Jesus was not a Stoic. Being abused by one’s spouse is a genuine evil in one’s life; to be abused is to be wronged. Yet Jesus urges forgiveness—not forgetting but forgiveness. And forgiveness involves forgetting one’s anger.

He thus addresses one of the most difficult—and yet crucial—ideas in Christian ethics, concluding that “forgiveness—overcoming one’s anger at the doer while continuing to condemn the deed—is possible only if one believes that there was then, or that there is now, a space between the doer and the deed” (205). Now would we also apply this space to considerations of the virtues, so that the doer cannot identify themselves with the deed? Perhaps, and we could call this the Christian virtue of humility. But either way, we are left with a situation where we have to mark a person’s essence, and distinguish this from their actions. This seems unpragmatic (although admittedly, this cannot be taken as a major criticism, since no one is professing pragmatism in this book).

In “Paul, the Mind of Christ, and Philosophy,” Paul W. Gooch says that what St. Paul learned from Jesus was that “to bring thoughts into the obedience of Christ is to attempt to carry out thinking in a spirit of appropriate humility and self-emptying so that space is made for truth” (99). With a pragmatic revision, this thought is not banal: To be Christian is to eschew ideologies so that truth can be made. This view is contrary to the evil alter-ego version of pragmatism, according to which ideology makes the world into its own truth. Christian pragmatism, on the other hand, says that truth is made in the world, the result of non-ideological deliberation from humble sisters and brothers. “Christian philosophizing,” says Gooch, “displays an attitude, an approach of mind and heart, regardless of specific method or systematic content.” Yet this statement is softened by his further statement that “the emphasis on attitude is too narrow, for even if there is no agree upon philosophical method that is demonstrably Christian, there are recognizably Christian beliefs that should form the subject matter of Christian philosophizing.” Finishing off his thought, Gooch invokes a question similar to that which often comes up among American philosophers: “Surely there is ‘Christian philosophy’ as well as philosophizing by Christian thinkers” (101).

So is there a Jesus philosophy? It’s hard to tell. I would offer that the scholastic understanding of Jesus is probably better left to literary analysis than to philosophy, but maintain that this book is useful as a work in Christian philosophy of religion nonetheless.

Tadd Ruetenik
St. Ambrose University


Gregory Pappas’ book is “the first comprehensive interpretation of John Dewey’s original and revolutionary moral philosophy” (1). He also connects Dewey’s ethics to several debates in the mainstream contemporary literature. Pappas is well-versed in a dazzling array of Dewey’s work and he weaves the parts together into a seamlessly integrated and coherent picture, but like any major philosophical work, his is not without its limitations.

In Part I, Pappas argues that the heart of Dewey’s empiricism in ethics is its reliance on “experience as method,” Dewey’s faith in the capacity for experience to develop norms sufficient
to resolving problematic situations (75, 294-297). He argues that for Dewey, ethical inquiry makes moral experience “its starting point and terminal point” (Pappas 18; lw.1.14). The implications of this shift are nothing short of “revolutionary” (21). In chapter 2, Pappas shows that this radical empiricism entails a “radical contextualism” in ethics. Each situation is unique, so “philosophy must quit seeking ends or standards over and above” those situations; we cannot say, a priori, that, e.g., “torturing children for fun” is, under all circumstances prohibited (57). Moral principles are tools for analyzing currently problematic situations, which tools “grow out of, and exert their normative force from, the moral inquiries that occur in the stream of situations that constitute our moral life” (75).

One might wonder at this point what might be the function of a normative moral theory. Pappas closes Part I by setting out Dewey’s answer. Taking his cue from Dewey’s metaphysics, Pappas argues that an “empirical description of moral experience” can serve to illuminate our moral practices and provide, in Dewey’s phrase, a “ground map of the province of [moral] criticism” (Pappas 64; lw.1.309). Such a task has two phases, a description of the generic traits of moral experience (Part II), and an articulation of a moral ideal of human life (Part III).

Part II outlines the “generic traits of situations in everyday experience,” describing what is “distinctively moral” without separating morality into a disparate realm (83). Two elements of experience that typically get short shrift in modern expositions of the moral life are the social and the qualitative, which are both described, if a bit too briefly, in chapter 4. Chapter 5 sets out the nature of moral problems, moral pluralism, moral deliberation, valuing and valuation judgments and their role in moral deliberation, and discusses Dewey’s relation to the objectivist-subjectivist debate about moral values. Chapter 6 succinctly lays out Dewey’s account of the role of habits in his “organic” conception of character, which leads into chapter 7, wherein Pappas argues that Dewey’s conception of character and conduct undermines the divide between “Act-Centered” and “Agent-Centered” ethics.

