

*Laudato Si'*. I see it as particularly suitable for use in both undergraduate and graduate classes, and as a must-buy for college and university libraries.

DENIS EDWARDS

*Australian Catholic University*

*Nietzsche and Montaigne*. By Robert Miner. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. xii + 294 pages. \$109.99.

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Friedrich Nietzsche had little respect for most of his philosophical predecessors. But one author he held in high esteem and even was tempted to “idealize” (2) was Michel de Montaigne. In *Nietzsche and Montaigne*, Robert Miner sets out to identify “points of contact” between the two authors. This is not a study of Montaigne’s influence on Nietzsche, nor is it a simple comparison. Rather, it is “a sustained dialogue” between the two thinkers. Miner’s primary aim is to illuminate Nietzsche’s thought by considering it in the light of similar themes in Montaigne, but he also aims to gain new insights into Montaigne by looking at him “with Nietzschean eyes” (3).

The themes that Miner considers are skepticism; perspectivism; the drives; the free spirit; the body, asceticism, and sexuality; and greatness. For each theme, he closely examines the primary sources, usually treating Montaigne first, and he also engages with much recent secondary literature on the two authors. The density of quotations and references makes for somewhat slow reading, but Miner’s writing and argumentation are lucid.

A brief review cannot do justice to Miner’s careful analyses, but the opening two chapters on knowledge and the closing two chapters on greatness may serve as examples of his approach. Montaigne’s *sceptesis*, like that of ancient Pyrrhonism, is a suspension of judgment in the interest of avoiding agitation of soul. In Montaigne’s hands, it is not a denial of truth but an exploratory, experimental attitude, indicated in the title *Essais* (the French verb *essayer* means both “to attempt” and “to evaluate or assay”). Miner likens it to Nietzsche’s perspectivism, which he construes as not “a post-modern truth-denying nihilism” (70) but “the activity of moving between a variety of perspectives in the service of knowledge” (71). So long as we are aware of the “affects and interests” (89) from which perspectives arise, taking different points of view on a subject enhances knowledge, though any perspectival knowledge necessarily distorts the Heraclitean flux of experience.

For Montaigne, the desire for the greatness of eminence binds us to the estimations of others. True greatness depends on knowledge of self, as

we learn by constant attempts at self-examination not to overestimate or underestimate ourselves. The free spirit's greatness is to know and live by his or her "master form," the ordering principle that unifies one's life around what is most fundamental to it (228). For Nietzsche too, greatness depends on self-knowledge and self-affirmation. The free spirit must, as in the image of the lion in the first discourse of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, make the "great separation," throw off inherited values and slay the great dragon of "thou shalt" in order "to discover or construct the self strong enough to say 'I will'" (248). But the "heroic will" of the lion must be overcome so that one may create values spontaneously, like a child at play, out of a generous, self-giving self-love. To value-creating, Nietzsche adds a further component of greatness, which he calls *amor fati*, not love of a predetermined fate but a joyful yes-saying to one's entire life in all its details, a will to repeat it into eternity. This, Miner says, is "beyond anything Montaigne could imagine" (263).

In an epilogue, Miner imagines Montaigne as a judge of Nietzsche, criticizing him for his "self-intoxication." Nietzsche is so "invested in an image of himself as exceptional, as belonging to an altogether higher type" that he cannot, as Montaigne does, accept "the respects in which he too belongs to the common herd" (274). Montaigne would also be critical of Nietzsche's continual struggle to overcome, rather than to accept, himself. But then, Miner observes in his closing paragraph, Nietzsche may be admired as a "sick soul" in William James' sense, always reaching for a greatness beyond what his life could offer.

Many years ago Conor Cruise O'Brien distinguished between the "gentle Nietzsche" of most American critics and the "fierce Nietzsche" whom Fascists admired, the enemy of modern liberalism and egalitarianism, the champion of the strong as, liberated from conventional slave morality, they subdue and even eliminate the weak. Essaying to read Nietzsche through the lens of the unruffled Montaigne necessarily yields a gentle Nietzsche, and Miner's examination sheds much light on his thought, only occasionally glancing at his fierceness. But, as Ronald Beiner reminds us in *Dangerous Minds: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Return of the Far Right* (2018), in the current political climate marked by exaltation of strength, disparagement of weakness, and dismissal of truth claims as power plays, we do well to be attentive also to the more menacing side of the complex figure of Nietzsche.

WILLIAM J. COLLINGE  
*Mount St. Mary's University, MD*