

Steven V. Hicks and Alan Rosenberg, eds.
Reading Nietzsche at the Margins.
West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press 2008.
238 pages
US\$34.95 (paper ISBN 978-1-55753-451-4)

This collection of eleven essays addresses topics that, as the back cover adverts, ‘have been marginalized or slighted because they do not fit neatly into any of the usual categories of Nietzsche scholarship.’ The essays are organized into four different parts, yet there is little continuity in the themes addressed in the work, as the essay themes veer from the significance of Nietzsche’s later prefaces to love, laughter, compassion, forgetfulness, ecology, Islam, etc. In short, this is a collection of essays which is topically all over the place, so it is difficult to make claims about the text as a whole. There are some fine American scholars contributing to this work, but there is much internal diversity to this collection in terms of content, as well as in the quality of the essays.

Christa Davis Acampora’s ‘Forgetting the Subject’ is one of the better essays in this work. It explores why the significance of forgetting is thematically important in Nietzsche’s thinking. Among other things, Acampora shows that Nietzsche is not simply celebrating mindlessness or oblivion (52). Nietzsche’s emphasis on the power of forgetting provides an interesting counterpoint to Plato’s concept of recollection and invites further reflection on Nietzsche as an anti-Platonist. Acampora’s analysis provides a good starting point for thinking about the philosophical significance of memory and its relationship to power: her analysis draws on Heidegger’s comments about memory as well as on contemporary scholars, and offers a nuanced account on the role memory plays in Nietzsche’s texts.

Nietzsche’s view that ethical systems often amount to coping mechanisms for the weak and his condemnation of moralities of pity lend plausibility to the claim that Nietzsche is insensitive to suffering. However, Kathleen Marie Higgins argues that such a view is overly simplistic, drawing on some observations by Krell, Bates, and others that Nietzsche did not want many of his friends and family to read his books out of concern that their feelings would be hurt (59). Higgins’ inquiry raises interesting questions about cruelty and suffering which are relevant to contemporary discussions involving active atheism. Consider, for example, Dennett’s comments on atheism (see Dawkins’ ‘The Four Horsemen’, a discussion with Harris and Hitchens on Youtube.com) and his assertion that it may not be possible *not to offend* or hurt others’ feelings who are deeply religious. This was an issue for Nietzsche as well and will persist as a difficulty for those who evaluate the significance of theology and religious moral systems in the future.

Higgins’ analysis is provocative and while there is some evidence suggesting that Nietzsche has a sensitive side, there still is much in Nietzsche’s work that suggests a lack

of concern with the suffering of the weak. Nietzsche's critique of slave morality and the will to power are still there. Higgins does recognize this though in her acknowledgement of Nietzsche's counsel to become 'hard', which she says at times almost amounts to a kind of sadism (71), and she concedes that her analysis does not explain the full range of Nietzsche's attitude toward suffering (70).

There are some other interesting themes in this work, such as Richard Schacht's analysis of the significance of music, but there are longer monographs devoted to this topic. A good deal of scholarship has been devoted already to Nietzsche and Wagner's encounter with Schopenhauer's theory of music and its significance as the immediate language of the will. However, Schacht's emphasis on *going beyond* what can be formulaically measured in music raises interesting questions about the unquantifiable in music and what it means to experience music. Even with his rejection of Schopenhauer's theory of the will, Nietzsche still thinks that there is something about music which exceeds a formulaic analysis (*Gay Science* 372).

Schacht points out the difference for Nietzsche between listening to music and making music (117). There is something strange and special about the significance of music for Nietzsche's life and thought, and Schacht's reflections on what *musical experience is* for Nietzsche raises important questions: how is music connected to vitality? What is the spirit which music liberates? How does music give wings to thought? In what sense is music different than other metaphysical objects? These questions remain largely unresolved by Schacht's essay, but there is value in raising them to decipher Nietzsche's thoughts on music.

One of the surprising and unique essays in this collection is Michael Zimmerman's 'Nietzsche and Ecology', a work that addresses what Nietzsche's position on contemporary ecological strategies might be. Zimmerman provides some context as to how the concept of nature has evolved from the late 19th century until now. How, for example, has our understanding of humanity and its relationship to the earth evolved? What would Zarathustra's counsel 'to remain faithful to the earth' mean today? Zimmerman points out that we know a great deal more about nature itself through the advancement of genetics and other sciences, so the landscape for thinking rigorously about nature has changed.

Zimmerman's work briefly surveys some contemporary ecologists who blame anthropocentrism for humanity's pollution of the earth. We live in a time where our geosphere and biosphere are being increasingly contaminated. How would Nietzsche respond to allegations of 'environmental racism' (pollution, installation of toxic waste dumps which are located in places which disproportionately affect minorities) when he employs 19th century racial categories? Zimmerman argues that if Nietzsche could be transported to the early 21st century, and could update his knowledge about genetics, he would need to revise many of his ideas about race and breeding. Further, 'given the

astonishingly evil purposes to which National Socialism put such racial doctrines, he might even renounce some dimensions of his aristocratic antimodernism' (171). Such a claim is bound to be controversial, but it does invite constructive thought about the relevance of philosophers of the past.

The politics of nature and of how humans understand their relationship to nature have changed. To think about nature rigorously is different now than it was in the 19th century. Nietzsche endorses the general view that those who believe humans have a special privileged place in the universe after Copernicus lack a type of intellectual integrity, and he thinks such hubris should be rejected. Can that type of hubris explain the destruction of our own environment? This is something which needs further attention if we are looking for guidance or edification from philosophers in history: in what sense can past thinkers be relevant to contemporary ecology, when knowledge of nature and the politics of nature are different than they were in the past? How does our advance in the understanding of our natural environment alter or condition our prospects for creating a philosophy in the service of life?

Some of the other essays in this collection address Nietzsche's prefaces, Pascal, asceticism, convalescence, and most of these offer some rigorous analysis, especially David Allison's essay on autocritique. However, the engagement of some of these topics falls short by lacking clear or illuminating theses. One essay cites 38 secondary sources, yet somehow presents little in the way of an original thesis about asceticism. While there are admirable essays in this work, some of the essays are tedious and offer little originality or insight, in spite of engaging provocative topics. There is probably something for every reader's interest in this work, but there is also likely to be something disappointing for any given reader. Some of the essays do succeed in the back cover's claim to offer 'appeal to a wide audience, not just specialists', but some do not. Nonetheless, this book does have merit as a vehicle for thinking about some important issues which are often passed over by standard philosophical categories, even if the essays vary in scope and quality.

Paul A. Swift
Bryant University