

A Review of *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* by John Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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Introduction

The strength of Richardson's book is that it does not merely discuss the influence of Darwin's thought on Nietzsche or catalog points of similarity and difference. Instead, Richardson opts for a more sophisticated project of reconstruction, which significantly expands the appeal of his book. *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* shows how several of Nietzsche's core ideas gain a more rigorous philosophical footing if we read him in a particular neo-Darwinian light. In other words, we better understand Nietzsche if we take seriously the conceptual resources Darwinism contributes to his thought. Moreover, Richardson argues that Nietzsche not only absorbs the basic Darwinian position on biological evolution, but also that he extends these ideas in terms of socio-cultural selection and lays out a critical project of self-selection. In the end, Richardson provides a clear, coherent, and compelling reconstruction of a central line of argument within Nietzsche's complex and multifarious thought.

Nietzsche's New Darwinism is broken up into four chapters—"Biology," "Metaethics," "Ethics-Politics," and "Aesthetics." Each chapter represents an effort at thinking through Nietzsche's relation to these different arenas of value, where biological value qua natural selection becomes the ontological and explanatory foundation for all the others. The first chapter lays out the basic Darwinian position and provides the core account of evolutionary teleology grounding the remaining chapters. In the second chapter, Richardson focuses on the "meta" drive of social selection, i.e., herd instinct, which operates as a secondary constraint on biological selection by promoting those habits and drives privileging the group over the individual. In

relation to this meta-drive, Richardson examines genealogy as a critical meta-practice for realizing individual freedom qua self-selection. The third chapter confronts Nietzsche's insistence on hardness and selfishness over the herd morality of pity and altruism, as well as his socio-political revaluing of rank ordering and selective breeding over the "democratic" values of equality and domestication. In the process, Richardson carefully distinguishes Nietzsche's brand of neo-Darwinism from the Social Darwinism of Spencer, which Nietzsche sees as uncritically committed to a herd morality of pity. In the fourth chapter, Richardson turns to Nietzsche's aestheticism and its relationship to truth. He argues that Nietzsche's view is best understood by looking at how aesthetic drives have already been selected vis-à-vis human sexuality and marked by the "rush of potency" (*Rausch*) accompanying aesthetic experience. Furthermore, Richardson argues that Nietzsche's aesthetic commitment to creativity can never be disentangled from his epistemic commitment to truthfulness, which is ultimately anchored in bodily tastes expressing a long history of biological selection.

Chapter 1 – "Biology"

The first chapter is especially insightful. Here, Richardson explicates the central conceptual framework that is developed and applied across later chapters. In simple terms, Richardson argues that Darwinism provides a way of naturalizing the teleology of Nietzsche's "drive theory," which needs to be robust enough to explain the drives via the ends that they aim to realize, while side-stepping an essentialist metaphysics. For Nietzsche's drive theory to be truly explanatory it has to be genuinely teleological, i.e., there has to be strong enough sense in which the result is historically anticipated or prefigured. Typically, however, such a teleological account is grounded in a strong theory of internal representation: one that is either straightforwardly psychological, wherein a mind represents a goal to itself and proceeds to

realize it, or metaphysical, wherein some determinate ideal (*eidos*) is internally represented and guides a process towards that ideal as its end. The result, then, is explained in terms of the internal representation of the goal. In contrast, Nietzsche's entire drive theory is at odds with anything like a mentalistic account of drives wherein the goals of drives are either consciously or unconsciously pre-cognized. Similarly, Nietzsche wholly rejects such essentialistic metaphysical positions. According to Richardson, however, the Darwinian view of selection can provide a non-representational account of teleology that is historical, natural, and yet sufficiently strong for Nietzsche's purposes.

Richardson carefully considers a number of ways of thinking about teleology before settling on a final formulation, “[a drive] is a disposition to cause a certain result, i.e., power, and past such results caused (produced) this disposition” (34), which draws on work in evolutionary biology and philosophy of biology aimed at naturalizing teleology—most of which can be traced back to the etiological account of teleology in the work of Larry Wright and, more recently, Ruth Millikan. For Richardson, the key to the etiological account is that the outcome of the drive is an end (i.e., truly teleological) only when this outcome genuinely explains the drive by referring to a causal history of selection: “They [drives] are behavioral dispositions that are ‘plastic toward’ bringing about certain outcomes—and they are explained by those outcomes, which are therefore their ‘ends’ and values” (226-227). It is precisely this explanatory criterion that distinguishes a simple dispositional account from a full-fledged teleological account, while also helping to distinguish metaphysical forms of teleology from a naturalized teleology.

