

Book Review: Bolaños, Paolo A., *Thought-pieces: Nietzschean Reflections on Anti-foundationalism, Ethics, and Politics*

Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland

University of Santo Tomas, Manila

Thought-pieces is Paolo Bolaños's latest work that has been baptized as the "Grey Book," the latest addition to the growing collection of his works which are fondly called by their covers' respective colors.¹ This current book under review provides Nietzschean reflections on anti-foundationalism, ethics, and politics, comprised of seven essays that were previously published as either journal articles or book chapters yet were revised to fit the book's subthemes.² Despite 133 years after his mental collapse in Turin, Nietzsche is still grossly misunderstood, evident especially in watered-down readings that do not confront the thinker as who he is and his ideas

¹ This is a running theme especially in the classes of Dr. Bolaños. His work *On Affirmation and Becoming: A Deleuzian Introduction to Nietzsche's Ethics and Ontology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) is called the "Blue Book" while the recent *Nietzsche and Adorno on Philosophical Praxis, Language, and Reconciliation: Towards an Ethics of Thinking* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020) is the "Brown Book."

² See Paolo A. Bolaños, *Thought-pieces: Nietzschean Reflections on Anti-foundationalism, Ethics, and Politics* (Davao: Aletheia Publishing, 2021), ii.

as to how they are, since the flair of the pronouncements of “death of God” and “eternal return” is more accessible to pick up than a serious discourse with his writing. *Thought-pieces* is an attempt to provide not necessarily a mere exposition of the thinker but rather musings based on Nietzsche’s ideas which intersect with those of other philosophers. It makes good sense then why Bolaños presents in the introduction the various Nietzschean assimilations that complement the already recognized German, French, and Anglo-American traditions (parenthetically, we may also add an Italian tradition).³ What is introduced are the Russian, Japanese, and Chinese assimilations alongside Nietzsche’s influence on theology, psychology, and literature among others that have brought the thinker to the contemporary world through (mis)interpretations.⁴ Through such an appreciation, Bolaños presents how Nietzsche remains profoundly contextual and “a field of contention” but at the same time a figure of dialogue “conditioned by the meeting of East and West”—which sets the mood for the entire work.⁵

The book’s first part is entitled “Anti-Foundationalism: The Critique of Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Modernity” that showcases two attempts to furnish a Nietzsche of dialogue through the first chapter “Metaphysical and Epistemic Anti-foundationalism in Nietzsche and Buddhism” for the East and the second “Hegel and Nietzsche on Modernity, History, and Metaphysics (Some Notes on Elective Affinities)” for the West. The discussion on Nietzsche and the Buddha presents the respective critiques of their traditions—the looming metaphysics, for Nietzsche, as the generalizations of philosophers such as the *arche*, the *eidos*, the Prime Mover, subject, *Geist*, and ultimately God while for Gautama Buddha, Hinduism’s *atman-Brahman* tie.⁶ These two figures are presented as iconoclasts, working to remove the old tablets of dogmatism

³ See Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. by William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 190-195.

⁴ See Bolaños, *Thought-pieces*, 7-18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 and 18.

⁶ See *Ibid.*, 26 and 28.

in exchange for a more open consciousness of reality. Following this, another set of affinities is drawn, but this time in the West, between Hegel and Nietzsche, for the second chapter. This unfolds with their similar critique of modernity via dialectics and genealogy respectively. However, their critiques are their ways to emphasize the importance of history's role, which is uncovered through Hegel's stress of *Aufhebung* in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and Nietzsche's utilization of genealogy in his three essays of the *Genealogy of Morals*.⁷ I opine, however, that it would have been more fruitful on the part of discussing Nietzsche's usage of history if there were parts on the second of his *Untimely Meditations* besides the chunk devoted to Foucault's discussion of the genealogy.⁸

The second part of this book, "Ethics: From Nihilism to Ethics" is composed of three essays, "Nietzsche's Critique of Nihilism and the Possibility of the Eternal Return as Ethical Imperative" for the third chapter, "Deleuze's Sense of 'Sense' and Nietzsche's Nomadic Thinking" for chapter four, and "Nietzsche, Spinoza, and the Ethological Conception of Ethics" as the fifth chapter. The movement from nihilism to ethics is a mark of affirmation first brought forward in the third chapter. Here a dialectics of agency surfaces as the realization of the precariousness of being human. This comes after a confrontation of the ethical challenge posed by the eternal return and the transitional image evoked by the Three Metamorphoses. These both ultimately lead to the figure of the *Übermensch*, the child of the new valuation.⁹ Nietzsche's critique of nihilism is a harbinger of the imperative to remain true to the earth, true to "life' replete with joy and pain."¹⁰ His critique is rooted in his disdain for Platonism, in, as the previous section shows, metaphysics assuming a dogmatic pontification. Part of this critique is Nietzsche's exact style of

⁷ See *Ibid.*, 46-50.

