which future volumes will aim. the standard professional desiderata of greater technical detail and of more thorough historical genealogy of the views proffered by Lachs can surely be met within this larger domain.

University of Alberta

Matthew Stephens


This book is the first of an anticipated two volume set dealing with important aspects of the cultural context in which William James was raised and the significance of his response to that context. Croce describes his project this way:

Volume I is about James and his circle in the context of certainty just entering an eclipse; Volume 2 will cover James's early adulthood and his formulation of answers to uncertainty --- and of a template for twentieth-century intellectual life. The two-volume project is about James at the center of groups of intellectuals who gradually steered scientific and religious understanding, often unintentionally, away from proclamations of certainty. (p. xi)

Croce considers the latter part of the nineteenth century "... the era of William James." (p. x) Because the first volume focuses on evaluating the significant cultural forces at work in James's early life, the determination of whether Croce has effectively established his case awaits the publication of Volume 2.

In the Introduction, Croce explains that the term, 'certainty,' is used "... not as a philosopher's abstract theory, nor even as a synonym for truth, but rather as a cultural category indicating confidence or assurance in any particular idea or belief." (p. 3) He points out that the confidence that most Americans had in religion and science at the beginning of the nineteenth century was largely lost by the end of that century. His aim is to explore those factors which promoted the development of what Peirce called the fallibilistic attitude. He sees this exploration as critically important because these realms of life are the ones that most fundamentally tell us who we are and define our relationship with the rest of the world. Uncertainties in other departments of cultural and intellectual life may come and go, but religious and scientific uncertainty is doubt at its most profound. (pp. 16-17)

Part I of the text examines James's early life and, in particular, the strong impact his father had on his intellectual and moral development. Henry James, Sr., was deeply influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg's mystical writings. Although he remained
uncommitted to the Swedenborgian religious sect, he felt that Swedenborg was an excellent example of the effective blending of scientific and spiritual truth. He hoped that his son, William, would take up the study of science and contribute to this blending.

Part II considers the effects of Darwin's ideas upon the scientific community in the United States. Croce situates his analysis of this topic in the context of the theme of certainty.

Darwin's theory of natural selection was both religious and scientific heresy. The nature of his scientific questions and the answers that he proposed challenged the conventional goals of both religious belief and scientific theory. Leaving religion completely out of his theory, Darwin provided a disturbingly plausible scenario for the transformation of species over eons without the active guidance of divine Providence; in addition, he demonstrated his theory not through a process of enlisting evidence for proof but rather with an extremely powerful explanation, which, if accepted, could provide a highly probable arrangement of the facts. In that shift from certain proof to plausible explanation Darwin started an intellectual earthquake. (p. 104)

Croce proceeds to examine the debate about Darwin's ideas among the faculty of the Lawrence Scientific School which James attended during the 1860s.

Part III considers the views of two prominent members of the Metaphysical Club, Chauncey Wright and Charles Sanders Peirce, about science and religion, and James's response to these views. Croce notes, for example, Peirce's ambivalence in "The Fixation of Belief" between the self-corrective nature of science and the idealistic view of truth as the end of scientific investigation pursued far enough. He concludes that, for James, "[T]he fallibility of scientific and religious knowledge was a chief lesson of his education; finding a way, despite those limitations, to attain truth and its positive fruits was the challenge of his adulthood." (p. 229)

The student of William James's philosophy will appreciate the fine scholarship which undergirds this study of cultural context. I find Croce's delineation of Darwin's impact to be of great significance in understanding the intellectual ferment during the latter half of the nineteenth century. I also think that, alongside the intellectual ferment in science, there was a similar upheaval in religion. Croce suggests that this did not affect the early James very much, and this explains why so much of Volume I is devoted to scientific issues. In my view, the impact of religious movements on James was significant. I hope this theme finds its rightful place in Volume 2.

Le Moyne College

Tom Curley