Pursuing philosophy "in" and "through" experience is a theme that pervades the history of pragmatism from the classical to the current period. The authors in this book approach and assess issues from the vantage point of experience and culture since experiencing is a form of disclosure through which we become aware of what there is. Each of the essays engages in this continuous dialogue on the past, present and future of these pragmatic trends. To this end, the book is divided into seven sections.

The first section focuses on the historical origins of pragmatism. Vincent Colapietro examines the role of tradition in Charles S. Peirce's philosophy, and argues that pragmatists must grant at least some authority to tradition to achieve an architectonic of knowledge. By examining tradition, philosophers can clarify the importance of pragmatism as a movement that is still part of the philosophical milieu.

In the second section, the authors focus on the pragmatic conception of the self. Kathleen Wallace critically examines Santayana's naturalistic conception of the self. The difficulty with Santayana's account "lies in the tension between the claim that spirit is inefficacious and the claims made regarding the difference spirit makes in human life by transforming it from merely physical organic life to conscious, feeling life". (p.49) Wallace argues that Santayana's naturalistic account of self is limited since it leaves us bifurcated, lacking identity and power, and making it impossible to redefine and relocate our possibilities as human beings. Douglas Anderson examines Peirce's account of self-realization by describing the representative roles provided for individual's within communities. Self-realization occurs when a person becomes a representative self of the community, i.e. an exemplar.

In the third section, the authors examine the importance of the community in the pragmatist tradition. James Campbell examines James Hayden Tufts ideals of the social purpose of the university and public education. The aim of education for Tufts was to advance the common good by advancing the possibilities of the members of the community, through a reconstruction of society. The purpose of education is not so much the pursuit of personal excellence as it is to create a better community of individuals in which values are shared. In the second essay, John Stuhr also argues that community and individuality reinforce one another. For Stuhr, American philosophy must not merely recall, repeat, and rehearse previous theorists; it must instead use, extend and reappropriate philosophical theories to respond to cultural conditions.

In the fourth section, the authors present an historical account of the role of interpretation. Felicia Kruse outlines Peirce's semiotic project and its relevance for current conceptions of interpretation. Richard Hart outlines Justus Buchler to explore the role of metaphysics in aesthetic interpretation and criticism. Both authors present views that are historic in nature. I will therefore rely on the reader's knowledge of the pragmatic tradition to fill in the details.
In the fifth section, the authors focus on the aesthetic dimension of pragmatism. Armen Marsoobian is critical of the restricted value of Dewey’s formal theory of art. Dewey’s representational theories of art fail to capture the meaningful content of the work of art, and this aspect of art expresses and informs human experience. Thomas Alexander, argues that there is a crisis in our culture since art does not communicate with the community, in a way that will make life more meaningful to the individual and society. Art and community must have an intrinsic relationship with each other; however, our culture isn’t literate enough in the humanities to appreciate art. The crisis of art results in the crisis of self-actualizing individuals.

In the sixth section, the authors examine the role of metaphysics. The pragmatist tradition deconstructed and reconstructed metaphysics to influence human experience. For John Ryder, there are no absolute foundations for knowledge, nor is there direct, immediate knowledge of the self. Thus, Cartesian doubt is impossible since the inquirer always operates within a given context. Human experience is conditioned and perspectival; thus, ultimate realities beyond the natural world are therefore rejected as mythical. Neither are there any objective observers observing an independent and causally determined world. Gary Calore examines time from a naturalist and pragmatist reconstruction of metaphysics. Calore argues that no two moments express the same world, since the world can never be re-experienced in exactly the same way. Thus, time creates change, flux and growth in human experience.

In the last section, Robert Carrington examines the six future themes of metaphysical inquiry within pragmatism. First, anti-Cartesianism reinforces the notion that mind and nature forms an integrated whole. Second, the community will be closely interrelated with the individual. Third, Darwin’s biological principles will be interrelated with metaphysical reflection. Fourth, teleology will change to accommodate the Darwinian revolution. Fifth, science will reconcile the dichotomy between nature and value. Sixth, experience will be reconceptualized so that it is in and of nature.

The book provides a coherent sense of some of the pragmatic themes of the past, present, and future. The authors made these issues both lucid and interesting to the reader. The book is insightful, and it is a valuable contribution to the literature on American pragmatism.

Irene S. Switankowsky

University of Waterloo


Richard Rorty has taken a new tack in the direction of his "conversation" with the American intellectual community. Instead of repetitively making the case for the