

## COMPTES RENDUS

**FERRY, LUC //ALAIN RENAUT.** *Pourquoi nous ne sommes pas nietzscheens.* Paris: : Grasset, 1991. pp. 305.

This is a collection of essays on Nietzsche, often by very well known writers who have been deeply involved in the French Nietzsche discussion. To understand the nature and significance of his work, it is necessary to consider it against the background of the ongoing French debate about Nietzsche's theory. The French Nietzsche debate that began at the end of the last century, continued in desultory fashion until it was given a decisive jolt by Heidegger's two volume study of Nietzsche. In France, and as a result of Heidegger's influence, attention to Nietzsche, as well as to Freud and Marx, three thinkers that Ricoeur has called "the masters of suspicion," was linked to an attack on the values of the Enlightenment. This attack required a deconstruction of reason as a mere symptom to be understood in physiological, psychological, or economic terms, in short from an extrarational angle of vision.

The message of the present volume, stated in the title, "Why we are not Nietzscheans," is a collective effort to indicate why, other than the long enthusiasm for Nietzsche, it is not really possible to be Nietzschean, or a follower of Nietzsche. In the present French philosophical scene, the French Nietzsche is influenced by Derrida and his followers, including J.-L. Nancy and especially Sarah Kaufman, and even more so by Heidegger. It follows that to the extent that the authors reject the French view of Nietzsche they are also rejecting deconstruction, including the Derridean influence, as well as Heidegger's view. Beyond the discussion of Nietzsche, this volume represents an effort to emancipate oneself from Heidegger's main French representative, Derrida, and from Heidegger, still the main "French" philosopher in the postwar period.

The volume contains a preface and eight papers, printed in alphabetical order by author's name. There is no indication of the source of the papers or the affiliation of the various authors. Although the writers are often well known, they are not identified. The level of the contributions is uniformly good. All the writers are very well versed in Nietzsche's thought.

The preface, due to Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, states that for those who began in the 1960s, it was advisable to take a genealogical

approach in order to show that the claims of reason were merely symptomatic. But today, it is necessary to abandon deconstruction to return to reason. Since it is not viable to return to reason as absolute knowledge, it is necessary to think with Nietzsche against Nietzsche.

The first two essays, by Alain Boyer and André Comte-Sponville, are attacks on Nietzsche's thought itself. In "Hierarchy and Truth," Boyer contends that Nietzsche is obsessed with hierarchy. In passing, he dismisses most of Nietzsche's main concepts, including those of interest to Heidegger, as uninteresting (15). The discussion considers Nietzsche's view of science that Boyer criticizes as uninformed (17-21). He maintains that to leave religion behind is not to abandon value; and he affirms that we need to take a rationalist stance (31).

The paper by Comte-Sponville, whose first book was on Nietzsche, is called "The Brute, the Sophist, the Esthete: Art in the Service of Illusion." In the course of the discussion, he frequently comments on the view of Clement Rosset, a philosopher at the University of Nice. He begins by stating that every philosopher needs to come to grips with Nietzsche (39). Nietzsche's works are not so important; it is simply exaggerated to see in them the start of a new era (4). According to Comte-Sponville, Nietzsche is both theoretically and practically immoral (46). His thought is essentially racist (54). Any effort to pass this off as metaphysical, as Heidegger does, is erroneous (57). Nietzsche's pretended fidelity to life betrays the humanity of human beings (61, 64). In fact, Nietzsche's idea of truth is selfcontradictory (72). Nietzsche is finally an esthete who places art over truth (89). One cannot be a Nietzschean unless one prefers brutes, sophists, or esthetes (90).

Vincent Descombes, who teaches at Emory University and at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Pratiques, contributes a paper on "The French Interest in Nietzsche." He begins with a portrait of the typical French Nietzschean (102). For Descombes, French Nietzscheanism is incoherent (107). After discussion of the origins of this movement, he criticizes Deleuze's influential discussion of Nietzsche (120-126).

Ferry and Renaut, two well known young French anti-establishment figures, provide a paper entitled "What needs to be demonstrated is not worth much." They begin by noting that for Constant and Tocqueville, the essence of modern society is the emancipation from tradition (131). They see Nietzsche as a neo-traditionalist who criticizes modern democracy and provides an analogue of the traditional universe (133). For Nietzsche, only tradition and modernity is incoherent (148). The paper ends with a warning against abandoning argument in a return

to authority (149).

