

Interview with Christa Davis Acampora

by Daniel Blue



Christa Davis Acampora was born in Roanoke, Virginia, and raised in nearby Dublin. She earned her undergraduate degree at Hollins University and took her Ph.D. in philosophy at Emory University. After stays in Washington, D.C. and Maine, she settled in New York, where she assumed the post vacated by Joan Stambaugh. She is currently Associate Professor of Philosophy at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Over the past decade Professor Acampora has published over two dozen articles, essays, and reviews and has edited or co-edited four anthologies, including two on Nietzsche: *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal* and *Critical Essays*

on the Classics: Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals. In addition, she has two books in progress, a study of *Beyond Good and Evil* and a work tentatively entitled *Contesting Nietzsche*. A tireless committee worker, she has set up panels for the APA and SPEP as well as hosted three "Nietzsche in New York" conferences. She also serves as executive editor of *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*. In the past she has produced student performances of Sophocles' "Antigone," and her CV lists such unexpected areas of competence as the philosophy of sport and topics in Japanese philosophy.

In conversation it emerged that Professor Acampora had been interviewed before, by *The New York Times*. The subject was Kate Fodor's play, "Hannah and Martin," which deals with the relationship between Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, and the *Times* had asked her to provide the philosophic background. That interview never appeared, but she was willing to try again, and we met at Neil's Coffee Shop near Hunter College, where our conversation took place amid the clatter of dishes, the bellows of waiters shouting orders, and the sound of accents rarely heard outside the precincts of New York City. Professor Acampora seemed utterly at home and gave her views, not just on her own writing, but on the use of Nietzsche studies and the trials of the anthologizer.

DB: *How did you choose philosophy as a career?*

CDA: I got into philosophy only through high-quality academic advising. I knew nothing about the subject, though I had some interest in religion and religious theory when I entered college. But my academic advisor insisted that I take a philosophy course, which turned out to be in philosophy of religion, and I was fascinated by the fact that you could actually make arguments—proofs for the existence of God—and that you could critique these arguments on the basis of logic. Also I found the style of instruction that my professor used very intriguing. She was extraordinarily intimidating and she had incredibly high standards in terms of what she expected of us with regard to preparation and participation in class, and so I was really just quite in awe of her. I kept taking philosophy classes, and the rest is history.

DB: *How did you come to be interested in Nietzsche?*

CDA: It was another fated accident. While still in college I wanted to engage in independent study, and there was a new, freshly minted Ph.D. at Hollins who was a student of Stanley Cavell. That professor, by the way, was Nickolas Pappas, who is now my colleague at The Graduate Center. I went to him and said that I wanted to do an independent study but I didn't know how these things worked. When asked what I wanted to study, I said, "Well, I didn't know I needed to have a plan," and he replied, "Well, I've been thinking about some Nietzsche lately. Would you like to read some Nietzsche with me?" I didn't know anything about Nietzsche, but I said, "Sure, I'll check it out." I think we did as many as three independent studies on Nietzsche, and my fate was sealed. I swore off Nietzsche actually, going into graduate school. I felt I had done all the thinking I could stand of him. Then I was slowly reeled back to it.

DB: *Can you specify what you disliked about Nietzsche and what was his appeal?*

CDA: I think it's a tension I still feel, drawn between falling absolutely in love with Nietzsche as a writer and such a witty and provocative thinker, and being utterly frustrated, sometimes to the point of disgust, about how obscure Nietzsche can be, how unclear he is. Certain traits of philosophical hygiene that our formal education cultivates in us are just not there in Nietzsche. Of course he has a whole critique of it, but there was this push and pull between loving him and hating him. I think that by the time I got to graduate school I was in my "gotta get away from Nietzsche" pole, but obviously I came back to the other side.

DB: *Perhaps that ambivalence accounts for something I've noticed in your work. Although Nietzsche is your immediate subject matter, you often have your eye on something beyond Nietzsche, so that he becomes a tool through which to address other subjects. Many people, for example, are very aware of Nietzsche the critic, but you are one of the few who concentrate on his positive programs. The agon would be an example of this, and recently you've been talking about Nietzsche's artful naturalism, and the way*

his gay science avoids both teleology and mechanism. But you don't just notice these positive suggestions; you apply them to other fields.