⁸ See Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. by Daniel Breazeale, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁹ See Bolaños, *Thought-pieces*, 64ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

thinking/writing, which is brought forward honestly as a repetition of difference in Deleuze's intention with playing with the word "sense" as found in the following essay. Bringing Deleuze and Nietzsche together gives the readers a glimpse of the "Blue Book." For this chapter, Nietzsche is introduced after the distinction of "Good Sense, Common Sense, and Nonsense" in a frisky intersection of these senses in that "nonsense fragments our good and common thinking" and ultimately deconstructs what earns the esteem of *doxa*.¹¹ With this, one is led to this section's last chapter, which provides a Nietzschean reading of Spinoza by Deleuze, or rather how Deleuze's practical philosophy is best situated between the two other thinkers.¹² Such a dialogue completes the entire movement from nihilism to ethics, yet an ethics based not simply on a widespread affirmation but from a plane of immanence, the perspective of the body and not from some hallow/hollow transcendent worldview.

Finally, the book's third part is entitled "Politics: From the World of Forms to the Agent of Solidarity" portioned into two, "Metaphysics as Politics: Nietzsche's Reading of Plato" for chapter six and "The Quest of Peace amidst the Death of God: Perspectives on Nietzsche's Philosophy of Affirmation and Camus's Ethics of Solidarity" for the last chapter. Nietzsche's relation to Plato opens chapter six with not the same hostility that was found in the previous chapters (such when Nietzsche equates Platonism with dogmatic metaphysics) but rather with due consideration to "the proper relation between philosophy and politics."¹³ This chapter provides an account of Nietzsche's appreciation of the Greek thinker, which is mirrored in how Truth intersects with life, especially in the context of a noble lie. Working on the commentaries of Catherine Zuckert and Laurence Lampert, Bolaños sketches how ultimately Nietzsche's reading of Plato uncovers a politics scaffolded by metaphysics. This relatively short musing on politics leads us to the next, which brings together the central role of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹² See *Ibid.*, 102.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 117.

affirmation in Nietzsche's philosophy and an ethics of solidarity sourced from Camus' writings. The latter is disclosed as a response to a world gripped by nihilism, by the death of God, which Camus diversely presents in his novels. This type of ethics is founded on the cry of humanity "based on our relationship with the world" and likewise stands as "the resistance against logical crime."¹⁴ With Camus' political writings and the wrong ties between Nietzsche and fascist groups, "affirmation is directed towards the highest expression of all values—life[,] which recognizes nihilism as necessary for the revaluation of values and a return to the human condition."¹⁵ Thus closes this third part and the entire work.

Overall, this work provides an image of a Nietzsche of and in dialogue, which perhaps would have been a better theme for the manuscript, his negotiations with other thinkers (the Buddha, Hegel, Deleuze, Spinoza, Plato, and Camus) or rather dialogical reflections with them on anti-foundationalism, ethics, and politics in the form of thought pieces. Anecdotally, a requirement in Dr. Bolaños' classes is writing thought pieces on each reading assignment. Such a practice allows the cultivation of one's writing style and likewise a keen awareness of the movement of one's philosophical praxis. Of all the chapters that make this book, such thought-piece style is found in the sixth chapter, while the rest takes the usual article format. However, the sporadicity of thought pieces is reflected in the differences in each of the chapter's writing styles, reflecting the separate periods they were initially written and the other works they bear semblance with (either Dr. Bolaños' other books or articles not included here). As a whole, this book serves as a sound primer for those who need to break the old tablets of their Nietzschean lens. It provides not just insights into Nietzsche's views but also a form of dialogue to enrich an understanding of Nietzsche's ideas and those of others. What results from this are interconnections that are weaved, which ultimately reflect the thought-piece nature of the entire work. However, on the merit of the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132 and 137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

Nietzschean import, such an attempt borders, especially from the middle of the book onward, a review for a person familiar with Nietzsche. This observation is grounded on how the discussion of Nietzsche's ethics is closely linked to Deleuze (akin to the theme of life-affirmation found in the "Blue Book"¹⁶), followed by a short treatment of a Nietzschean view of politics. There are currently numerous titles that precisely treat these, such as Maudemarie Clark's *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics*, Hugo Drochon's *Nietzsche's Great Politics*, or even the recently translated 1000-page work by Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel* besides others.¹⁷ These works may be considered by those who wish to venture further on the topic. Parenthetically and for the last note, it has to be said that this is the first book in Aletheia Publishing's Philosophy Series which seems a promising venture for provoking pieces in philosophy that do not suit the usual formats found in other publishers.

¹⁶ See Paolo A. Bolaños, *On Affirmation and Becoming: A Deleuzian Introduction to Nietzsche's Ethics and Ontology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 4.

Thought-pieces: Nietzschean Reflections on Anti-foundationalism, Ethics, and Politics (Davao: Aletheia Publishing, 2021), ii.

¹⁷ See Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche's Great Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel: Intellectual Biography and Critical Balance-Sheet*, trans. by Gregor Benton (Leiden: Brill, 2020)

REFERENCES

- Bolaños, Paolo A., *Nietzsche and Adorno on Philosophical Praxis, Language, and Reconciliation: Towards an Ethics of Thinking* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020).
- _____. *On Affirmation and Becoming: A Deleuzian Introduction to Nietzsche's Ethics and Ontology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).
- _____. *Thought-pieces: Nietzschean Reflections on Anti-foundationalism, Ethics, and Politics* (Davao: Aletheia Publishing, 2021), ii.
- Clark, Maudemarie, *Nietzsche on Ethics and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- Drochon, Hugo, *Nietzsche's Great Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).
- Losurdo, Domenico, *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel: Intellectual Biography and Critical Balance-Sheet*, trans. Gregor Benton (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- Vattimo, Gianni, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).