The Vicissitudes of Nature: From Spinoza to Freud by Richard J. Bernstein (Polity Press, 2023).

ISBN 9781509555192

doi:10.1017/S0031819123000323

In *The Vicissitudes of Nature*, Richard J. Bernstein examines the philosophical approaches to nature and naturalism of seven figures in the history of modern thought. The book has seven chapters, each devoted to a different thinker, and it is divided into two parts. Part one: Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Hegel. Part two: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud. Bernstein is typically asking, in each case, what the thinker has to say about nature, and how to characterise their approach to philosophical naturalism.

The Spinoza chapter moves from biography to a broad sweep through the *Ethics*. That includes the eight definitions of Part 1, the distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*, the three kinds of knowledge in Part II, *conatus*, affects, acts and passions, bondage, and the prospect of freedom. The Hume chapter introduces his empiricism, his critique of causality, his compatibilism, and his brand of scepticism. Bernstein also contrasts Hume's and Spinoza's naturalism. Kant is presented as 'the greatest challenge to naturalism' (whether Spinoza's or Hume's) and Bernstein moves from the Copernican revolution and Kant's answer to Hume, to Kant's idea of a 'pure science of nature' (p. 88), and from there to Kantian freedom and the attempt to reconcile freedom and nature in the third *Critique* (especially its second part). The Kant chapter submits two major and not altogether unfamiliar complaints against Kant. First, Kantian 'free' causality is unintelligible, or at least unhelpfully mysterious (pp. 90–95). Second, Bernstein criticises the 'cakeism' (my term, though see p. 104) of Kant's account of purpose in nature: the concept of purpose is *de jure* merely regulative, not constitutive; but it is *de facto* (though never *de jure*) constitutive (pp. 101–6). He also charges Kant with sheer dogmatism when he claims that organisms could never be explained mechanistically. Bernstein next tries to thread a path between Kantian Hegelians (he means Brandom and Pippin, among others) and what he calls 'the pragmatic, naturalist Hegelians' (Dewey, Pinkard, and Levine, among others), though his sympathies clearly lie with the latter.

In part 2, Bernstein borrows from Ricoeur to group Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as the masters of suspicion. Marx, on Bernstein's telling, 'approaches the meaning of nature from his conception of man as a laboring animal' (p. 138). What follows is a summary of the varieties of alienation in the *Paris Manuscripts* and a general discussion of Marx on nature: Marx moves (Bernstein proposes) from treating nature as something that man uses, to something that interacts with man in a '*single relational transactional process*' (p. 142, emphasis in original). The later Marx, echoing the earlier, is read as offering a future in which nature is 'no longer [...] encountered as a hostile force or resource to be exploited solely for profit' (p. 153). The Nietzsche chapter takes its cue from naturalist interpreters. Bernstein argues, in reply, that there is 'something *askew*' (p. 167, emphasis in original) in their privileging of the natural sciences (he names Schacht, Leiter, and Janaway, but he has Leiter foremost in mind – see p. 167; p. 251 n. 20). Bernstein's Nietzsche seeks a redemption of nature through the affirmation of life: a 'few rare gifted individuals purge themselves of the vestiges of life-denying values and live their lives in a joyous, life-affirming manner' (p. 176). Freud is characterised as caught between the view that science is the 'sole discipline of knowledge' (p. 178, quoting Whitebook, who is in turn quoting Ricoeur) and a more romantic, speculative tendency. The bulk of the Freud chapter, however, barely addresses Freud's naturalism or conception of nature directly, instead offering a selected overview of Freud's development and major ideas, from the 1895 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' to *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Since a philosopher's view of nature and their brand of (or approach to) philosophical naturalism are very different things, Bernstein leaves himself a lot to do, and the summary just given offers a sense of the book's scope. In fact, however, it has even more ambitious goals. *The Vicissitudes of Nature* doesn't have an overall argument, but Bernstein stakes out some aims in the introduction. One is to fill readers in on 'the rich modern tradition of nature, naturalism and critiques of naturalism' (p. 11). He is a lively, engaging, and thoughtful guide. The second is to emphasise the differences in the conceptions of nature and naturalism (though almost none of them use the latter word) on display. This aim is largely met implicitly, by presenting the different approaches and letting the reader work out the differences for herself. Bernstein does not, for example, look beyond his chosen seven for other approaches,[1] nor does he take a step back to consider relative advantages and disadvantages of what he has presented. Third, for each figure, he aims to show the *centrality* of nature and philosophical naturalism to 'every aspect of their thinking' (p. 12). Depending on the thinker, the degree of controversy of that claim ranges from precisely zero (Spinoza) to something much more elevated (Marx); in fact, *Bernstein's* Nietzsche chapter in effect suggests that Nietzsche's philosophy has no centre at all. In any case, it was a shame that Bernstein did not touch on the fact that 'nature' is such an infamously polysemous word. It is not all that surprising that nature *in some sense* is critical for each thinker, a point which is not meant to undercut his project, but which indicates where an opportunity was missed. As for philosophical naturalism, a frequent point of reference for Bernstein are three characteristics set out by Joseph Rouse (e.g., pp. 66, 162–63).[2] Roughly, these are: nothing supernatural; ways of thinking must be consistent with scientific understanding; no first philosophy. But Bernstein himself admits that these are too 'abstract and general' (p. 163) to tell us much about any individual's view. A final stated aim, mentioned in the blurb and briefly at the start and the end of the book, is to draw a line between these conceptions of nature and the challenge of the climate crisis (pp. 11–12, 207–8). The book makes no attempt whatsoever to address this aim.

