John R. Shook. *Pragmatism*. The MIT Press 2023. 284 pp. $16.95 USD (Paperback 9780262544610); $13.99 USD (eBook 9780262372176).

In the preface (subtitled "Reality, Verity, Mentality") to *Pragmatism*, author John Shook notes that "pragmatism insists on revising or replacing rigid tenets that have dominated Western thought" (4). Shook, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Bowie State University, Maryland, has an established history popularizing pragmatism. In addition to numerous books and essays on this and related philosophical topics, he also launched the still useful online resource the *Pragmatism Cybrary* in 1999. Such bona fides suggest that Shook is well-suited to introducing pragmatism to a new generation of readers.

This is a paradoxically 'small' (5x7 in and 50,000 words in length) big book that provides a solid introduction to pragmatism. Front matter consists of a series foreword and the author's preface. The body of the book is comprised of eleven chapters that are all around twenty pages in length and include short concluding summaries. Back matter is extensive, consisting of a brief series of acknowledgements, a useful and concise glossary of key terms, notes, suggestions for future reading, and nicely detailed index.

"Pragmatism: An Old Name for Newly Confirmed Ideas" serves as an introduction to the rest of the chapters. In it, Shook suggests that pragmatism focuses on "change and impermanence over form and permanence, deprioritizes necessity and certainty for knowledge and truth, and depicts individuality and sociality as codependently interfused" (7). He also traces pragmatism's varied historical influences, while necessarily emphasizing the impact of philosopher William James. In covering the development of pragmatism up to contemporary times, Shook also does away with some hoary suggestions relative to its supposed decline in the post-war years.

The second chapter, "Principles of Pragmatism," situates the rise of the same within the context of scientific developments in the mid-1800s to early-1900s. Bolstered by these changes, "pragmatists rebelled against Kantian dualisms and instead looked to supportive precursors in philosophy and science" (22-23). Here again, the influence of James, particularly as regards his work in psychology, looms large, as does the work of John Dewey and George Herbert Mead (35-36).

"Permanence and Impermanence," posits that pragmatism challenges philosophies that plead for an "ideal standard for reality" (40). Here, Shook links pragmatism to other historical challenges to rationalist perspectives on the world, while also suggesting that it productively extended beyond the theorizing of thinkers such as Josiah Royce or Henri Bergson. In so doing, he argues that, in the place of certainty and noncontradiction, a pragmatist "ascribes truth to [the] achievable knowledge of capable knowers" (54).

The fourth chapter, "Context and Reality," continues the discussion of pragmatism providing a foil against rationalist dogmas. Shook emphasizes that, for the pragmatist, "knowing is a *dynamic coordination* between reality's processes and human endeavors within reality" (68-69). Given such a worldview, things are not predetermined, and expectations can be thwarted by novelties arising out of action and interaction. Put more simply, "pragmatism's pluralistic ontology diffuses reality

across endless connectivities and context, without anything playing the role of 'the most real'" (78).

"Truth in Consequences" provides a natural extension of the previous two chapters. If novelty is the rule and reality resists pre-established truths, then pragmatism celebrates a world where knowledge is both "flexible" and "contextual" (90). Which is not to say that this is a model lapsing into chaos or relativism. Rather, Shook posits that the testing of knowledge by way of pragmatism is a posteriori; it functions by evaluating "a thing's capacity to yield discernible effects in the world" (106-107).

The sixth chapter, "Being and Thinking" provides a wider purview in demonstrating the pragmatist challenge to not only rationalism, but also subjectivism, absolutism, and mysticism. Shook asserts that, while these approaches emphasize the intellectual and abstract when arguing about truth, pragmatism places it within the "warm embrace of experience and life" (125). By casting away the imposition of a priori thinking, pragmatism accepts a world necessarily though not totally in flux, a place where "some matters are regarded as secure stabilities while others are questionable variabilities" (138).

"Pragmatism versus Epistemology" engages in questioning traditionalist assumptions about "the knower-known relationship" (157). Leaning on the works of Dewey, but also James, Shook engages in an oftentimes granular critique of the standard approaches to epistemology. The consequence of which is to demonstrates how pragmatists "faulted the Greek fascination with a permanent and aloof realm of being that attracts the exclusive aim of knowledge" (144).

The eighth chapter, "Transactional Knowledge," acts as both a continuation and a coda to the previous section. If traditional approaches fail because they assert abstract realms of correspondence, pragmatism champions the need for a "transactional" alternative which "judges that whatever is really knowable must be responsive to a dynamic process" of inquiry (162). The result is a philosophical approach which emphasizes "pluralism and contextualism" (172).

"Ecological Mentality" serves largely as a response to post-Cartesian conceptions of mind. In their place, a pragmatic approach stresses "that mentality is selective, purposive, ecological, and social" (182). Here again integrating the works of James and Dewey, as well as C.S. Peirce, Shook argues that pragmatism abandons the search for the "stuff" that makes up consciousness and reject conceptions of thoughts and things that remain trapped in antiquated amber. Instead, what is needed is a worldview where thinking is contextual and experiential, and "mind is always interrelated with and within the world" (193).

The tenth chapter, "Society, Self, and Mind," widens the scope of coverage relating to minds, asking how we come to know and interact with interested others. Pragmatism stands in contrast with traditional theories which argue for discrete and individualistic minds. In their place, and returning to the works of Dewey and Mead, Shook suggests that "humans are . . . able to treat each other as selves because of their intense sociality" (208). And this sociology of self can be traced across the entire arc of an individual's life. From childhood to adulthood, "the mentality of individuals develops from, and operates with, the group mentality of organized societies" (221).

"Culture and Person" closes out the book with a pragmatic defense of lived experience.

Ranging across the works of the aforementioned pragmatists, while also embracing the work of people like sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, Shook lays out the strengths of this decidedly "naturalist worldview" (228). Chief among them is a continued rebuttal of "worldviews that divorce mind from world, persons from practices, or culture from nature" (239).

Early in the preface, Shook acknowledges that a book of this sort cannot be exhaustive, nor can it provide a successful summary of its topic proper. Then again, he argues, pragmatism is a living method and one that resists any sort of coda (3). That said, there are two slight quibbles with this concise approach to introducing pragmatism to newcomers. Certain sections in several chapters lapse into lists of ideas only lightly touched upon. The result is perhaps a suggestion that, once interested readers gain the basics in *Pragmatism*, they should look elsewhere for deeper dives into the nuances of pragmatism, with the aforementioned suggestions for future reading being a good start. Another issue relates to the series foreword, which claims the book is "accessible" and geared towards "non-specialists" (vii). While that is in large part true, certain sections—particularly in chapters seven and eight—seem to be written for those with a pre-existing knowledge of the minutiae relating to pragmatism's epistemological battles.

On the publisher's website, the overview extends the book's own synopsis by suggesting that pragmatism "reaches well beyond the confines of philosophy into concerns and disciplines as diverse as religion, politics, science, and culture." With *Pragmatism*, Shook has provided a foundational and engaging overview designed to pique the interest of those wanting to further explore those connections.

Mark Porrovecchio, Oregon State University