Given that the “will to power” is generally taken by Nietzsche as explaining more specific drives, Richardson treats Nietzsche's drive theory and his notion of the will to power separately. The key issue, as he sees it, is whether the will to power explains selection or whether

natural selection explains the will to power. While he recognizes that the former is the dominant view within Nietzsche, Richardson holds that the latter view is not only more coherent, but that there is also good textual evidence for supporting it. Richardson argues that Nietzsche “can try to ground even the universality of power *in selection*, in a way that preserves both power’s aspects of control and the doctrine’s empirical status” (60). He entertains two possibilities for reconciling the will to power with naturalism. The first tack is to understand power as the fittest strategy: “the drives that have best served reproductive success and that dominate the drive economy of most organisms are drives whose goals involve some kind of *control*, either over other organisms, or over other drives in the same organism” (55). In other words, power operates as the most successful competitive strategy for reproductive success, while reproductive success remains the ultimate end of selection. The second tack takes power even more strongly and considers it as *the* structural end of selection. On this view, Richardson suggests that Nietzsche moves away from the Darwinian emphasis on survival and reproduction to new norms aiming at growth and evolution for their own sake. Rather than directed at merely replicating the species, selection can be more dynamically construed as towards the continual growth and expansion of the lineage. In this case, power (qua lineage growth) is the ultimate end of natural selection. Amidst a context of changing competition, it could be the case that all drives are designed for continual adaptation towards increased potency of the lineage. The weakness of this second approach, according to Richardson, is that it is too deeply invested in Nietzsche’s Lamarckian tendencies, wherein the self-overcoming of the individual organism is genetically transferred to its lineage. While it seems to me that this is precisely what Nietzsche takes to be the case, Richardson rightly points out that such Lamarckism is biologically untenable. In the end, Richardson holds that the first tack adequately substitutes a naturalized “power biology” for a

metaphysically suspect “power ontology,” while simultaneously providing Nietzsche with a position that is “most consistent with his other main claims” (64) and consistent with contemporary biological theory.

In general terms, such an etiological analysis works so nicely for thinking about Nietzsche’s drive theory because it closely connects the identity of the drive (as that which it is “toward”) with the history of the drive’s emergence via selective pressures. Nietzsche’s genealogical method, then, is a mode of analysis that seeks to understand this relationship between contemporary drives or values and the specific historical context of their development. Genealogy strives to unearth the “meanings of our practices,” which “stretch back through their design history” (42). Genealogy seeks to track the *deep* formation of drives qua biological selection, as well as the *latest* transformation of drives qua socio-cultural selection. Nietzsche’s genealogies, therefore, can be read as a process of tracking exaptation, namely the way in which the herd appropriates and redirects biological drives towards socio-cultural ends selected by the herd: “He looks to the past, because this is where the ends are assigned or constituted. This is why genealogy tells us not only what, e.g., slave morality *was*, but what it *is for* is what it is selected for, which genealogy bares” (43).

Chapter 2 – “Metaethics”

The second chapter examines the way in which Nietzsche’s thinking moves beyond classical Darwinism by considering the selective pressures exerted by sociality and the role that these second-order pressures play in establishing values. In general terms, Richardson contends that Nietzsche absorbs the basic view of biological selection, but supplements the notion of biological selection (classical Darwinism) with an analysis of social selection (herd instinct) and the task of self-selection (freedom). Richardson first examines how “human values” emerge

within the context of social selection as goals of responsive behavior designed to promote the integrity of the herd over the integrity of the individual. He then turns to the ways in which Nietzsche establishes the project of self-selection and the creation of “superhuman valuing,” i.e., a disposition towards responsive behaviors designed to promote the integrity of the self.

