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Reverence for the Relations of Life: Re-imagining Pragmatism  
via Josiah Royce's Interactions with Peirce, James, and  
Dewey (review)

Douglas R. Anderson

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attempts to show that ethical beliefs should be included in a post-Quinean naturalized epistemology. This was, for White, the philosophical proving ground of his claim that analysis should be applied to the full variety of human experience. But on the question of whether White has been able to articulate a truly “*philosophical* point of view”—one that transcends Quine’s “logical point of view” by demonstrating that an holistic pragmatism regarding beliefs holds across the manifold aspects of human understanding—it seems clear that White has been unable to offer a coherent perspective. Many of the studies in *FFPV* stand up well individually, but their common perspective is not obvious. Thus, for example, one of the major sections of the book is called “Analyticity, Morality, Causality, and Liberty”—topics that do not, despite the best efforts of the author, hang together very well. More revealing is the difference in outlook between the White of the 1950s and that of more recent times. His early pleas with analytic philosophers to address broad social issues, just as Mill and Dewey once had, have been replaced by what seems a forced, post hoc, attempt to claim that analytic philosophers had been practising the “philosophy of culture” all along. “[W]hile I was once disappointed by the failure of first-rate minds of the twentieth century to address problems of general concern,” White observes, tellingly, in his introduction to the volume, “I have since come to exult in the fact that Isaiah Berlin, Nelson Goodman, Herbert Hart, and John Rawls worked so beneficently in the philosophy of history, the philosophy of art, legal philosophy, and the philosophy of politics—that is to say, in the philosophy of culture” (p. 1). With the possible exception of Berlin, however, none of the philosophers whom White has come to exult has had much of an impact on public (as opposed to academic) debates regarding the major social or cultural issues of our time. They were dons and academicians rather than public moralists. One wonders if the young White, inspired by the example of Dewey, would have accepted that the philosophy of culture, as it now stands, is philosophy enough.

Joel Isaac

Selwyn College, University of Cambridge

*jti20@cam.ac.uk*



FRANK M. OPPENHEIM, S.J.

**Reverence for the Relations of Life: Re-imagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce’s Interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey.**

South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005. ix + 479 pp., with Bibliography and indices.

Frank Oppenheim is a scholar’s scholar. In a time when the patience for scholarship has in large part been put to flight by the need to publish quickly and widely, Oppenheim has taken the time to produce a fascinating and

provocative look at Josiah Royce's relations with the "big three" American pragmatists—Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. A quiet but powerful subtext of the book is Oppenheim's consideration of what Royce took philosophical practice and a philosophical life to be; here we find both Royce and Oppenheim making suggestions relevant to our contemporary assessments of philosophy. Though Oppenheim's aim is scholarly, he is openly a champion of Royce and his work. Indirectly, he is also a champion of Peirce's pragmatism, which figures as a catalyst for Royce's last revisions of his outlook. Though I find myself disagreeing with Oppenheim here and there regarding specific claims and interpretations, I find that he presents a remarkably undistorted account of pragmatism in its seminal years. Champions of Peirce, James, and Dewey will easily recognize their heroes, and will simply find themselves disagreeing with Royce's absolute pragmatism as it attempts to re-imagine what pragmatism can be. Along the way, all readers will learn that Royce's nuanced philosophical outlook cannot be easily subsumed under the rubric of "block universe" thinking, and that the relations among these four thinkers run deeper than most have imagined or wanted to acknowledge.

*Reverence* is not a book just for Royceans. Oppenheim has finely combed the early and middle years of American pragmatism to provide a picture of the relations of thought among the pragmatists. In this respect, without explicitly intending to, he has written a much better history of pragmatism than many who have made it their aim to do so. The structure of the book is itself instructive. Though he deals with four thinkers, Oppenheim has made the basic structure triadic, matching the triadic nature of interpretation that Royce borrowed from Peirce. The three major divisions of the book trace Royce's historical and intellectual relations to Peirce, James, and Dewey respectively. This alignment reveals what Oppenheim takes to be the order of impact on Royce's thought and the order of proximity of thought. Thus Peirce has the most direct impact on the development of Royce's thought and also holds that final view most closely aligned with Royce's. This is the case despite the long and fruitful interaction between James and Royce. As importantly, the triadic structure brings to life the very Peircean features that so deeply influenced Royce. Any thinker's work takes place in a community of interpreters whose comments and critiques serve to mediate the development of ideas. It is in this spirit that Oppenheim assesses the relations among the four pragmatists. Moreover, this spirit is underwritten by a synecism that holds that there is a continuity among the pragmatists' ideas that generates the natural class of thought we have come to call pragmatism. Part of Oppenheim's subtext, then, is not only that this is the way pragmatism developed, but it is a fitting and fruitful way for any philosophy to be conducted—through a genuine community of inquirers.

