

the talk of postliberal “regime change” is growing, some may want to discourage—perhaps even ban—the reading of this contrarian book. Libraries, therefore, would do well to add it to the now popular “forbidden books” display.

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Paul Franco: *Rousseau, Nietzsche, and the Image of the Human*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021. Pp. ix, 169.)

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Ambitious in scope, Paul Franco’s *Rousseau, Nietzsche, and the Image of the Human* argues that “in order to understand ourselves as modern human beings, we must engage with Rousseau’s and Nietzsche’s profound analysis of the discontents of modernity and their attempts to create a new, psychologically richer, and more spiritually nourishing image of the human” (8). Franco’s reading demonstrates that Rousseau and Nietzsche were not simply two of the most trenchant critics of modernity but also that they were profound theorists of the modern self who developed constructive, reformist projects. While Franco is not the first scholar to consider these two thinkers in tandem, his wide-ranging thematic approach advances our understanding of where they converge and diverge in their critical and constructive projects. Franco concludes that, of the two, Nietzsche’s vision proves to be more profound as well as more salient to our contemporary concerns.

Following an introductory chapter that provides an overview of the book’s aims, chapter 2 delves into Rousseau’s and Nietzsche’s genealogies of modernity and their opposing ideas about what, exactly, went wrong along the way. Franco focuses particularly on the role that morality plays in each argument. For Rousseau, declining morals and escalating vice, especially vices stemming from *amour-propre*, are to blame for the decadence of modern culture, whereas Nietzsche sees morality itself as a primary culprit. This chapter also delineates how the ideal of nature functions in each critical vision. While both thinkers measure the corruption of modern human beings against a standard of nature, they have quite different understandings of that standard and how humanity ought to relate to it, and Franco provides an instructive explanation of how these conceptions of nature inform their respective critical genealogies.

In his third chapter, titled “The Modern Self,” Franco discusses the ideas of authenticity and self-overcoming deployed by each thinker. Franco’s Rousseau is concerned almost exclusively with the achievement of moral virtue. His reading of Rousseau’s view of the self strongly emphasizes “the

psychic unity that constitutes the essence of Rousseau's conception of happiness" (53), thus differing from scholars who detect more ambiguity in Rousseau's defense of wholeness and complexity in his view of the self. Franco sharply contrasts Rousseau's emphasis on equilibrium and psychic unity with Nietzsche's positive affirmation of "the chaos of drives, desires, and values" (41) out of which a unique self must be created in an ongoing, dynamic process of becoming.

Franco devotes chapter 4 to the similarities and differences between Rousseau's and Nietzsche's views on women and the relation between the sexes. Acknowledging that their views are typically deemed sexist and even misogynistic by today's standards, Franco seeks neither to condemn nor to defend their views, focusing instead on the question of the place of those views in each of their larger philosophical projects, especially in connection to each thinker's critique of modern bourgeois society. While both see sexual differences as fundamental and necessarily complementary, they differ markedly regarding the ends that they believe such differences should serve. While Rousseau envisions an idealized harmonious interdependence, Nietzsche emphasizes a creative antagonism—a difference that reflects their respective views of the dynamics of political and social life more broadly.

After briefly addressing some of Rousseau's general remarks about the relation between the sexes, the first half of the chapter focuses on the figures of Sophie and Julie and the implications of their respective educations and fates for understanding Rousseau's ideas about women. It is Julie, Franco argues, who represents "Rousseau's ideal of womanhood; she does not point up its limitations" (86). For Rousseau, "women play a crucial role in overcoming the individualist, self-interested, and calculating character" (75) of bourgeois society, but only by "moralizing men," which Franco identifies as a limitation of Rousseau's model of ideal womanhood. Franco looks to Nietzsche for a more capacious model that "yields an understanding of the relationship between the sexes and a vision of politics that are both suggestive and problematic" (139). The chapter helpfully pulls together Nietzsche's many scattered reflections on women, charting an evolution but also identifying common threads across the early, middle, and later works. And while some scholars detect "a disconnect between Nietzsche's nonegalitarian views on men and women and the nonessentialist thrust of his philosophy as a whole," Franco argues that Nietzsche's views on sexual difference are actually consistent with his more general intention "to deepen the differences and distances between types of human being" (139).

In chapter 5, "Politics," Franco provides a lucid and concise account of Rousseau's conception of the general will and the various supports (e.g., morality, patriotism, the legislator figure) designed to foster it. Turning to Nietzsche, Franco argues that Nietzsche has a discernible and coherent political philosophy and that it contains a more complex stance toward democracy than may first appear. A strength of the chapter is the discussion of Nietzsche's careful distinction between democracy's "liberation of the

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private person” on the one hand, and the liberation (and achievement) of genuine individuality on the other (124–45).

As he makes clear in his concluding chapter and throughout, Franco finds Nietzsche’s diagnosis of modernity richer and more compelling than Rousseau’s. This is because “neither Rousseau’s critique nor his solutions address the deepest problems of modernity” whereas Nietzsche’s critique “speaks directly to the most fundamental problem that afflicts us today: the absence of a civilizational purpose, goal, or meaning in a world in which God is dead and all metaphysical supports collapsed” (138). Franco contends that, in light of this crisis, “everything that looks like a solution in Rousseau’s view – liberal democracy, freedom from personal dependence, social equality, romantic love, and even the solitary enjoyment of the sweet sentiment of existence—only exacerbates the fundamental problem of modern aimlessness and nihilism, according to Nietzsche” (139).

In making his case that Nietzsche speaks more directly to this fundamental problem and that “his solutions therefore provide more useful guidance in trying to escape from it” (9), Franco touches only briefly on the potentially disturbing implications of that guidance. While he is careful to note that there are “difficulties” in Nietzsche’s aristocratic politics, and mentions the fact that Nietzsche said little about how such a politics would actually work, Franco nevertheless sees value in the attempt to restore an ennobling, common purpose to politics and to overcome the individualism and aimlessness of liberalism. Going further, Franco maintains that because Nietzsche’s aristocratic vision is primarily cultural, his politics “are perfectly compatible with democracy,” which “serves as a broad and sturdy base” that enables “the aristocratic few to engage in the experiments of self-creation that serve not only their own needs but also enhance the species as a whole and ultimately redeem democracy itself” (140). This apparently tidy resolution of the tension in Nietzsche’s vision, however, leaves us to grapple with the implications of such an instrumentalized view of democracy, and Franco might have said more about this. Franco’s point, however, is not that we should adopt the proposals put forward by either thinker. “We do not go to Rousseau and Nietzsche primarily for answers, but because they ask the right questions and put their fingers on real problems and weaknesses in the dispensation of Enlightenment modernity” (140).

Overall, this book points us toward a deeper understanding of the points of contrast between Rousseau and Nietzsche and makes a provocative case for the enduring relevance of their respective critiques of modernity. Franco writes with an impressive clarity that makes the book accessible and of interest to both students and scholars alike.

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