It is not possible to review the details of Bernstein’s arguments, but space permits a brief consideration of some of the choices shaping his astute presentation of our present horizon. In philosophy, for instance, Bernstein might have taken any one of a number of paths, but by offering a comparative discussion of two public intellectuals, Charles Taylor and Juergen Habermas, he beautifully illustrates the manner in which the fallibilistic ethos transcends pedantic squabbles and can unite thinkers on seemingly opposite sides of a philosophical spectrum. By contrasting the competing notions of “the political” offered by Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt, Bernstein not only treats us to a clear summation of one of the more “sexy” academic topics, but vividly clarifies the difference between those who equate politics and violence and those (like Arendt, Dewey, Taylor and Habermas) who insist that “the essence of political life is debate” (77). And finally, by concluding The Abuse of Evil with a fascinating, historically grounded discussion of religion in American politics, Bernstein offers precious guidance in yet another field where we must confront the dangerous claims of absolutism.

The Abuse of Evil is not a long book. It is not crowded with academic footnotes and it does not read as if it was written in an ivory tower. Indeed it is so straightforwardly presented that it could be given in good conscience to a family members or friends without philosophical training. And you might want to, for it is the kind of book that can produce harmony around the Thanksgiving dinner table. It certainly would make an excellent reader in an undergraduate philosophy course. And most ideally, The Abuse of Evil will filter into our shared discourse, helping to cure us of our addiction to absolutes.

Rachel Sotos

New School for General Studies

David Hildebrand, Beyond Realism and Antirealism: John Dewey and the Neopragmatists (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003). 241 pages, bibliography, index. $59.95

Among philosophers steeped in the tradition of classical American pragmatism, it is now commonly noted that the rise of neopragmatism is both a boon and a bane. The boon is there because philosophers who are of note outside of our smaller tradition are suddenly paying attention to the works of Dewey, James, and to a lesser degree, Peirce. It is a bane because there is a perception that these neopragmatists don’t really “get” what classical pragmatism was all about. Arguably the two most interesting and influential neopragmatists are Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam. These two have been developing their neopragmatism now for several decades, and the time is ripe for a systematic examination of the adequacy of this movement. With his book Realism and Antirealism: John Dewey and the Neopragmatists, David Hildebrand offers just such an analysis.

After a brief introduction, the first two substantive chapters are titled, respectively, “Dewey and Realism” and “Dewey and Idealism.” In these chapters, Hildebrand discusses the philosophical climate of the early decades of the 20th century, the climate in which Deweyan pragmatism emerged. In the former, Hildebrand begins
with an examination of the emergence of New Realism and Critical Realism, and their contrasts with the idealism that was predominant until the early 20th century. While the early part of the chapter is historical, it quickly turns to a discussion of Dewey's relationship to the new varieties of realism. While Dewey is critical of much of this movement, there is, as Hildebrand points out, common ground between them. Further, it is clear that Dewey is a realist of sorts, though his pragmatic realism is a realism of a different stripe. And the difference has its roots in Dewey's radical starting point: experience.

The second historical chapter, "Dewey and Idealism," is much longer and much more expansive. While there is a significant discussion of the charge by his contemporaries that Deweyan pragmatism was a new form of idealism, the chapter goes much further than that. It is here that Hildebrand really begins to plumb the depths of Dewey's radical reconstruction of philosophy. In addition to discussing Dewey and idealism, he is more directly concerned with Dewey's epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophical method. The historical discussion is thoroughly dialectical, engaging figures from Montague to Lovejoy to C. I. Lewis to Santayana. The outcome of this crucial chapter is a clear picture not only of Dewey's philosophy, but also of his relationship to his contemporaries. It is here that the ground is set for Hildebrand's encounter with the neopragmatists.

Chapter four, "Rorty, Putnam, and Classical Pragmatism," is by far the longest in the book, occupying roughly a third of the text, with about half devoted each to Rorty and to Putnam. Hildebrand's treatment of Rorty is sharply critical and incisive. His discussion of Rorty focuses on Rorty's misunderstanding of the core concepts in Dewey's project, viz., method, inquiry, nature, experience and the practical starting point. Hildebrand's critical examination clearly shows that Rorty carries some fundamental assumptions that are fully counter to Dewey's reconstruction. In the end, Hildebrand argues that Rorty's neopragmatism is undermined by two fatal flaws. First, it is incoherent. Rorty denies the possibility of philosophical progress, noting that we should tolerate all "vocabularies" while at the same time counting himself as an anti-Cartesian. Successfully refuting Cartesianism would certainly seem to be something like philosophical progress! Indeed, this same criticism applies to other Rortian concepts as well.

