This is, notably, the second hypothetical Virginia Held offers to demonstrate the outer limit of her “principle of responsibility of random collectives.” It is designed to demonstrate the common response with regard to assessment or withholding of blame; Held intends by it to contrast how blame would more likely be assessed if five unacquainted people were, for example, to remain impassive if “the second smallest passenger begins to strangle the smallest of the passengers.” Yet though Held is advocating the concept of collective responsibility, she designs her examples to “fix” its placement within our, presumably, 20th century western consciousness. As the parable of the Good Samaritan, shows, however, responsibility can also be viewed without regard to fixed cultural standards of blameworthiness, as a sliding scale on which we might (or might not) choose to evaluate our individual or collective selves.

Mellema’s book is an excellent analysis and resource for the dominant discussion of collective responsibility—albeit a synchronic discussion. It leaves unrecognized the degree to which the concept of responsibility, both individual and collective, may be both constructed and constructive.

Frederic R. Kellogg

Sabre Foundation Fellow


There are sixteen essays here. From an intramural point of view, the essays will elicit grunts of assent from those who are familiar with Dewey. Their value is mostly for those not familiar with Dewey, viz. how pragmatism applies to knowledge and culture, as well as the special implications each author has inferred and valued. Since SAAP reviews allow little space, I will supply the thesis and conclusion of each essay, leaving it to the reader to read the book for the intervening meaty linkages. Such an abbreviated treatment will leave out the intervening interesting discussions of the authors, but I don’t know how else to do this.

In “American Philosophy, Socialism and the Contradictions of Modernity,” Thelma Lavine asks, “What bearing does classical American philosophy have upon recent momentous historical changes?” She claims that the collapse of socialist statist economics and politics has exposed the difficulties of Deweyan social philosophy. How the two are connected seems obscure and is in need of elaboration by Lavine. She believes that Deweyan social philosophy “is itself in need of Deweyan philosophical critique.” Her conclusion is twofold. One: only American Pragmatism “has a sharpened sense both of the Enlightenment thought-structures and of Counter-Enlightenment critique,” and two: it is the only American philosophy which aspires to bring the contradictions of Modernity under one roof.
"Democracy and Cooperative Inquiry" is by James Campbell. At the base of Dewey's socio-political thinking is "the conception of democracy as a cooperative inquiry. . . . The process of living in a democratic community requires a recognition that our political life is essentially a cooperative undertaking, one which rests on persuasion, upon ability to convince and be convinced by reason." Campbell discusses the increased complexity of living and possibility of cooperative decision-making, especially when increasingly fewer people possessed specialist knowledge required for decision-making. C. Wright Mills' criticism of Dewey is dismissed, namely, that the "power elite" actually run government and that cooperative social inquiry is a fantasy. Campbell finds that Mills neither offers us a full picture of Dewey's work nor does Mills offer consistency in his own analysis.

In "Democracy as a Way of Life," John Stuhr notices a "vast cultural darkness and disarray," a consequence "of letting American democracy stand still." These problems are "reminders of the demands on our collective imagination, intelligence, and individual life-styles." Stuhr offers some needed steps as to how we can "produce a genuinely democratic way of life." Some of these steps require "pragmatic inquiry (and not just neo-pragmatic 'conversation')." "Democracy exists only on paper and in statute unless individuals enact it in their own transactions day by day and face-to-face in local communities." [This reviewer once proposed that SAAP's nominating committees smacked of back-room politics, and were hardly in the Deweyan democratic tradition.]

In "The Individual, the Community, and the Reconstruction of Values," Sandra Rosenthal, takes up the apparent dilemma between group conformity and individualism, community and pluralism. Following Dewey, she develops the "view that the creativity of the individual and the constraints of group conformity are not two conflicting alternatives." She agrees with Dewey that "through social interaction the self is formed and brought to consciousness." Turning to the nature of community, Rosenthal says, "The unique individual both reflects and reacts to the common perspective." And "no amount of aggregated collective action constitutes a community." "To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community."

"Dewey and Contemporary Moral Philosophy," by James Gouinlock. Gouinlock wonders "whether there really are any characteristics of the [ethical] subject matter that would constrain our ethical convictions in a manner to bring them into some common ground." "If any headway is to be made . . . it will require the adoption of a mode of philosophizing very much in the manner of Dewey." One must answer, "What is the fundamental subject matter and, what is the philosopher's relation to it?" Contrary to those who espouse meta-ethics, rational morality, utilitarianism, and other pursuits, the subject matter is the moral life itself. Gouinlock looks at the current cultural scene and finds the need for a reconstruction of culture even more relevant today. Gouinlock's essay hews closest to the title of Stuhr's book. He dismisses Rorty's neo-pragmatist desire to rub out the distinctions between art, science, and philosophy and substitute a "vague and uncontroversial notion of intelligence." "Whereas the [Deweyan] social reformer argues
that the sciences and the arts constitute different types of inquiry, . . . [Rorty's] liberal ironist wants to blur the distinction." Gouinlock agrees with Ralph Sleeper, viz., Rorty leaves us with "ungrounded social hope and a philosophy that can provide us with nothing more than occasional illumination to dispel the gathering gloom." This summary cannot convey Gouinlock's scathing analysis of Rorty's position.