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[1] Though he has elsewhere, for example in Richard J. Bernstein, 'Pragmatic Naturalism: John Dewey's Living Legacy', *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 4:2 (2019): 527–94.

Setting out these aims tells us something about the author's intentions, but it risks misleading the reader: the book *is* its seven chapters, one per thinker, largely summarising a combination of their best-known claims, their accounts of nature, and (Freud aside) weighing in how best to characterise their naturalism or their attack on it. That said, looking back at the aims, one notes that some are introductory, some comparative, and some treat the philosopher in question directly at a more scholarly level. Perhaps that is why putting one's finger on the level of this book is persistently tricky. In itself, of course, that is neither praise nor blame, but it makes it hard to know for whom it was written and, therefore, how successfully it might communicate with such a reader. In almost every chapter, the reader is given material, philosophical or biographical, which surely cannot help but feel introductory: the curse on Spinoza; Hume on causation; Hegel's antipathy to one-sidedness; Kant's dogmatic slumber, his Copernican Revolution (p. 78), 'thoughts without content are empty […]' (p. 83); varieties of alienation in Marx; Nietzsche's 'only a perspectival seeing' (p. 159); Freud's distinction between conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious (p. 182). Bernstein often engages recent, Anglophone scholarship in a corrective manner (see the summaries of the Hegel and Nietzsche chapters, above), but there are exceptions (Spinoza,

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[2] Bernstein is working from and citing Joseph Rouse, *Articulating the World: Conceptual Understanding and the Scientific Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 3).

Freud), where it's not clear that we are being offered anything more than a summary, often via lengthy if well-chosen excerpts from other commentators. Likely, the interventions into Hegel and Nietzsche scholarship will be perceived as too cursory to make a mark on the relevant interpretations, even if Bernstein may be onto something in each case. On the other hand, the Hegel and Marx chapters, for my tastes, both assume and miss out too much to be assigned to a student, while failing to hit the mark of the specialist scholar. If the results were uneven, they were often insightful, always striving for clarity, covering a great deal while moving at a brisk pace.

Any reader with their own views on these figures is likely to take issue with Bernstein in places and it is hard to know which points are worth touching on. I'll mention two examples which *may* illustrate a broader tendency in the book. For some of Marx's critics – in the early Frankfurt School, for example – Marx's focus on increasing production, and on Capitalism as (eventually) restricting production, is a weak point in his approach to the natural world. Under communism, so the criticism goes, nature would simply be exploited faster and more efficiently (if also more freely from the human point of view). This critique of Marx doesn't really get a look-in, but it seems worthy, at least, of a mention, especially given the material Bernstein himself quotes. Marx says that 'really free labour' will be 'the activity of *a subject controlling all the forces of nature in the production process*' (cited on p. 152, my emphasis). Bernstein's gloss on this is that Marx wants humans to relate to nature 'in a more rational and harmonious manner' (p. 153). That seems a little generous. When I try to imagine a subject who controls all the forces of nature in the production process, I see Christopher Lee's Saruman ordering his Orcs to rip down *all* the trees. Bernstein's Nietzsche, as noted, redeems nature through the affirmation of life. Bernstein cites one of the rare places in which Nietzsche speaks positively of 'naturalism' (p. 172). But, in my view, he fails to connect what Nietzsche says there with Nietzsche's more specific conception of nature, which ties in with both life-affirmation and power. Nietzsche's later works focus on themes of exploitation, domination, and appropriation, all of which Nietzsche proclaims both essential to organic processes and (sometimes: *and therefore*) good.[3] In his discussion of Marx and Nietzsche, then, the approaches to nature of the target figure took on a soft benevolence and, from the present standpoint, lost some of their more off-putting qualities – or, at least, these apparently off-putting qualities did not get an airing.

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[3] Here, I am borrowing from and condensing some of my own analysis of Nietzsche. See Thomas Stern, *Nietzsche's Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) for further evidence and discussion.

The elephant roaming between the lines of this review is that Richard J. Bernstein died in July 2022, at the age of ninety. From what he says in the Preface, he must have been working on the book at least into his (very) late eighties. The age of the author makes the book more impressive, but to dwell on that point risks a condescension it in no way merits. This is a wide-ranging, detailed and – for the most part – accessible book, whose author can find his way nimbly around seven very different thinkers. If I'm not sure who its readership will be, that has as much to do with my sense of what and how philosophers read, now, as it does about the merits of the book.

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This review first published online 31 October 2023

A Case for Necessitarianism by Amy Karofsky (Routledge, 2021). ISBN 9781032026169

doi:10.1017/S0031819123000335

There is no contingency. *All truths are necessarily true*. *Truth, possibility, and necessity collapse*. However you put it, the thesis of *A Case for Necessitarianism* (Karofsky, 2021) is radical. And with far-reaching implications given that modality permeates many (all?) philosophical subdisciplines. Threats to free will and moral responsibility are invigorated since prominent versions of compatibilism still require *some* alternative possibilities (e.g., Lewis, 1981; Sartorio, 2016); counterfactual reasoning is rendered vacuous; and the metaphilosophical landscape is seismically altered if we are not constrained by the norm of explaining necessity (see Van Cleve, 2018, for examples) and if possibilities cannot feature as premises in arguments (see van Inwagen, 1998, for examples).

After summarising the history of necessitarianism, Karofsky (chapter 1) critiques the justification for (belief in) contingency. We can only *experience* what's actual: 'it is impossible to experience what does not happen' (p. 22). So, neither experience of change over time nor experience of variation between individuals justifies