

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Spring 2018

Volume 44 Issue 3

- 359 *Rodrigo Chacón* Philosophy as Awareness of Fundamental Problems, or Leo Strauss's Debt to Heidegger's Aristotle
- 379 *W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz* Why a World State Is Unnecessary: The Continuing Debate on World Government
- 403 *Laurence Lampert* Reading Benardete: A New *Parmenides*
- 425 *Ronald Beiner*
431 *Charles U. Zug* **An Exchange:**
Nietzsche's Final Teaching
by Michael Allen Gillespie
- 439 *Michael Allen Gillespie* On *Nietzsche's Final Teaching*: A Response to My Critics
- 447 *Charles U. Zug* Developing a Nietzschean Account of Musical Form: A Rejoinder to Michael Gillespie's Response
- 451 *José A. Colen* **Review Essay:**
What Is Wrong with Human Rights?
La loi naturelle et les droits de l'homme
by Pierre Manent
- 471 *Marco Andreacchio* **Book Reviews:**
For Humanism, edited by David Alderson and Robert Spencer
- 475 *Bernard J. Dobski* *Tyrants: A History of Power, Injustice, and Terror*
by Waller R. Newell
- 483 *Jerome C. Foss* *James Madison and Constitutional Imperfection*
by Jeremy D. Bailey
- 487 *Raymond Hain* *The Virtue Ethics of Levi Gersonides*
by Alexander Green
- 493 *Richard Jordan* *Public Intellectuals in the Global Arena: Professors or Pundits?*, edited by Michael C. Desch
- 501 *Mary Mathie* *Fate and Freedom in the Novels of David Adams Richards* by Sara MacDonald and Barry Craig
- 507 *Tyler Tritten* "Philosophie und Religion": Schellings *Politische Philosophie* by Ryan Scheerlinck

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

- Editor-in-Chief* Timothy W. Burns, Baylor University
- General Editors* Charles E. Butterworth • Timothy W. Burns
- General Editors (Late)* Howard B. White (d. 1974) • Robert Horwitz (d. 1987)
Seth G. Benardete (d. 2001) • Leonard Grey (d. 2009) •
Hilail Gildin (d. 2015)
- Consulting Editors* Christopher Bruell • David Lowenthal • Harvey C.
Mansfield • Thomas L. Pangle • Ellis Sandoz • Kenneth
W. Thompson
- Consulting Editors (Late)* Leo Strauss (d. 1973) • Arnaldo Momigliano (d. 1987) •
Michael Oakeshott (d. 1990) • John Hallowell (d. 1992)
• Ernest L. Fortin (d. 2002) • Muhsin Mahdi (d. 2007) •
Joseph Cropsey (d. 2012) • Harry V. Jaffa (d. 2015)
- International Editors* Terence E. Marshall • Heinrich Meier
- Editors* Peter Ahrens Dorf • Wayne Ambler • Marco Andreacchio •
Maurice Auerbach • Robert Bartlett • Fred Baumann • Eric
Buzzetti • Susan Collins • Patrick Coby • Erik Dempsey •
Elizabeth C'de Baca Eastman • Edward J. Erler • Maureen
Feder-Marcus • Robert Goldberg • L. Joseph Hebert •
Pamela K. Jensen • Hannes Kerber • Mark J. Lutz • Daniel
Ian Mark • Ken Masugi • Carol L. McNamara • Will
Morrisey • Amy Nendza • Charles T. Rubin • Leslie G.
Rubin • Thomas Schneider • Susan Meld Shell • Geoffrey
T. Sigalet • Nicholas Starr • Devin Stauffer • Bradford P.
Wilson • Cameron Wybrow • Martin D. Yaffe • Catherine
H. Zuckert • Michael P. Zuckert
- Copy Editor* Les Harris
- Designer* Sarah Teutschel
- Inquiries* ***Interpretation, A Journal of Political Philosophy***
Department of Political Science
Baylor University
1 Bear Place, 97276
Waco, TX 76798
- email* interpretation@baylor.edu

Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nietzsche's Final Teaching*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017, 264 pp., \$35.00 (hardcover).

