legal ground. For David Luban legal pragmatism is not freestanding. Philosophic views about personhood affect many legal issues. After Rorty’s reply, Richard Weisberg proposes that judges should be codifiers, like Stendhal, who unhampered by precedent seek to embody their private ideals into political programs. Examining hate speech Michel Rosenfeld argues that pragmatism offers no solution to the problems of legal interpretation.

Richard Poirier examines the problem of how the pragmatist as strong poet can communicate to ordinary people. The relation of the strong poet to social change is discussed by Louis Menand. The notion of the strong poet is challenged by David Bromwich’s reflections on how ordinary people are also interpreters of experience. In delightful analyses of paintings by Thomas Eakins, Ray Carney treats him as a pragmatist, painting the connection of thinking and doing and the transitoriness of experience. Rorty’s narrative of pragmatism as relentlessly secular is challenged by Giles Gunn who raises astute questions about Rorty’s opening paper. Stanley Fish claims philosophy is insulated from other activities, that pragmatism has no ethico-political consequences, no affinity for democracy, does not nurture openness, toleration or self-correction. Postmodernism does not foster irrationalism. And pragmatism has nothing to do with religion since religion is inherently irrational (he apparently never heard of liberal religion).

Jerome A. Stone
William Rainey Harper College


This book is about the transformation of a classically trained transcendentalist into a radical empiricist naturalist. In five years Thoreau turned himself into a skilled botanist, zoologist, geologist, hydrologist and meteorologist.

McGregor starts off with a detailed environmental study of Concord and its history. Biographers often hold that Thoreau’s family was devoted to nature study, but McGregor marshals evidence that the family’s knowledge was superficial.

There follows a detailed study of Emerson, whose idea that compound nature is merely an emblem of unitary spirit (thus undercutting the work of the naturalist) influenced the early Thoreau. This view appealed to Thoreau because he lacked detailed
knowledge of the natural world. The belief that Thoreau was an expert naturalist in the 1830's came from the recollection of friends and students and McGregor points out problems with this testimony. Nature observations are meager and moralizing. For the early Thoreau, like Emerson, we learn by sympathy, not inference, deduction, contrivance and method. So in "The Natural History of Massachusetts," "A Walk to Wachusett," and "A Winter Walk," the nature descriptions are general and focus on spiritual growth.

Readers often assume that Thoreau withdrew to Walden to live alone in the wild. Emerson's portrait of him as ideal individualist, James Russell Lowell's caricature of him as a misanthrope, and Thoreau's final version of Walden all helped shape this Thoreau legend. However he did not go to Walden to study Nature, but to find the quiet to work on his writing. Rather than an outpost on the frontier, Walden was a pocket of glacial sand surrounded by farms. Gradually the stay at Walden impacted Henry. McGregor finds journal entries showing increased attention to his surroundings and a loosening of the Emersonian outlook.

Thoreau's first visit to wilderness was the trip to Mount Ktaadn. McGregor disputes a number of interpreters including James McIntosh and Roderick Nash. His point is that the Ktaadn experience was not a sense of nature as demonic, but that it was a key event in overcoming Emerson, for the mountain was Titanic and inhuman.

The Concord Lyceum lectures and most of the original version of Walden show little interest in the woods. By the second spring at Walden Henry finally started recording observations and finally, in the original conclusion of Walden, wilderness becomes a synthesizing concept. After his stay at Walden Thoreau's distance from Emerson may be seen in writing A Week where he criticized Goethe and disputed the idea that nature is mere symbol.

In 1849 and 1850 Thoreau began to redevelop his interest in nature study, particularly botany, in support of his idealized vision of "the Wild," published in his essay "Walking."

From 1849 to 1854 he renewed his study of Eastern, especially Hindu philosophy, drawing on the ideas that nature is an interlocking whole in constant flux and that each creature is a part of Brahma so that there is spirit in nature. During this period his study of Native Americans also supported his sense of divine spirit(s) related to nature. He also studied naturalists, including Alexander von Humboldt, Asa Gray, Gilbert White, William Bartram, Darwin's Beagle journal and the landscape painter William Gilpin.
By 1851 Thoreau began intensive study of nature. In daily walks he used a botany book, and spyglass and collected plant specimens. By 1854 he was a committed naturalist, able not merely to catalogue hundreds of species, but to organize his observations into predictive patterns following the seasons. McGregor finds an ambivalence toward science. Thoreau read botanists yet spoke of the earth as having a spirit akin to the spirit in him and questioned neutral observation, the separation of science and art, and the killing of specimens.

One of the great values of this book is MacGregor’s chapter 5 in which he organizes the welter of journal entries from 1851 to 1861 in terms of location and season and traces Thoreau’s increasing understanding of the natural and human forces shaping local ecology. There are virtually no other studies of this mass of important journal material. This chapter with its references is a valuable tool for the Thoreau scholar. Part of the philosophical import of this material is that it inverts the tradition of the Great Chain of Being.

McGregor ends with a helpful treatment of the later nature writings.

William Rainey Harper College  Jerome A. Stone


The latest in the Fordham University Press American Philosophy Series, Singer's book contains nine independent, though connected, essays plus a postscript essay which serves as a response to reviews and critiques of her earlier Operative Rights (SUNY Press, 1993). The nine essays are grouped into three parts. The first part ("Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in the Theory of Rights") outlines what Singer sees as the received view of the nature of rights as well as a summary treatment of her own alternative conception and her acknowledgement of some historically kindred critiques of the received view (viz., Rousseau, J.S. Mill, and T.H. Green). Her open debt to Justus Buchler, John Dewey, and especially G.H. Mead is evident throughout the essays. The second part ("Democracy and Multiculturalism") contains four essays focusing, on the one hand, on the sociality of rights and their inherent connection with community, and, on the other hand, particular issues related to rights, such as minority rights, group rights, and ethnic conflict. The third part ("Democratic Praxis") consists of two essays.