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Nietzsche and Modern German Thought

Ansell-Pearson, Keith, ed.: New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 314 pp., Publication Date: 1991

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democratic values must be present for open societies to prosper in stable fashion. Competitive markets alone are not enough for him. He writes: "The modern version of *laissez-faire* postulates that the pursuit of self-interest will lead to the optimum allocation of resources. What we have learnt is that self-interest is not enough; there has to be a commitment to making the system work that transcends self-interest" (250).

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Young, John Wesley
Totalitarian Language: Orwell's Newspeak and its Nazi and Communist Antecedents
Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia
320 pp., $36.50, ISBN 0-8139-1324-1
Publication Date: December 1991

One of the major controversies in academic circles is over the relationship between language and politics. Many champion the deconstructionist notion that reality is linguistic and that meaning is arbitrary; hence, language usage is essentially political. Many contest this view. This book, by a political scientist at Andrews University, promises to shed light on this question, as it addresses the attempts by totalitarian regimes to control thought and action through deliberate manipulation of language.

The book begins with a thoughtful examination of the "ideal" of this attempt spelled out in George Orwell's dystopia *1984*. Young carefully dissects the logic of Newspeak and derives specific components of a model of totalitarian language policy. He then tries to measure the actual behavior of the Nazi, Fascist, Stalinist, Maoist, and various other communist and "totalist" regimes against this ideal. This study is qualified by the recognition that these regimes were never able to achieve the complete control described by the ideal. The concluding section briefly notes the ways their policies were subverted by "reality" and through the cynical humor of their victims.

Although *Totalitarian Language* deals with a lively and significant topic, the author misses many opportunities to deepen our understanding of the subject, largely by failing to get beyond a kind of outraged hyperbole. Young's use of terms like *semanticide*—the willful perversion of a word's meaning—and *logocide*—the killing of words—amounts to granting the effort the kind of power it claimed. This makes the failure of that effort more puzzling. It also leads the author to overdramatize, as especially pernicious, things like trying to downplay policy failures, deny the significance of battlefield reverses, or vilify political opponents, which most governments and politicians do. The result is a sort of catalog of propaganda techniques used by the regimes under discussion. Most of this material is discussed in earlier works, however, such as Ebenstein's *The Nazi State*.

Although the major totalitarian powers have collapsed or, like China, appear to be on their last legs, imitators who employ the same techniques, like the Khmer Rouge or Saddam Hussein, have reappeared. It is worthwhile, of course, to try to understand the attempts of such rulers to cement their political control through propaganda, but the deeper question remains as to why such efforts continue to fail. While Young attributes this failure in large measure to the resistance of "reality" to manipulation, work by people like de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* points to the resistance by ordinary people to efforts to be controlled by language. Young's work, and our understanding, could have been enriched by more sustained attention to this phenomenon.

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Ansell-Pearson, Keith, ed.
Nietzsche and Modern German Thought
New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall
314 pp., $49.95, ISBN 0-415-04442-1
Publication Date: 1991

As the title suggests, this collection of essays is concerned with locating Nietzsche in the context of modern German thought—roughly speaking, from Kant through Schopenhauer. The volume's central appeal is just this historical concern, for Nietzsche has of late been largely treated as the definitive figure of postmodernism. As such, he has been considered mostly in isolation from his predecessors and seen as a thinker who breaks decisively from historical contextuality and who can thus be treated in the same way. As several of the essays indicate, too much can be made of seeing Nietzsche as an unprecedented thinker. While not begging the question of where to locate Nietzsche historically, the best of these essays carefully delineate Nietzsche's indebtedness to his predecessors, (e.g., Kant, Schopenhauer, the hermeneutic school) or place him in reference to the definitive issues of modern thought (e.g., freedom, individuality, the will).

As in any collection, the quality of contributions varies. Stack's essay on Kant and Lange, Davey's on hermeneutics and Nietzsche, and Janaway's on Nietzsche and Schopenhauer will mostly appeal to those desirous of determining Nietzsche's place in the history of ideas. Of the pieces taking a thematic approach, Ansell-Pearson's on Nietzsche and the will is especially helpful, and Bernstein's treatment of autonomy and solitude deserves attention, although its terse and lapidary style mimics the turgidity of the German critical theorists. Pippin's "Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the metaphysics of modernity" stands out by combining successfully both the historical and the thematic approaches. Unfortunately, a few of the essays seem to be straining to find something—anything—to say about Nietzsche in the context of modern thought and will only appeal to those who feel compelled to read everything being written about Nietzsche.

Overall, this is a worthwhile book. Its mission is an important one, and it largely succeeds by indicating how Nietzsche's thought fits into its historical location. Most, but not all, of the essays are by philosophers, and although considerable familiarity with Nietzsche and modern philosophy is presupposed, the majority of the essays take a broad perspective and avoid technical jargon. In fact, part of this collection's appeal is that most of the essays are written clearly and from a traditional scholarly perspective, eschewing the tendentious self-referentiality and incoherence that plagues the writing of many of those who champion Nietzsche as the definitive postmodernist.

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Ferdinand, Peter
Communist Regimes in Comparative Perspective: The Evolution of the Soviet, Chinese and Yugoslav Models
Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield
332 pp., $55.00, ISBN 0-389-20975-9
Publication Date: 1991

This book is a welcome addition to the literature on communist issues of the twentieth century. Its major strength lies in the insights of the author (Peter Ferdinand is head of the Asia-Pacific Programme at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House), who has attempted and, for the most part, succeeded in providing us with an analysis that is at once historical, comparative, and very nearly up-to-date. Ferdinand has chosen a thematic, rather than a chronological or national, organization of the material, which places a priority upon highlighting the truly comparative issues within his topic. On the other hand, his subdivisions within each chapter tend to break down along national lines, thus protecting the very real national historical differences among his three communist countries from being obscured or denied by the rigidity of any particular model.

In his introduction, Ferdinand states that "the overall theme of this book is diversity within unity." The body of his work successfully devotes itself to the development of this central theme on three different levels: first, that the trio of regimes in question have had more in common with each other than with other types of regimes; second, that the diversity among them is more than happen-