

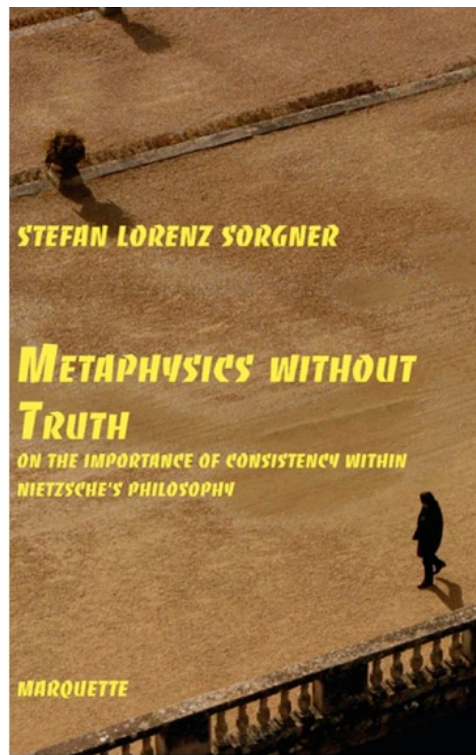
**Book Review**

# Metaphysics without Truth: On the Importance of Consistency within Nietzsche's Philosophy

by Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 2007)

reviewed by Yunus Tuncel (Ph.D., The New School)

Much has been said on truth and metaphysics in Nietzsche, and yet much remains to be said. Sorgner's recent book, *Metaphysics without Truth*, is yet another addition to this dialogue. One central question Sorgner asks in this book is whether there is any good reason to believe in Nietzsche's metaphysics, what he calls "artistic metaphysics," that refers to a philosophy that postulates a real world (39), if "the truth" that corresponds to the world does not exist for him. Sorgner explores the questions of truth and consistency in Nietzsche's works within the context of such notions as the will to power, the eternal recurrence, and perspectivism. Before he embarks on his exploration, he presents some definitions and parameters for his work.



For Sorgner metaphysics, in the sense that is applicable to Nietzsche, simply refers to any description of the world, not to the metaphysics of two world theories that have existed from Plato to Kant. There is not only a metaphysics in Nietzsche, that is, a world-description, but also an ontology that explains certain aspects of Being. In Nietzsche's metaphysics, Apollo stands for the creative force, whereas Dionysos for the destructive force. As Sorgner explores Nietzsche's artistic metaphysics, he also keeps in sight several key issues that Nietzsche was sensitive to. The first one is that philosophers defend their prejudices and baptize them as truths; according to Sorgner, Nietzsche does not exempt himself from this criticism that he raises against other philosophers. The second issue, closely connected to the first one, has to do with philosophers' approach to philosophy; here what stands out as significant is how philosophers start practicing philosophy and how they regard their philosophical activity. Both of these issues, no doubt, have to do with the lives of philosophers, and Sorgner touches briefly on Nietzsche's life. These and

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other remarks are presented to set the stage for the main body of the book that has three parts: "Apollo," "Dionysos," and "Apollo & Dionysos Reconciled." Below is a review of each of these parts.

The first part of the book, "Apollo," deals with the metaphysical aspect of Nietzsche's artistic metaphysics. Central to this metaphysics are the will to power and the notions of organic life and force. All that is living is organic, and all organic beings have memory and mind. For Nietzsche the world is not one unified organism, but is rather a continuum of power-quanta that are in perpetual interaction with one another—here Sorgner likens power quanta to Leibniz's monads. These interactions may be agonistic and war-like or loving and friendly. Furthermore, the power-quanta manifest themselves as will to power where will is their form and power their content (52), and there are both degrees of strength (or power) and an integrally unified internal/external power (53). What the overhuman has to achieve is the highest form of power (56); this is an insightful way of linking the will to power to the overhuman both of which appear as important themes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

Proceeding with his reflections on Nietzsche's philosophy of power, Sorgner adds that every power-quantum is a perspective, an interpretation in which perceptions and judgments about the world occur via mind and memory: "So a power-quantum perceives its environment via its mental capacities and makes a judgment about it via its memory" (59). Here Sorgner places too much emphasis on mind and memory, whereas for Nietzsche instincts and drives play their game at the unconscious level and manifest their power as power-quanta. Only in passing he mentions instincts which "age-old memories are transformed into" (59). However, he makes a sound observation when he says that "Nietzsche's will to power metaphysics offers a way of unifying emotions" (60) and also that a power-constellation is always what it does or is the sum of its effects.

