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The Philosophy of Gesture: Completing Pragmatists'
Incomplete Revolution by Giovanni Maddalena (review)

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The Review of Metaphysics, Volume 72, Number 1 (Issue No. 285),
September 2018, pp. 143-147 (Review)

Published by The Philosophy Education Society, Inc.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rvm.2018.0019>



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nonhuman animals or future generations limits our obligations with respect to them. On Murray's analysis we can have duties *toward* beings we do not have duties *to*, if those beings would be protected by the agreements of self-interested contractors. Since people generally care about animals, there is an obligation not to be unnecessarily cruel to them, but no obligation not to use them. This distinction ensures that our obligations toward animals do not impose heavy costs on humans. Abortion is permitted. Sentience is a necessary condition for having rights and, even granting fetuses the right to life, abortion does not violate that right, owing largely to the onerous burdens of pregnancy. Murray rejects even modest affirmative action proposals on the grounds that self-interested contractors would endorse a policy of equal opportunity. In a provocative final chapter he argues that blackmail itself is not impermissible: when blackmail is wrong it is so for reasons independent of what is characteristic of blackmail.

Murray notes that some environmentalists reject contractarianism based on its failure to establish duties to future generations to fight climate change but maintains that "the fact that a moral theory fails to give you what you want is not necessarily a mark against the theory, particularly when contractarianism is a cure for those moral theories relying on sketchy metaphysics." Such reasoning underscores the way that many of Murray's positions ultimately rely on a denial of the objectivity of morality, which may inspire some readers to reexamine the queerness critique in the first part of the book. Nonetheless, even skeptics of contractarianism will find worthwhile Murray's rich treatment of each ethical issue that he considers. Much of his insightful criticism of other views on those issues does not require accepting contractarianism.—Andy Engen, *Illinois Wesleyan University*

MADDALENA, Giovanni. *The Philosophy of Gesture: Completing Pragmatists' Incomplete Revolution*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. xii + 195 pp. Cloth, \$34.95—Western philosophy's modern period has been very much shaped by a representationalism according to which "concepts" (earlier: "ideas") assembled into "propositions" constitute the fundamental unit of meaning, thought, belief—and even, in the hands of twentieth-century philosophers such as G. E. M. Anscombe and Jaegwon Kim—action, conceived as performed under a description. What exactly a proposition consists in ontologically is not easy to explain in a manner consonant with prevailing scientific naturalism. But it is clearly a disembodied entity, some kind of abstract object.

For over 150 years the fledgling pragmatist movement has strenuously critiqued this approach. Thus John Dewey explicitly rejected the so-called spectator theory of knowledge, urging us instead to model epistemology as a series of existential encounters with situations that are actually

experienced as problematic, and may be resolved through real adjustments between experienter and experienced. Likewise Charles Peirce, in his early pragmatist manifesto “The Fixation of Belief,” defined belief as habit—a settled state whereby an organism knows how to act in a given respect. (For instance, my belief that my car is parked outside my house consists in nothing but my disposition to walk there when I wish to drive.) More recently, Richard Rorty has railed against representationalism as the source of numerous philosophical ills, such as epistemic hubris deriving from fantasies of asserting propositions from a God’s-eye view. Overall, then, pragmatism can be understood as a shift in our understanding of meaning from “(mere) saying” to “doing.” But (as was also noted by later Wittgenstein) this shift has vast philosophical consequences, and these are arguably still being plumbed. This volume dives exceptionally deeply into these new waters, bringing up new treasures for us all to ponder. Take Peirce’s definition of belief in terms of habit. Here of key importance becomes what we might call the shape of the habit. Under the old representationalism, a proposition is essentially the same whoever utters it. But in human behaviour, much depends on not just what is done but how it is done (and this how will possess a beginning, middle, and end denied to abstract objects). The how may be understood as gesture, and Maddalena’s book takes a first pass across how a philosophy that takes this, rather than disembodied meanings, as its foundation might organize itself. The result is a fascinating wealth of germinal ideas, not all of which I have space to discuss here.