Robert Legros, a well known Belgian Hegel scholar and phenomenologist, contributes a thoughtful essay, "Nietzsche's metaphysics, but the critique of metaphysics leads to a disavowal of Nietzsche who finally accepts its distinctions (158). For Nietzsche, metaphysics concerns the essence of truth (159). His critique of metaphysics implies a separation of appearance and reality (170). But this critique is inconsistent in many ways since Nietzsche presupposes what he excludes (173, 184, 190). Hence, if we are Nietzschean we cannot be Nietzschean (193).

Philippe Raynaud, who has published a book on Max Weber, provides a paper on "Nietzsche as educator." For students of Raynaud's generation, Nietzsche offered a way to emancipate thought from "metaphysics" (197). Raynaud identifies three forms of French Nietzscheanism linked to the views of Deleuze, Foucault, and Nietzsche's impact on French culture (198-201). Nietzsche's critique of the Enlightenment is essentially irrational (211). Nietzsche provides a critique of modernity (214).

The paper by Pierre-Andre Taguieff, "The traditional paradigm: Horror of Modernity and Antiliberalism. Nietzsche's reactionary rhetorics," is the longest in the volume. Taguieff identifies modernity as the commitment to perpetual discussion and traditional antimodernism as opposed to liberal democracy (219). He sees Nietzsche as influencing an alternative to rightwing traditionalism due to Bonald and Donoso Cortes in the political voluntarism of nationalism, exemplified by Action Française (220). The paper begins with an analysis of antimodernism and the idea of decadence in virtue of which Nietzsche is a traditional thinker (220-230). This is followed by a summary of Nietzsche's attack on liberalism (230-237). Then there is a discussion of nihilism (238-246), followed by a summary of Nietzsche's attacks on dialectic (246-252), on modern mediocrity and liberal degeneration (252-256), and cultural decadence (256-263). Taguieff notes that for Nietzsche, discussion is a sign of weakness (264). The paper ends with an account of Nietzsche and Action Française, a rightwing catholic monarchist movement (276-284). The treatment of parallels between Nietzsche's thought and his influence on the thought of various rightwing movements is very interesting.

**SARTRE AND EXISTENTIALISM: PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, ETHICS, THE PSYCHE, LITERATURE, AND AESTHETICS.** Edited with introduction by William L. McBride. 8 vol. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997. ISBN 0-8153-2440-5.

For the quarter-century following World War II, existentialism was a pervasive current of thought worldwide, not only in philosophy, but also in literature and in much of psychological and social theory. Jean-Paul Sartre was the towering, controversial figure who gave impetus to the movement and with whom existentialism was identified. Sartre's philosophy, which evolved considerably over more than three decades, continues to generate attention today.

This collection begins with contemporary articles that recapture the atmosphere in which the idea of existentialism crystallized. It presents important comparative and background studies that establish connections between Sartre and existentialist writers who preceded him, and offers some of the best scholarship on his writing, including posthumous publications. The articles also connect Sartre's philosophy with the work of his best-known French contemporaries and associates, notably Camus, de Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty, and with major post-existentialist intellectual currents.

While presenting Sartre as a philosopher, as he saw himself, this interdisciplinary collection of articles includes both comprehensive overview of his philosophy and in-depth analysis of it, some highly sympathetic and some highly critical. Because of its interdisciplinary character and its chronological range over more than half a century, this series is an exceptionally valuable resource for scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

This collection of outstanding articles brings multiple perspectives to bear on existentialism and draws on a wider range of periodicals than even the largest library usually holds. Even if all the articles were available on campus, chances are that a student would have to track them down in several libraries and microfilm collections—providing, of course, that no journals were reserved for graduate students, out for binding, or simply missing. This convenient set saves students substantial time and effort by making available all the key articles in one reliable source.

Not only does the collection offer the best of contemporary articles, but it also includes important classics and seminal pieces. Thus a student can view in one place the historical evolution and advances in existentialist thought, as well as be informed about the latest

developments.

A distinguished authority in the field, William McBride has put together a balanced and well thought-out selection of the most significant works, accompanied by expert commentary. The series puts into the hands of students a selection of the best writings on existentialism that is convenient, comprehensive, multidisciplinary, and ideal as a starting point for research. A general introduction gives important background information and outlines fundamental issues, current scholarship, and scholarly controversies. Introductions to individual volumes put the articles in context and draw attention to germinal ideas and major shifts in the field. After reading the material, even a beginning student will have an excellent grasp of the basics of the subject.