CDA: I think philosophy always has the responsibility to identify and address our current questions. And I'm very concerned that my work do that in every context. So I don't want to write just about Nietzsche but about why we should bother to read Nietzsche, for reasons other than his historic interest or our artistic curiosity. I feel a responsibility philosophically to do that and I always struggle with it.

DB: *You began with the agon, which is the focus of most of your early works. How did you choose that particular topic?*

CDA: I'm not entirely sure, but as a young person—and I think this is part of how we come to fall in love with Nietzsche—we are sure he is speaking directly to us and that Nietzsche is somehow challenging us as individuals, personally, to bring out something that is the best in ourselves. And to some extent this individualism that people identify in that message is tied to the American myth of the self-created individual...

DB: *Emerson.*

CDA: Yes. The pulling-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps Nietzsche. And I'm sure that that is part of what attracted me to him. I wanted to understand why Nietzsche was interested in talking about this phenomenon. And when I discovered "Homer's Contest" in Kaufmann's collection, it seemed to me that I had an explanation for part of what he saw as the promise, the making sense of the struggles that constitute our ordinary lives and how they might be transformative in the future.

DB: *Did any of your peers find this topic controversial? You once gave a presentation entitled, "Does Competition Have a Place in the Feminist Classroom?" This suggests that certain co-workers may have considered agon problematic.*

CDA: There were some weird political pressures I felt when I wrote that paper, but they weren't the ultimate or primary motives. I am obviously interested in how Nietzsche thinks that the *agon* is a positive cultural force. At the time I wrote the paper, I had been reading arguments against competition. In feminism, the individualism of competition and its association with capitalism are tied to rejections of the kinds of ideas I found in Nietzsche. The "care ethics" tradition is especially critical. I found the rejection of competition to be flat-footed and potentially rather harmful for women, given the realities of social and political life. It also annoyed me that some of the interesting work by women philosophers that was positive about aspects of competition was just ignored. Helen Longino, for example, wrote a really interesting essay in 1987. I found sympathy in the work of Page DuBois and Anne Carson. I'm now intrigued to see some new perspectives emerging on resentment, envy, and other related topics. A different version of this paper explores some of the relations between love (or the erotic) and opposition (or the eristic). My work on this topic isn't finished; it, too, should recapture my attention in the next few years.

DB: *So your interest began with "Homer's Contest."*

CDA: Yes, I was curious about "Homer's Contest" itself, which was just an excerpt in *The Portable Nietzsche*. I wondered what was left out, and this forced me to consult the translation which appears in the Oscar Levy edition from the early 20th century. Even with sketchy German skills at the time I could tell that there were problems there, and I realized that as a graduate student I was ultimately going to have to read Nietzsche in German. So I began to prepare the translation of "Homer's Contest," and the necessary research led me increasingly to see the *agon* as a central organizing idea in Nietzsche, and I tried to see how he applied it throughout his works. Of course, after "Homer's Contest" he stopped talking about *agon* until *The Twilight of the Idols*, where it resurfaced in his discussion of Socrates. So I saw "Homer's Contest" and *The Twilight of the Idols* as bookends. My project, which became my dissertation, was to figure out what happens between those two references. And in one domain after another I began to try to cash that out.

DB: *That's a perfect case in which you've used Nietzsche, as it were, to extrapolate beyond Nietzsche. After I read your essays, I saw contest everywhere, in classrooms, politics, employment offices, the courts, and of course the free market, so called. But these competitions had a double function: they both encouraged contest and were often communally creative. And Nietzsche foregrounds these complementary processes.*

CDA: Right. And I still think this is an underappreciated, underrepresented facet of Nietzsche's interest in contest. Of course, as you've noted, there's competition and struggle in virtually every facet of human experience, seemingly. One of Nietzsche's interests was to examine it in its institutional context and, particularly early on, to consider how it might be better engineered, organized and creatively appropriated. I think this requires underscoring. It is at least complementary to the popular image of Nietzsche as an individualist. For example, you can go to Central Park and run as fast as you can, but it's not a contest unless you have a community of competitors and a community that gives it its meaning in judging it. Without those, it can be a running event, maybe, but it can't be a contest. So others play an essential role in there being a contest and in determining its meaning. And situating this construction of meaning in the context of certain contemporary ethical issues, perhaps even political issues, remains uncharted territory.