In the section where Sorgner deals with pleasure and pain and their connection to power, he makes two assertions that need more support from Nietzsche's texts to be convincing. The first one is that "...according to Nietzsche everything has a mind" (61) This would make Nietzsche not only an Anaxagorean but also a logocentricist, both of which he was not, unless something else is meant by 'mind' such as the capacity to have some kind of perception, beyond the limits of the intellect. As for the second point, which is made after Sorgner explores carefully and insightfully the connection between power and the feelings of pain and pleasure, it has to do with the disjunction between pain and pleasure. He writes: "I do not think that one can be consciously aware of pain and pleasure at the same time. They might be both present, yet one is always dominant" (65). Although this is Sorgner's own position, I believe that for Nietzsche both pain and pleasure may be equally strong (as in an agonistic tension) and can make themselves felt as such at the same time (as in the practices of the orgiastic cults of ancient Greece he so much revered).

In the last sections of "Apollo," Sorgner discusses Nietzsche's notion of eternal recur-

rence and its connection to the will to power. After stating that Nietzsche and modern physics concur on the implications of the eternal recurrence and the fact that it follows by necessity, Sorgner rightly observes, in disagreement with many scholars, that the eternal recurrence is a cosmological principle with ethical implications. Furthermore, contra Bäumler and Heidegger, he shows that the eternal recurrence and the will to power are consistent metaphysically, and that consistency resides in the fact that the will to power is the content of Being and the eternal recurrence its form; a point that was missed by Heidegger, according to Sorgner, when he thought both of them as two modes of *Seienden* (beings).

In the second part of the book, “Dionysos,” Sorgner presents a lengthy discussion of perspectivism, truth, and nihilism in Nietzsche. Regarding truth, he makes distinctions among a variety of notions of truth (88): Nietzsche’s truth, each interpretation being a “truth,” “our truth,” and finally “the truth” which is the sum-total of all possible perspectives (and which cannot be known). As Sorgner observes, for Nietzsche there is no “the truth;” therefore, Nietzsche does not accept the correspondence theory of truth. What we have are many “truths” that are the individual perspectives. The author reiterates a question often posed against Nietzsche: If there is no “the truth,” then why believe in what Nietzsche says? Some light is shed on this question in the part on perspectivism.

Sorgner rightly observes that some perspectives are superior to others; one might also add that this may be so within the context of a particular set of highest values, and this brings up the question of hierarchy. Nietzsche must have believed that his perspective was higher than others so that it can be taken into account (so that his works are read and they have the power of persuasion). Sorgner then comes to a conclusion on the question of the hierarchy setting: “It is the intellect with its logic and the categories of reason which enable us to create a hierarchy of perspectives” (95). It must be pointed out that in Nietzsche it is not only the intellect that sets hierarchies.

Regarding truth in Nietzsche, there are, at least, two other notions of truth that are not brought up in *Metaphysics without Truth*: Dionysian truth and truthfulness. The Dionysian truth is presented in *The Birth of Tragedy*, as it is expressed in the dictum: “excess revealed itself as truth.” Even though the term Dionysian rarely appears in Nietzsche’s later writings, what the Dionysian truth stands for is an integral part of his works and his way of thinking. On the other hand, the notion of truthfulness, *Wahrhaftigkeit*, which also appears in BT and runs throughout Nietzsche’s works, stands for the search for truth as opposed to the possession of truth. Though missing in Sorgner’s discussion of truth, both of these aspects of truth in Nietzsche would have supported his position on the hierarchy of perspectives. Those who are searching, seeking, wandering, overcoming, and experimenting, qualities embodied in the notion of the overhuman, are on the higher steps of the hierarchy, although all beings are somehow connected in this universe.