The book begins with Kant (chapters 1 and 2). Although many scholars have fruitfully analysed Peirce’s thought as a continuation of Kantian projects, Maddalena suggests that we have underestimated his departure from the Prussian sage. He diagnoses Kant’s phenomenon–noumenon distinction as one of the most inevitable yet ultimately unsatisfying end-points of modernity, and suggests that Peirce’s semiotics (theory of signs) is designed to bypass the problem through its “extreme” scholastic realism according to which patterns in reality (from the modern perspective: “outside the head”) and our understanding of them (“inside the head”) are literally the same. For both form part of a continuous world of signs, and insofar as we ourselves are part of this world we can trust our common sense far more than Cartesianism would have us believe. Maddalena boldly suggests that this semiotic framework enabled Peirce to seek “a completely new pattern of reasoning” that is entirely synthetic, replacing Kant’s categorical-analytic “necessity of content” with a completely general (pragmatist) “necessity of method” for investigating a world as yet unglimped by our conceptual schemes.

Chapter 3 further develops this claim through a three-way distinction that resonates through the book. Maddalena proposes that analytic reasoning is characterised by losing identity through changes (as entities are decomposed) and synthetic reasoning by recognizing identity through changes (as entities combine to form greater wholes). But these two are insufficient; we must also posit vague reasoning, which is “blind to

identity through changes.” As I understand it, such blindness is required for the formation of new and creative thoughts. Maddalena crucially believes that all synthetic judgment is creative, insofar as it consists in a movement from an initially vague experience to an identified singular experience that can then be generalized in a habit of action. For example, imagine that I am outside and experiencing the usual plethora of human feelings. I choose to organize a significant subset of them into an object—“the weather”—and I assert the singular observation, “The weather is very hot today!” This statement then enters the general space of reasons where it can be shared, disputed, inferred from, and so on. As any sign-use may be understood to consist in synthetic judgment thus broadly conceived, this account captures the heart of Peirce’s semiotics. The representationalist’s supposedly univocal “proposition describing reality” is thereby revealed as a spuriously static stage abstracted from living thought that is continuous and in flux. Maddalena claims that these insights deepen “three celebrated pragmatist affirmations”: (1) research is always tied to problem-solving (this represents, in effect, the new embodiedness of meaning), (2) belief serves as a resting place for inquiry in action, but at the same time, (3) fallibilism makes that resting place always only provisional.

Through the rest of chapter 3, Maddalena further explicates thought’s continuity using tools from mathematics, following the lead of Peirce, who famously appreciated Cantor’s controversial discovery of transfinite numbers, attempting to engage the brilliant schoolteacher in argument about the greatest infinity. This section is not an easy read for the uninitiated, but by drawing on Peirce’s cherished diagrammatic logic, the Existential Graphs, which Peirce deliberately scribed on a continuous sheet of assertion (so continuous that he eventually envisaged it as multidimensional), Maddalena does some intriguing metaphysical work. He urges us to accept that in this overarching perspective whereby the universe is “perfused with signs,” identity fundamentally coincides with the activity (gesture) of recognizing it. In line with Peirce’s breathtakingly cosmological semiotics, this move ambitiously generalizes the basic movement of synthetic judgment to all becoming. It shifts discussion of identity from both its current understanding in analytic philosophy as permanence of attributes and its current understanding in Continental philosophy through Hegelian dialectic between opposites. Maddalena understands identity as a dynamic, teleological “development of experience.” To my mind just this move potentially lays the groundwork for a highly original pragmatist metaphysics (which, despite popular opinion, is not a contradiction in terms).

All this scene-setting enables Maddalena in chapter 4 to define a vital concept: complete gestures. These may be understood as particularly effective semiosis; clarifying what exactly “effective” means here requires thinking hard about semiosis itself. Maddalena first attempts a formal analysis: the gesture must be simultaneously iconic, indexical, and symbolic, thereby expressing the three modalities of possibility, specific

actuality, and general law, respectively. The first example given is explicitly gestural: Italian mountaineers require someone who makes a stone roll to carry it as a reminder of the danger of inattention. This ongoing tradition is iconic in its metaphor of the “weight” of wrongdoing, indexical in being triggered by particular instances of carelessness, and symbolic as a general rule adopted within a given community. A second example shows how the concept of complete gesture transcends “quaint” cultural eccentricities: Rutherford’s brilliant idea to fire alpha particles through gold foil, reasoning that if the gold atoms possessed nuclei they would deflect a certain proportion of the particles. This did indeed occur, with enormous ongoing ramifications for physics.

