

*British Empiricism and American Pragmatism: New Directions and Neglected Arguments*

Robert J. Roth, S.J.

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x + 205 pp.

Robert Roth has gathered together some work on Locke, Hume, Peirce, James and Dewey for a look at some interrelationships between these two philosophical traditions. There is a link in the author's purpose for this book between the new directions and the neglected arguments. The former phrase refers to the "pragmatic turn" (p. vii) as a divergence taken by the pragmatists from the strict path of British empiricism, while remaining in the wider road of empiricism. The topics where Roth sees some key points of dissent between them are where he finds the need for further research. In the preface, Roth says that he has "selected a number of themes which in my opinion have not been sufficiently aired and which deserve further consideration" (pp. vii-viii). These themes are experience, cause and effect, personal identity (each receiving a chapter), and moral, social, and political theories (receiving two chapters, one for each tradition). The chapters are typically divided into sections for each philosopher, proceeding in their historical order. The book concludes with a "broader view of the two traditions" (p. 182) in which Roth offers some "neglected challenges" for those interested in pragmatism and British empiricism.

Overall, the book presents an uneven mix of broad generalizations and dense commentary. The ties that are forged to bind together the book are not nearly as strong as the individual expositions. Whenever Roth makes an attempt to reveal the current of philosophical discussion flowing between Locke and Hume, on the one hand, and Peirce, James and Dewey on the other, it is obvious that there is great difficulty in knowing how to proceed. The turbulence is too much, the commonalities too distant and vaguely seen, and the disagreements between them so deep, that

Roth is struggling to remain afloat.

Roth at the outset of his first chapter claims that "the unifying element will be their account of experience" and that "there are enough similarities to put them into a family of philosophers" (p. 2). Then without defining empiricism or telling us anything about any similarities (indeed taking them as granted, though unspecified, throughout the book) he at once plunges boldly into the differences: ". . .the contrast between atomism and unity, diversity and identi[t]y, discontinuity and continuity" (p. 2). These contrasts are identified as the source of the "pragmatic turn" away from the British empiricists. Of this there can be no doubt; Roth has his eye upon the necessary starting point since these contrasts are the most fundamental possible upon the subject of experience! The very essence of British empiricism lies in atomism, diversity, and discontinuity, while their opposites are the essence of pragmatism. But the use of the term "turn" is thus to make a large understatement. The pragmatists were not merely making a turn; they were halting and making a complete about-face to go directly against the tide. To try to understand these two traditions as if one simply flowed from the other is to ignore the actual source of all the turbulence, as Roth does: the German and British idealists. Their arguments with the British empiricists in favor of unity, identity, and continuity are key sources for pragmatism. With barely a touch of recognition for them and their heavy influence upon pragmatism, Roth makes it sound as though the pragmatists alone were responsible for opposition to the tenets of British empiricism. Those who are not familiar with post-Kantian idealism will find Roth's discussions of the relationships and debts of pragmatism to British empiricism weak, forced, and artificial at best; those who are will be frustrated by the obvious omission. This problem necessarily affects Roth's expositions of the pragmatist as well, leaving them skewed and misshapen whenever an understanding of an idealist-inspired outlook is required. The "pragmatic turn" would make better sense as a unifying theme if the pragmatists were portrayed as placing themselves in the confluence of

empiricism and idealism, while trying to avoid their excesses and the potential for skepticism or absolutism. Roth's decision to attempt a unified book instead of a collection of essays on these philosophers leaves him with no good choice. To stress either their similarities or their differences while omitting idealistic themes leaves too much unsaid.

The sections concerning Locke and Hume can be covered briefly because there is nothing of controversy to report, and the quality of the material is consistently high throughout. Within the (regrettably) short space allotted, Roth presents clear and concise explanations of the philosophers' positions on the chosen subjects, without minimizing the difficulties: those faced by the philosopher, as well as those confronting the interpreter. Roth is also to be congratulated for the way he presents the relationships between Locke and Hume's philosophies. The subjects chosen and the issues discussed are superior for an introduction to British empiricism, and full advantage is taken of the opportunity.

Turning to the pragmatists Roth says that "there is no inventory of the mind, a sorting out and cataloguing of discrete and separable sensations and ideas as the building blocks of knowledge. Nor is there a sharp separation between mind and object as introduced by Descartes and continued to some extent by Locke and Hume. Atomism gives way to continuity, diversity to unity, discreteness to interrelation, isolation to interaction" (p. 11). Roth can easily provide such generalities, but in the thick of things he leaves a suspicion that a deep comprehension of their meanings and implications is lacking. In the chapter on experience Roth highlights the differences in Peirce, James and Dewey from British empiricism. Peirce is treated gently and quickly. The categories of Firstness, etc., are absent, and fast use is made of four points: a comment made by Peirce to the effect that experience is broader than perception, his rejection of Cartesian skepticism, his statement of the pragmatic maxim, and his synechism. James is treated at greater length, probably because his descriptions of experience are more accessible for an introductory sec-

tion. Roth finds some measure of success in linking James with Hume as the former used introspection to refute the latter's atomistic sensationalism. This introspective method and the resulting "stream of consciousness" account is nicely explained. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for James's postulate of radical empiricism, which is misused to find in James the preservation of a mind-matter dualism (p. 20), instead of the dual-aspect or neutral monism theory. The proper understanding of James's theory is not a simple matter, yet Roth omits an important interpretation. The section on Dewey and experience is consistent with many works upon the subject, stressing the biological standpoint and the resulting "experience is interaction" formulation of his later works. However, Roth's claim that Dewey's divergence from the older empiricism originated in the biological conception of the organism (p. 24) overlooks the fact that his initial Hegelianism provided Dewey with the organic conception of the mind, which was all he needed to reject sensationalism. The all-important distinction Dewey makes between ordinary experience and the cognitive, experimental experience is then summarized, with the aim to show how Dewey tried to defeat epistemological dualism and the spectator theory of knowledge. These three sections achieve their aim to show that the principles of unity, interaction, and continuity played central roles for the pragmatists. A greater attempt to interrelate the pragmatists' work could have been made, but as introductory material it is the sort of treatment one wishes could be found more often in textbooks and surveys of the history of philosophy.