DB: *By the way, one of your earliest lectures was called "What's Beautiful about Baseball?" and you list "Philosophy of Sports" as an area of expertise on your CV. Did sports inspire you to turn your attention to agon or were those parallel interests?*

CDA: Sport was not my inspiration, although it obviously supplies helpful examples to illustrate various facets of *agon*. The baseball paper was an occasion for me to combine my interests in *agon* and aesthetics. I had been an admirer of baseball for quite awhile, although I did not know enough about player stats and such to be a *fan* of the game. I grew up in a small town in Virginia that had a farm team for the Braves, and my time in Atlanta at Emory overlapped with some of the greatest baseball that team has ever

played. At the time I wrote the paper, I had been working on trying to figure out how Nietzsche's conception of contest might be similar to or different from Kant's conception of the free play of the imagination in aesthetic judgment and Schiller's application in his aesthetics. How free play is realized in the purposiveness without a purpose of aesthetic judgment was on my mind, and sports seemed like an interesting place to look for it.

Beyond that, I do have personal interests in sports. I've been running off and on since 1988. In early 2001 I decided I needed a big goal and was both thrilled and terrified to get a number in the NYC Marathon lottery. My training was going well all through the summer of 2001 and then it looked for a while as though the race might not happen following September 11. They didn't cancel, and I was there shivering at the start with the other 20,000 or so who decided to go ahead with the run. It didn't occur to me to be afraid, although I was daunted by the police presence as we came across the Verrazano Bridge, which connects Staten Island with Manhattan and makes up the first mile of the race. I finished that one and went on to run several more marathons in NYC and elsewhere. After a break from any serious training following baby, I am beginning to focus half marathons and other middle distances. So far, the ultras (races of 30 - 100+ miles) haven't lured me.

DB: *Nietzsche would probably have loved that, both for the competition and the celebration of the body. Meanwhile, as you cite in your footnotes, there has been a lot of academic work on agon before. It does seem, however, that you more than anyone else have actually made it your own and pushed it forward.*

CDA: Well. I need to publish the book. To plant the flag I will need to publish the book, and that simply must happen soon.

DB: *You mean your book, Contesting Nietzsche.*

CDA: Yes. You recently asked, "Is it almost done?" and I've been saying it's almost done for a very long time. Just when I think I've put it all together, I begin to think about

things in a somewhat different way that causes me to delay. But it's also because I am interested in contemporary applications. I'm fairly confident, for example, that I've done the work of situating in context certain discussions of contemporary political theory, which is one of the pieces of the project. As for other aspects, I think I've said all that I can say about its relationship to aesthetics, and I have plenty of things to say about its relationship to ethics, so the thinking part is largely done—I just need to do the writing.

What remains is to more fully articulate how I think this relates to issues in epistemology. The work on artful naturalism is part of that. But I think there is more to say about how Nietzsche conceived the *agon* and its relationship to our understanding and our pursuit of truth. I have published work related to this in “Nietzsche’s Agonal Wisdom” and “Naturalism and Nietzsche’s Moral Psychology.” And this summer I’ll be giving two talks, probably the same talk in two different versions, because they’re very different audiences, addressing this naturalism issue again.