Second, with his worship of language, indeed, of taking language as the starting point for doing philosophy, Rorty himself makes the same mistake that gave rise to pragmatism in the first place. His starting point is theoretical, not practical. The suggestion that life begins and ends with language is a theoretical presupposition that is not supported by life as lived.

In Hildebrand's account, Putnam fares much better than Rorty. Putnam is a more careful scholar of the Deweyan literature than Rorty, and Putnam seems to understand what motivated Dewey's reconstruction of philosophy. However, he doesn't quite go far enough. Putnam misses the real significance of the practical starting point in part because he neglects any serious investigation into Dewey's notion of experience, especially Dewey's (functional) distinction between primary and secondary experience, between
experience had and experience known. Putnam’s neglect of this central notion has led him to view Dewey’s notion of truth as a form of verificationism; led him posit a notion of the “tenselessly true” in order to avoid relativism; and has led him to claim that Dewey is a constructionist when it comes to value. While Putnam is more solidly pragmatic than Rorty, he still falls into the trap of misunderstanding the significance of the practical starting point.

In the penultimate chapter, Hildebrand turns to the realism/anti-realism debate that is going on between Putnam and Rorty. Rorty’s neopragmatism is radically anti-realistic while Putnam wants to reconstruct a neopragmatic realism. Even though they share a love of the linguistic turn, they take their neopragmatisms in radically different directions. I’ll let Hildebrand’s conclusion stand as the best summary of this dispute:

Putnam spurns the irresponsible radicality of Rorty’s antirealism, while Rorty rejects Putnam’s efforts to reconstruct realism as a lamentable fealty to obsolescent matters. Meanwhile, both accuse one another of covertly offering theological guidance—totalistic explanations from a God’s-eye vantage point. Can either move beyond realism and antirealism? Is it necessary to choose between them, rather than taking a solution closer to the one Dewey proposed (176)?

This last question is the subject of the final chapter.

In that final chapter, “Beyond Realism and Antirealism,” Hildebrand pulls together the primary thread of his criticism of Rorty’s and Putnam’s neopragmatisms: their adherence to a theoretical starting point. Here he points out that their debate over realism and anti-realism greatly parallels the debate in the early 20th century between realism and idealism, and that both debates make similar mistakes—they both fail to understand the significance of the practical starting point. He pulls together the arguments presented throughout the book, clearly showing how both Rorty and Putnam fall into this trap. His subsequent explanation of the practical starting point is perhaps the most important section of the book. It is at least arguable that most if not all of the significant misunderstandings of Dewey’s philosophy boil down to a misunderstanding of Dewey’s starting point. Hildebrand’s discussion stands as a much needed correction.

While it should be apparent by now that I have a great deal of sympathy and agreement with Hildebrand’s project, there are some points of disagreement between us, some more substantial than others. I mention three, in order of increasing significance. One minor point occurs in his “Table 3.1. Experience: Five Contrasts between Dewey and the Tradition” (p. 36) where he claims that Dewey’s view is that “experience is future oriented.” This claim is at least misleading. While Dewey is certainly more concerned with the future than traditional empiricism, to claim that it is future oriented is too strong, and it is to take away Dewey’s ultimate concern of enlivening our present experience. I should add, though, that Hildebrand’s subsequent accounts of Dewey’s view of experience do reflect Dewey’s richer, more inclusive view.
On a more general level, there are a couple of paragraphs in Hildebrand’s text that are ambiguous as to whose voice is being portrayed. This is especially problematic in the section on Putnam called “Truth, Verificationism, and Relativism.” To set this up, it is necessary to quote Hildebrand at some length:

...Sellars and Putnam share a concern typical to analytic philosophy, namely, that pragmatism rushes toward reconstructive action, bypassing reflection. In a haste to combat metaphysical Truth, pragmatists emphasize inquiry and justification to a degree that eliminates truth altogether. This is why, despite his hearty approval of Deweyan inquiry, Putnam rejects the Dewey-Peirce definition of truth. Verification, even in an ideal and subjunctive “long-run,” still ignores Putnam’s dicta that rightness “is not subjective,” that it “goes beyond justification.” Rather than give up on truth entirely, as do Rortyans and Deweyans, Putnam seeks a way that “pure knowledge” might remain “tenselessly true.” His solution is to split the difference between pragmatists and metaphysical realists with “idealized justification” (136).