On Richardson’s view, social selection, which selects for conformity and the *capacity* for future conformity, represents a secondary constraint on biological selection. Thus, social selection becomes expressed as a “meta-habit,” which Nietzsche calls the “herd instinct.” This meta-habit represents a drive to copy others and incorporate the habits of the social group: “Social selection favors habits that not only preserve this social medium in which they replicate, but that also shape or adapt this medium to suit their own replication” (86).

Richardson divides the history of social selection into two basic moments: the ethic of custom and the phase of morality. The first establishes the conditions for the possibility of social selection with respect to the necessary meta-habits and the evaluation of individual behavior with respect to the integrity of the herd. The second phase marks the psychological internalization of the herd instinct in terms of conscious intentions.

The ethic of custom addresses the process of social cohesion whereby the herd establishes the necessary conditions for constituting a group identity. Richardson details three meta-habits constituting the transcendental conditions for establishing the identity of the social group, and thereby an ethic of custom. These meta-habits are memory, consciousness, and language. Each of these new epistemic powers marks significant steps in the individual’s identification with the group as well as providing new possibilities for regulating the individual in view of the group’s interests. Richardson writes, “These factors—memory, consciousness, and

language—transform the character of ‘values.’ They allow a behavioral disposition to ‘aim’ at its goals in new ways: foresightedly, self-consciously, and linguistically” (91).

With the establishment of an ethic of custom, the role of memory, self-consciousness, and language becomes intensified and more deeply incorporated in the individual. In the first phase, memory essentially concerned rule following, whereas the moralization of memory concerns a sense of a fundamental indebtedness. Self-consciousness initially facilitated imitation by allowing for communication, comparison, and sharing, but within the phase of morality, consciousness becomes transmuted into bad conscience and a radical inward turning against the self. Similarly, language supported communication and social conformity, but after becoming moralized, language allows for ideological frameworks re-describing the self vis-à-vis metaphysical notions of sin and evil.

In the section on “Superhuman Values,” Richardson tackles Nietzsche’s notion of freedom in terms of self-selection. On the basis of the epistemic powers of memory, consciousness, and language, the self-creation of values supporting one’s individual interests, rather than the interests of the herd, becomes a possibility for the first time—albeit a possibility that is rarely or perhaps yet to be realized. Richardson proposes that Nietzsche’s description of this new form of valuing as “superhuman” is apt, because it represents a radically new structure of value selection and thus a new stage in evolutionary history. He then articulates two “tasks” involved in overcoming our breeding: insight and incorporation.

Insight represents a transcendence of false consciousness or the belief that we already “choose” our own values. This insight is achieved through the violence of honesty, which attempts to gain a new critical distance from the herd morality. The labor of Nietzsche’s genealogies exemplifies this effort at achieving distance. By coming to understand how the

values we already embody have emerged with respect to the preservation and enhancement of the group, we gain insight into our own sickness: “Valuing freely, as self selecting one’s values, is precisely to value in the light of an understanding of why one values” (107). However, since we are the evolutionary result of herd morality, insight is not a sufficient condition for realizing freedom. The more difficult task is to “incorporate” new drives and practices, i.e., a new psychology, a new health. Honesty leads to *insight* about the origin of values in the herd, while developing new habits, practices, and dispositions mark an effort at *embodying* these insights.

In the last sections of the chapter, Richardson addresses the tension between Nietzsche’s view about the perspectival nature of all values and Nietzsche’s insistence on the ranking of values. Richardson holds that Nietzsche’s insistence on perspectivism is a consequence of his naturalized explanation of the origin of value, whereas his emphatic ranking of values, which would seem to negate his perspectivism, stems from his genealogical and bodily relation to value. His genealogical relation offers new insight into value and entails the rejection of objectivity and universality qua value. Objectivity and universality concern a metaphysical form of valuation rather than a genealogical-biological form of valuation, which is to say that they “belong to a *kind* of valuing—a kind Nietzsche aspires to overcome” (127). At the same time, Nietzsche’s genealogical approach opens up a counter form of valuing, i.e., freedom, as a new stance qua value creation. Against objectivity and universality, this alternative mode of valuing embraces the assertion of the individual rather than the effacement of the individual. Most of Nietzsche’s ranking of values is rooted in a correlative ranking of psychological “types” and their respective style of valuing. Closely connected to his rejection of objectivity and universality, Nietzsche relies on his bodily relation to value, rather than on his socio-cultural relation to value. By genealogically tracing the meaning of many values back to sociality and the

herd instinct, Nietzsche turns to the pre-social biological drives of the body, which he takes to be older, more developed, and therefore more trustworthy. The body represents the only critical position outside of the herd, because it remains in deep contact with a history of drives stretching back beyond their “domestication” and exaptation by the herd. At the same time, however, Richardson rightly points out that Nietzsche is not promoting an anachronistic return to this earlier drives, but is interested in exapting these old drives such that they serve the freedom of the individual.