The crux for me is the degree to which Nietzsche’s naturalism is different from positions often attributed to him. The dominant view today is that philosophy must be naturalistic; so philosophers are trying to give the naturalistic account of everything under the sun. But I have the impression that very often naturalism in philosophy is conceived as a sort of crude scientism. This is not Nietzsche’s view, but I don’t think the Nietzschean scholarly community has sufficiently articulated the precise nature of Nietzsche’s naturalism. Many will grant, “Oh, well, it’s not just scientism.” But we have to say what the ‘not just’ part is. My hunch is that when we’ve done a better job of explaining precisely how and why Nietzsche’s naturalism is not just scientism, we will have something of interest to offer contemporary efforts of philosophy to naturalize this and that. I’m interested, for example, in Nietzsche’s understanding and reception of evolutionary theory and in how some of what he says may be relevant to the relationship between what happens in philosophy of mind and what’s going on in contemporary cognitive science. So that is the grand aspiration for that chapter. I just haven’t been in a position to articulate it yet.

DB: *Speaking of Nietzsche's artistry, I was struck by a paragraph which occurs near the close of "Nietzsche's Agonal Wisdom." There you explain how scientists have to engage in a kind of artistry simply in order to construct and present their findings. It's not just about discovering something new. They have to be responsive to previous knowledge-formations in the very act of introducing material which may modify the latter.*

CDA: Right. I'm pretty confident about that. But that's the conclusion of an argument, and I need the argument. I need to be able to spell out precisely the relationship between that artistry and the application of what our best science tells us. The solution to that puzzle will not be discovered in just doing more science. I'm quite sure of that, because we're asking questions about the very foundations of science. So the challenge will be whether I can articulate that. I don't at all have aspirations to explain it fully. I just want to be able to talk about the interplay between science, philosophy, and art. I think it's really at the core of what Nietzsche was struggling to articulate, and I think that makes an enormous contribution to our making sense of the world as human beings.

DB: *While we're talking about Nietzsche's naturalism, we might bring in A Nietzschean Bestiary, the anthology you co-edited with your husband. I found the basic format—various writers discussing such animals as the lion, cow, cat and dog in Nietzsche—humorous, clever, and germane since Nietzsche often speaks of naturalizing humanity. How did you come up with the idea?*

CDA: Several interests converged to produce that book. My husband does environmental philosophy, and he's especially interested in animal ethics—and not just in the vein of asking questions such as "Should we test animals in this way?"—but asking questions about human-animal relationships and how these are an essential part of defining and understanding who we are. Our relationship to animals, for example, tells us a lot about such things as how we think about bodies. So we had this shared interest in Nietzsche, and as young, aspiring academics (still in graduate school when we came up with this idea), we decided that it might be professionally advantageous to find a research project that we could collaborate on. Of course it's obvious to even a casual reader of Nietzsche

that there are animals all over the place. They are part of his artistry. So this seemed a natural place for it, and we talked it over with other Nietzsche scholars, and there evolved the idea of individual essays, of single animal figures that people would pick and write an essay about. We found that this was enormously appealing. We had little difficulty getting people to sign on board with the project, and publishers absolutely loved the idea, although astonishingly many we approached rejected the project just because they thought they could make no money. Now this is bewildering when you consider what gets published in Nietzsche studies, just bewildering. So it took quite awhile to actually get a publisher, and that was crucial in getting people to go ahead and write their pieces for the book. So, that book was a long, long time in coming to fruition, although it was quite gratifying to see it happen in the end.

DB: *It was your first book and a co-venture with your husband, so I would imagine that it was quite satisfying.*

CDA: And I did some of the illustrations for the book. I don't know whether you noticed that.

DB: *I thought they were all taken from old clips.*

CDA: Some of them were done by Earl Nitschke. Earl's medium is woodcutting and he identified some public domain figures that he then based his own figures on. But he wasn't able to do all that we needed. And so, [humorously dramatizing] in the *last* days of the production of the *final* manuscript I had to do some of the illustrations for the book, although I don't recall how many off the top of my head. I'm sure it was for my psychological health that I repressed it because it was immensely stressful, but I would say I might have done as many as six of them.

DB: *You did woodcuts?*

CDA: I did an assemblage. I had a studio art minor as an undergraduate and a very short stint in advertising—between being an undergraduate and going to graduate school—and I put all of those skills to the test in creating these illustrations.

