that the author does not want to get mixed up with ‘us’, his normal insensitive ‘academic’ readers”². It is, therefore, in itself a challenge to treat Nietzsche’s philosophy while remaining in the bounds of a scholarly enquiry – a challenge rightly acknowledged by the authors.

Indeed, because of his unconventional – “untimely” might be in fact more suiting – way of making philosophy, Nietzsche’s works offer a real challenge for the somewhat more academic approach of the “Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy” collection. As many of the authors of the book rightly note, Nietzsche seldom uses logical argumentation in the traditional way of classical philosophy: “[T]his makes it, to paraphrase Aaron Ridley, more or less impossible to give a convincing *précis*” of Nietzsche’s thought³. Always evolving, multifaceted, complex, and fragmented, Nietzsche’s writings offer in themselves little possibilities for synthetic summaries; it is perhaps why most of the authors of *Introductions to Nietzsche* have preferably adopted a contextual approach in order to adequately introduce such texts. Such an approach could be seen as inappropriate for an introduction to one’s philosophy, for it fails to address directly the conceptual construction of the philosopher. But as we shall see, in the specific case of Nietzsche’s philosophy such a contextual approach is philosophically justified as a proper method of exposition.

This “contextual approach” obviously differs from one author to the other. For some, it consists in making an emphasis on the historical context, which gives the key to understanding Nietzsche’s works, especially the early ones. In effect, hardly can one understand the underlying meaning of Nietzsche’s writings without knowledge of the national, cultural, and philosophical context in which he evolves or to which he reacts. For example, “*The Birth of Tragedy*, as Raymond Geuss writes, was one of the last and most distinguished contributions to a Central European debate about the ills of modern society”⁴. Such a contribution finds its true significance once acknowledged as an attempt made by Nietzsche to spark a cultural

² Pippin, R. (dir.) (2012), *Introductions to Nietzsche*, p.185.

³ *Ibid.*, p.236.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.49.

revolution in the mind of his contemporaries. An attempt which, when we look at the reception of *The Birth of Tragedy* after its publication, has undoubtedly failed its purpose⁵.

This brings us to consider another aspect of what I call the “contextual approach” put forth by the vast majority of the authors⁶. Many introductions tend to focus on the (poor) reception of Nietzsche’s work. They also tend to concentrate on the intellectual influences of Nietzsche at the time of his publishing. Of course, a great deal of these influences is attributed to Wagner and Schopenhauer, two well-known inspirations for Nietzsche’s philosophical thought (in a positive sense for the young Nietzsche, whereas this influence grows negatively – as that to which Nietzsche opposes himself – in the later works). However, Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter also put some lesser-known influences forth in their introduction, such as German materialists to whom Nietzsche’s naturalism is greatly indebted.

Some authors will rather focus on biographical elements of Nietzsche’s life in order to explain the underlying meaning of his works. In every case, the context in which Nietzsche writes his works, be it the general historical setting of Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century or the biographical background of Nietzsche at the time of writing or even his intellectual influences of the moment, is essential to one’s understanding of his work.

But this “contextual approach” of Nietzsche’s work offers not only good guidelines to one’s comprehension of the underlying issues of the texts. The authors also show convincingly that this “contextual approach” has, particularly in the case of Nietzsche, a philosophical

⁵ Cf. Pippin, R. (dir.) (2012), *Introductions to Nietzsche*, p. 69-70.

⁶ A notable exception is the text of Rüdiger Bittner on the late notebooks, and to a lesser extent, those of Robert Pippin on Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* and Keith Ansell-Pearson on *The Genealogy of Morality*. In the case of Pippin and Ansell-Pearson, the somewhat less ‘aphoristic’ narratives of works as *Zarathustra* and the *Genealogy* – out of which a general topic is more easily extracted – may explain it. And the selection made by Bittner is voluntarily oriented toward the philosophical topics of Nietzsche’s late notebooks. Bittner uses this pretext to clarify Nietzsche’s views on moral, Christianity and truth by comparing his published works with some positions sketched in his notebooks.

relevance. With Nietzsche a new way of making philosophy seems to emerge: whereas “in some cases authors intentionally withdraw from their products in an attempt to become invisible and let their work speak for itself,”⁷ Nietzsche tries to show how philosophy as a life-activity is intimately intertwined with one’s biography. This explains not only why so much of Nietzsche’s work is linked to his life, but also how he practices philosophical controversies in an *ad hominem* way. Thought and philosophy, as expressions of the urge of life or of the will to power, cannot be understood, following Nietzsche’s perspective, distinctly from one’s life, from the forces that allow or restrain one from affirming the world as such and such. Nietzsche’s critic of philosophy from Socrates to Kant and Schopenhauer can be understood as such: philosophy is incomprehensible outside of a context, of one’s life, of one’s desire, of one’s history and perspective. The description of reality is always an interpretation intimately linked with one’s affects and desires.

Even though the book gives a good general overview of Nietzsche’s philosophy to the reader by focusing on a contextual approach, it seems to fail to find its unity as a book. As previously published texts introducing Nietzsche’s famous work, the different chapters seem sometimes naked without the works they refer to. Moreover, since the chapters are unmodified versions compiled together, the result is from time to time repetitive, notably on Wagner and Schopenhauer’s influences on the young Nietzsche. Thus, *Introductions to Nietzsche* gives a partial result. On the one hand, the reader can grasp all of Nietzsche’s most famous works with a good general introduction. On the other, the book in itself lacks unity. We could say that by virtue of its form, *Introductions to Nietzsche* is a fine introduction to his works, but unfortunately this is to say something else than an introduction to his thought, his main ideas, etc. Such ideas and concepts are obviously treated in the introductions, but not in a systematic and thorough way, as it would have been possible if the book weren’t confined by its own structure; despite its qualities, the outcome remains uneven.

⁷ Pippin, R. (dir.) (2012), *Introductions to Nietzsche*, p. 180.