A second instructive feature of Oppenheim's text is directly attributable to the influence of James. That is, Oppenheim focuses on Royce's interest in the attitudes and temperaments of different thinkers, and then employs their differences in attitude and interest as one way of highlighting similarities and

differences among the pragmatists. For Royce as for James, attitude or temperament is a key part of any thinker's worldview, and it is therefore a useful topic of philosophical reflection. Royce provided a topology of possible philosophical attitudes, and himself tried to adopt an attitude consisting in "a genuine loyalty" to his particular local communities and also to "the Universal Community." He was committed to both—like Dewey, to social development in the short run and, like Peirce, to truth in the long run. The breadth of Royce's commitments meant that Royce, perhaps more than any of the other pragmatists, was attuned to a reverence for the relations of life. And it was this attitude that he took to be a mark of a philosophical life.

A third instructive feature of the text is attributable to the influence of Dewey: a focus on the import of thought for actual, living communities. While Oppenheim focuses on the intellectual community of the pragmatists, he also examines the culture from which they emerged and the ways in which their ideas affected the wider social context. We read of Royce's attempts to provide practical advice to students in light of his conception of loyalty; we are reminded of Dewey's involvement with the social gospel and his eventual relinquishing of ties to religions in order to clear a space for the unencumbered work of intelligence in the social sphere; and we see pragmatism's dialectical give and take with an America coming to grips with the ascent of Darwinian evolution and its challenges to traditional religious views. For Royce, despite Dewey's suggestions to the contrary, philosophy is never a matter of hiding in abstractions but of finding the ways in which generality and interpretation have roles to play in our everyday existence.

Thus, Oppenheim in a variety of ways takes up the ideas he is portraying and enacts them in his own scholarly work, providing at once a performative and conceptual look at Royce's re-imagining of pragmatism. Oppenheim's description of the pragmatists and their relations is not, however, without its provocative moments. In my own case, I wonder if Oppenheim doesn't underestimate the influence of Peirce on Dewey's work at the turn of the century, in particular, on *Democracy and Education*. I also think there are textual reasons in Royce's *Principles of Logic* for doubting that Royce embraced chance, spontaneity, and possibility to the extent that Oppenheim suggests. Indeed, as Oppenheim points out and as Dewey noted, Royce still employed "performative contradiction" as a criterion for determining "absolute" truths in his late work. From a Peircean perspective arguments from performative contradiction have the look of the a priori method and seem to resist the move to a fully experimental and abductive logic. Others may worry that Oppenheim, with Royce, is occasionally a bit hasty in criticizing features of James's and Dewey's work. And it may be that he is not critical enough of Peirce's inability to bring philosophy back to primary experience.

But I set these inroads to criticism aside—they serve as the loci for future conversations. To them I would add some of the places where I believe Oppenheim's insights are clearest. His concern for the absence of a sensibility for the importance of Peirce's semeiotic for a pragmatic theory of

inquiry in James and Dewey seems on target. His suggestion that the “prophetic” side of Peirce’s work is often obscured is also important—it was this together with the logic of relations that inspired Royce’s interest in Peirce’s thought. Oppenheim also clearly understands the importance of Peirce’s realism to the pragmatic movement. However nominalistic James occasionally appeared, his notions of continuity and possibility leaned heavily on an outlook akin to Peirce’s scholastic realism. Royce, as Oppenheim shows in detail, relied extensively on such a realism from *The Problem of Christianity* forward. And Dewey’s adaptation of the idea of natural habits is realistic at bottom. Oppenheim’s most basic insight, however, lies in his ongoing revelation of the nuance and complexity of Royce’s religious and idealistic thought. Royce was neither an American Hegel nor a clone of the tedious Lotze. He was an original thinker; he was identified by Peirce as a pragmatist; and he deserves a more open reading than he has been given heretofore.

*Reverence* is an excellent overview of Royce’s thought in its relation to other pragmatisms of his day; at the same time it brings into play tidbits of thought from correspondences, notes, and lectures that readers are unlikely to find elsewhere. The most extensive analysis of the book, rightly, has to do with the complex relationship between James and Royce. Perhaps the most original features appear in Oppenheim’s development of key themes relating the thought of Royce and Peirce. But for me the most fascinating section of the book is the leading historical comparison of Royce and Dewey that discloses details of their religious upbringings and their mutual interest in Spinoza. There are elements in this section that should inspire future inquirers to take up where Oppenheim has left the comparison. Finally, it is worth noting that Oppenheim’s attentiveness to the religious thought of the pragmatists is not misplaced or overstated; as he points out, they were raised in a culture whose “deep roots in the doctrines of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards could not be easily eradicated” (p. 395).

Oppenheim’s many studies of Royce’s work have been invaluable sources for those interested in the Californian’s impact on American thought. This most recent work, I believe, will provoke interesting responses from the various corners of pragmatic thought, and I have no doubt it will become a classic text in the history of American philosophy. In this work, Oppenheim stands somewhere between the styles of Richard Bernstein and Herbert Schneider: less philosophical but more scholarly than Bernstein in approach, and more philosophical and less strictly historical than Schneider. Those seriously interested in the history and culture of pragmatism should read *Reverence for the Relations of Life*.

Douglas R. Anderson  
Southern Illinois University-Carbondale  
dra3@siu.edu