DB: *Would you care to state for the public which ones you did?*

CDA: I don't recall off the top of my head, but they appear in the credits on the title page. I know for a fact, because it was one of the most difficult, the ape is one that I did; I did the polyp; I did the whip—one of the ones for woman; those are the ones that immediately—that caused me the greatest pain, [laughing] the greatest pain and suffering. I remember those.

DB: *While we're talking about your books, your collection of essays on On The Genealogy of Morals was also an anthology. In one case the articles were commissioned, in the other they were mostly gathered from previous publications. Were the experiences significantly different?*

CDA: They had different challenges. With a commissioned piece, you're trying to write a book for which you're not the author. That can be a delicate process if you want the book to have some integrity, to come across as a whole in some sense, while also having respect for your contributors and their distinctive styles and interests. Sometimes one also has to deal with personality issues and how other people plan and execute their work, and sometimes the editor's plans don't necessarily coincide with the contributor's plans, and that's inevitable and understandable, but it requires a great degree of negotiation.

By contrast, the greatest difficulty in putting together a volume of previously published work is really practical. One has a limited budget with which to pay for permissions from the publisher, and these days the changing nature of academic publishing and the consolidation of ownership of journals have inflated the price of previously published material so that it's really cost-prohibitive. In the beginning I read maybe 170 articles on

the *Genealogy*. I did an enormous amount of thinking and arranging and planning and I finally put together what I thought was the best book I could assemble and then went out to seek permissions. I discovered that probably seventy percent of the book was going to be cost-prohibitive, and so, one by one, I had to make substitutions and I found that the whole thing fell apart. I had to start over again with that material constraint in mind.

A number of the contributors to the book were immensely helpful in filling gaps for me by giving me new work. Maybe twenty-five percent, thirty percent of the book consists of new pieces, and that was crucial in providing continuity. I think in the acknowledgements for that book I thank my family and friends for listening to me complain incessantly about the permissions, and that I'm grateful to all the permission editors who were not the subject of those conversations, who were cooperative with me.

But it's an astonishing industry, and the process involves a tremendous amount of negotiation. There is a huge degree of variation in what a piece might ultimately go for. For example, the first quote you might get from a permissions editor is, "Well, yes, we'll give you permission. It'll be \$36 a page or \$48 a page." And you write back and say, "Well, I can't. I don't have that much money in my budget." You may get a message back the next day. "Okay, what about \$24 a page?" [Mutual laughter.] So there was constant negotiation back and forth, very tedious, plus there was the problem of getting the rights in all the different countries. I needed worldwide rights. Some publishers only controlled English-only, UK- and North America-only, so there was a great deal of negotiation. But all of the authors were exceptionally generous and cooperative. They waived their own personal interest in the subsidiary royalties to help me out. And it was a big book—twenty pieces and almost four hundred pages. If I were paying \$36 a page, you can imagine how expensive that would be. So those are the challenges associated with putting together an edited volume.

DB: *I had no idea that it was that hard to republish works. That strikes at the heart of what might seem a purpose of academia.*

CDA: Right. The purpose of a university press used to be to identify and publish the very best quality research it could find without regard for its financial viability. In those days you knew that university presses didn't have to direct their acquisitions decisions based on marketing considerations. Now university presses have a requirement to be financially self-sustaining, so increasingly, marketing decisions are playing a role in acquisitions decisions. And as for journal publishing, Blackwell owns very many of the quality philosophy journals, and since it is a commercial publisher, and so its very reason for being is to make money and as much as it can, it can name its price. It's very hard to escape, and that was my greatest nemesis.