Reading this passage, one is led to the conclusion that Dewey has a) given up on truth entirely, and b) is a verificationist. But both of these views are problematic. The former is seriously misleading while the latter is simply false. It becomes clear later that the voice here isn’t Hildebrand’s but is Putnam’s incorrect interpretation that Dewey is a verificationist, who therefore has given up on truth. At this point in the text, though, Dewey’s views on this subject have not yet been explained. It is only later that we find out that Dewey’s concern is with inquiry rather than truth. For Dewey, as we later learn, truth is an abstract idea, and if we must define it, we should go with Peirce. Given that these errors are relatively common ones among Dewey critics, it would have been very helpful if this had made clear earlier, and even more helpful to make it clear whose voice we are hearing.

My final criticism is, to me, the most significant of the three, and this one is a criticism of omission. While it is clear that Hildebrand has a strong understanding of Dewey’s practical starting point, it isn’t so clear as to why he neglects Dewey’s foundational essay on the subject, his 1905 essay “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism” (TPOIE). This seminal essay, from which he never wavers, clearly establishes that experience per se is not knowledge, that a knowing experience is but one type of experience. This claim lies, of course, at the root of Dewey’s later (functional) distinction between primary and secondary experience. An appeal to TPOIE would have been most useful, for instance, in arguing against Putnam’s claim that Dewey’s appeal to practice is an effective theoretical strategy (150-153). While Hildebrand is correct that Putnam’s misunderstanding goes back to his lack of attention to Dewey’s account of experience, I would say that it is even more tied to a lack of understanding of Dewey’s position in TPOIE. An appeal to TPOIE would also be a most effective counter to the “linguistic turn.” Again in that essay, Dewey notes that things are what they are experienced as being, that every experience is determinate, and that what is experienced is real. It is not what is said or even what can be said. Language isn’t basic—experience is basic.
This is not to say that Hildebrand’s position is wrong for neglecting this essay, though I find his neglect curious. It is to say, however, that an appeal to that essay is perhaps the most effective way to counter the sorts of misunderstandings one finds in Rorty and Putnam. I suggested earlier that most significant misunderstandings of Dewey’s philosophy can be traced back to a misunderstanding of his practical starting point. I would go so far as to suggest that most misunderstandings of Dewey’s practical starting point go back to a neglect or misunderstanding of “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism.” It provides a much needed corrective to many of these errors, and would have served as great way to strengthen Hildebrand’s case.

William T. Myers
Birmingham Southern College


At 85, Davidson had come to be resigned to a life where he could no longer surf, his long-time favorite pursuit, but when knee problems had begun to restrict even hiking he chose to undergo what should have been routine surgery. He died from complications related to the anesthetic. At the time of his death, his book *Truth and Predication* had been accepted for publication by Harvard University Press but was not yet complete. His wife, fellow philosopher Marcia Cavell, worked through the final revisions based on Davidson’s marginalia and notes.

Marketed as his “first book,” *Truth and Predication* is in fact comprised of two series of lectures in essay form—Davidson’s preferred mode of philosophical communication. (A full five collections of his essays have been published, all by Oxford, from *Essays on Actions and Events* in 1980, to *Problems of Rationality*, published in 2004.) The first three chapters of the book focus on theories of truth and are based on his 1989 Dewey lectures that were then published in 1990 as the essay “The Structure and Content of Truth” (*The Journal of Philosophy* 87: 279-328). The remaining chapters center around issues of predication and are based largely on Davidson’s Hermes lectures in 2001. Both sets of lectures were reworked for *Truth and Predication*, and brought together with introductory and concluding chapters.

Of the two main topics, philosophers of a pragmatist bent will find the chapters on truth to be the most interesting. Here Davidson’s own pragmatist streak reveals itself. His focus is on everyday communication rather than on philosophical paradoxes that arise only in the most artificial and constrained circumstances, and he spends much of his introduction explaining why the latter problems hold little or no interest for him.

His intellectual debt to Dewey is acknowledged in the first two sentences of Chapter 1: “Theories of Truth”. Davidson writes: “Nothing in the world, no object or event, would be true or false if there were not thinking creatures. John Dewey drew two conclusions: that access to truth could not be a special prerogative of philosophy, and that