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On Professor Young, Again

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There is much to wonder at in Professor Young's "Second Reply," not the least of which is the fact of the reply itself. Young was given an opportunity to respond to my article, and he took it more than a year ago. He had no need to frame his latest as a critical reply to me, and he would have done better to compose a brief "Note to My Readers" with a forthright acknowledgment of his scholarly lapses, inadvertent though they may have been, and a detailed proposal for putting matters right. He has at least moved in this direction.

Unfortunately, Young dilutes his acknowledgment by introducing a variety of qualifications. But I think few will be persuaded by his suggestion that the mere appearance of Curtis Cate's name in his bibliography somehow mitigates his offense, and his insistence that he reproduced only "occasional phrases of Cate's" but "never a complete sentence" is evasive at best, as the following example (one of many) demonstrates. Here's Cate:

By early July Nietzsche's condition had deteriorated so drastically that his doctor friend, Professor Immermann, told him that he would have to cease his *Pädagogium* classes before the end of the school year and undergo a cure of total rest in some secluded mountain village.¹

And here's Young:

By early July, Nietzsche's condition had deteriorated so rapidly that his medical friend, Dr. Immermann, told him that he would have to cancel his grammar-school teaching before the end of the school year and undergo a rest cure in some secluded mountain village.²

Although Young's proposed course of "remedial action" is encouraging, it is not yet adequate. He seems to believe that the problem with his work is limited to the "less than 300" words he has reproduced from Cate's biography and does not also involve, say, the minimal and occasionally clumsy use he has made of primary sources. So the specific word count is not the salient issue, but it is worth noting that Young seems simply to have estimated (and *underestimated*) his figures. This matters because it indicates something of what we can expect from his promised corrections. No one with Professor Young's book in hand can be confident that he is reading Young rather than Cate until Young provides unambiguous evidence that he has himself sorted carefully through both works and identified and corrected each and every reproduced passage.

It is unpleasant to dwell on the details of this affair; but however much one would like to sympathize with Young, he has an unfortunate way of making this difficult. Consider, for example, the “extraordinary suggestion” he himself has fashioned from the raw material of the title of my essay and ascribed to me, namely “the suggestion . . . that the ‘story’ of the life that I construct out of the raw historical data is, from start to finish, simply Cate’s ‘story’ recycled in slightly altered language.” This suggestion—the product of Young’s own imagination, not mine—has, he says, been “dispose[d] of” by Daniel Blue. And here is his report of Blue’s argument: “By obsessively ‘focusing on the similarities’ and ignoring their evident differences, Blue writes, Anderson fails to notice that, with respect to Nietzsche’s life, ‘the two books are strikingly different.’” Young has crafted this sentence to attribute to Blue the sentiments expressed by the words “obsessively,” “ignoring,” and “fails to notice.” But Blue neither meant nor implied any such thing, nor was he in the relevant passage commenting on anything like Young’s misrepresentation of my thesis. In short, then, Young has constructed a straw man of my argument and knocked it over with fabricated thoughts attributed to another man.

Finally, regarding Young’s describing as “nebulous” my claim to have found similarities of narrative structure between his work and Cate’s, I invite readers to examine my original essay (the second half in particular) and decide for themselves whether my argument throughout is not rather quite specific and substantial.

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NOTES

1. Curtis Cate, *Nietzsche: A Biography* (New York: Overlook Press, 2005), 175.
2. Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 171.