"Aristotle and Dewey on the Rat Race," by John Lachs. "Aristotle himself thought of his odd god as consisting of just such an eternal act in which the timeless timelessly contemplated itself." It was "a being shielded from time, growth, decay, need, desire and imperfection." Lachs shows how Dewey's idea of means-ends integrated actions are an alternative to Aristotle's notion of activity.

"Validating Women's Experiences Pragmatically," by Charlene Haddock Siegfried, asks, which "aspects of Dewey's analysis of experience . . . seem particularly apt for enriching feminist explorations of women's experiences." Dewey "analyses the complex ways our perceptions are enmeshed in past beliefs, current anticipations, and values." She concludes that her interrogation "is consistent with Dewey's contention," viz. "that we are interested in purposely managing the traits of experience so that we can avoid being victimized by inherited structures [so that we can] develop ones more conducive to growth . . . . Feminist angles of vision will extend Dewey's insights in new and unexpected ways."

"Heteronomous Freedom," by Raymond Boisvert, finds that "freedom remains as central a topic as it was in the nineteenth century." Moreover, "the meaning of important leading ideas [e. g. freedom] is not given once and for all"; the meaning changes with time. And so, Boisvert rejects 18th-century (Rousseauian and Kantian) preoccupations with autonomy. Boisvert's aim is "to indicate that one important reconstruction involves articulating a view of freedom that is allied with heteronomy, not with autonomy." "In place of autonomy, self-definition, and antidependence, empirical naturalism admits that we live in a world where heteronomy and dependence ought to be viewed as opportunities for growth and liberation of capacities."

"Naturalizing Epistemology: Reconstructing Philosophy," by Peter Manicas, focuses "on the implications of the current debate over the effort to naturalize epistemology." He believes that we cannot take science for granted. A second goal is to raise some questions both about current scientific practices and our understanding of these practices. There are ideas we familiarly associate with Peirce and Dewey, the ideas of publicity and access. These social conditions of inquiry are threatened by 'shoddy science,' 'entrepreneurial science,' 'reckless science,' and 'dirty science.'

"Rationality and a Sense of Pragmatism: Preconditions for a New Method of Thinking," by Igor Sidorov. "The present day surfeit of ways of philosophizing " creates a problem within the culture of philosophy. From his use of the term, it seems that we who practice or teach philosophy have "philosophical knowledge." Hence, when he asks whether it is possible to "transform the functions of philosophical knowledge," he is
Sidorov's essay concludes: "The current pragmatic task for pragmatism itself is nothing short of a transition from past pragmatism as a philosophy of action to future pragmatism as a philosophy of the soul." Sidorov, interestingly informs us that Russian thinkers contemporaneously were coming to views like those of the classical American thinkers. He cites L.S. Vygotsky (1896-1934) and lists six Russians with similar concerns currently active and publishing.

"Objects of Knowledge," by H. S. Thayer. "A fundamental doctrine that has proved especially troublesome in discussions of Dewey's theory of knowledge [is] his conception of an object of knowledge." Dewey writes: 'The object of knowledge is eventual; that is, it is the outcome of directed experimental operations, instead of something in sufficient existence before the act of knowing.' [Dewey] also states that an act of inquiry initiates a 'new empirical situation' such that 'the consequences of directed operations form the objects that have the property of being known.'

"Dewey seems to be saying that an object of knowledge does not exist before it is known. And in a very special sense he is saying that." Part of the problems, says Thayer, is verbal. Thayer is a masterful expositor of Dewey's theory of inquiry.

A concluding lemma that follows from Dewey (as Thayer sees it) is: "Accordingly one's inquiry into one's own person, if reliably administered, will issue in a changed object, a qualitatively new person." It is a translation "into Dewey's terms the famous Socratic injunction to self-examination." The idea is worth investigation "as a way of clarifying procedures and contributing to what is meant by knowing and Knowledge of one's self."

"The Human Eros," by Thomas Alexander. "A drive for encountering the world and oneself with a sense of fulfilling meaning and value realized through action" is "a radical impulse I call the 'Human Eros.'" This essay "explores the relation between our desire to exist meaningfully through action and the question which this poses for philosophy . . . . We are beings who seek meaning imaginatively through each other and the locus of this transformative encounter is the community. This drive for meaning and value will allow us to endure suffering and even death for the sake of love for another person or for an ideal." Before "expanding on the emergence of the community through the dialogue of the social imagination," Alexander takes Rorty and Stanley Fish to task. "Both have such attenuated views of the nature of the imagination, the community, the process of growth, the aesthetic nature of experience, and the human drive for shared fulfillment."
fills out what he thinks should be a less attenuated view of these matters and the impulse--the human Eros.

