Book Reviews

Pragmatism, Critique, Judgment: Essays for Richard J. Bernstein

Seyla Benhabib and Nancy Fraser (eds.)

MIT Press, Cambridge (MA), London, 2004, 379pp.

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In this *Festschrift*, colleagues, students, and friends of Richard Bernstein pay tribute to his life and work. As the editors note, Richard Bernstein has been one of those figures who helped transform 20th century philosophy's conception of itself, which in 1950s Anglo-American circles was positivist, wedded to unyielding oppositions between explanation and evaluation, and in many respects patently factorial. Like John Dewey, his inspiration and the subject of his first major scholarly work, Bernstein sought to explode this narrow self-image by urging a conversation across disciplines and traditions, thereby reinvigorating American pragmatism and arriving at 'a countermodel of philosophy for a democratic society,' in which philosophy is underpinned by and augments the ideal of solidarity (p. vii). In doing so, Bernstein not only fostered a post-positivist understanding of social enquiry and reduced the gulf between the analytic and Continental traditions, but also reasserted social critique as a legitimate concern of philosophers, stressing the inevitable, yet constructive, intertwinement of knowledge, ethics, and politics.

Pragmatism, Critique, Judgment divides into four parts. The concluding part comprises a short biographical essay by Judith Friedlander and a very useful bibliography of Bernstein's writings from 1956 to 2002. Friedlander does an excellent job of situating Bernstein, a New Yorker of humble Jewish background, within the context of mid- to late-20th century academia and of recounting his role within that milieu, from his early days as editor of the *Review of Metaphysics*, to the controversy surrounding his denial of tenure at Yale, down to his involvement with the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik and *Praxis International*, the successor to the dissident journal *Praxis*. The impression conveyed is of a passionately committed thinker and of a teacher exerting an empowering influence over generations of students.

The three other parts each reflect a key aspect of Bernstein's work, although none of the essays contained within them is about Bernstein alone or even predominantly. Part I focuses on philosophy, specifically the role of philosophic reflection in late modernity. In their contributions, Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor reflect on the future of philosophic discourse and, in particular, the meaning of pragmatism. Where Rorty dismisses philosophy as a

genre now surpassed by literary criticism, Taylor, by contrast, insists on a form of pragmatism which retains a strong notion of truth, thus preserving philosophy's relevance. Less broad in scope, Jürgen Habermas's essay reprises his long-standing debate with Bernstein over the relation between the 'good' and the 'right' in moral and democratic theory. However, the most impressive contribution is Yirmiyahu Yovel's essay on Hegel, a figure occupying a central position in Bernstein's writings. With admirable clarity, Yovel reflects on Hegel's aphorisms regarding 'the true' in order to clarify Hegel's system of thought as a whole and to provide a telling critique of that system, namely that its supposition of a final end or complete actualization of 'spirit' falsely effaces human finitude.

The essays in Part II are all motivated by Bernstein's ideal of socio-political critique. A one-time student of Bernstein's, Nancy Fraser considers the uneasy relationship between the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition in contemporary theories of justice. Her conclusion is that these supposedly contradictory perspectives on social conflict have to be combined into a single theoretical framework where the evils of maldistribution and misrecognition are countered simultaneously. In a similar vein, Seyla Benhabib urges a re-alignment of current thinking and practice as regards citizenship, contending that Kantian cosmopolitanism is a necessary and yet insufficient basis for a robust trans-national conception of citizenship. In his contribution, Thomas McCarthy criticises the idea of 'ideal theory,' arguing persuasively that normative theory in the tradition of Rawls is blind to the racial structuring of basic social institutions. What is needed to counter racial injustice is not abstract theorization disengaged from empirical reality, but a 'critical' normative theory that self-consciously operates from within that messy reality. This section concludes with Jacques Derrida reflecting upon the death penalty. Derrida's central claim, obscurely expressed, is that capital punishment, in being bound up with the sovereign's right of exception, is implicated in a 'theologico-political discourse' which is deeply problematic in the modern secular West, a West which claims to have surpassed religious myth (p. 200).

Part III considers themes that underpin Bernstein's later writings, including the meaning of Judaism and the problem of evil. Agnes Heller revisits the debate between Yosef Yerushalmi, Derrida, and Bernstein over Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, arguing that they each provide important insights into that controversial book. Carol Bernstein's analysis of the novels of Jorge Semprun and Shoshana Yovel's tale, the 'Seventh Demon,' explore the experience of 'radical evil' during the Holocaust, as Bernstein himself does in his most recent work, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (2002). The Holocaust also provides the background to Joel Whitebrook's comparison of Freud with Hannah Arendt. Whitebrook proposes the interesting argument that these otherwise very different thinkers are united by their recognition that the

impetus to mass atrocity lies in a hubristic and ultimately totalitarian faith in human omnipotence. Jerome Kohn also focuses on Arendt, taking Bernstein's (1996) *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* as his starting point, but with the goal of explicating the faculty of 'judgement' and, in particular, how this human faculty can be said to contribute to the generation of a 'common world.'

As with nearly all *Festschriften*, the essays and pieces that make up *Pragmatism, Critique, Judgment* are very diverse, offering analyses of disparate subjects from a variety of perspectives. There is a failing often observed in books of this sort: that the multiplicity of their contributions leads to a shallow, superficial effect. Yet this is not the case here. Rather, the diversity of this volume's contributions happily mirror the diversity of the man they were collected to honour, a man, as Benhabib and Fraser rightly note, defined by his patient refusal to limit himself to one line of thought or to a single concern. Thus, *Pragmatism, Critique, Judgment* is certainly marked by eclecticism, but certainly this eclecticism is of the very best sort.

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Dylan and Cohen: Poets of Rock and Roll

David Boucher

Continuum, New York & London, 2004, 261pp.

ISBN 0 8264 5981 1.

The Political Art of Bob Dylan

David Boucher and Gary Browning (eds.)

Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004, 177pp.

ISBN 1 4039 1682 9.

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There's no question about it: Bob Dylan is a fascinating artist. I use the word *artist* here fully in the knowledge of its ambiguity: an artist is one who makes art, but we also use the word *artist* these days when we really mean *artiste* — a performer, or entertainer. That Dylan is a performer is unquestionable — the man performs almost ceaselessly, to the extent that we must wonder whether or not he has any time for life beyond performance. He spends so much time on the road, endlessly touring, that one might conclude he has the proverbial hellhound on his trail. We might, less dramatically, see this incessant desire for life