DB: *After working on anthologies, it must come as a relief to write a book on your own. We've already discussed Contesting Nietzsche but haven't yet mentioned your forthcoming work on Beyond Good and Evil.*

CDA: That's part of a series of readers' guides that Continuum is doing, as are many other publishers—Routledge, Oxford University Press, and Cambridge University Press. Several of Nietzsche's texts are often part of these sorts of series, and another book Continuum will publish on a Nietzsche text will be Dan Conway's on *The Genealogy of Morals*. That will be coming out soon. And Paul Loeb is writing one on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

As for me, I'm still at the early stages of writing that book. *Beyond Good and Evil* plays a crucial role in my articulation of Nietzsche's artful naturalism, and I'm hoping that the work that I'm doing on the *Beyond Good and Evil* book will be harmonious with the work I need to do on *Contesting Nietzsche*. Meanwhile, with regard to the *Beyond Good and Evil* project, there are two points I am keen to emphasize. The first is that Nietzsche's work is a *book*, one which has a coherent, elaborate, purposeful structure. It is not just a collection of aphorisms—which is often how even very good Nietzsche scholars treat it. Nietzsche did after all write books, not just sprinklings of sayings. Even his aphorisms are *books* of aphorisms, and we have to remember that and always place our discussion of his writings in that context. So that's one feature that I emphasize.

The other is that *Beyond Good and Evil* is often a place that people go to look for what Nietzsche said that would be relevant to political theory. I think that is important, but I will be emphasizing neither the political aspects nor the critique of morals but the project with which the book begins: asking questions about the nature of philosophy and what philosophy might look like when free of the prejudices that Nietzsche identifies. And seeing the rest of the book as an exercise in application of those ideas. So I'll be focusing on the role of philosophy, the conception of philosophy found at the very beginning and trying to see how that's exercised throughout.

DB: *To move from your books to your communal work. I note you've been on numerous departmental and administrative committees at Hunter and CUNY. You've also organized three "Nietzsche in New York" conferences, and you've arranged some conferences at the APA.*

CDA: Some panels at the APA and at SPEP. I really do like to collaborate with others. I benefited early on from people who were established figures in Nietzsche studies, who gave me opportunities to do things. I see that as an excellent way to contribute to the vitality of the area of study, and I try to do that myself. We already talked about the significance of community in the *agon*, and I find those experiences where I'm talking with others who are interested in the same questions to be the richest ones that I have as an academic. So I do seek out those opportunities wherever I can find them. Arguably it takes more time. Maybe we would have seen *Contesting Nietzsche* published a little sooner had I done things otherwise, but it will come out eventually.

DB: *Speaking of conferences, I understand that the next "Nietzsche in New York" will take place in October. Do you have the dates?*

CDA: I don't have exact dates yet, because some of the invited participants are still lining up their schedules. But I hope for it to take place just before Nietzsche's birthday, which is Oct. 15.

DB: *At the last “Nietzsche in New York” conference you talked about creating a Center for Nietzsche Studies. Could you elaborate on that proposal?*

CDA: There is a model for this in the sciences: you identify what you call a center for excellence, Area X, and it serves as a magnet for drawing and coordinating resources. I think that New York is a particularly rich place to endeavor to do this. We have a great variety of resources relevant to Nietzsche studies here, but largely they’re discrete, disconnected, and in some cases very difficult to access, as were, for example, the copies of Nietzsche’s notebooks at the New York Public Library for so many years.

There’s nothing concrete or specific I can share about that except I think there are opportunities to do this and it will take some work to figure out how we institutionalize it so that it has the desired effect. I’m somewhat hopeful that there would be ways of pulling it off. And then we would be able to collaborate with others—there are efforts to create centers of excellence elsewhere, throughout the world but particularly in Europe, and I think that there would be opportunities to increase interchange with those scholars, especially if we had a more formal arrangement set up in North America. So that’s the big dream.

DB: *One of the other things you’ve been working on lately is The Journal of Nietzsche Studies. What are your hopes and your plans for it?*

CDA: I take editorship of *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* as a great responsibility, and I’m thrilled to have the opportunity. The *Journal* recently celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. In that time it has certainly established itself as the English-language source for quality Nietzsche scholarship. I want to build on that success and to broaden the audience somewhat. I’d like the journal to become known as a journal that publishes not only articles on or about Nietzsche but also those addressing current philosophical

concerns. Since the inception of the journal, Nietzsche has finally – somewhat – become recognized as a legitimate philosopher, with something to say that philosophers might have to pay attention to. This is of course still questioned considerably in many quarters of philosophy, but at least there's a toehold there that he didn't have twenty-five to thirty years ago. Now that we've established that, we need to establish the contemporary relevance. He's not just a figure in the history of philosophy. Nietzsche has something to contribute to our contemporary discussions. That, as we discussed, is the nature of my own approach, and I think my editorial vision would be to facilitate that work.

