In his fascinating intellectual biography, *C. I. Lewis: The Last Great Pragmatist*, Murray Murphey provides a compelling case that Lewis should be part of the renaissance of pragmatism. Some might balk at the idea that he is the last. We should hope that he was not truly the last great pragmatist – if so, then there is not much hope for contemporary pragmatists. Or we may be reluctant to include Lewis under the heading of ‘pragmatist’ at all, instead placing him within the analytic tradition. However, if Arthur Lovejoy was correct that there are at least thirteen pragmatisms, then there is certainly room for Lewis.

In discussing an intellectual biography, we are faced with three basic questions. We must ask whether it is accurate, whether it is true and whether it is relevant. Regarding the first, Murphey has provided an exhaustive work that reveals both the personal and professional Lewis. (Though, admittedly, more of the thinker than the man.) Typically, acquaintance with Lewis’ work is restricted to his *Mind and the World Order* (1929) and the notion of ‘conceptual pragmatism’. Many are familiar with his argument that, given an indefinite number of self-consistent conceptual schema, we choose between them on a pragmatic basis. This post-Kantian position then argues that there are many systems of categories, but it is the practical will that is final. Murphey certainly accounts for conceptual pragmatism, but also extensively discusses the roots of Lewis’ theory in his early involvement with idealism and Josiah Royce’s understanding of logic as the general science of order. He also details Lewis’ later work in which he attempted to develop a logic of strict implication, to defend the analytic / synthetic distinction and, most surprisingly, to go beyond logic and epistemology to create a theory of valuation.

Murphey is as equally at home telling us of Lewis’ controversial political beliefs or troubled marriage as he is describing the rigorous work in logic that accounts for two of the book’s chapters. This does require a proviso. Despite Murphey’s best efforts to help the reader, sections of the book require familiarity with statements such as “\((\psi \chi \land \psi \chi) < (\neg \psi \chi \land \neg \psi \chi)\) (209)”. Thankfully for the uninitiated, this familiarity is not required to appreciate the biography as a whole.

We may also ask whether the ideas are true. Of course, as Murphey has written a biography, the ideas are ultimately Lewis’. It would be foolish to identify weaknesses in Lewis’ original theory as a way to evaluate Murphey’s exposition of it. Thankfully, we do not have to. This is a critical biography. Murphey is not afraid to question Lewis where he believes it is necessary, particularly in the late chapter on ethics.

Given that Murphey has provided an insightful, comprehensive and critical work on the personal and intellectual life of C. I. Lewis, we are left to ask whether it is relevant or, put another way, whether the audience will find it relevant. Murphey certainly believes that Lewis’ value is more than historical. He argues that Lewis holds a unique position bridging the 19th and 20th centuries, Royce and Russell. Lewis’ work engaged pragmatism, idealism, critical realism and logical positivism, taking on each with
uncommon rigor. Murphey sees the present moment as an opportunity, a time in which unfortunate experiments in behaviorism, positivism, linguistic philosophy and ‘the French disease (407)’ are receding. It is a time that calls for a reengagement with Lewis’ thought.

But perhaps Lewis’ greatest strength is also his greatest weakness. He bridges so many worlds that he may not have a home in any. For those whose interest in pragmatism is driven by its concern for existential or social issues, James, Dewey and Mead provide more compelling guides. Lewis’ central concern for epistemology may smell too much like the analytic philosophy that marginalized ethical and political thinkers. Or, more concretely, they may lack the tools of logical analysis to penetrate Lewis’ work. Within the pragmatic tradition, Lewis’ closest affinity is with certain stripes of Peircean or Roycean scholarship.

Lewis may find a home on the other side of the divide in analytic philosophy. However, as Murphey notes, Lewis was subject to a cruel irony. He is arguably the grandfather of neopragmatism, that blend of analytic and pragmatic philosophy that ultimately fed on its own premises. His conceptual pragmatism argued for an undetermined number of conceptual schema that may be joined with the ‘given’ element of experience. This bears more than a passing resemblance to the conceptual holism that we find in the work of Quine, Goodman or Rorty. Sellars declared the given to be a ‘myth’ and Davidson questioned the distinction between schema and content. Particularly damaging was Quine’s ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’ that is believed to have undercut the analytic / synthetic distinction so central to Lewis’ thought. In Murphey’s own words: “[H]e suddenly finds himself outflanked. By 1952, the AKV (An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation) was in ruins, and Lewis left epistemology behind (331).” I note this not because Lewis’ thought is necessarily irrelevant or untrue, but only because he could have a difficult time finding a home in a tradition that feels that he has been left behind.

Lewis is then a bridging thinker, between epistemology and ethics, analytics and pragmatism. Hopefully, this is not terminal. Rather than a eulogy, perhaps this book is an opportunity. Lewis found himself in a period moving from moral and religious concerns to those of logic and scientific method. As the dominance of analytic philosophy fades and a culturally engaged pragmatism has been revitalized, it may be that we are in the same position, only in reverse. The same conflicts return. The problem then may not be with Lewis and his inability to find a new home, but in our desire for easy categorization. If this is the case, then Murray Murphey has done us a valuable service by reintroducing us to C. I. Lewis.

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Some books add new information; others rearrange existing information, thereby sheds new light on it. Here is one that does a bit of both. In this book we find an