Chapter 3 – “Ethics-Politics”

Richardson conceptually divides the third chapter into two parts. The first concerns ethics, “how [Nietzsche] means to feel and act toward (particular) other people,” while the second examines politics, “what [Nietzsche] wants society to be like (how he wants it to be structured or organized)” (133). Under the rubric of ethics, Richardson looks at Nietzsche’s endorsement of the virtues of hardness (*Härte*) and selfishness (*Selbstsucht*) against the herd morality of pity (*Mitleid*) and altruism (*Altruismus*). With respect to politics, he examines Nietzsche’s valuing of rank order (*Rangordnung*) and his claims about breeding (*Züchten*), which stand in sharp opposition to the traditional democratic virtue of equality (*Gleichheit*) and the project of civilizing (*Civilisiren*).

Roughly speaking, the first half of the chapter deals with Nietzsche’s critical stance. This critique includes Nietzsche’s rejection of the Social Darwinists and their corresponding faith in the concept of progress. Whereas someone like Spencer recognizes the value of egoism within natural selection, Nietzsche criticizes the Social Darwinists for conflating egoism and selfishness, as well as for believing that such a coherent ego can then evolve towards the “higher virtues” of altruism and pity. The Social Darwinists naively take the ego as the basic unit of

selfishness, whereas Nietzsche sees the drives as primary. Rather than a singular, coherent selfishness, Nietzsche holds that individual drives compete for their own satisfaction against each other and against the drives of others. Richardson notes that Nietzsche agrees with much of Spencer's account, but that he sees Spencer's faith in social progress towards altruism as rooted in the herd instinct and not in the actual workings of natural selection. The difference that Richardson marks between Spencer and Nietzsche rests in the fact that although both thinkers see the social context as a central in the emergence of pity and altruism, Spencer accounts for this emergence via a theory of natural selection while Nietzsche argues for this emergence via a theory of social selection. The difference in Nietzsche's position is that social design is more mimetic than genetic: "dispositions are transmitted not 'in the blood' (as he puts it) but by imitation" (157). In other words, Nietzsche introduces social norms into the logic of social design such that it is not only reproductive success that selects specific behavioral responses but mimetic success, i.e., how "habit forming" these practices are, becomes a factor in their selection.

Another aspect of this critique addresses the problem of evolution as necessarily progressive. Nietzsche balks at the Hegelian scent of the Social Darwinists, who see evolution as an inexorable movement of progress. In contradistinction, Nietzsche holds a more deflated view on progress, which can allow for some minimal conception of advance, thereby making conceptual room for his positive ethical and political projects. Nietzsche's positive position vis-à-vis ethics and politics is picked up in the latter half of the chapter, particularly in sections five and six, which primarily addresses how his "reevaluation of values" represents a way of exapting the drives and values defining the herd morality.

One of the starting points for understanding Nietzsche's polemics against pity and altruism, as well as against equality and civilization, is to appreciate the strategic force of his rhetorical attacks. Like Diogenes, Nietzsche reveals the grip that social norms have on us by offending and provoking us. Richardson argues that his polemics are a kind of jarring performance intended to incite a deep reflection: "He wants us to feel strongly that *we can't think that way*...and then to ask ourselves, what restrains us, exactly?" (174). One of his criticisms of Socrates was precisely that mere dialectic is simply too easy to expunge. In short, Nietzsche's polemics are meant to get our attention rather than to convince us.

Richardson maintains that Nietzsche's critiques of pity and altruism involve both a rhetorical moment aimed at freeing one from the herd's values and a secondary moment challenging the way in which particular values direct our freedom. In the first case, Nietzsche's polemics may be less a matter of criticizing a particular table of values *per se*, but of criticizing the underlying cause, i.e., the herd morality, behind why we hold the values we do. In the second case, Richardson holds that Nietzsche's critiques have an assertive dimension wherein he contests the ways in which specific values curtail our more self-interested drives.