"Liberal Irony and Social Reform," by Larry Hickman. "It is, Dewey argued, of great functional importance to differentiate . . . the unique subject matter of philosophy, the set of general tools that it brings to bear on philosophical questions qua philosophical, and the specific tools that have been found to be of use in each of the specific areas of philosophical inquiry." For Dewey, "what functions as the unique subject matter of philosophy--the general method of intelligence . . . also functions as a general tool for the other arts and sciences." Richard Rorty, for example, has approved what he mistakenly takes to be Dewey's desire to 'rub out' the distinctions between art, science and philosophy and to substitute for those distinct methods a 'vague and uncontroversial' notion of intelligence."The Pragmatics of Deconstruction and the End of Metaphysics," by Ralph Sleeper. Sleeper laments about the coded messages of the deconstructionists. "After the decoding is done . . . we have the sinking feeling that we are not much better off than before." Berezdivin tells us that metaphysics is over before it begins. According to Rorty, the irony of the situation that Berezdivin reports is just what deconstructionist criticism intends. It is trying to leave us in the condition of aporia. "But that condition," says Sleeper, is "the condition that John Dewey taught us to think of as 'problematic.'" He paraphrases a Czech saying, viz., "Deconstruction is the practice of criticism in which philosophers, by their heroic efforts, overcome the obstacles that would otherwise not have arisen."

"Body-Mind and Subconsciousness: Tragedy in Dewey's Life and Work," by Bruce Wilshire. He discusses Dewey's "mid-life crisis," and how F. M. Alexander's therapeutic technique enabled him to acknowledge the subconscious, but in non-mentalistic terms. "Dewey has put himself in a position to understand . . . much of the irrational behavior of human beings." Tragically, "The obstacles to reconstruction of culture that Dewey discovers are enormous."

"Why Bother: Is Life Worth Living? Experience as Pedagogical," by John McDermott. This is the most moving of all the essays. Encapsulation loses the rhetorical power of McDermott's well-discussed question.

There are "those of us who have serious doubt about whether life is worth living and who refuse to accept a supine gentility as the appropriate response to mortality." Only a "refusal to accept the righteous character of the inevitability of death can make it possible for life to be worth living." "For me living is a journey the origin of which is not of our making. The goals are en passant and the end is ontologically tragic." "With regard to the ultimate meaning of existence we do not and can not have a clue." From this "a homely question emerges, namely, why bother?" "It may justly be asked that if one does not bother what else does one do? The answer is very singular and clear? One should commit suicide." "At one point in the recent past I chose not to go on living. Before my decision was consummated, I was personally seized and forced to reconsider. . . . I have mixed feelings about that reprieve. . . . I now undertake to ground the decision to go on living,
hoping to answer the question, "Is life worth living?" affirmatively. "I try as hard as I can
to believe that the nectar is in the journey and not in its final destination."

What McDermott finds wise and energizing is the aesthetic pedagogy of John Dewey. According to Dewey, "The time of consummation is also one of beginning anew. Any attempt to perpetuate beyond its term the enjoyment attending the time of fulfillment and harmony constitutes withdrawal from the world." McDermott comments, "When a person is open to the multiple voices of experiences, inclusive of the apparently inert presence of things, the inchoate and the riot of sounds and colors, nutrition is at work such that one, indeed, might decide to, bother." Paying "attention to the aesthetic rhythm of how we have our experiences, the possibility of profound enrichment emerges." They are consummatory experiences "set off in verve, in implication, in sheer delight, in ambience, and in exquisite intensity." Consequently, it is the journey that yields the nectar. In a contingent world that yields no certainty, "if the nectar is not in the journey, where else could it possibly be?"

Angelo Juffras
William Patterson College


Realism has long been an issue dividing classical pragmatists and their contemporary admirers. Pragmatism has, successively, been associated with Peirce's scientific realism, Dewey's instrumentalism, an ambiguously "robust" realism (in Quine), and Putnam's internal realism. In addition there is the Rortyan "neo-pragmatist" proposal for dissolving the realism/anti-realism debate altogether. Ontological issues — what is real in the world, and how we may best speak of this reality — are relevant both practically and philosophically; moreover, they force us to re-examine the implications of pragmatism itself.

In his comprehensive and persuasive book, Sami Pihlström argues for a form of realism that is meant to avoid the "essential tension" of pragmatism: respecting the "ontological independence of the world" while recognizing that "the world is always dependent on our ways of conceptualizing it or practically dealing with it" (87). Pihlström's pragmatic realism owes much, first of all, to a Jamesian notion of "ontological toleration": to the idea that, because "the world can be approached through many different conceptual schemes" (65) what is real depends on our practices and ways of life. As a result, we should allow for a wide variety of real objects in the world, not just the entities required by our best scientific theories.