As though Sorgner predicted a criticism on the role of the intellect, he later says that

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logic does not tell us anything about the world and “the truth” cannot be expressed in language at all (99). Logic and language are some of the most intellectual functions of human life; they facilitate our lives and thus serve the preservation of the species, but beyond that they do not have much to do with “the truth.” Here we can also come to the conclusion that neither logic nor language alone can set the hierarchy of perspectives according to Nietzsche; this applies to both the hierarchy of truths and the hierarchy based on “the truth,” even though such truth does not exist for Nietzsche. Finally, what complicates Nietzsche’s already complicated notion of truth is also what he says about untruths, namely that our perspectives or our little truths are falsifications.

Next comes another important issue in Nietzsche: nihilism. What again makes the subject of nihilism intricate are the different meanings of the term as they appear in his texts. Sorgner captures some of these meanings which will be briefly surveyed here: 1) There is no justification for any (one) absolute standard; this has to do with the death of God and Nietzsche’s anti-foundational posture (102). In this sense, Nietzsche can be said to be a nihilist. 2) Nihilism is about a process of change, of overcoming, as in active nihilism (105). Nietzsche can be said to be a nihilist in this sense also. 3) Nihilism belongs to an intermediary stage between two periods (106). Nietzsche, insofar as he has revealed this *interregnum*, is a nihilist. 4) Finally, nihilism is an indicator (107), a symptom that reveals the current state of affairs of a civilization.

On the other hand, Nietzsche is not a nihilist in the ways Schopenhauer, Plato, Buddhism, and Christianity are nihilistic, as Sorgner observes. Schopenhauer is a pessimist who promotes a certain type of the ascetic denial of the will. Buddhism fights against suffering and is ultimately pessimistic, as it promotes calmness and peace. Plato and Christianity, Sorgner treats them together, are life-negating, promote will to nothingness, and appeal to the weak, the sick and the stupid. Furthermore, there are not only “nihilistic” religions and philosophies, but more importantly nihilistic forces, nihilistic in the retrospective sense, that may manifest themselves in different historical and cultural contexts, as in arts and artists, for example, a frequently recurring subject for Nietzsche. Therefore, I do not agree with Sorgner when he says “...it is not quite appropriate that Nietzsche used the expression “nihilistic religion” for Christianity as well as Buddhism...” or when he writes: “So Nietzsche’s use of language here is misleading and inappropriate...” (121-122) For one thing, Nietzsche uses the term ‘nihilism’ in a variety of ways, as Sorgner himself explores; we must try to understand its sense within the context where it appears. Therefore, the concept of nihilism does not remain the same for each context. On the other hand, when Nietzsche uses the term “nihilistic religion,” he must mean that there are nihilistic forces in that religion, not to say that that religion is entirely nihilistic. Nietzsche is not a unitarian thinker that sees life or culture as consisting of one force, but rather of multiple forces, albeit in their agonistic unities.

In the third and the final part of the book, “Apollo & Dionysos Reconciled,” Sorgner



wants to demonstrate that there is consistency in Nietzsche, especially regarding metaphysics and truth, as he presents ideas on the following topics: Christianity, science, and spirit. To achieve this goal, Sorgner presents Nietzsche's life (the person behind the philosophy), his insights, and what philosophy meant to him.

From the chapter "Apollo" we have learnt that "the greatest power is to impose Being on Becoming" (131), and from "Dionysos" that Nietzsche's conception is an interpretation among many others, but it is a special one. These two teachings come together in how Nietzsche fashions himself to be the inventor of values for the new epoch; he claims to be pre-destined for this task, which Sorgner sees unfit for Nietzsche's way of thinking and explains it at the end of this chapter. The term 'pre-destination,' no doubt, has many different meanings depending on the context; obviously, Nietzsche is not saying that the God of monotheism sent him to mortals to save them (such a claim would bring down his entire philosophy which does not rest on some other-worldly being as its blood supply and source of power). On the other hand, Nietzsche recognizes all these other forces that are larger than him, that came before him, and all the epochal conditions of his times, all of which make his philosophy and "prophecy" possible. It is not a divine necessity in the Judeo-Christian sense of eschatology that dictates such a predestination for Nietzsche, but rather a tragic necessity, akin to what befell tragic heroes, through whom the unconscious forces make themselves felt intensely and the cycles of creation and destruction run their violent course and battle.