In chapter 5 Maddalena adds a more functional analysis of complete gestures, as maximally creative within a given meaning-system. This leads to interesting meditations on creativity itself as necessarily involving awareness, and not occurring *ex nihilo* (as per Romantic fantasy) but as “accepting what reality permits.” A further important point is that as complete gestures have a direction and aim, they possess an ethical dimension insofar as they successfully develop (or not) potential latent in earlier stages. Thus “[m]orality becomes an intrinsic value . . . rather than an external discipline.” In this Aristotelian-pragmatist aspect of Maddalena’s work I see significant implications for finally making progress with the apparently baffling puzzle of grounding normativity—a recurring yet largely impotent preoccupation of much mainstream philosophy.

The book’s final chapters explicate various aspects of human life fruitfully analyzable as “development of experience.” Chapter 6 discusses the memory theory of personal identity, distinguishing from the more usual “narrative” identity a “figural” identity (drawing on Auerbach) the prophetic overtones of which may be echoed in the temporal development of a gesture, and thus a life. Chapter 7 considers literature, offering a moving discussion of Grassman’s bleak Holocaust novel *Life and Fate*, as a gesture that “becomes an independent reality, a common property of author and reader in the assent they have to give.” Chapter 8 turns to morality and education, returning to Kant and seeking to dismantle his “chasm” between theoretical and practical reason, and thus knowledge and freedom, through the ever-growing development of intelligent right action. The book concludes with the following stirring antirepresentationalist manifesto: “The perspective of knowledge is now turned upside-down. We are not the independent masters of detached reality . . . we are part of a reality with which we cooperate inasmuch as we imitate its intention by learning to perform the complete gestures performed by others.”

This is a slim and provisional volume, and might be criticized for lacking more explicit engagement with philosophers who have previously explored some of its themes, such as Aristotle and Merleau-Ponty, to name just two. A work in pragmatism might also be justly criticized for not including more examples. Overall, though, if you would like to step

for a time out of the deep premise-lined grooves in which run many debates in mainstream philosophy, and consider with fresh eyes a raft of foundational questions, I warmly commend this book.—Catherine Legg, *Deakin University*

O'CONNOR, David K. *Plato's Bedroom: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Love*. South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2015. 301 pp. Cloth, \$28.00—When a teacher no longer teaches a course, but wants to provide a substitute for others, it might take two forms.

One, with videos of lectures and discussions, with assignments, exemplary answers, and testimonials from students, would have ups and downs, loose ends, chatter, yet with sparks of eros, bits of its wildness, and would convey the experience, even to the “yet unborn.”

Another form, in print and in prose, would provide as perfected, completed, and finished a version of the inquiry at the heart of the course, as the teacher, now the writer, were able. Aspiring to wisdom, this fruit of long inquiry, would be a book, fit especially for fellow inquirers, now and ages hence.

Why would a teacher, still teaching a course, issue a version of it? What should those still taking the course do with it? And what of the completion the teacher might later achieve in a book?

The subject of love is certainly serious, and vital. What should one think of love? What is truly loveable? Beauty? Truth? Wisdom? Or a human being? Who should one choose to love? Woman? Man? And to what end? Friendship? Marriage? Children? At its heart, *Plato's Bedroom* is engaged with these questions, serious for all human beings, all countries, and our civilization, and vitally serious to the young, who must decide them, and choose, and then live the one life they will ever have accordingly.

For O'Connor, ancient wisdom resides in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, while modern love is spread out, in Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Midsummer's Night Dream* (strangely not *Romeo and Juliet* or *A Winter's Tale*, let alone *Anna Karenina*), in some short stories (“Death in Venice” and, especially, four stories by Andre Dubus), and in quite a few movies (festive “Babette's Feast,” disordered “Hannah and Her Sisters,” repellant “Exotica”). Attending to Plato and also to literature, rather unusual in “philosophy,” makes for richness, but most stories are recounted at a level and length assuming the reader does not know the originals, maybe need not. O'Connor criticizes our impoverished language of love, “sex,” “f—,” and “sexual intercourse,” but does not recur to Shakespeare's bawdy for refreshment. Would Platonic wisdom help modern lovers? Or is something modern superior to Plato? Perhaps only in hailing *Humanae Vitae*, recognizing that the “pill” severs the natural link of eros and children, and affirming the supervening moral bond of