

Christopher Janaway and Simon Robertson (eds.)

Nietzsche, Naturalism, and Normativity.

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This batch of meticulous essays tugs at a nasty knot in Nietzsche's works: crudely put, he reduces the normative to the natural, yet advances a new kind of normativity purportedly immune to such reduction. The editors flag one of their main questions at the outset: 'If Nietzsche is a philosophical naturalist, and if part of his evaluative project involves explaining such phenomena as morality away in naturalistic terms, it remains to be seen how the values constitutive of his own positive ideal fit into this naturalized vision' (4). The essays treat the following topics: Nietzsche's views on or relationship to aesthetics (essays 1-3), metaethics, (specifically, non-cognitivism and fictionalism) (essays 4-5), compassion and the self (essays 6-8), and naturalism (essay 9). They orbit around the following questions: Just what is the relationship between Nietzsche's views on normativity and naturalism? Does he advance a normative theory? If so, what kind? How does he—does he—justify it? Moreover, does he justify it by recourse to a naturalistic worldview? If so, what kind? Lastly, do such naturalistic commitments undermine his attempt to advance his own normative position?

Peter Railton, Peter Poellner, and Simon Robertson all construe Nietzsche's value-theory as a kind of aestheticism that is neither universal nor categorical; strictly speaking, they argue, Nietzsche does not offer a normative theory. Railton throws down the gauntlet, beginning his essay by laying out four of the thorniest problems in interpreting Nietzsche's thought that crop up throughout the essays: the truth problem (Does his perspectivism collapse into relativism?); the morality problem (Can he consistently endorse a positive ideal given his critique of morality?); the normativity problem (Does his naturalistic deflation of key concepts like free will and agency undermine this positive ideal?); and the value problem (How can values be both discovered in nature and created by people?). Railton draws on a useful distinction between normative and evaluative concepts in order to clarify Nietzsche's position on values. Nietzsche's notion of value, here, is aesthetic and relational: 'new values and virtues can come into being only because new kinds of persons have come into being, a persona with a capacity for greatness sufficient to occupy her place in the expanded value relation.... The force they have is relational and arises from the desires, appreciate capacities, rewards, and powers of imagination that underwrite them...not from a categorical rational standard' (47). All of which is to say that Nietzsche's is not so much a normative theory as a 'theory of how to live well' (48)—it is committed to a notion of excellence or perfection, and is therefore *evaluative*, but not *normative*.

Poellner claims that, for Nietzsche, values are adequate affective responses to expressive features of the world. He thinks such a position does not devolve into a form of subjectivism: 'While the values Nietzsche takes himself to apprehend here are values that can only be instantiated in persons...they are thus not essentially indexed to particular persons.... They are, in that sense, essentially universal' (65). This seems aligned with Railton's notion of 'normative guidance' mentioned above. Poellner clarifies his view further: 'What Nietzsche's affective response aims to be veridical to is the intrinsic values of a highly specific type of well-being constituted by a complex web of thoughts, exercised capacities, commitments, inclinations, and feelings' (70). For Nietzsche, it is the capacity to value that matters, and it is individuals mindful of

that capacity who tend to register the affective responses adequate to the type of interior life Nietzsche admires. Poellner draws (undeveloped) parallels here to Scheler, Sartre, and Korsgaard that would make for an interesting sequel.

Robertson tackles the ‘scope problem’, which has to do with determining the precise limits and target of Nietzsche’s critique of morality (this is of a piece with Railton’s ‘morality problem’). This is important for two reasons: to differentiate Nietzsche’s positive ideals from those he critiques, and to show that these ideals do not fall prey to that critique. In Robertson’s view, Nietzsche held to a ‘quasi-aesthetic individualist perfectionism’ (108). What marks this off from morality proper is that it is not a system of values and obligations, it is not categorical, and it is not universal. It is ‘not an ideal everyone ought to pursue: rather, it makes a constitutive claim about what a higher type is and how such an individual ought to be’ (108). In essence, Robertson attempts to lay bare the zone of values that is immune from Nietzsche’s critique of morality, while Railton and Poellner attempt to delineate just what those values are.

Three of the essays explore Nietzsche’s conception of self. Though Reginster focuses on the nature of compassion, his argument engages Nietzsche’s understanding of the self and the role of interests in the egoism/altruism debate. Reginster contends that one thing often overlooked in Nietzsche’s critique of Schopenhauer’s view of compassion is that the two thinkers had different conceptions of selflessness. The key difference, he thinks, lies in the ‘personal significance each agent’s interests have for him; that is to say, the fact that he experiences them as his own’ (181). Since Nietzsche holds that an individual can only ever experience his interests as his own, he views Schopenhauer’s form of compassion, which issues out of an identification of self and other, as a form of false consciousness, a subtle form of egoism masquerading as altruism. It is thus Christian in spirit, an iteration of the ascetic ideal.

