Review of Aria Izik-Dzurko's *The Will of God and Godless Willing: Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on How to Live Without Religion to Guide Us*

Synopsis

Izik-Dzurko proposes to offer a comparative analysis and critical evaluation of the concept of the *der Wille* in its different formulations between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. She furthermore aims to understand their respective relations to Christianity, as well as to art and broader socio-cultural trends. The work explores how the different conceptions of the will can facilitate making sense of our lives and provide substantive normative prescriptions for how we ought to live.

The work presents reliably accurate exposition of the two figures' thinking on the proposed theme. Izik-Dzurko rightly understands Schopenhauer's characterization of *der Wille* as a blind, perpetual striving which tends to frustrate the willing subject in whom it is paradigmatically instantiated, i.e., the human being. She is sensitive to the metaphysical architecture of Schopenhauer's conception of the will, viz., that it is that which permeates all representation and thus holistically binds all beings. Izik-Dzurko astutely notes Schopenhauer's awareness of a range of worldviews on spirituality and highlights affinities between certain features of his philosophy and Christianity (e.g., some form and measure of ascetism). She takes Schopenhauer to advocate resignation and withdrawal by dissolving desire and retreating into aesthetic appreciation and intellectual activity.

Nietzsche's *will to power* is set up as a contrast and competitor to Schopenhauer's position. The author characterizes this notion above all as an ambitious drive, a striving toward overcoming and excellence. Izik-Dzurko rehearses the scathing appraisals that Nietzsche makes of the Christian tradition, as well as the general metaphysical project of western philosophy. She takes Nietzsche to be a steadfast individualist, inviting persons to uniquely generate their own values and defiantly pursue self-determined ends.

Izik-Dzurko ultimately wants to take an impartial position on the question of which thinker offers more plausible conceptions of and prescriptions for life. "It could well be that either theory might serve equally well to give life purpose, for meaning, we may surmise, does not lie in the content of the chosen path alone, but in the disciplined commitment to walk the entire length of that path" (38). She allows that in some ways Schopenhauer's suggestion to diminish the striving of the will could provide helpful reprieve from life's frustrations and anxieties; at the same time, she allows that Nietzsche's call to strive for excellence can be instrumental for our becoming better versions of

ourselves. Both, she contends, provide ways of generating the value that each of them grant has been lost in the wake of the destruction of the traditional metaphysical ground.

Evaluation

The constructive arguments in Chapter 4 are admittedly a little difficult to follow. At times, the terminology seems inconsistent; for example, sometimes the terms *meaning* and *significance* appear to to be synonymous, yet are sometimes presented as distinct. The reader often gets the sense that sometimes the author means the phenomenon of things *making sense* as such, and sometimes she means that something carries a great qualitative weight for subjects making value appraisals, and it is never clear which meaning is intended.

More substantively, one of the claims Izik-Dzurko makes, drawing on Reginster, is that, "Schopenhauer contradicts himself when he says the will is blind, for he also implies that 'human willing (or desiring) is an essentially intentional state and therefore requires an intentional object,' and we necessarily will 'something.' Either the will is truly blind and its striving is thus purposeless and not aimed at any specific goal, or, as Nietzsche would argue, our will is somehow combined with the intellect to give it a specific directionality" (40). Two details in this quote deserve elaboration in order to be vindicated. Firstly, it would be productive to appreciate the difference between *der Wille* (as a noun) and *wollen* (as a verb), as in human willing ('Man will etwas'). Secondly, it should be clarified whether *intentionality* is being understood as the psychological condition of deliberately engaging in certain behavior, or as in its technical philosophical usage (L. *intentio, in + tendere*), as the reaching out of consciousness toward something. That the human mind and subject intends something would be a different matter than if, how, and what *der Wille* as such intends. To wit, it is always necessarily true that human beings, as empirically constituted, are always directed toward *something*, and also mean to exert their will *on* something. But it is not clear that *der Wille* as Schopenhauer understands it is not directionless in the sense that it does not *want* anything in particular and does not strive *for* anything in particular. To infer that Schopenhauer is contradicting himself here remains unclear from the argument presented.

Another point to clarify would be the apparent accusation that Nietzsche is insufficiently sensitive to the social nature of value generation. "Nietzsche's ideal of self-created values may be more dependent on external influences than he acknowledges…" (42). The 'orthodox' reading of Nietzsche (at least in the anglophone literature) understands Nietzsche as an eminently social philosopher and even a naturalist in some regards. Izik-Dzurko borrows a well-known quote from the *Truth and Lies*

essay which is usually used to highlight this point: “[Truths are a] movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding” (27). A plausible reading of this is that Nietzsche wants to draw attention to the *social* genesis of truth and value. To that extent, Nietzsche’s ethics is largely an anthropological enterprise. When advocating for ‘self-created’ values, the *self* here can be understood as the human being as such. It is true that individuals should take an active role in critically scrutinizing and eventually endorsing carefully considered values; but this is not an exercise done in a vacuum, nor an arbitrary act of defiance against society at large. Nietzsche understands the human being as a fundamentally social being. The self-generation and re-evaluation of value is an imperative for humanity, both in its constituent parts and as a whole. It is unclear if the author means to make the stronger polemical claim, or if she means to and would be amenable to the wider context.

Recommendation

It is clear that Izik-Dzurko possesses deep and immense subject knowledge. Her thinking is subtle, sensitive, and sagacious. The essay is creative, original, and evidences strong research, communication, and critical thinking skills. I would recommend an excellent mark (1).

Prague, 1.9.2025 Shawn Christopher Vigil, MA