strives to understanding the possibility of theology without
metaphysics, sure a pragmatist task. However, Bube runs the
danger of eliding pragmatism and process thought, rather than
explicitly acknowledging their similarities and differences.

It would be easy, in addressing a work with the title
Conversations with Pragmatism, to compile a long list of omitted
conversational partners. In this case, however, there are some
glaring omissions: education, political theory, and the
philosophy and practice of the sciences in particular.
Furthermore, this volume does not address a growing convergence
between pragmatists and social theory in the Frankfurt School
tradition on many of the issues the authors discuss.
Fortunately, one can turn to individual volumes on each of these
connections which, taken together with this work, form a small,
essential, interdisciplinary pragmatism library.

Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective. Cambridge, MA: MIT
Press.
Burke, K. (1941). The philosophy of literary form: studies in
symbolic action. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University
Press.
Boston: Beacon.
Interpretation. New Haven: Yale University Press.

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Phyllis Chiasson, Peirce’s Pragmatism: The Design for Thinking
Amsterdam: Rodopi. 2001.

Peirce’s Pragmatism is written in that old and venerable
style that goes back most famously to Plato: the dialogue. The
locale of the current dialogue isn’t the prison or the bath
house, nor is it a peaceful eighteenth-century garden. It is a
loud Italian restaurant quickly departed and a home office daily
revisited. The characters are taken from real life. They are the
author herself and her husband Hal Leskinen. The book purports
to be a literal account of eighteen early morning sessions during which the two went sentence by sentence through Peirce’s 1905 “What Pragmatism Is.” The account is an interesting one and one that is particularly useful for beginners in philosophy, as it clearly shows philosophy in action at a level the novice can easily associate with. The two discussants are amateurish philosophers, and that is the very charm of it—no scholastic to-and-fro of detailed discussions in the secondary literature, nor long excursions into minute and far-fetched technicalities. It is a plain account of two people struggling with a complicated text that fascinates them greatly. To put it more precisely, Chiasson’s book gives a vivid account of one person struggling to explain to another what Peirce’s pragmatism is all about. Leskinen is the philosophical novice par excellence who naturally asks many of the questions that first time students will be grappling with. Reading the text that is discussed (a full copy of “What Pragmatism Is” is included as an appendix), and examining whether it is adequately explained and whether the right questions were asked is a most valuable exercise to sharpen the philosophic mind. It makes the book very suitable for introductory classes in philosophy.

One could have some reservations on how the book was set up. My preference would be to situate “What Pragmatism Is” firmly within the dialogue, rather than exiling it to an appendix. Not having the text right on the table, as it were, makes one feel as if one is listening in on a discussion one isn’t really part of. The situation would have been different had this been a dialogue on Peirce in general, but since this is decidedly a dialogue that is generated while closely following the text of “What Pragmatism Is,” the reader is frequently forced to sneak out and quickly peek at the appendix to see what Peirce is driving at. The second part of the book regularly offers quotations of Peirce, which forces Chiasson to stay closer to Peirce’s arguments and results in a philosophically richer discussion. However, this use of quotations comes too late, and by then the damage has already been done. Perhaps Chiasson believes she must shield the reader as much as she can from Peirce’s complicated sentences and terse vocabulary. She seems to adhere to that old Catholic idea that laypeople shouldn’t read sacred texts, and throughout the book I retained the strong sense that Leskinen never picked up the text to read it. I found Chiasson’s repeated insistence that Peirce is a poor and unapproachable writer the most disappointing aspect of the book. In contrast to Chiasson, I would say that Peirce is very readable, and his success as a writer for the Nation testifies
to this. Peirce is not the wordy, convoluted writer Chiasson makes him out to be, but he is a meticulous thinker who carefully whetted his words, and this can be demanding on both author and reader. The book would have been more successful in its purpose, which I take to be introducing Peirce to a lay audience, had it actively sought to empower the reader to read Peirce.

Something else that distances the reader from the dialogue at hand is the frequent references to certain theories with which the discussants are intimately familiar—such as Engaged Intelligence and Davis Non-verbal Assessment—but which are never adequately explained.

The seasoned Peirce scholar will find things wrong with Chiasson’s text. For instance, she doesn’t have the distinction between reality and existence quite right, and she gives an idiosyncratic interpretation to the medieval logica utens/logica docens distinction that doesn’t quite square with Peirce’s. However, Chiasson’s mistakes are minor and they do not undermine the major purpose of the book, which is to introduce Peirce to the layperson. This gives Chiasson much more leeway than she would have when writing for professional philosophers. Taking the book as an entry-level introduction into the thought and writings of Charles Sanders Peirce, Chiasson does an admirable job.

What struck me most about the book was the prologue. Here Chiasson explains how she found Peirce, and this is an interesting tale indeed. In the 1970s, she was forced to use a dry exercise book for her high school English students. To her amazement the book worked. Chiasson decided to find out why. In the process she gained exposure to a second, altogether different approach to teaching. This second method had been developed by one of her colleagues at school, Dorothy Davis, to whom the book is dedicated. Chiasson discovered that both approaches went back to Peirce: the first through Ogden and Richards’s The Meaning of Meaning; the second through a graphical representation of Peirce’s theory of reasoning that somehow had found its way into the conceptual toolbox of Davis’s dissertation advisor.

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