In the last chapter on 'pragmatics' Prof. Sherover has stressed three pragmatic tests to keep our future open and to maintain the integrity and continuity of our freedom. These are, firstly, to judge everything as a historical continuity and in their possible interaction with others. Secondly, to take into consideration the 'means along with the ends'. Thirdly, to change, alter or reject any course of action even in the mid-course, if that suggest a better future. As a fair critic, he also held, the pragmatic maxim 'cannot stand alone in any ultimate way' and cannot be properly be used for 'grander' questions of speculative concern. (p. 256) But he has not dealt with the points where pragmatic method falters.

It seems to me, that in order to retain the openness and flexibility of all situations, Prof. Sherover has left moral situations with options as well, "without freedom of choice, there can be neither morality nor moral responsibility" (p. 68). To my understanding, a moral situation is a totally different situation, where commands are given to follow certain course of action. Of course, we are free to disobey these commands and face the consequences as some punishment or 'anxiety'. Generally, these moral rules happen to be the guidelines to moderate behavior patterns and lead to common good. And it is our responsibility towards our society, human race and futurity, to follow the commands of moral rules. Though they too should pass through the pragmatic tests mentioned by Prof. Sherover to bring in reforms, if necessary.

Rita Chatterjee Lahoti. Hyderabad, INDIA.


Will the real pragmatist please stand up? As in the old TV show, William James, the author of Pragmatism, starts to rise. Peirce and Santayana shift in their seats. But they all sit firmly down, and Williams's brother Henry stands serenely above them all.

What evidence can be marshalled for this extraordinary portrait? There is Henry's testimony in a letter to William after reading Pragmatism: "I was lost in wonder of the extent to which all my life I have unconsciously pragmatised (51). Henry is as committed to action as his brother, Posnock argues, and although one may say that the writing and observing that is his main form of action is not as robust as the action glorified by William, one may also say that it is more steadily and lastingly produced. "The whole conduct of life," Henry writes in The Art of the
New novel, "consists of things done, which do other things in their turn, just so our behavior and its fruits are essentially one and continuous. . . . To 'put' things is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them. Our expression of them . . . belongs as nearly to our conduct and our life as every other feature of our freedom" (51).

Taking his cue from Thorstein Veblen's statement that pragmatism's blind spot was its inability to credit "idle curiosity," Posnock finds Henry's superiority over William to lie in the fundamental role curiosity plays in his work. The object of curiosity, Henry writes in The American Scene, is to look "over the alien shoulder . . . seeing, judging, building, fearing, reporting with the alien sense" (21-1). Much like his brother's taste for the "wild" and "raw" (a similarity not noted by Posnock) curiosity is for Henry James motivated in part by the desire for objectivity, for contact with the world. In its apparent effortlessness and even aimlessness, curiosity allows the "shock" of reality to break through.

In his search for "the Henry James that canonization has obscured" (78) Posnock presents a writer as curious about the teeming New York ghetto as he is about the rooms of Washington Square, whose project is related not only to his brother's but to that of such continental figures as George Simmel, Theodor Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. Posnock stresses these writers' common emphasis on the "power and nature of the irreconcilable and the uncontrollable in human experience," and on "the genius's special affinity for what defies classification" (81). "Curiosity" is Henry's word for a consciousness that is both active and receptive at once, in which as he puts it "deviations and differences" become "my very terms of cognition" (82).

Posnock explains William's aversion to passivity and his idealization of resolute action as a compensation for his own struggles with neurasthenia: the 'fluency" James attributes to rationality in "The Sentiment of Rationality" is for Posnock a defense against his own inertia. "If we wish to act," James writes, "we should pause and wonder as little as possible." And in The Principles of Psychology he wrote that "there is no more contemptible type of character than the nervous sentimentalist and dreamer who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but who never does a manly concrete deed" (64). In this context, William's description of his brother as "at bottom very powerless-feeling Harry . . . full of dutifulness and affection for all gentle things" takes on a condemnatory as well as a condescending aspect.

Posnock faults William James for denying that paradox is an ineliminable feature of the real, aligning his critique with Adorno's statement about Bergson that "the dialectical salt was washed away in an undifferentiated tide of life" (125). He finds superior accounts in Adorno, Horkheimer, and John Dewey, and
provides a useful review of the Frankfurt school's late appreciation of Dewey. While Posnock's criticism of James's notion of "pure experience" has some validity, it ignores James's commitment in the Essays in Radical Empiricism to the "loose appendices" and "imperfect intimacy" of the empiricist universe.

Posnock is intelligent and learned. In addition to the topics discussed, The Trial of Curiosity contains chapters on Henry James's autobiography and his novel The Ambassadors, and on James, Santayana and Howard Sturgis. Although at times The Trial of Curiosity appears to be a set of texts and subjects in search of a unifying theme, the heart of the book--roughly its first half--is a significant contribution to the ongoing recontextualization and reevaluation of American philosophy.

Russell B. Goodman University of New Mexico


What can a philosopher who has already published fifty-seven books do to maintain his reputation in the field? Princeton Press has proudly published the first of three volumes hinted as being Nicholas Rescher's magnum opus, a systematic amplification of the thought of one of America's most distinguished philosophers. This first volume of A System of Pragmatic Idealism treats issues of epistemology, philosophy of science, and philosophy of nature.

Rescher's writing style and argument is clear and straightforward. The accessible style helps the author avoid the unfortunate tendency of philosophers both ancient and modern to speak past one-another on issues such as those concerning realism and idealism. Rescher's version of idealism, which is called "conceptual idealism", is of the epistemological sort; it is coordinated with a coherence theory of truth and with the theses of "interactionism" and "axiological conventionalism". However, it is also of an irenic character, making significant concessions to metaphysical realism.

The development of this irenic idealism affords fine insights into the history of philosophy and the European and American sources of influence upon Rescher's thought. Bradley and Peirce are rewarded with the most attention along with Kant, Hume, and Hegel. Hume is present because his thought like Rescher's remains in constant dialogue with the skeptic and the dogmatist. Kant is there in discussions of the phenomena/noumena distinction, although Rescher bases his warrant for the distinction on a pragmatic or "functional" rather than either an a priori transcendental or an empirical ground (p. 259 and 264).