

The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism

ALAN MALACHOWSKI (Ed.)

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Alan Malachowski's *Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism* is a recent contribution to Cambridge University Press's *Companion* series, which is intended to provide reference works for inter-disciplinary and non-specialist audiences. To accomplish this task with a topic like pragmatism is no small feat, given the sheer scope of the subject matter. Thankfully, this volume does an admirable job of rising to and meeting that challenge.

The editor's introduction does well to explain the logic of the volume by situating it against the backdrop of a contemporary (and politicized) debate about the history of pragmatism. Those on one side of the debate suggest that pragmatism "fizzled out after burning briefly with some bright promise" only to be "eclipsed by analytic philosophy" (3); those on the other side suggest that, contrary to this received narrative, "pragmatist ideas exerted a good deal of influence" in the development of analytic philosophy (4). Recent champions of pragmatism, especially Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty, made this second way of seeing the history of pragmatism possible because they, as Malachowski puts it, drew "attention to pragmatism as an independent source of ideas and themes [and thereby] interrupted such progress as it had been making by stealth within mainstream philosophy" (6). This latter narrative is chosen by Malachowski to structure the volume, especially its second section, where pragmatist themes in the work of Quine and Wittgenstein (among others) are presented for the reader's consideration. Because of space constraints, I will only briefly mention the project undertaken in each of the three sections of the volume, highlighting those chapters I see as exceptional.

The first section is "Classic Pragmatism" (Chapters 1-3), which covers the traditional trinity: Peirce, James, and Dewey. Though many contemporary pragmatists will balk at the idea of limiting this section to these three figures, a volume charged with introducing such a vast literature can't be faulted (much) for taking a traditional approach to the traditional figures. Each of the essays in this section provides a noteworthy contribution to scholarship on their respective topic, though Christopher Hookway's "The Principle of Peirce' and the Origins of Pragmatism" is arguably one of the strongest contributions to this section and the volume, and is a valuable resource for pragmatists and non-pragmatists alike. Hookway presents a clear and concise account of the development and implications of the founder of pragmatism's leading contributions to the field: the method of science (offered in "The Fixation of Belief") and the pragmatist maxim (from "How to Make our Ideas Clear") (18).

The second section is "Pragmatism Revived" (Chapters 4-9), and it explores (as noted above) the efforts of Putnam and Rorty to revive pragmatism, as well as comparative work their interruption-*cum*-revival has made a space for, namely, into the pragmatism(s) of Quine, Hegel, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein. One of the standout contributions here is Richard Bernstein's chapter, which traces the Hegelian influence on philosophy in the United States through three historical moments, each of which is "directly or indirectly related to pragmatism" (105): in the late 19th century with the work of the classical pragmatists, in the mid-20th century with the work of Wilfrid Sellars (among other then-marginal thinkers), and in the present time with the work of the "Pittsburgh Hegelians."

Another excellent chapter in this section is Malachowski's (his third appearance in the volume), "Imagination Over Truth: Rorty's Contribution to Pragmatism," in which he offers a remarkably lucid overview of a thinker whose work tends to be read incorrectly and uncharitably. In recognition of this fact, Malachowski's essay proceeds by way of responding to Rorty's critics in order to "unravel and clarify" his relationship with pragmatism. Once this is accomplished, Malachowski suggests, "it becomes more difficult, and often less appropriate, to pin labels of intellectual irresponsibility on his efforts" (208-209).

The third and final section, "Pragmatism at Work" (Chapters 10-19), shows how pragmatism can inform various practices, namely, feminism, education, aesthetics, religion, and law. There are two essays that stand out as particularly valuable for both the pragmatist and non-pragmatist. The first is Carol Nicholson's chapter, "Education and the Pragmatic Temperament." Though it doesn't deal with education as explicitly as one might expect, Nicholson's efforts to define "the pragmatist temperament" as "a habit of mind that is open to uncertainty, change and different points of view" (250) has clear implications for how we might think about pragmatism itself, as well as the task of educating our students. The second is Michael Sullivan and Daniel J. Solove's "Radical Pragmatism," which takes aim at the suggestion, recently defended by Richard Posner, that pragmatism is politically neutral. The authors argue instead that (Deweyan) pragmatism is inherently democratic because both democracy and pragmatism hold "a commitment to a form of inquiry—the endorsement of [the] experimental method on the social and political stage" (337). Thus, "far from being timorous, far from accepting our current practices and institutions as given realities, pragmatism subjects them to criticism and reconstruction. Pragmatism is anything but banal—it is radical" (343).

In sum, this volume does an admirable job of presenting pragmatism in its best light to those who are unfamiliar or less well-versed in the tradition. There are occasions where the volume lapses into the risks inherent in such a project. Some papers, for example, seem more preoccupied with debates among pragmatists; some papers assume more familiarity with thinkers outside the pragmatist canon than many readers are likely to have; some papers, in appealing to a general audience, remain a little too superficial; and some papers are inattentive to current research on their topics. However, most papers, and the volume overall, will benefit both pragmatists and non-pragmatists by offering clear and concise overviews of those thinkers traditionally identified as pragmatist, others who exhibit pragmatist tendencies, as well as the broad-ranging applicability of the pragmatist approach. Philosophers from any and all traditions are bound to find something in this volume that will enhance their own research.

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Context

ROBERT STALNAKER

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This is Stalnaker's highly anticipated, book-length treatment of the concept of common ground, of what participants in a linguistic discourse agree to take for granted. He develops an account of the structure and dynamics of common ground that, he argues, allows both