In the next chapter on cause and effect we find one of the better stretches of work, encompassing Hume and Peirce. At issue is Peirce's affirmation of the reality of Thirdness. Roth speaks of it as the principle that there are "real powers in objects that operate on particular occasions and that will surely operate in the future if certain conditions are fulfilled" (p. 38). Its justification using Peirce's pragmatic rather than deductive logic is then well-explained by Roth. His account of Peirce's role in the nominal-

ist/realist debate is unfortunately marred by the mention of the category "Secondness" (p. 43) without a delineation of it or its companion categories anywhere. Roth next wanders over many themes in James looking for a touch of realism in a very nominalistic environment. Eventually he settles on two which James took from Peirce, and another involving the aforementioned postulate of radical empiricism. Roth may well be on the right track, but the evidence presented so far is sketchy.

The discussion of Dewey's views on laws and causality starts with his aversion to the view of nature as operating throughout by fixed laws. The freedom of inquiry from initial *a priori* principles, which must only arise out of inquiry, is thereby explained. Roth might have better proceeded if he made use of Dewey's insistence that necessity is a property pertaining to judgments only, and not to reality, which only exists. Turning to Dewey's views upon causality, Roth hits the required mark: the cause and the effect should not be erected into distinct entities, but should instead be regarded as functional portions of a larger, continuous whole involving innumerable contributing factors. However, Roth seems to misunderstand the functional analysis, leaving Dewey with the position that causes and effects are only our creations. This all-too-common accusation of anthropomorphism against Dewey is compounded by Roth's insistence that cause and effect must be categories of nature in-itself. He thus begs the question against Dewey, so that he can conclude (wrongly) that Dewey has no room for any regularities in nature at all. Regularities exist independently for Dewey, but *which* are to be singled out as *the* causes for *this* effect is a matter of human means and purposes. These matters are by no means uncontroversial, as Roth notes; in any case the section as a whole is just the sort of stimulating commentary which Dewey scholarship could use nowadays.

In the chapter on personal identity it is Hume and James who take center stage. James's view of experience as a continuous flow is presented as a needed correction to Hume's atomism. The

problem facing James, according to Roth, is that the common qualities possessed by both present experience and memory do not fully support the conclusion to be reached. The existence of the self is supposed to account for the common qualities, but, as Roth explains, James eventually rejected soul-substance. He thus concludes that a convincing argument for personal identity has not been accomplished. In the section on Peirce we again find Roth trying to force a discussion of an issue into a pre-established framework. The question of whether Peirce said anything interesting about personal identity depends upon whether he held to the existence of substance (which is difficult to show). The reader who has not caught on before should realize that the author has trouble at times remaining sympathetic or charitable to pragmatist tenets which run counter to Aristotelian-inspired traditions. This does not unduly mar the book as a whole however, and on the positive side, is often the catalyst responsible for engaging and thought-provoking commentary.

Dewey's views on personal identity are presented through the lens of the question of the existence of soul-substance as well, which initially seems appropriate as Dewey of all the pragmatists was more of an Aristotelian than the rest. But for Dewey it was always a Hegelianized Aristotelianism which grounded his work on the mind, and Roth's inability to deal with Hegelian themes again leads him to make several errors. Dewey never accepted the existence of a soul-substance, nor of any other kind of substance: primary allegiance to process and activity (his inheritance from G.S. Morris) for Dewey excluded the possibility of some abiding permanence underlying change. The discussions of his "Soul and Body" and *Psychology* are therefore misconceived, as is the nature of his turn towards naturalistic explanations of human activity. Roth rights himself with a commendable description of the theory of the self contained in *Experience and Nature*, though again overlooking a Hegelian theme in the socio-cultural rendering of mind.

In the chapter on the pragmatists' moral, social, and political

theories, there is a surprising standout: Peirce. The contrast presented by Roth between the Peirce for whom everything revolves around science, and the Peirce who would subordinate the more practical ethics to speculative aesthetics, is so great that interest with this issue is easily aroused. Added to this are brief discussions of Peirce's theory of the social mind and evolutionary love, making this section the best of all of the work on pragmatism. James was never far from moral issues, and in the next section his concerns to preserve free will, human participation in the fight for the final good, and the belief in God are highlighted. This all proceeds in the context of James's attempts at a truly pragmatic ethics, in which a belief is justified if it makes life better: "one refuses to accept a moral life and a moral universe at one's own risk" (p. 154). In all, a comprehensive distillation of the central themes of James's moral theory is attained. The section on Dewey is not as good, though Roth is fairly in line with the more extensive works on Dewey's moral and social theories. More could have been said about Dewey's attempt to make inquiry into moral problems scientific, and recent work on Dewey's political views dates Roth's commentary. As a whole this section does not recommend itself as an adequate statement of Dewey's central doctrines.

As a textbook it could be used for intermediate students of philosophy, though the lack of a firm supporting purpose and occasionally dense exegesis would require close guidance from the teacher. An unqualified approval is earned by the sections on Locke and Hume, and on a few of the pragmatists' sections. There is not a wide selection to choose from when a shorter work on pragmatism is desired. Roth's book may therefore have some usefulness, and hopefully more books in this genre will be written.

State University of New York at Buffalo

John R. Shook