CHARLES U. ZUG

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

charleszug@utexas.edu

“I obviously do everything to be ‘hard to understand,’ myself!” taunted Friedrich Nietzsche in 1886,¹ clairvoyantly challenging the legions of future scholars he knew would one day make their careers trying to understand him and to make him understandable. *Nietzsche's Final Teaching*, by Michael Gillespie—a seasoned veteran in these legions—stands as a daring new attempt to meet Nietzsche’s challenge. Gillespie seeks to demonstrate which of Nietzsche’s core philosophical ideas functions as the true foundation of his philosophy as a whole. Not the *Übermensch*, not the “death of God,” not even the “will to power,” but—holds Gillespie—the “eternal recurrence of the same” fits this bill. Anyone who has studied Nietzsche and sensed what it would take to succeed in Gillespie’s undertaking will be impressed by his ambition. As Gillespie shows, Nietzsche himself, in his later, post-*Gay Science* writings, came increasingly to dwell on his own works as a topic worthy of philosophical inquiry. Whether Nietzsche in the end (i.e., before his descent into madness) believed he had understood the ultimate meaning of his own philosophy, and whether a genuinely systematic understanding of that philosophy is possible, are the long-debated questions Gillespie tries to put to rest.

The author warmly thanks Tim Burns, for generous comments during the publication process, and Jeff Tulis, for suggestions regarding this piece as well as for guidance and support.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1989), 39.

Methodologically, *Nietzsche's Final Teaching* charts a course between contextualism and the careful attempt—associated with Leo Strauss and his students—to understand the great author's intent (on the assumption that great authors are capable of transcending time and place). Gillespie aptly characterizes his own interpretive approach as "cultivat[ing] a practical sensibility in synthesizing the different elements that impact individual thinkers" (8).² In practice, this approach eschews many of the annoyances that encumber the two aforementioned interpretive approaches. While insisting, for example, that Nietzsche was a capacious thinker whose thought is of enduring relevance, Gillespie draws heavily on historical and biographical anecdote in attempting to resolve interpretive puzzles. He places particular emphasis, for example, on the moment when the idea of the eternal recurrence reportedly first occurred to Nietzsche, on the shores of Lake Silvaplana, in August 1881. More importantly, however, Gillespie makes no bones about criticizing Nietzsche as a thinker when he thinks criticism is warranted—particularly in regard to Nietzsche's diagnosis of the "last man" and the death of God.

For Gillespie, who on this point follows Heidegger,³ the core of Nietzsche's philosophy is his comprehensive theoretical rejection of all previous Western metaphysics—a rejection which nonetheless "depends in its fundamental structures upon traditional metaphysics" (13). Gillespie in his introductory chapter refers to his rejection theory as "Nietzsche's (anti)metaphysics." As Gillespie explains, through recourse to an Aristotelian-Thomistic framework, "Nietzsche's (anti)metaphysics" consists of two categories and five subcategories. These are a new *metaphysica generalis*—ontology and logic—and *metaphysica specialis*—theology, cosmology, and anthropology. Gillespie's position, as he articulates it in his introduction, is that "from Nietzsche's point of view, European metaphysics"—based on the biblical and Greco-Roman outlooks—"had become unbelievable" (17). In response, Nietzsche sought to develop, as an "alternative" to all of the metaphysical conceptions that had previously been proposed to satisfy these subcategories, five *new* subcategories. Thus, on the basis of Gillespie's proposed framework, Nietzsche's new ontology is the "eternal recurrence"; his new logic, perspectivism and "musical logic"; his new theology, the "death of God" and the rebirth of Dionysus; his new cosmology, the "will to power"; and his new anthropology, the "last man" and the *Übermensch*.

² Parenthetical page references are to the book here under review.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 3–6.

In proposing to conceptualize Nietzsche's final teaching by means of a new theory—namely the “(anti)metaphysics,” which Nietzsche never develops himself—Gillespie indicates the scope of his ambitions. Indeed, he could well be interpreted as attempting to move *beyond* Nietzsche in a certain respect, insofar as the “(anti)metaphysics” which he purports to uncover would provide a conceptual unity for Nietzsche's thought which Nietzsche himself was evidently unable to articulate before his death. As Gillespie puts it, “Nietzsche had his own vision for what his completed final teaching would look like, in part visible in his existing works, and in part drawn from his notes and letters” (188). To this end, Gillespie puts great stock in Nietzsche's *Nachlass*. In these, Gillespie believes, he can discern the architecture of Nietzsche's incomplete magnum opus, which he believes would have centered on the “eternal recurrence.” He thus bravely does battle with Heidegger. Like Gillespie, Heidegger purported to have espied in Nietzsche's unpublished manuscripts—which, following Nietzsche's sister, Heidegger refers to as *The Will to Power*—the essential structures of Nietzsche's uncompleted final teaching. Gillespie rightly faults Heidegger and other contemporary scholars for putting too much stock in this “work,” which, as Gillespie persuasively contends, is not so much a work as a heap of notes for a *projected* work: Nietzsche “was unable to finish even a draft of the great final work in which he intended to announce to the world in the clearest terms the doctrine of the eternal recurrence” (21). Much more imagination than has previously been exerted is therefore required, argues Gillespie, in order to glimpse that connective tissue—namely, the eternal recurrence “doctrine”—which holds the *Nachlass* and Nietzsche's later published works together.