The core project of Nietzsche's ethics is to redesign our configuration of drives in order to contribute to the aim of self-selection (freedom) and, secondly, to serve a greater health. In Richardson's narrative, the morality of pity is exapted such that it becomes empathy disciplined by hardness. Nietzsche's commitments to genealogy and perspectivalism entail a corresponding commitment to empathy as a necessary capacity for the genealogist, who must enter into the valuative stance of the other. According to Richardson, empathy is primarily epistemic for Nietzsche, that is, it plays a diagnostic and an explanatory role within genealogy. His emphasis on hardness, then, is a counter-force to the propensity of empathy to become pity. Unlike

empathy, pity represents a purely passive, reactive, and moralistic stance. Empathy focused by a timely hardness represents a disciplined and resolute stance, a form of “tough love” or “bitter medicine,” in view of the self and others. It helps constitute an honesty that does not shrink from the severity of genealogical critique.

Richardson builds his explication of Nietzsche’s selfishness around the notion of a greater health. By this he means that *his* selfishness does not issue from the ego, but from a deeper form of health, which wills what is truly good for it rather than what it, the ego, merely wants. Similarly, Nietzsche’s rejection of altruism is a rejection of the rational self’s negation of the deeper, more robust, more animal, and more bodily aspects of the self in moral self-sacrifice and asceticism. In the place of empathy, Richardson points to a Nietzschean form of “giving,” as exemplified by Zarathustra and the Sun’s “bestowing virtue.” In this instance, there is no negation of the self qua nihilism, but an overflowing of the self qua surplus.

In terms of politics, Richardson approaches Nietzsche’s political ideas as a “reform of values, [...] for the sake of freedom” (200). Moreover, he does not read Nietzsche as endorsing a transcendent authoritarian political project imposed from outside by any particular regime or existing political structure. Rather, he sees Nietzsche as projecting the possibility of certain kind of immanent transfiguration of customs, consciousness, and values—perhaps, what Nietzsche thinks of as a form of “convalescence.” The political project, then, is a diagnostic and analytical examination of the macro level social selective conditions, which are genealogically revealed as undermining or enabling the tasks of self-selection and health. The macro-conditions occupying the center of his political thinking are a critique of bad breeding due to domestication’s skewing of biological selection and an endorsement of rank ordering rather a flattening of social relations qua democracy.

Nietzsche's discussions about breeding, as well as race, eugenics, and sexual/gender relations, primarily concern an elevation of taste qua biological selection. The main goal, for Nietzsche, is a more critical reproductive taste—one motivated by increased freedom and health, rather than by the interests of the ego and, by extension, the herd. Given the importance that Richardson places on the epistemic power of *Rausch* (“aesthetic-sexual rush, excitation,”) in the last chapter, it is surprising that it is not more central to his remarks about breeding. If I read his fourth chapter correctly, the epistemic importance of *Rausch* originates in its bodily roots and its long evolutionary history, which is what makes our aesthetic drives more trustworthy and potentially more critical, i.e., truth discerning, than consciousness or any of our more “mental” drives. In other words, *Rausch* represents a standpoint that is both immanently available and critical, because it remains at least partly transcendent to the history of domestication (social selection). In view of this account, it seems to me that Nietzsche's worries about breeding for the “wrong reasons,” that is, breeding motivated by metaphysical and moralistic interpretations of marriage and love, undermines the critical veracity of *Rausch* by over-writing the biological history that is the source of its epistemic reliability. It seems to me that Nietzsche's views about breeding are primarily marshaled in defense of what is still wild and Dionysian within this aesthetic-sexual drive. While this reading is rooted in Richardson's own account, he reserves his discussion of *Rausch* for the fourth chapter on Aesthetics.

