Although he is the only historian on the roster of contributors, David Hollinger writes a close textual analysis of James's famous scolding of William Clifford and leaves the reader with a significant philosophical proposition. He portrays James exaggerating his differences with Clifford in "The Will to Believe" in order to express his commitment to the stark differences between scientific and religious ways of thinking; Hollinger argues that this position was a way-station on James's path toward a more secular approach to "religion within, rather than as an exception to . . . the pragmatist outlook" (p. 81). Literary critic Ross Posnock's essay is actually more explicitly historical in his account of James's "fermentative influence" on a host of important students (p. 324). James was a hero to the modernist generation for "expressing moral outrage ... [and] contempt for smugness and certainty" (p. 327). For example, Posnock documents the ways Walter Lippmann used pragmatism but misread his teacher as he developed an overconfidence in science; and he shows that W. E. B. DuBois drew on the spirit of William James not just for his theory of a racial "double consciousness," but also because his "metaphor of crisis" is built on a picture of "Chance in human conduct" (p. 340). The literary analysis of Jessica Feldman offers a culture studies perspective as she hones in on the metaphors and theories in James that depict domesticity, ranging from the parallels between his anonymous autobiographical reference during his crisis and the veiled voice of women in an era of "separate spheres," to his granting of a prominent place for temperament and sentiment in his philosophical orientation; comparing James to the novelist Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, Feldman argues that "Home is an important context in which to consider James's thought" (p. 305).

Readers will not find in this volume a distinct call for a new overarching perspective on James's work. What unites the essays, however, is their high-quality analysis of various parts of James's philosophical works.

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Reissued Texts and Scholarly Resources: James, Peirce and Whitehead.

Recently a colleague in the philosophy department here at the Air Force Academy decided to embark upon a systematic reading of the works of William James. I showed him the two volume set Library of America devoted to James but I suggested he get the Harvard critical edition. We were both stunned to find out that except for the paperback version of Pragmatism, the rest of the Harvard edition is out of print and unavailable. So beyond convenience and low price there is a need for presses like Nebraska, Fordham and Vanderbilt to reissue, with helpful new prefaces and introductions, the classical primary and secondary works of main line American philosophers. A year ago in NEWSLETTER #77 I called attention to the reissue of Josiah Royce's The Philosophy of Loyalty (by Vanderbilt UP) and four volumes by or on William James. Here are four more welcome reissues.
Levinson’s accessible introduction reminds us of James’s life long interest in respecting the some times conflicted demands of experience, of science and of religion. As Levinson puts it James recasts and thereby effectively dissolves the perennial problem of the one and the many “by asking rather how things maintain continuity and coherence in light of all the real changes they undergo. How, then, are things both one and many? This question goes a long way toward establishing James’s agenda in A Pluralistic Universe” (vii). Remarkably, the rest of that agenda amounts to a recapitulation of the major themes in James’s thought: the impact of temperament on one’s philosophy, pragmatism, radical empiricism, ethical and social meliorism, the faith ladder, the will to believe and a finite god. In a sense, a recurring image in A Pluralistic Universe aptly captures James’s final philosophical assessment of the human condition: human flourishing and solidarity must be daily won in the face of an ever-present possibility of shipwreck.


Perry’s 1936 Pulitzer Prize winning biography The Thought and Character of William James, and its “briefer version” (1948) here reissued as part of the Vanderbilt Library of American Philosophy, have had an indelible impact on Jamesian scholarship. Seigfried’s fine introduction reminds us of the good, the bad and the ugly in Perry’s legacy with regard to how James has been understood and misunderstood. Now that we are gradually getting access to James’s letters (the University Press of Virginia critical edition of James’s correspondence has now issued six volumes taking us to 1889) James scholars can decide for themselves how accurate and insightful are the countless excerpts of James’s letters that make up the bulk of The Thought and Character of William James (both versions). With regard to Vanderbilt’s reissue, the availability of the volume is itself an obvious boon for teachers, and students. Second, Seigfried’s introduction offers numerous suggestions regarding Perry’s helpful interpretations and his false scents. Just one illustration of the latter: by treating The Principles of Psychology as a classic of the discipline of psychology, Perry delayed by several decades “the influence of phenomenology . . . [in understanding] the perceptive and nuanced account of an engaged consciousness in Principles [now] seen as integral to the positions developed as pragmatism and radical empiricism (xiii).

Potter’s influential volume initially appeared thirty years ago when Peirce was not internationally recognized in the widely diverse areas of philosophy that are now seen to be powerfully illuminated by his thought. This Fordham reissue is important so that Potter’s seminal influence on Peirce scholarship can be appreciated and understood. Second, of perhaps of more lasting value, this volume lets Peirce (via Potter’s interpretation) help us deal with a critical and immensely practical issue: how can norms and values be legitimated in the face of the skeptical suggestion that all values are ultimately arbitrary or, what is just as harmful, that they are eventually simply the result of “might makes right.” As Harrison explains in his helpful introduction, “the implicit premise of Peirce’s distinctive doctrine of normative science is that the objective reality of an ultimate ideal, and so of ultimate value(s), can be defended. Most provocatively, perhaps, Peirce held this doctrine without compromising his lifelong commitment to fallibilism” (x).


The impact of Darwin and the rise (and dramatic successes of technologically applied science) set the agenda for classical American philosophy. Fordham’s reissue of Whitehead’s wrestle with the issue is a welcome resource and a fine introduction to process thought. “Wrestle,” however, implies more antagonism between science and religion than Whitehead sees. As Judith Jones explains in her leisurely (but informative) introduction, Whitehead seizes on the overlap in these two basic human approaches to reality. “Whitehead’s metaphysics is designed to interpret the profoundly suggestive communality of insight between science and religion rather than to impose a communality upon them which threatens the integrity of either” (xvii). Jones’s 57 page Introduction and Randall’s E. Auxier’s comprehensive and user-friendly 85 page “A Glossary of Whitehead’s terms in Religion in the Making will help even Whiteheadian rookies profit from this volume.

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