DB: *In the past two “Nietzsche in New York” conferences you have solicited discussion on the future of Nietzsche studies. You have also written a somewhat tongue-in-cheek piece entitled “The End of Nietzsche Studies” in which you take a quasi-Hegelian approach to various approaches to Nietzsche which you regard as aufgehoben, exhausted, and ready for the dust heap. Do you have any positive thoughts on the future of Nietzsche studies and where you think they might usefully head?*

CDA: Well, things that are *aufgehoben* aren't necessarily ready for the dust heap. One way of reading what Hegel intends by such overcoming is that what has been overcome has been superseded by being incorporated. My little polemic suggests that English-language Nietzsche studies has reached a certain stage of development in which the analytic and the literary approaches (in my little sketch, represented by Kaufmann/Nehamas and Danto) no longer have the push and pull they once did. Each was reacting against the other at earlier stages. Kaufmann emphasized the artistic/transcendental; Danto stripped Nietzsche's texts of their artistic qualities to “reveal” their philosophical kernels; and Nehamas showed us how there is no “true text” of Nietzsche, only interpretations and that Nietzsche advises us to live our lives as artistic interpretation. Nehamas' view more or less puts Nietzsche studies at a certain sort of end in terms of trying to figure out who the “real” Nietzsche is, but there is still plenty to think about (and fight about!) concerning the significance of Nietzsche's work and its relevance for contemporary philosophy. So, no, I don't think Nietzsche studies itself is dead, and even the kind of Nietzsche studies that I suggest is “*aufgehoben*” still goes on,

of course.

As for Nietzsche studies in the future, I envision them as focusing on the relation of Nietzsche to contemporary philosophical questions. As I see it, there is still plenty to do in engaging Nietzsche in this way, and we need no longer concentrate on identifying *the* real Nietzsche.

DB: *Meanwhile, change can be slow. Consider the fate of one of your own more innovative and controversial contributions. In your article, “On Sovereignty and Overhumanity: Why it Matters How We Read Nietzsche’s Genealogy II: 2,” you question whether the “sovereign individual” who is praised near the beginning of Part II of On The Genealogy of Morals in fact represents Nietzsche’s ideal. This thesis flies in the face of a century of Nietzsche scholarship and was bound to prove controversial. What sort of response has it received?*

CDA: The sovereign individual lives on and has an enduring fan base. Some of those who used to casually assert that the sovereign individual is Nietzsche’s higher type have backed off the association. My article is just the tip of a larger iceberg, I think. It primarily attacks a certain position, namely that Nietzsche’s ideal is identical to the sovereign individual, who makes his lone appearance in that particular section of the *Genealogy*. All of the rest that people build around the sovereign individual might nevertheless still be compatible with Nietzsche’s views. My article just undermines making such arguments on the basis of appealing to the traits of the sovereign individual. So, potentially, my essay just creates some more work for others and prods them to think more about how to make their case. What I don’t do in that article is spell out what I *do* think is Nietzsche’s ideal, only what it is not. My own take on Nietzsche is that he is ultimately quite critical of the kind of *individualism* that comes with the idea of sovereign individuality and that this is, in fact, to be overcome. I hope to be able to show this with greater detail in the work I’m doing on *Beyond Good and Evil*.