Chapter 4 – “Aesthetics”

One of Richardson's clear commitments is that Nietzsche never stops caring about truth, even when he is emphasizing the aesthetic. On Richardson's view, Nietzsche preserves what he sees as a productive tension or *agon* between his projects of truth and aesthetic value. Richardson further divides the aesthetic component into three aesthetic attitudes, which differ in their basic

orientation: (1) the creative (active) attitude towards producing beauty, (2) the receptive (passive) attitude of enjoying beauty, and (3) the discriminative attitude for judging beauty. In each case, he gives an interesting and plausible account of the role these attitudes play in the task of self-selection and the way in which these attitudes remain in contact with the will to truth.

Richardson's overall account of Nietzsche's aesthetic view is rooted in the experience of *Rausch* as the central function of the aesthetic drives. By focusing on *Rausch*, he is able to give a naturalistic account of the aesthetic by turning, once again, to the way in which our various capacities vis-à-vis the aesthetic can be explained in terms of selected drives. Moreover, given that his account of *Rausch* is rooted in his etiological theory of drives, it is not surprising that the result of the aesthetic drives is *Rausch*. But Richardson's claim is stronger still; he contends that the very function, i.e., identity, of these drives is defined in relation to *Rausch*.

The biological basis for the importance of aesthetic drives is sexual and reproductive discrimination. According to Richardson, the primary aesthetic attitude is discriminative, because it has been crucial for biological selection that human beings recognize beauty, that is, respond positively to the "rush" (*Rausch*) of the beautiful, the healthy, the strong, the ascending human: "Our bodies themselves have a taste for certain kinds of beauty—above all the beauty of human bodies" (229). Conversely, we have evolved to be instinctually repelled by the ugly, the harmful, and the dangerous. As Richardson puts it, "we're mainly bred to find beautiful" (236), which is not only an aesthetic issue, but also an "epistemic ability" (236) to discern fitness. Since our capacity to judge beauty is a biologically selected capacity, it is inextricably tied to truth. In other words, this particular capacity for judgment is rooted in the selective advantage of *being right* about the fitness of mates. Richardson writes, "what's been bred into us first is the disposition to respond by *Rausch* to physical and behavioral features that have been, on average,

reliable predictors of health and fitness” (242). He then argues that this discriminative attitude forms the footing of the aesthetic attitudes of receptivity and creativity vis-à-vis beauty.

The fact that our aesthetic drives are fundamentally rooted in sexuality, and by extension fecundity, means that the bodily excitement or stimulation of *Rausch* is deeply intertwined with a sense of power and creative potency. It also means that *Rausch* is a basic discriminative capacity for discerning strength and health as powers for creatively engaging the world, which is sharply distinguished from the passive model of disinterested appreciation à la Shaftsbury and Kant. From an evolutionary perspective, our relationship to aesthetic experience is highly motivated. The ability to reliably recognize beauty is a selected epistemic capacity belonging most originally to our animality, to our bodies, rather than to our domesticated humanity, i.e., to our conscious judgment. This is precisely why Nietzsche holds that one needs to trust the *feeling* of ascendancy or the *smell* of elevation over and above a calculated and articulate judgment stemming from “later,” and thus more superficial and less trustworthy, cultural norms.

In his effort to show that truth and art always remain closely intertwined in Nietzsche, Richardson departs from many other interpreters. He contends that these two drives both remain vital to the liberatory project of realizing freedom qua self-selection. Richardson articulates three basic ways in which Nietzsche sees the task of “redesigning aesthetic experience to serve freedom as self selection”—(1) as recuperative, (2) as diagnostic, and (3) as creative. In the first case, art functions as a counter-stance to the will to truth and therefore allows a restorative respite from the rigorous expenditure of effort required by honesty. The play of aesthetic enjoyment thus allows for the recollection of one’s energies. In this way, Richardson holds that the aesthetic stance indirectly supports the project of truth.

The second role of aesthetic experience more directly relates to the epistemic project in that they reside at the heart of Nietzsche's skepticism. Richardson points out that Nietzsche's judgments about value are often expressed in aesthetic terms, especially in visceral and gastronomic language. For Nietzsche, the values of the herd are distasteful, nauseating, disgusting, and repulsive. In this sense, the aesthetic plays a critical epistemological role in diagnosing the sickness of the herd, and thus in gaining insight and distance from it.

