

power that shapes people. Although Foucault's work seeks to overcome binary oppositions, which are common with structuralist modes of thinking, the distinction between East and West forms the political context for Said's theory to prove his basic presupposition: there has never been any neutral, unbiased, objective scholarship on the Orient. Said also operates with Foucault's grasp of the relationship between culture and power, even though Said cannot acknowledge the power possessed by the subjugated because he insists on their being simply victims without agency. Another aspect of Foucault's influence upon Said that Varisco does not develop is Foucault's conviction that history possesses a fictive character, which might help explain Said's reliance on novels to support his theory. Nonetheless, these observations do not detract from the first-rate assessment by Varisco of his subject.

—Carl Olson

ANOTHER NIETZSCHE

Tamsin Shaw: *Nietzsche's Political Skepticism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007. Pp. x, 159. \$24.95.)

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There is a sizable academic industry devoted to teasing out the political implications of Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche has been read as a proto-fascist, an aristocratic radical, an antipolitical romantic, and in recent years as some unusual species of democrat. Given the scope of the existing literature, it is very difficult for new scholars to make an original contribution. Yet Tamsin Shaw has achieved exactly that through her argument that Nietzsche is best understood as a "political skeptic."

By political skepticism, Shaw means belief in an unavoidable conflict between the demands of political legitimacy and those of genuine normative authority. One can question whether this position is properly called a form of skepticism, given that it involves belief rather than disbelief. Yet the political skeptic does adopt a skeptical attitude toward all political ideologies, which can be understood as attempts to resolve the conflict that the political skeptic sees as irresolvable. In the political skeptic's view, ideology is a product of the state's need for normative consensus—for widespread agreement that the government is to be obeyed because its power is morally justified. The modern state has sufficient ideological control over its population to manufacture this normative consensus. Shaw's political skeptic believes that a consensus produced through such dubious means—a consensus upon which the legitimacy and stability of the modern state depends—cannot reflect normative reality.

Far from resting on some form of moral skepticism, political skepticism in this sense depends on a robust form of moral realism. The political

skeptic's objection to popular ideology is not that it creates convergence on certain principles when no such principles can in truth be justified. The political skeptic's objection is that popular ideology creates convergence on the wrong principles. Yet the political skeptic also believes that moral reality could never be the basis for an alternative ideology—a "correct" ideology which can be contrasted with other, "incorrect" ideologies. There is something about correct moral principles that makes them unsuitable for such political uses. Perhaps they must be the product of individual self-legislation, or they are too complex for a majority of the population to understand, or too shocking for the masses to accept, or some combination of these and other such factors. Even liberalism—with its thin, overlapping consensus supporting a minimal set of political principles compatible with a wide variety of moral worldviews—is, for the political skeptic, incompatible with the one moral worldview that matters, the one which is truly justified.

Ideology thus poses a special problem for the political skeptic that it does not for the moral skeptic. If no normative principles can be justified, then the principles of modern political ideologies are no more or less justified than any other. Yet this is not the case if the false principles of all ideologies necessarily conflict with moral reality.

Despite their opposition to ideology, however, Shaw's political skeptics are not anarchists. Political skeptics see the state as necessary to create conditions of stability, stability that is itself genuinely normatively required. For the political skeptic, ideological consensus is paradoxically both morally required (to allow for the stability of the modern state) and morally incorrect (because it conflicts with normative reality).

Political skepticism in this sense is a fascinating position quite different from the political applications of moral or epistemological skepticism that have usually gone by that name. Shaw deserves much credit for illuminating it. But is it Nietzsche's position?

Nietzsche's hostility to the modern state is well known. Shaw makes a very convincing argument that Nietzsche abstains from describing what a truly legitimate state might look like, not out of confusion or lack of interest in the subject, but because "the consensus required by political life cannot readily be achieved, except through unacceptable forms of political manipulation" (62). Yet political skepticism in Shaw's sense implies not only opposition to ideological consensus, but also a robust moral realism as the meta-ethical foundation for this opposition. The common view is that Nietzsche must have had some other grounds for his hostility to statist ideology, grounds compatible with his well-known rejection of the idea of an objective normative reality.

As Nietzsche memorably proclaims in *Twilight of the Idols*, "There are absolutely no moral facts." Far from ignoring this passage, Shaw quotes it not once, but twice (89, 122), along with many other passages in which Nietzsche explicitly rejects moral realism. At the same time, however,

Shaw points out that Nietzsche's work is filled with adamant normative evaluations which seem incompatible with his antirealist meta-ethics. Rather than trying to render this conflict somehow consistent, as many others have tried before, Shaw instead suggests an "incompatibility thesis" under which Nietzsche's explicit meta-ethical position is irreconcilable with the evaluative practices of his value-criticism. Shaw then argues that the realist strand of his work must be privileged because it "allows us to comprehend more clearly the political predicament that Nietzsche seems to be concerned about" (109).

The bulk of Shaw's book is thus devoted not to Nietzsche's politics *per se* but to his meta-ethics. As such, Shaw leaves behind the literature on Nietzsche by political theorists and plunges in to the even more voluminous literature by moral philosophers. At times, the book seems to be less about Nietzsche's own writings and more about the many and varied ways Nietzsche has been interpreted in recent years by those employed in Anglophone philosophy departments. Shaw's original contribution to this vast philosophical enterprise is a distinctly political argument about Nietzsche's meta-ethics, the argument that a morally realist reading of Nietzsche makes better sense of his political position than does an antirealist reading.

The antirealist strain in Nietzsche's philosophy, Shaw argues, produces "problems of coherence" which "are most evident at the political level" (80). If Nietzsche's normative positions are "not being offered as justified views that might legitimately be accepted by others," Shaw argues, "they can only be read as an aspiration to the very kind of ideological authority that Nietzsche exhorts his readers to resist." Yet "this political incoherence is an idiosyncrasy of the antirealist reading of Nietzsche" (107). If we instead read Nietzsche as a moral realist, his political position can be understood as the sort of political skepticism discussed earlier.

This argument, however, depends on the claim that morally realist political skepticism is a coherent position, whereas morally antirealist opposition to ideology is not. Here Shaw's case is weakest. The paradox at the heart of her conception of political skepticism—that statist ideology is both morally required and morally incorrect—can easily be taken as a genuine inconsistency. Nor is her explanation of why she believes morally antirealist opposition to ideology to be incoherent ever fully satisfying, especially given the current popularity of this position among many postmodernists.

Perhaps these concerns could have been addressed more adequately in a longer book, or in one that did not feel the need to cover so fully the existing literature on Nietzsche's ethics and politics. One is left looking forward to future work on Shaw's political skepticism, perhaps work which moves beyond the difficult question of whether this position can accurately be attributed to Nietzsche and instead examines the strengths and weaknesses of this fascinating political position in its own right.