Michael Bacon
Pragmatism: An Introduction.
Cambridge and Malden: Polity 2012.
224 pages
$69.95 (cloth ISBN 978–074564664–0); $24.95 (paper ISBN 978–074564665–7)

Introductions to pragmatism usually take one of two forms. Some are organized as histories, tracing the movement's development from the late nineteenth century to the present. These histories typically pay a great deal of attention to the three classical pragmatists, Peirce, James, and Dewey. Other introductions to pragmatism are organized around a series of problems, such as the pragmatists' attempts to clarify the nature of knowledge or truth. Problem-oriented introductions tend to emphasize contemporary thought a bit more, since they are interested in the most advanced attempts that have been made to solve the problems under discussion. Bacon's book is a hybrid. It is organized as a history, but it devotes a great deal of attention to recent pragmatists such as Huw Price, Cheryl Misak, and Robert Brandom, and less than one might expect to Peirce, James, and Dewey. The result is a little unorthodox, but quite well done. Above all, Bacon's book is useful, which is probably the highest compliment one can pay to an introduction to pragmatism.

The book consists of seven chapters, each of which discusses one to three figures. The usual suspects are here: classical pragmatists such as Dewey as well as neo-pragmatists such as Richard Rorty. But Bacon also discusses figures with more tangential ties to the pragmatist tradition, such as Jürgen Habermas, and figures such as Donald Davidson who reject pragmatism but have shaped its development in important ways. Chapter 1 is devoted to Peirce and James. At just 29 pages, it is a very brief discussion of these seminal figures, and it examines only their best-known texts: James's *Pragmatism*, for example, and Peirce's three most famous essays. But Bacon's descriptions of these texts are intelligent and concise, and pack quite a bit of insight into a few pages. Chapter 2, on Dewey, is a little more expansive. It focuses on *The Quest for Certainty* and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, paying particular attention to Dewey's views of scientific method and democracy. Chapter 3 examines the works of Quine, Sellars, and Davidson. Again, there are few surprises in the choice of texts: Quine's 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', Sellars's 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', and Davidson's 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' take centre stage. But Bacon does an excellent job of summarizing the arguments of these papers and of explaining their significance for the development of pragmatism. He also makes some useful remarks about lesser-known texts, such as Davidson's last papers and Quine's essay 'The Pragmatists's Place in Empiricism'.

Chapter 4 is devoted to Rorty and Hilary Putnam. The discussion of Rorty is probably the least satisfying part of the book: accurate as far as it goes, but focused on just a few works, notably the fourth chapter of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.* Bacon gives a good overview of Rorty's critique of representationalism, but this chapter does not really convey the breadth of Rorty's interests, and at times it makes Rorty look like a mere vulgarizer of Davidson. The treatment of Putnam, however, is excellent: it does a good job of highlighting the influence of Peirce, James, and Dewey on Putnam's work on realism and on the entanglement of fact and

value. Chapter 5 deals with Habermas and Richard Bernstein, and thus with the intersections between pragmatism and so-called continental philosophy. It carefully describes the role pragmatic themes play in Habermas's *Knowledge and Human Interests* and *Theory of Communicative Action*. But while Chapter 5 notes that Habermas's pragmatism is a 'transcendental pragmatism' (125) that differs significantly from the work of Peirce or Rorty, it downplays the tension between pragmatism and any sort of transcendental philosophy. The discussion of Bernstein, on the other hand, is one of the strongest parts of the book. It gives an informative reconstruction of Bernstein's entire career, from his early studies of Dewey to his relationship with Rorty and his attempts to establish a dialogue between pragmatism and Gadamerian hermeneutics. Bernstein's importance for the pragmatist tradition is not adequately appreciated, and Bacon's discussion should go some way toward remedying this.