Notwithstanding the initial emphasis Gillespie places on his original theory of the “(anti)metaphysics,” we soon learn that Gillespie understands the *main* contribution of his book rather to be his thesis that the “(anti)metaphysics was given unity by the doctrine of the *eternal recurrence*” (13; emphasis added). Gillespie thus seeks to ground his *own* (re)formulation of “Nietzsche's final teaching”—the “(anti)metaphysics”—on a basis which Nietzsche himself provides. The eternal recurrence, argues Gillespie, should be understood as the foundation of Nietzsche's final teaching, and for two reasons. As the “ontology” of Nietzsche's *metaphysica generalis*, the eternal recurrence is presupposed if the rest of his “(anti)metaphysics” is to be understood. Regardless of what Nietzsche himself says, in other words, the eternal recurrence is the concept in light of which all of Nietzsche's other concepts make the most sense; it is therefore reasonable to construe Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole in light of it. Second, Nietzsche himself indicated the special place which the

eternal recurrence occupies in his thought—a point Gillespie emphasizes in discussing Nietzsche’s autobiographical description of the moment when the thought of the eternal recurrence, which Gillespie styles “Nietzsche’s deepest thought,” came to him, in August 1881.

Gillespie thus seemingly promises to execute—in eight subsequent chapters, grouped into three parts—the weighty task of explicating Nietzsche’s account of the eternal recurrence, and then demonstrating how the other four subcategories of his *metaphysica generalis-specialis* flow from it. It is, consequently, with considerable disappointment that in turning to the body of Gillespie’s book the reader finds not an orderly, synoptic, systematic examination of the five parts of Nietzsche’s new *metaphysica generalis-specialis*—which his introductory chapter unabashedly promises—but instead, eight separate essays whose relation and relevance to this opening set of ideas turn out, on the whole, to be rather hard to discern.

Gillespie chooses to begin his book not with an account of how Nietzsche understood the eternal recurrence—we have to wait until chapters 2 and 3 for such an account—but with a two-part discussion of Nietzsche’s “anthropology.” Gillespie grounds this discussion in specific passages from *Zarathustra*, arguing that Nietzsche there erects the framework within which to make sense of his broader account of human nature. Central to Gillespie’s discussion of *Zarathustra* are the poetic images that Nietzsche employs, which Gillespie persuasively interprets. “Human being is a rope stretched between beast and *Übermensch*, a being whose being consists in being pulled in opposite directions, indeed, a being that only remains in being as a result of the tension generated by these two conflicting directions” (29). For Nietzsche, there is a continuum between man and beast; yet by the same token, man is also ultimately animal, rooted in and, in a sense, limited by a network of mutually conflicting animal passions. Whether man becomes more *man* (*Übermensch*) or more *beast* (“last man”) depends, paradoxically, on how powerfully he is pulled out and away from his animal existence, while remaining nonetheless firmly planted in that existence. On this score, Gillespie’s analysis of the tightrope walker is of particular interest. Like modern man, who faces the death of God and a prospect of vanished ideals (a “twilight of the idols”), the tightrope walker in Nietzsche’s presentation faces only grave choices. He cannot relax the rope, and if he hurries toward his goal, he might fall. It takes dauntless *Übermensch*-aspirants to try to cross the rope, yet even for these, there is no guarantee of a successful crossing; they, too, could come to nihilistic ruin in the form of—to use Gillespie’s own formula—“murder, madness, and suicide” (xi, 149, 154). Yet, Gillespie also points out, the intrepidity of

such men—their very willingness to cross, despite an uncertain outcome—is itself a sign of what Nietzsche would call their higher “rank.”

The concept of rank Gillespie argues to be central to Nietzsche’s thought, claiming that it constitutes the link between Nietzsche’s “anthropology” and his “ontology” (48, 131). Men of low rank, or “slaves,” develop resentment, or the “spirit of revenge,” toward the world because, feeling themselves to be weak and exposed, they wish the world to be other than it is. Men of *high* rank, by contrast, are those capable of “willing everything” (154), that is, embracing all that comes to be without regret or resentment. The “thought” or “doctrine” that accompanies this latter view of the world is that of the eternal recurrence, which entails affirming the necessity of all that happens. Or, to use Gillespie’s own formulae, the eternal recurrence is “a manifestation of the will to power; it is the assertion of an *Übermensch*” (19).

