Booknotes

Polemical Papers by Jenny Teichman (Ashgate 1997) will certainly engage and amuse the bystander. They will not amuse Jonathan Lear or Martha Nussbaum or Peter Singer or Ronald Dworkin or Richard Rorty or Jacques Derrida, to name only some of the most prestigious of Teichman's targets. But then home truths usually do not amuse their recipients. Teichman's points are certainly not unsubtle, but they are expressed with the directness characteristic of the home truth, and indeed of good thinking.

This, doubtless, is part of Teichman's object. Through the directness of her writing and her own rootedness in good sense, she communicates to the reader that a big reputation and inflated style are no guarantees of good sense. She says that in her essays she is discussing cases where philosophers are explicitly or implicity recommending or condemning various important human practices and institutions. There is, therefore, a sense in which her targets are already polemical and ought to be ready for 'replies of a somewhat polemical character'.

Another reason for polemic 'has to do with puffs and blurbs'. Puffs are 'brief recommendations signed by authoritative people, usually but not always friends or colleagues of the authors' and put on the covers of academic books. Blurbs are usually written by the authors themselves. Despite being aware of the provenance of puffs and blurbs, even seasoned academics are taken in occasionally. But the case is far worse with students who don't understand the conventions, and who are discouraged from intellectual self-reliance by what appears to them to be the weight of authoritative opinion.

As we know from the *Philosophy* office, few academic books these days emerge ungarlanded with puffs (not even Teichman's, it is disappointing to note). If publishers will not refrain from this embarrassing practice, then essays like Teichman's will at the least serve the more than useful function of demonstrating the possibility of intellectual self-reliance and the virtues of plain speaking. (To say this is not to say that one agrees with everything Teichman says. Even those not enamoured of Peter Singer's views on euthanasia and the killing of babies may remain unhappy with Teichman's conclusion that he was abusing his privilege of access to public platforms when he attempted to express those views in Germany. Her inference that Singer's ensuing quandary was similar to those who write poems no one will publish is, for Teichman, unusually slippery. The situation was rather that some people did want to publish Singer's views, but that others who disapproved of them prevented their publication. Teichman is probably right to say that for the protesters Singer represented not freedom, but the oppressive power of an élite, but her attitude to freedom of academic discussion itself invites polemic.)

As predecessors in the tradition of polemical philosophy, Teichman enlists Plato, Hume, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. Nietzsche was much given to violent polemic, particularly against those

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he felt were comfortable, complacent, and conventional. What would he have said had he known that in 1997 his life and journeyings were to be made into a coffee table book of art photographs and Alpine views? Yet, this is just what has happened in *The Good European: Nietzsche's Works Sites in Word and Image*, by David Farrell Krell and Donald L. Bates (Chicago University Press, 1997)

Professor Krell wants to claim Nietzsche as a good European. It is true that Nietzsche did once write something to that effect and he disliked nationalism, particularly of the Germanic variety. But as well as extolling the virtues of the master race, he also wrote that the suppressed pre-Aryan race is all over Europe recovering 'the upper hand in colouring, in shortness of skull, perhaps even in the intellectual and social instincts' (i.e. modern democracy, modern anarchism, and its penchant for resentment and its inclination for 'commune'). He was clearly not a 'good European' in the sense that Chancellor Kohl or President Santer are good Europeans, but we do not hear much about that from Krell and Bates. Interestingly, the best and most evocative photographs in the book are not Mr Bates's, but the archive prints dating from Nietzsche's lifetime.

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