Part III concludes with Dewey’s reconstruction of the relationship between present activity and the “ends” of conduct (chapter 8) and a summary of the ways in which Dewey reconstructs traditional conceptions of moral theory (chapter 9). The consequence of Dewey’s views so far is that the resolution of this problematic situation, in this “unique, concrete, and individual” context, is the whole of the purpose of ethical theory. As Dewey puts it, “growth of present action in shades and scope of meaning is the only good within our control, and the only one, accordingly, for which responsibility exists” (149; mw.14.194). This series of reconstructions of the philosophical tradition add up, and Pappas summarizes them in chapter 9.

Part III consists of three chapters detailing Dewey’s ideal of democracy and a chapter justifying that ideal. In chapter 10 we see Dewey’s conception of the balance—between the aesthetic, the intelligent, and the democratic elements—necessary for an ideal life. This leads, in chapter 11, to Dewey’s conception of the ideal moral self. Pappas’ exposition reveals how habits and character are integrated with the virtues, including open-mindedness, courage, sensitivity and conscientiousness. The account is enriched by discussions of the intellectual, executive, affective, and imaginative aspects of the moral self, and finally juxtaposes Dewey’s account of the “morally interested agent” with the egoism-altruism debate.

Chapter 12 deals with Dewey’s conception of democracy as an ideal “mode of associated living” (mw.9.93). Pappas describes the democratic ideal from a number of perspectives before
turning to the notion of democracy as a task. He then compares Dewey's conception of democracy to contemporary deliberative democratic theory and shows how it undercuts the “one-versus-many” debates in political theory. Finally, Pappas defends Dewey's account of Democracy in chapter 13. The central element is Dewey's “faith in experience” or the capacity of experience to "generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness" (296). Democracy, as Dewey might say, is our best hope for growth.

Pappas' book is outstanding, painstakingly bringing out what is unique in Dewey's ethics, revealing its intricacies and defending it well against its detractors. However, Pappas claims, wrongly, that the science/ethics comparison in Dewey has outlived its usefulness. In addition, his discussion leaves out the important concepts of valuation judgments “in their distinctive sense” (lw.13.208), and Dewey’s normative ideal of ‘growth.’ How these all fit within Dewey's ethics is an important question Pappas (admittedly) makes no effort to answer.

Pappas is right to worry about one-sided, partial, or de-contextualized interpretations of a philosopher's views (3), and that “we must not become so eager to become part of the mainstream philosophical dialogue that we compromise Dewey's unique and most worthwhile contributions” (ibid.). However, this cuts both ways: If Pappas' interpretation ignores significant elements of Dewey's thought, then he, too, can be accused of a “selective reconsideration of Dewey’s ethics” (ibid.). Pappas has developed the most thorough, detailed, and sophisticated understanding of Dewey's normative ethics to date, and its appearance has put us in an excellent position from which to ask some very important, but as yet unanswered, questions.

Matthew Pamental Northern Illinois University


Howard Callaway here has given us a thoroughly annotated new reading of James's 1909 pragmatic classic, then one last sword-thrust at the dying Absolute of metaphysical idealism, now the enduring final note of America's most distinctively stylish and original philosophical voice. (Some Problems of Philosophy was still to come, posthumously. James did not consider it finished at his death.)

Absolute Idealism was on its deathbed thanks in no small measure to James's own polemics on behalf of radical empiricism. This book represented his clearest explication of why pragmatism and radical empiricism are best completed by the philosophy of pluralism: the view hat a world of multiplicity, teeming with uncounted and only-loosely-related personal centers of subjectivity, is rich and resourceful beyond the dreams of metaphysical Absolutists who would impose the unity of “vicious intellectualism” -- the habit of excluding from reality all that has not been explicitly included in our verbal accounts.

Callaway's notes and introduction add a layer of clarity, and shine a spotlight on James's important intellectual kinship with Emerson. James endorsed Emerson's insistence that we each forge our own original relations to the universe, and not submerge our separate identities in a