1. THE DEVELOPMENT AND MEANING OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY EXISTENTIALISM. 388 pp. ISBN 0-8153-2491-X.

This volume recaptures, through the writings of figures already well-known in the mid-1940s, the coming-to-consciousness of the existentialist movement, along with early disagreements concerning its significance. The articles present various critics' shifting views of that significance and the movement's standing over subsequent decades. Despite the centrality of Sartre's thought to existentialism, these selections offer interestingly diverse perceptions of his place within the existentialist pantheon, along with varied interpretations of both the historical origins and the future importance of existential philosophy.

2. EXISTENTIALIST BACKGROUND: KIERKEGAARD, DOSTOEVSKY, NIETZSCHE, JASPERS, HEIDEGGER. 402 PP. ISBN 0-8153-2402-8.

These essays explore the relationship to existentialism of some of Sartre's 19th-century predecessors and near-contemporaries. Some of the contributors clarify these issues through their disagreements with one another, while others analyze major affinities and differences between Sartre and other existentialists.

3. SARTRE'S LIFE, TIMES, AND VISIONS DU MONDE. 412 pp. ISBN 0-8153-2493-6.

These articles are organized to give a sense both of the original reception of Sartre in his own country, in the United States and

elsewhere, and of the evolution of his thought from the immediate postwar period up to his death in 1980. Writers from several disciplines review his life as he perceived it and as others saw it against the background of the Cold War and the other great historical developments of those years, in which Sartre played such a major intellectual role as commentator and critic. Complementing the underlying question of this volume: Who was Sartre? are the philosophical, historical, and literary issues addressed in a number of the articles: what answer is possible to such a question and what is the meaning of biography and autobiography.

4. EXISTENTIALIST ONTOLOGY AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS. 355 Pp. ISBN 0-8153-2494-4

The majority of the distinguished scholarly articles in this volume focus on Sartre's early philosophical work, which dealt first with imagination and the emotions, then with the critique of Husserl's notion of a transcendental ego, and finally with systematic ontology presented in his best-known book, *Being and Nothingness*. In addition, since his preoccupation with ontological questions and especially with the meaning of ego, self, and consciousness endured throughout his career, other essays discuss these themes in light of later developments both in Sartre's own thought and in the phenomenological, hermeneutic, and analytic traditions.

5. EXISTENTIALIST ETHICS. 318 Pp. ISBN 0-8153-2495-2

Ethics was Sartre's principal concern, beginning with his famous and complex treatment of "bad faith" in *Being and Nothingness*, and continuing through his massive posthumously-published *Notebooks for an Ethic* of the late 1940's and his mostly unpublished lecture notes that date back to 1964. This volume contains highly informed analysis of all of these materials and other Sartrean works on ethics, as well as interpretations emphasizing the confrontation of his ethical ideas with inauthenticity, sexism, and racism.

6. EXISTENTIALIST POLITICS AND POLITICAL THEORY. 371 Pp. ISBN 0-8153-2496-0

The publication of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in 1960 marked the culmination of Sartre's efforts, begun in his more occasional political writings in what became essentially his journal, *Les Temps*

*Modernes*, and developed more systematically in his important essay, *Search for a Method*, to forge links between existentialism and a non-orthodox version of Marxism with a view to developing a new philosophy of politics, society, and history and a new approach to the philosophy of the social sciences. The articles provide a wide-ranging, insightful exploration of Sartre's successes and failure in his domain.

7. EXISTENTIALIST LITERATURE AND AESTHETICS. 379 Pp.  
ISBN 0-8153-2497-9

Most of Sartre's extensive works of and about literature—his fiction, his drama, his never-produced film script on Freud, and his extensive biographical studies of Genet and Flaubert—as well as theoretical questions about the genres and their relationship to philosophy, are here subjected to critical scrutiny by leading experts from both literature and philosophy. The essays illuminate Sartrean existentialism's contributions to bridging the gap between the two disciplines as well as that between existentialism and other recent approaches to literary criticism.

8. SARTRE'S FRENCH CONTEMPORARIES AND ENDURING  
INFLUENCES. 354 Pp. ISBN 0-8153-2498-7

This final volume examines Sartre's best-known philosophical contemporaries in France—Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Simone de Beauvoir—in terms of both their own philosophical insights and their relationship to Sartre's thought. The articles also offer some suggestive connections between Sartre's thought and subsequent developments in European philosophy, notably structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. The comparatively recent nature of much of this scholarship is solid testimony to the enduring influence of Sartrean existentialism.

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