In the course of part 2, “Nietzsche as Teacher of the Eternal Recurrence,” Gillespie jumps abruptly from Nietzsche’s “anthropology” to an interpretation of his 1886 “Prefaces,” then to an account of the role of music in Nietzsche’s thought. We infer—because we are not told—that Gillespie here wishes to replicate his process in part 1: to establish a connection between the eternal recurrence (Nietzsche’s new “ontology”) and another subcategory of Nietzsche’s *metaphysica specialis*, this time his new “logic”: perspectivism and “musical logic.” On this score, Gillespie’s discussion of perspectivism constitutes his book’s strongest argument while his discussion of music constitutes its weakest. With simplicity and elegance, Gillespie unpacks and summarizes Nietzsche’s powerful, perhaps irrefutable critique of the idea of a “true” perspective of the world. Every human perspective, Nietzsche maintains, is the outcome of the animal passions driving the individual, and therefore just as determined to be what it is, just as “necessary,” as all other perspectives. The world for each of us, according to Nietzsche, therefore cannot be other than what our own passions compel us to think it is. What each of us perceives of and thinks about the world thus cannot be evaluated on the basis of how accurately we grasp intelligible objects separate from ourselves. Rather, for Nietzsche, the only solid basis of evaluation is the inner organization or rank of our passions, out of which emerges our own perspective of the world. Whether our perspective is a master’s or a slave’s—that of a joyous *Übermensch* or a retributive “last man”—depends on the “rank” or “hierarchy” of our passions: which passion masters which. Yet how, in Nietzsche’s view, one might establish whether precisely *this* determination is not made perspectivally—and hence without any real ground—is a question Gillespie does not take up.

Sensibly following Nietzsche's cue in *Beyond Good and Evil* ("By means of music, the very passions enjoy themselves" [§106]), Gillespie next turns from Nietzsche's account of the passions to his account—insofar as he has one—of music. If, according to Nietzsche, the world makes sense to us as a result of our passions, then music—which stirs our passions perhaps unlike anything else—has a rightful claim as a kind of reasoning: hence, Gillespie's view that Nietzsche found in music a new "logic." Regrettably, Gillespie spends less time explaining what this implausible view might mean and more time advancing the frankly odd suggestion that two of Nietzsche's books, *Twilight of the Idols* and *Ecce Homo*, are structured in sonata form. Though Gillespie marshals considerable evidence to this end, the interpretive effort seems hardly worthwhile. Setting aside the fact that the sonata form could easily be "discovered in" (read: attributed to) the structure of any number of books, we must ask: How, if true, would such a discovery in Nietzsche's books help us better understand the staggering claim by Nietzsche that music is a kind of logic that makes deeper sense of the world than does *actual* logic? How—to put it more pointedly—would such a discovery amount to anything more than a trite literary parlor trick?

The final section of *Nietzsche's Final Teaching* compares Nietzsche with Dostoyevsky and Plato. It contains many fascinating observations, and evidences great learning. Most of the terrain it covers is well trodden, however, and contributes nothing to Gillespie's "(anti)metaphysics" thesis. (Incidentally, Gillespie makes no mention of this thesis in all of section 1 [chapters 2–4] nor most of section 2 [chapters 6 and 7] nor in all of section 3 [chapters 8 and 9].) Dostoyevsky, argues Gillespie, traveled down the same nihilistic path as did Nietzsche, yet saw redemption through Christ—as opposed to the eternal recurrence—as the way to overcome true nihilism. Plato, similarly, agreed with Nietzsche to the extent that he recognized the need for a "warrior aristocracy" in the best political order. Yet, whereas for Plato that order can be glimpsed only through a full investigation of human reason, for Nietzsche, that political order over which the *Übermenschen* of the future will (after years of cataclysmic war) reign will stand as the ultimate enfranchisement of the masterly, tyrannical, antirational passions.

