BOOK REVIEWS


Often times philosophical inquiry neglects the more common and ancestral aspects of our experience. This volume offers a versatile exploration of the connection between agrarian and intellectual thought. Its editors have compiled a variety of essays regarding this topic with the aim to clarify the overlooked relationship between philosophical pragmatism and its foundation on the agrarian perspective. The idea for the text, we are told, originated out of several discussions at the Eastern APA about the topic of agrarianism.

In this text the concept of agrarianism centers around a long-standing tradition of naturalism—nature deeply influences our comportment as well as our social and political practices. This agrarian naturalism forced the emergence of a pragmatic attitude toward the rural landscape and its transformation. For the purpose of the volume at hand, Thompson and Hilde define Agrarianism as formed by two beliefs: first, agriculture and individuals engaged in agriculture are particularly important members of society; and second, agricultural practitioners have a privileged perspective on matters of life, metaphysics, and ethics. (1) In spite of this general definition, each author presents their own particular outlook on agrarianism in their respective essays.

Four parts divide the text. The first attempts to clarify the American tradition of agrarianism with essays by James Montmarquet, Paul Thompson, and Charles Taliaferro. All three essays focus their attention on how European and colonial thought influenced our views on reproductive land use.

The second part serves as a general introduction of how prepragmatist American thinkers regarded agriculture and the agrarian society. James Campbell shows Franklin's strong and positive view of farming as an economic, cultural, and political foundation for the emerging American society. Thompson eloquently illuminates Jefferson's attitude toward the agrarian and its place in the Jeffersonian vision. Robert Corrington presents Emerson's views celebrating nature and the agrarian
life. Douglas Anderson introduces the ambivalent views of Thoreau toward agrarianism and life in the farm.

Part three has one essay devoted to Royce and two to Dewey. Thomas Hilde identifies how Royce's notions of provincialism, community, and the ethical dictum of "loyalty to loyalty" can establish a robust foundation for agrarianism and the agrarian community. Armen Marsoobian provides a Deweyan response to the question of whether agrarianism can indeed provide a basis for further philosophical exploration.

The last section explores, in four stimulating essays, the relevance of agrarian thought today. John Brewster and Gene Wunderlich present two distinct views on how a Jeffersonian agrarianism persists in today's industrial age. Richard Hart exposes the sensibilities of Steinbeck toward matters regarding agriculture and land use, as evidenced in the most famous works of the novelist. An essay by Jeffrey Burkhardt, describing the development of agricultural studies in modern land-grant universities in the United States, bring the anthology to full circle.

This volume could serve as thematic text for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in American philosophy, pragmatism, and intellectual history of the United States. Studying the diverse relationships among the land, its labor, and its fruits as well as their connections to pragmatism could help students develop a clear, historically grounded awareness of the origins of classical American pragmatism.

For the scholar this text offers a variety of different perspectives on the thought that a philosophical doctrine does not just get conjured up by highly genial minds, but rather through a complex combination of factors, including the development of land cultivation practices. This text will be of interest to scholars of pragmatism, American philosophy, intellectual history of the United States, agrarian research, and environmental studies.

A striking omission, however, seems to spoil the richness and versatility of the text. The early agrarian development in the United States and the accompanying thoughts and attitudes were probably influenced by or borrowed from Native American practices. Recent scholarship (Wilshire, Pratt for instance) point out the influence of the pluralistic thought of Native Americans in the development of American pragmatism. Yet, this
volume does not address the relationship between Native American agricultural thought and the development of agrarianism in America. The text treats the agrarian tradition purely as a European and colonial product.

Overall, Thompson and Hilde have done a fine job of bringing out a rather significant collection of essays that richly bridge the gap between the philosophical intellectual life and what is perceived as the more mundane existence in the agrarian.

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This collection of essays exploring the historical and philosophical origins of Peirce, James, Dewey and Mead exceeds expectations on every front. The book proposes to "trace the paradigmatic novelty of classical American pragmatism as it weaves its way through fundamental issues of human existence, exploring the way it undercuts old alternatives and offers constructive new directions for advancing beyond them. These issues are treated under four themes that are central to the pragmatic understanding of the world in which we live."(ix) The four themes are 1) The Centrality of Practice, 2) The Significance of Social Life, 3) Quality, Value and Normative Conditions, and 4) Creativity, Experience and the World. Each theme is developed by an essay on each of the four philosophers. The sixteen essays are uniformly well written, providing superb historical background and introduction to key texts with solid interpretation. The introduction by John Smith establishes the broad development of American pragmatism in its historical and philosophical context. Although its origins reach back a century, Smith says that American pragmatism "is not a relic of the past but a living set convictions about the cosmos, human life in society, and the many facets of experience - moral, aesthetic, religious, scientific, and political - that provide an indispensable resource for confronting the problems that now beset us."(3) The writers consistently move their analyses toward an application to "problems that now beset us" with moderate success. This collection makes a needed and excellent