
Book Review

Aurélie Choné, Isabelle Hajek, and Philippe Hamman (eds.), *Rethinking Nature: Challenging Disciplinary Boundaries* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), xiii + 268 pp., £ 31.99 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-138-21493-4.

Rethinking Nature is presented by the editors as a 'textbook' but goes way beyond that. Its purpose is to critically investigate developments in the debates on nature at the crossroads of nature, environment, society, and culture. Contributions came from twenty-one scholars from diverse disciplines from both the French/European and the American schools of thought. Bringing together these hitherto largely separated academic traditions is an accomplishment in itself. Developing lines of thought from social sciences, literary, and cultural studies are explored and integrated in new views on environmental humanities. The book is well written and provides a wealth of information for students and scholars of many disciplines.

Rethinking Nature contains twenty-one chapters divided in five parts. Part I discusses 'Values and actions'. Larrère (Chapter 1) describes North American and European traditions of environmental ethics and argues for combining them together with non-Western cultural worldviews into a global/local ethic of respect and responsibility. Deep Ecology is investigated by Afeissa in Chapter 2, emphasizing that everything is 'relational' and nature protection is essentially self-realization. Choné's Chapter 3, 'Ecospirituality', describes current discourses on ecology and spirituality familiar to the readers of the *JSRNC*. She sees them gradually converging toward the building of an 'inner ecology' to re-enchant a secularized world. Important Western philosophers and practices are presented (however, leaving out Patriarch Bartholomew's waters blessings and Pope Francis's landmark *Laudato Si'*). Chapter 4 (by Merritt) describes 'Ecopsychology', which aims to re-connect the human self with nature on the basis of Jungian and other psychotherapeutical schools, almost presenting ecopsychology as a remedy to all flaws of modernism (pp. 56-57).

Part II deals with 'Writings and representations' of nature in literature and art. Chapter 5 (by Blanc) cleverly analyses the potential of nature aesthetics for re-connecting landscape inhabitants to nature. In Chapter 6, Peraldo discusses the origins and meanings of 'ecocriticism' as well as its potential for ecological and ethical reflection. Dahan (in Chapter 7) traces 'Epistemocritical Perspectives on Nature' in literary texts and observes unfolding human-nature integration under the 'posthuman paradigm'.

Part III, 'Movements, activism, and societies', examines how connection with nature is inextricably bound with culture and power. Chapter 8 (by Repussard) traces the history of environmental activism and policies from the nineteenth century to current ecological visions embracing either 'green markets' or antimodernist

'de-growth'. In Chapter 9, Lauwers gives an insightful account of the development of ecofeminism and its underlying 'logic of domination', criticisms, misconceptions, and challenges (p. 94). Chapter 10, 'Ecosociology' (by Woodgate), presents a well-argued framework for analysing socioecological discourses and practices. This could have been enriched by including social representation of nature theory (Buijs et al. 2012). In Chapter 11, Navet charts the anthropocentric Greco-Christian roots of anthropology and hails the latter's evolution to a more people-respecting ethnoecology.

Part IV discusses the positioning of nature in the globally on-going urbanization. Jones (Chapter 12) analyses the 'shifting rural/urban complexities of space and nature' (p. 152) engendering renewed landscape approaches and urban ecologies to counter widespread 'ecocide'. In Chapter 13, Hajek and Lévy discuss trends in research on urban ecology hinging around the paradigm shift from city-nature opposition toward an integrated view on human-nature relations in urban planning. In Chapter 14, 'Nature, Environment, and Health', Charles describes the history of 'environmental health' in depth but ignores research on health benefits of 'green' nature (Hartig et al. 2014). Chapter 15 (by Hamman) details the integration of 'sustainable development' in urban planning and theorizing including the emergence of transition and resilience concepts. Buclet (Chapter 16) investigates the development and perspectives of ecosystems-based, cyclical economies. In Chapter 17, Muradian skilfully discusses the politico-strategical merits of the ecosystem services model as well as its analytical inadequacies for accommodating cultural dimensions and instead proposing more comprehensive models.

Part V, 'Human-Animal' starts with Navet's (Chapter 18) tracing of 'ecocide and ethnocide' in the Americas to Christian biblical roots. He advocates a 'traditional peoples' perspective to counter planetary destruction, but omits critical debates on this issue. In Chapter 19, 'Animal Studies', Borgards discusses philosophical, methodological, cultural, and literary views on 'animals' and the blurring boundaries with humans. In Chapter 20, Baratay argues for a multidisciplinary, non-anthropocentric *animal* perspective on history. Both chapters overlook current ethological thinking which, having left anthropocentrism far behind, investigates empathy, culture, and even 'religion' of animals as subjects (de Waal 2016). In Chapter 21, 'Outlook', Wilke sketches a future research agenda for environmental humanities in the context of intensifying global/local interactions, postcolonial power structures, changing views on human-nonhuman relationships, and novel forms of cultural expressions. She urges for radical integration of the humanities with science and notes the importance of new spatial, visual, and narrative/linguistic methods. The book concludes by stating that the ultimate goal of producing nature-knowledge is to invent 'new ways of living together' in the real world (p. 257).

This book evokes three comments. First, various authors discussing the link between biological and cultural diversity seem unaware that 'biocultural diversity' already exists as an intrinsically 'relational' concept standing at the heart of the book's matter. Originating from indigenous societies (Posey 1999) it is increasingly applied to Westernurbanities (Elands et al. 2015). Secondly, 'non-Western paradigms' are unevenly covered, despite the book's promise to the contrary (p. 8). Aboriginal perspectives from the Americas feature in Chapters 11 and 18, but insights from Africa and Asia are hardly presented. The reader is thus deprived of knowledge on how these other-than-Western perspectives view the visible and invisible environment.

References to the invisible—the domain of spirituality and religion—are also lacking among the specifications of ‘non-humans’ (p. 250) in Chapter 21 outlining the future of ‘environmental humanities’.

This relates to the third point. Notwithstanding the book’s frequent mentioning of religion and the inclusion of a specific chapter (3) on ‘ecospirituality’, the outlook overlooks religious studies and theology as potential partners for integrated research. It could have benefited from the last decade’s cross-cutting work in this journal, ISSRNC conferences, and other humanities-science fora. Despite these shortcomings, the book is a valuable and inspiring source for further integrated research on human-nature relationships.

References

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