As this summary suggests, section 3 crystallizes Gillespie's tendency—one he evinces throughout *Nietzsche's Final Teaching*—to smooth over the rough edges of Nietzsche's endlessly intricate writings. Yet as the quote with which we opened this review makes clear, the rough edges of Nietzsche's work are not imperfections, but part of his artistry. As a result of his tendency

to (over)polish, Gillespie in the aggregate obscures the most philosophically interesting paradoxes in Nietzsche's thought. It is in precisely these paradoxes, however, that we find Nietzsche's philosophical depth; with them, other first-rate thinkers—such as Dostoyevsky and Plato—would take issue. Is it true, Dostoyevsky and Plato might have rejoined, that that which raises man above the animals is his own will—and not, instead, a natural erotic desire for the noble, which exists in tension with the equally natural desire for the truth?⁴ Or (alternatively) a desire for eternal life with God? What is Nietzsche's *evidence* that man is—to quote Gillespie's summary from his chapter on Dostoevsky—"a willing being, not a mind or a soul but a self or body consisting of a multiplicity of conflicting passions" (171)? That Gillespie believes Nietzsche *has* no compelling evidence, or that the evidence Nietzsche marshals is so unconvincing as to be unworthy of serious consideration, he would seem to suggest in two ways. Early on, Gillespie quite surprisingly asserts that "any doctrine that makes a claim about the whole cannot in principle be known or demonstrated by experience or by any kind of rational proof" (19). Much later, in his chapter on Dostoevsky, he states similarly that "the idea of the eternal recurrence is *just an idea*, a possibility that may or may not be true.... As an account of the whole, *it can have no demonstration*" (156; emphasis added). It is difficult to read such dogmatic statements about the limits of philosophy without wondering what importance Gillespie actually sees in the study of *Nietzsche's* philosophy, beyond some kind of rhetorical training. Gillespie himself seems to have wondered this, asserting rather implausibly in his semiautobiographical preface that "Nietzsche's goal is not to persuade, but to enthuse, entrance, and overpower" (vii). Is this *all* Nietzsche intended? Are the thousands upon thousands of pages that make up Nietzsche's *Gesamtausgabe*—notes, correspondences, researches, and published writings—really just behind-the-scenes preparations of a rhetorical impresario?

This *substantive* weakness in Gillespie's treatment of Nietzsche—a reluctance to pursue to their respective ends the various lines of inquiry that emerge in the course of attentive reading—I believe to be connected to the *structural* weakness in his monograph that I discussed above. The chapters of *Nietzsche's Final Teaching* do not build on each other; they do not issue in a powerful, coherent argument about the eternal recurrence and its place in Nietzsche's "final teaching." Rather, they read as distinct works, each

⁴ Additionally, Plato might point out that eros is peculiar to us as human beings, and raises us above animals, even if it does not belong to the rational life (consider *Symposium* 207a–c).

conceived as a treatment of a specific puzzle within a specific text and each, consequently, pursuing its own line of inquiry. To be sure, Gillespie from time to time tries to tie them back in to his initial theme (“As we have seen...”), but such attempts at imposing coherence read as just that: impositions.

It is to Gillespie’s credit that, in his preface, he refers to his book as consisting of “essays.” Nevertheless, there is no indication in the book’s definitive-sounding title, or on its title page, that *Nietzsche’s Final Teaching* is anything less than a cohesive, coherent, unified account of precisely that. What is more, Gillespie’s compelling introductory chapter—which takes aim at such venerable authorities as Löwith and Heidegger, as well as at the renowned Nietzsche commentator Laurence Lampert—presents itself as introducing a work that will finally put the nail in the coffin of the question whether Nietzsche’s thought *has* a unifying ontology at all. Perhaps, one might reasonably retort, this criticism concerns the author’s publisher, rather than the author himself. That it *does* concern the author becomes obvious once one realizes that the unifying themes that Gillespie proposes to treat in his preface and introductory chapter he almost entirely drops in the body of the book itself. As noted above, the core theme of Gillespie’s undertaking—the eternal recurrence—is discussed in detail briefly (less than four pages, total) in chapters 2 and 3. What is more, and to repeat: Apart from a few brief mentions in chapter 4 and in his conclusion, Gillespie simply abandons the theory of Nietzsche’s “(anti)metaphysics” after his introductory chapter. Perhaps anticipating the reactions of readers—such as the present one—who looked forward to a fully developed account of this theory, Gillespie concedes in his concluding chapter that Nietzsche’s final teaching constitutes merely “*something like* an (anti)metaphysics” (188; emphasis added). Such a concession might well have been made up front, rather than at the book’s end.

All of this is by no means to say that the essays that constitute Gillespie’s book are not themselves worthwhile writings. Far from it. It is simply to point out the following consideration, which might be of use to potential readers: Gillespie’s book is considerably marred by the disjunction between its self-presentation as a systematic—indeed, *definitive*—treatment of a topic that has long befuddled scholars, and what it is in reality, namely, a collection of highly learned, thought-provoking essays that were, nevertheless, quite obviously conceived as separate writings. Subsequent editions of *Nietzsche’s Final Teaching*—which Gillespie’s monograph duly merits—would therefore do well to correct its erroneous current self-presentation.