BOOK REVIEWS


In the "Preface" the Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays John Stuhr defines the purpose of this volume in these terms: "This book seeks to present the essential writings of the major figures of classical American philosophy, to provide introductory essays helpful to both beginning and more advanced readers, and to offer suggestions for further reading and study." (p.vii) Classical American Philosophy realizes these objectives in an exemplary way. Indeed, here we have an invaluable resource for the teaching of American philosophy. In addition, the selections from Peirce's writings make available some texts to which only a few scholars, prior to the appearance of this book, have had ready access; thus, the volume in this respect is an aid for doing research into the philosophy of Peirce.

The structure of the volume is: a short general introduction (pp. 3-12, including notes) by Professor Stuhr and then six sections devoted to the writings of six major American philosophers (Peirce, James, Royce, Santayana, Dewey, and Mead), each section being introduced by an expert on that philosopher. In the introduction to the volume as a whole, Professor Stuhr identifies seven pervasive themes in classical American philosophy: the rejection of modern philosophy; fallibilism; pluralism; radical empiricism; the continuity of science and philosophy; pragmatism and meliorism; and the centrality of community and the social. One slight criticism is that while these are unquestionably pervasive themes, they should have been stated with more caution and greater qualification. (For example, Peirce in a letter to James wrote: Pluralism "does not satisfy either my head or my heart." [8.262]) It is possible for students unfamiliar with American philosophy to be misled into thinking the classical period possesses a tighter unity than it, in fact, does.

The "Interpretive Essay" on Peirce was written by Kenneth Laine Ketner (Texas Tech University); the one on James, by John J. McDermott (Texas A & M); on Royce, by Jacquelyn Ann Kegley (California State College at Bakersfield); on Santayana, by John Lachs (Vanderbilt University); on Dewey, by John Stuhr (then at Whitman College and now at the University of Oregon); and Mead, by the late David Miller (University of Texas). These essays are, without exception, extremely helpful for both the student first coming to the study of these philosophers and the scholar who has spent years, perhaps even decades, in exploring the writings of these thinkers. Not only do these essays serve well this double purpose, they also offer a double revelation. For example, the introduction to Peirce's writings by Professor Ketner is simultaneously a disclosure of Peirce's own systematic or architectonic aspirations and Ketner's own careful and painstaking efforts to present Peirce to the community of inquirers in the manner Peirce himself deemed most appropriate (namely, as a scientist). So too, in Professor McDermott's introduction to James, we are given a revelation of James as philosopher (i.e., as "only man thinking") in a voice which is distinctively McDermott's. And so too with the other four introductions. This feature seems to me especially worthy of comment since it indicates something essential about the vital spirit of American philosophy, namely, its capacity to empower the individual to express his or her individuality in a way commensurate with the communal nature of our reflective enterprises.

Finally, Stuhr, with the assistance and expertise of Miller, Kegley, Lachs, McDermott, and Ketner, has assembled a set of texts which truly merit the label "Essential Readings." In A Pluralistic Universe James notes (in a discussion of Hegel): "Any philosopher is easy if you can catch the center of his vision." There is no question that the scholars who have put together this volume not only have
caught the center of each philosopher's vision but they have also assembled readings which clearly and forcibly articulate the philosophical visions of the six figures anthologized here. In short, six major American philosophers have been served well by six contemporary scholars. So have we who teach American philosophy and, of even greater importance, so have our students.

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According to Bertrand P. Helm, "the golden age of American philosophy raised with special urgency foundational questions about the nature of time and its relation to reality. Peirce, James, Royce, Santayana, Dewey, and Whitehead are of a single voice in asserting the centrality of the themes of time, but they answer the questions in an idiom peculiar to the philosophical perspectives each occupies." (pp. 7-8) They are, moreover, united in their commitment to the postulate that "experience is to be explained in terms that come from experience itself." (p. 19) However, Whitehead carried out the implications of this postulate "with a resoluteness of attention that is unique in his case." (Ibid.) But, Helm is quick to point out that this does not mean "Whitehead somehow synthesizes the main temporalist themes of the leading American philosophers in his work, say, from 1925 on . . ." (Ibid.) In truth, there "simply is no way to tie together all of these vigorous projects of thought in his [or most likely any other] metaphysics." (Ibid.) In the very last paragraph of this study, he returns to this point, stating there: "Aside from the nuances associated with raising most of the fundamental questions of philosophy in the context of the temporal passage that infects all things, the analyses of these major American philosophers are so diverse that it would be specious to try to gather all of their main arguments into a single framework." (p. 200)

In this passage we are given an indication of both the major strength and the major weakness of this highly informative yet insufficiently integrated study of the six thinkers named above. Its chief virtue is that Helm has painstakingly tried and, in my estimation, largely succeeded in attaining an interior understanding of the various approaches. This interior understanding is gained by (among other things) a careful reading of the key texts of the six philosophers, a reading which takes these texts on their own terms and does not make of them mere "moments" in the development of a grand synthesis. However, in his legitimate concern to avoid telling too neat a tale—to refrain from gathering all of the diverse views into a single framework—he has squandered far too many opportunities for interesting and important comparisons. Herein lies its chief shortcoming.

The overall impression, thus, is one of penetrating individual studies strung out successively. One wishes that Whitehead's view of time as an integrative process had more deeply informed Helm's treatment of the thinkers discussed in Time and Reality. It is as though Helm has prepared a wonderful table and invited six brilliant conversationalists, only to have each of the six deliver a monologue. There is far too little dialogue among the philosophers presented. In presenting with accuracy and clarity the viewpoints of each philosopher, Helm has done an admirable job; in facilitating a conversation among them, in getting them to talk to one another about matters of mutual concern, he has fallen somewhat short. Even so, in my judgment, the virtue outweighs—perhaps even far outweighs—the vice.