The third role of aesthetic experience concerns the production of new values in order to facilitate the ongoing transition from critical insight to the lived incorporation of freedom. Richardson proposes that this creation of values is embodied in the creation of Nietzsche himself, the creation of his audience, and the creation of his artistic-philosophical works—a creation requiring both energy and discernment, that is, the recuperative and diagnostic dimensions of the aesthetic. In each case, the task of creation must discipline itself with respect to truth, albeit a *deflated* evolutionary conception of truth that is irreducibly local, historical, and perspectival. Hence, in the final pages of his book, Richardson summarizes his view on Nietzschean creation as a “move within self selection,” where this creativity remains “an activity that follows and values truths” (269).

Concluding Remarks

My guess is that some aficionados of Nietzsche will reject the very idea that Nietzsche entertains even a deflated notion of truth, as well as rejecting the corresponding work Richardson has done to ground Nietzsche's thought within the context of evolutionary theory. Perhaps it is the formative role he played in many an adolescence, but whatever the reason, it is clear that a certain protectiveness, or even possessiveness, can make it difficult to revise some people's “take” on Nietzsche, even when such a reconsideration is well warranted. This is clearly a

mistake in this case, because there is a great deal to be learned from Richardson's perceptive book. His reconstruction seeks to strengthen Nietzsche internally, that is, in ways that are largely amenable to Nietzsche's own approach to philosophy, while addressing some contemporary philosophical concerns about Nietzsche along the way. While developing a systematic theoretical account may not have been Nietzsche's own project, this does not mean that understanding how Nietzsche can be interpreted systematically should not be ours. This is also not to say that Richardson's view is the *only* way of reading Nietzsche in a cogent way, but I do think that he provides one of the most compelling examples. To my mind, Richardson's naturalism is particularly appealing, although I can again imagine that some may not see such a scientific naturalism as an appropriate hermeneutic touchstone when dealing with Nietzsche. And yet, Nietzsche's own rejection of otherworldly thinking makes naturalism an obvious ally in his battle against metaphysics (hence, the *Gay Science*). Moreover, showing how Nietzsche's thought can be consistent with, but not reducible to, contemporary biological and evolutionary thought strengthens the overall force of his thought.

Stepping back from specific issues of content for a moment, it is worth rehearsing some general impressions about other aspects of the text. Stylistically, Richardson's writing is clear, even at its most technical moments, and avoids getting bogged down in unnecessary jargon. He simply has many genuinely insightful things to say, and thus he is never given to hiding behind rhetorical flamboyance and "hand waving." At every turn, the text is extremely fair as it carefully entertains alternative views and readings. In many places, the book is explicitly self-conscious about the fact that Richardson's interpretation challenges many received readings of Nietzsche. Indeed, this sensitivity may be the source of what I take to be one of the only weaknesses of Richardson's book, albeit a minor fault. Since the book represents a relatively

radical reconstruction of Nietzsche's views, it seems to me that at times Richardson falls back on a less authoritative voice than he should. The result is that his sensitivity and care sometimes falls into an overly cautious and protective writing reminiscent of what one sees in dissertations, which also manifests itself in some unnecessary repetition and recapitulation. While his distinct lack of arrogance is certainly an enviable quality, the prose could benefit from a slightly stronger voice more appropriate to a scholar of Richardson's stature and still avoid the conceit plaguing too much of today's academic writing.

At a structural level, most readers will appreciate the fact that the bulk of the scholarly apparatus is contained in footnotes at the bottom of the page, which means that the flow of the text is not overburdened by direct quotations. At the same time, however, Richardson provides ample textual evidence in the footnotes to support his reading. One of the real strengths of his interpretation is that he cites evidence from across the Nietzschean corpus with emphasis on his "mature" position (from 1881 onward), rather than localizing his argument in a specific period or relying too heavily on the *Nachlass*.

In the final analysis, I strongly recommend *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*. Although it may be too technical and dense to be of interest to casual readers of Nietzsche, one does not need to be a scholar of Nietzsche in order to appreciate his argument. Anyone that is serious about thinking through Nietzsche in a comprehensive way should read this book. Personally speaking, in a sea of commentaries on Nietzsche, it is simply one of the most valuable secondary sources on Nietzsche that I have read, and one that more than repays your investment in time and effort. Like Richardson's earlier book, *Nietzsche's System* (1996), *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* represents a major work within American scholarship on Nietzsche.