Christopher Janaway explores Nietzsche’s conception of human greatness, focusing on his challenging view of morality as both cause and consequence. While a morality or moral system is a symptom, expression or, perhaps, a kind of ideological superstructure produced by a particular psycho-social constitution, it also produces or selects for that very constitution. Janaway points out that this duality is also reflected in Nietzsche’s own positive ideal of self-affirmation. The problem, again, is how the self can make the leap to health, creativity, the sovereign individual, the free spirit, revaluation, etc., if there is no free will, no agency, no unified consciousness, no, well, *self*; or at least, if these things do not have the efficaciously causal power to tend to take them to have. This peculiarity of Nietzsche’s moral philosophy shows up in his conception of autonomy, the subject of R. Lanier Anderson’s essay. Anderson offers a nuanced, granular interpretation of Nietzsche’s conception of drives with which he opposes eliminativist readings of Nietzsche’s psychology (which often appeal to *Beyond Good and Evil* 12) and argues that Nietzsche embraces a ‘minimal self’ that, while porous, is self-organizing; it lies somewhere between a Kantian autonomous moral agent and a Humean bundle of drives. This is why Nietzsche can embrace a limited form of autonomy in which the latter functions as a *norm* in the sense of a *task*. This capacity ‘to “stand back” from one’s attitudes and assess them’ seems the same as the mere capacity to value to which Poellner calls attention (228). All told, Anderson does much to convince us that Nietzsche’s psychology is congruent with his vision of how to live well, and presents as one of the strongest essays in the volume.

Though Richard Schacht’s is the final essay in the volume, it provides what appears to be the most comprehensive definition of Nietzsche’s naturalism. In Schacht’s view, the ‘guiding idea’ of Nietzsche’s naturalism is this: ‘that everything that goes on and comes to be in this world is the

outcome of developments occurring within it that are owing entirely to its internal dynamics and the contingencies to which they give rise, and come about (as it were) from the bottom up, through the elaboration or relationally-precipitated transformation of what was already going on and had already come to be' (239). Nietzsche's naturalism is thus intended to chart a middle way between a dualistic, transcendent metaphysics and a reductive, scientific naturalism. Schacht claims it is 'minimalist' because it is only committed to the 'guiding idea' mentioned above; it is 'extended' because it not only 'translates man back into nature' but sees humanity as transcending and transforming its animal inheritance; and it is 'robust', 'emergentist', and 'historical' because, unlike scientific naturalism, it acknowledges the psychological, social, cultural, and artistic aspects of human experience, not just the physiological and biological aspects.

Schacht (correctly) rejects what he sees to be Brian Leiter's scientific interpretation, which holds that Nietzsche was committed to a 'substantive' naturalism, a 'scientific picture of how things work' (238). On the contrary, in Schacht's view, Nietzsche's task was to debunk not just the ontological pretensions of religion, but those of modern science as well. Though he does not mention it explicitly, Schacht zeroes in here on a key to understanding Nietzsche's approach to the interlocking themes of naturalism and normativity: nihilism. As Schacht notes, at *Gay Science* 373 Nietzsche clearly rejects a "'scientific" world interpretation' because it cannot account for things that are 'meaning-constituted': 'Nietzsche here has "mechanistic" thinking specifically in mind; but his basic point applies to natural-scientific thinking more generally: such thinking is inherently meaning-blind' (241).

A curious, and in my view glaring, omission in the volume is any substantive discussion of philosophical biology. The book's index contains no entries on biology or Darwin. Careful work has been done by scholars such as Gregory Moore (*Nietzsche, Biology, Metaphor*) and John Richardson (*Nietzsche's New Darwinism*) on the importance, indeed centrality, of biological and evolutionary considerations in Nietzsche's work, especially his naturalism but also his value-theory. Daniel Dennett, for one, ultimately rejects Nietzsche's philosophy because it is incompatible with neo-Darwinian biology (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*). Nietzsche, he thinks, is a pioneering philosopher precisely because he understood the philosophical implications of evolutionary theory; however, it is because Nietzsche (definitely) rejected Darwinian mechanism and (allegedly) embraced a form of vitalism that Dennett rejects his philosophy of the will to power. Even Richardson, who does his best to make Nietzsche's thought compatible with, or palatable to, scientific naturalism, concedes that Nietzsche's dominant tendency is to see the will to power, i.e., drives, in Lamarckian terms, operating above and beyond natural selection à la the *Bildungstreib* of the romantic biologists of the nineteenth century. Dennett *et al.* could well be wrong, of course. But if Nietzsche's naturalism depends on a dubious metaphysical premise—an *élan vital* or whatever—then I think that issue deserves an essay in a volume on Nietzsche's naturalism. All told, however, the essays thoughtfully grapple with tough, important problems at the core of Nietzsche's philosophy.

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