DB: *Apart from Nietzsche scholarship, you have co-edited two books with Angela Cotton, (Un)Making Race, Re-Making Soul: Transformative Aesthetics and the Practice of*

Freedom *and* Cultural Sites Of Critical Insight: Philosophy, Aesthetics, And African-And Native-American Women's Writings. *Both of these deal with racial themes. How did those come to be, and are they associated in Nietzsche in some way?*

CDA: I guess everything I write about has something to do with Nietzsche, since he's played such a prominent role in how I think about many things. However, those works come out as part of this cooperation/collaboration emphasis, which is characteristic of my professional activities. Angie has been a colleague stretching back to graduate school, and our professional lives and career paths have crossed several times since. She was working on articulating a philosophy of consciousness that she saw in the literary works of Alice Walker. I found this work interesting and compelling and believed that it showed us something that we couldn't just get out of contemporary philosophy. So I recommended that she seek out others who were doing work in this vein and that she try to put together a volume of essays. She liked the idea but had difficulty doing it and asked if I would help. I agreed, and we ended up getting two volumes of material.

A unifying idea in both of these projects is a notion of aesthetic agency. In the course of struggles organized around racial identity, gender identity, or class identity, aesthetics potentially plays an important role, both in how people cope with experiences of oppression and discrimination, and also how they appropriate their sense of themselves and their aspirations from within those struggles, out of those conditions. We call this idea 'aesthetic agency,' and I see it as an idea that we find in Nietzsche too, an idea that aesthetics gives us a way of calling into question the values that we have and gives us a different direction for what we aspire to do, a sense of creative appropriation. That's the central idea in each of those books, and it would apply to a very contemporary problem.

DB: *You make me really want to read them.*

CDA: Nietzsche's lurking there. A big challenge in putting those books together, however, was that they're interdisciplinary. They come with very different vocabularies, different ways of setting up their problems. Coordinating all of that and putting together

something that seemed coherent had its own unique challenges too. We'll see whether I can make good on this, but I'm swearing off editing volumes for awhile.

DB: *You've done four.*

CDA: I think I've done my fair share. I'll be happy to contribute, but I don't wish to have that particular responsibility again for awhile.

DB: *We'll record that in the interview.*

CDA: (Laughing.) That's right. Hold her to her word.

DB: *We're at the end of our time, so let me ask a question which unites the communal and personal. At the recent "Nietzsche in New York" conference, Dan Conway, whose view seemed to reflect a consensus, thanked you by saying, "I can't think of anyone in recent years who has done so much for Nietzsche studies." He seems to have had in mind the many hats you wear, as thinker, convener, editor, and writer. I know that in addition to your writing and many responsibilities you have a two-year-old son. How you find the time and energy?*

CDA: Well, certainly it wouldn't be possible if I didn't have a lot of support in really all facets of my life. My husband is a terrific partner in parenting my son, and my son's grandparents are very involved in helping to manage the chaos of our home life. What I have been doing for the past three years would just be impossible without that support. But I also have a lot of support specifically from Hunter. I've had an excellent, fantastic department chair the whole time that I've been there. I'm grateful to Hunter itself and CUNY as a whole, which has given me a tremendous amount of support in terms of release time, access to resources, funding to go to conferences and so on. And there are my colleagues in Nietzsche studies, generously commenting on my work, giving me opportunities to speak, cooperating with me in the work on the volumes, conferences and such – really none of it would be possible without the help and support of all three of

those domains. So I share all—any—glory I have with others, and [smiling wryly] the responsibility for errors is entirely my own.

DB: *That explains the support, but not the energy.*

CDA: It must be genes. People in my family live forever on both sides of the family, and so we have a really slow heart rate. That gives us lots of energy.

DB: *And you run.*

CDA: I get a lot of joy from running. There is a tremendous energy that comes with it, not just in terms of the pleasures derived from disciplining and training oneself to do something one couldn't do before (about which Nietzsche writes much). Running can instantly bring connections with others. I used to run from my apartment in central Queens to my office at Hunter—a body-pounding 8.5 miles along the rock hard concrete sidewalks lining Queens Boulevard, also known as “The Boulevard of Death” for the high number of pedestrian fatalities along its course. The compensation for the tough surface and the nuisance of the traffic lights is that I get to pass through many different communities that reflect the diversity of Queens, the most diverse county in the country. People who don't normally like to make eye contact as they go about their daily routines give me a thumb's up or some encouraging word. It is as though they are momentarily sharing with me the pleasure of feeling alive in the context of vigorous physical activity, the pleasure of being a *live* body. It's a great thing.