Chapter 6 discusses Susan Haack and Cheryl Misak. It characterizes their work as the 'return of Peirce' (147): Haack because she wants to 'defend a Peircean understanding of both truth and scientific inquiry against those whom she thinks insufficiently attentive to their importance' (147); Misak because she 'reworks [Peirce's] ideas, notably his theory of truth, in the light of objections' (159) from other pragmatists. The first half of the chapter consists of a detailed discussion of Haack's *Evidence and Inquiry*, and an overview of her acrimonious exchange with Rorty after the book's publication. Bacon gives a sympathetic reconstruction of Haack's argument that, *contra* Rorty, truth is a goal of inquiry. The rest of Chapter 6 discusses Misak, focusing on her attempts to apply Peirce's ideas to ethics, politics, and democratic theory. As Bacon sees it, Misak's key contribution is to suggest that 'Peirce's writings contain elements of a more attractive and normatively substantive theory of democracy than that of the avowedly democratic Dewey' (165). Chapter 7 is devoted to two other contemporary figures: the 'rationalist pragmatism' (171) of Robert Brandom and the 'metaphysically quietist' (185) naturalism of Huw Price. Bacon presents Brandom as calling attention to 'the distinctively *normative* dimension of our practices' (172). In advancing a claim, I commit myself to giving reasons in defense of it, and according to Brandom, 'the game of giving and asking for reasons cannot be seen simply as one practice among others, because it is the practice that institutes the meanings that are presupposed by all those others' (174). Chapter 7 gives a concise overview of Brandom's *Making It Explicit*, which tries to supplant semantics with pragmatics by showing how the meanings of concepts are 'constituted within social practices' (176). Bacon views Price, on the other hand, as a thoroughgoing anti-representationalist who thinks pragmatists such as Brandom have gone too far in 'trying to make peace with traditional notions of representationalism' (192). Chapter 7 ends with a useful summary of Price's important paper 'Truth as Convenient Friction', which argues, against Rorty, that the notion of truth actually does make a difference to our practices.

This book has many merits. While brief—especially considering how much ground it covers—it is also accurate and engaging. Bacon rarely criticizes the figures under discussion, but when he does, the results are illuminating. He makes a convincing case that Davidson is wrong in his criticisms of Peirce, James, and Dewey (90); later in the book, he makes a similar point about Haack's criticisms of Rorty (157–158). Bacon's overall picture of the pragmatist tradition does not exactly break new ground, but there are a few noteworthy differences between his views and those of other commentators. For example, while he grants that pragmatism is not a 'single doctrine' (12), he argues that Nicholas Rescher's distinction between a Peircean

pragmatism of the right and a Jamesian pragmatism of the left are 'overdrawn' (13). He also rejects the view, which he attributes to Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin, that different pragmatists can be classified according to which elements of 'the world of human practice' they see as 'most fundamental'. According to Bacon, the elements of the world of practice all 'hang together' and 'none is more fundamental than any other' (201).

My main reservation about this book concerns its audience. It is, of course, an introduction: it is non-technical, presupposes little background, and devotes most of its energy to summarizing well-known texts. All of this suggests that it is intended mainly for undergraduates, especially those taking survey courses in pragmatism. But its choice of topics raises questions about how useful it will be to such students. In my experience, most introductory courses in pragmatism emphasize Peirce, James, and Dewey. Rorty and other recent figures are covered later, often in less detail; difficult figures such as Brandom and Price may not be covered at all. But as I have mentioned, Bacon pays relatively little attention to the classical pragmatists. More than half of this book is devoted to work published since the mid-1970s. There is certainly an audience for discussions of this work, but I wonder how much it overlaps with the audience for introductions to pragmatism. Readers who are new to pragmatism may not find the material they want here, while readers who are chiefly interested in figures like Haack and Brandom may not need an introductory text at all.

None of this is meant to detract from the book's strengths. It has many. My point is simply that if you were going to read only one book on pragmatism, this would not be it. On the other hand, if you already had some familiarity with classical pragmatism, this would be a very useful second or third book to have on your shelf.

Robert Piercey
Campion College, University of Regina