Furthermore, the highest values that are proposed by Nietzsche are the overhuman, the eternal recurrence, and the will to power. For his claim to hold, "he has to be convincing, to actually be able to change the perspectives people have..." (133-134) Although the author does not mention it, here comes the role of rhetoric that Nietzsche learned from the Greek rhetoricians and modified it according to his own need and use as a value-creator. These new values, as Sorgner says, call for a new metaphysics that will be based on the will to power. In fact, it seems like this is one of the tasks that *Metaphysics without Truth* tries to accomplish: to what extent does Nietzsche's explanation of the world (i.e. his metaphysics) make sense or is convincing?

In the section "Christianity" Sorgner discusses the different phases the Western spirit goes through as an evolution of Christianity such as Enlightenment, decadence, pessimism, and nihilism. He then presents another aspect of nihilism, which is the blending of growth and decline, which he considers to be a good sign. Once a civilization recognizes its decline, then it can rise out of its ashes. As he further observes, between the two there are only differences of degree. Nietzsche's role was to hasten the decline of Christianity (139), not to be the killer of God (God was already dead before Nietzsche was born). At the end of the third part, Sorgner claims that Nietzsche, despite his counter position to Christianity, remains within the Christian tradition (158). To support his claim, he presents the following: Nietzsche's notion of antichrist is borrowed from the Bible; TSZ has an affinity to the New Testament (TSZ also has an affin-

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ity to several literary, tragic, and musical works); and Nietzsche's favorite numbers were 7 and 10 (7 was also a favorite number for ancient Greeks, and 7 and 10 may be favorite numbers in other cultural contexts). All of these may be true, but the question to be posed to Nietzsche who, despite his Christian upbringing, was immersed in the teachings of ancient Greece, is not whether he wants to remain within the Christian tradition or not, but what he proposes to retain and what to overcome in Christianity (the emphasis in Nietzsche's works is on the latter). By claiming that Nietzsche remains within the Christian tradition, Sorgner seems to be turning Nietzsche upside down and turning Nietzsche's own critical tools against him.

Sorgner then proceeds to another area of concern in Nietzsche scholarship; here he states with textual support that Nietzsche's worldview is scientific and that the next age will be scientific. Now even if one reads the word 'scientific' in the broadest possible sense as in German, where would one place Nietzsche's artistic, poetic, and mythic world-conceptions, not to mention the other ones? No doubt Nietzsche has an immense *respect* for all the sciences and scientific activities; however, what makes Nietzsche unique and original in many ways, is not in this respect, but the fact that he could envision the unity of opposing forces of culture (such as *sciences* and *mythology*) within the context of a new epoch with its unique ideas and values. Furthermore, Nietzsche's own attempt to provide scientific proofs of the eternal recurrence does not mean that it should be taken only as a scientific principle.

In the last section of the third part, "Spirit," Sorgner addresses the question as to why anyone does or should accept Nietzsche's artistic metaphysics. Here are some of his observations: there must be a basis for ordering perspectives in Nietzsche for the overhuman to make any sense; Nietzsche gives an explanation as to how and why the scientific spirit is winning over the religious spirit (a problematic reading as observed above); Nietzsche seduces us with his metaphors; Nietzsche speaks not to the herd, but to the value-creators; and finally, the most compelling one in my view, Nietzsche's philosophy appeals to the spirit of our times (but unlike the author I do not reduce the spirit to the scientific spirit).

*Metaphysics without Truth* raises many thought-provoking questions within the context of Nietzsche's philosophy, which are still debated today in Nietzsche scholarship. The most outstanding of these questions are: What is truth in Nietzsche? Is there consistency in his thought? Is there a hierarchy of perspectives in his perspectivism? Where is Nietzsche's position on nihilism? In many of these difficult aspects of Nietzsche's thought, Sorgner has done an in-depth analysis, as he explores them from different angles. I recommend the book highly for those who are interested in these aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy.