Steven Levine. *Pragmatism, Objectivity, and Experience*. Cambridge University Press 2019. 270 pp. $105.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781108422895); $32.99 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781108435925).

This is a welcome and ambitious book, and notwithstanding some intra-pragmatist quibbles, an excellent one at that. Levine puts into dialogue several different but related philosophical traditions, such as historical and contemporary pragmatism, German Idealism (Kant and Hegel), and analytic philosophy. His goal is a satisfactory pragmatist account of *objectivity*, a notion sometimes trouble-some for pragmatists: famously rejected entirely by Richard Rorty, concerns about whether pragma-tism can vouchsafe the real objective purport of our knowledge have also dogged contemporary pragmatists like Robert Brandom, but also the historical pragmatists William James and John Dewey, who are sometimes criticized—by other pragmatists!—as being too 'subjectivist.' Levine sees the post-Rorty efforts to 'rehabilitate' objectivity as taking one of two forms: either 'communicative-theoretic' views, in which objectivity is secured by the nature of discourse, or 'experience-theoretic' views, in which objectivity has its source in our perceptual experience of the world (3). Levine's central contention is that only an experience-theoretic account can suffice for true objectivity, and that resources from James and Dewey can be deployed to construct such a pragmatist account of objectivity.

In this short review, I'll first summarize the book and its argument and follow that with a few critical comments. Any criticism, however, should be seen in light of my strong admiration for the book and for Levine's evident scholarly and philosophical acumen.

In the Introduction, Levine argues that objectivity is required, but will it be from language or experience? Levine thinks that unless the account involves experience, and further that it be in par-ticular what the German Idealists called *Erlebnis*, an *episodic* kind of experience, we cannot have a pragmatism that properly respects objectivity (11). This sets the stage for the first half of the book. Levine harkens back to Rorty's rejection of the very notion of objectivity, and gives us his take on Rorty's fundamental argument for that (21ff.). In contrast, Brandom (and others) think that Rorty's critique can accommodate a notion of objectivity that is consistent with Rorty's insights and is not the kind of objectivity he rightly, according to them, rejected (28). Levine disputes Brandom's characterization of Rorty's critique, but agrees that a rehabilitated notion of objectivity is required for pragmatism to work. Next, Levine argues that even though Brandom supplements his mostly linguistic account of objectivity with a notion of experience—*Erfahrung,* the other German word for 'experience' that refers to a temporally extended learning process—that this is not enough to get the required objectivity, and that we need the kind of 'episodic' notion of experience that Brandom rejects: *Erlebnis* (79f.). It is here that the experience-theoretic notion of objectivity emerges. Levine argues that P.F. Strawson and Gareth Evans provide the right kind of argument for the necessity of an experience-theoretic account of objectivity as opposed to Brandom/Davidson's communication-based account, since only an experience-theoretic account can get us actual, not ersatz, objectivity (110). But Levine does not think that Strawson's or Evans's accounts work in the details (125f.), so the second half of the book begins with Levine's Jamesian account of *Erlebnis*, which is to provide the kind of experience-theoretic account which chapter three argued was required. This is an account of 'our grasp of the concept of objectivity, the concept of a world of objects and events that continue to exist when not perceived or experienced' (157).

This being done, the last two chapters focus on Dewey's answer to a second question about objectivity, namely, 'whether the content of empirical thoughts and judgements undertaken in light

of this grasp (of the concept of objectivity) are in fact constrained by, and answerable to, the mind-independent world' (157). Put another way, he wants to show Dewey's answer to 'the question of how thought, via experience, can be constrained by, and rationally responsive to, the way things are' (ibid.). Levine argues that Dewey has the right kind of account for this because of the way the world is directly involved in thought and action, through *habits* of action, though still in a way that allows for a realism of the right kind for true objectivity. This is supplemented by an account of how 'experience' for Dewey is the thing that gives him the right kind of 'answerability' to the way things are. This chapter i) explains 'experience' according to Dewey ii) argues that Dewey's account of 'experience as second nature' supports realism about answerability and iii) argues that Rorty is wrong that Deweyan 'experience' is an instance of the Mythical Given (225ff.). So, in sum of the whole book, for Levine, this James-Dewey hybrid pragmatist account of 'experience' delivers a robust notion of objectivity without falling prey to the Myth of the Given.

Levine's book shows how all of these thinkers are working similar territory, and can be fruitfully engaged in the pursuit of these central philosophical questions. The book is erudite, scholarly, and the accounts of the philosophers' views he engages with are extremely well done. Further, it centres on two very important topics for pragmatism: i) securing a non-traditional (in the sense in which pragmatism goes against the Platonic-Cartesian 'tradition') but still robust notion of 'objectivity' and ii) what role, if any, should be played by 'experience.' For all these reasons, it is a timely, necessary book from a philosopher of great knowledge and skill.

But, I do have some qualms. Argumentatively, the book is a little lacking. Levine's arguments *against* the likes of Rorty, Brandom, Davidson, Evans, and Strawson are well done; that is, the critique of the rival communication-theoretic and experience-theoretic accounts are excellent. Even though I disagree with some of the conclusions, there is no denying that Levine has marshalled strong arguments that will require equally strong counter-arguments to fend them off. But the *positive* view, the presentation of Levine's pragmatist experience-theoretic view, has a dearth of argument. In particular, Levine's positive project relies a great deal on James and Dewey, but in the book their views are *presented* but not substantively *argued for*. Even assuming that Levine gives successful arguments for the superiority of the experience-theoretic view to the communication-theoretic, and against Evans's and Strawson's versions of the experience-theoretic view, it is not enough to just present an alternative experience-theoretic account—we want to see a positive argument for that account, not just an explanation of it. We don't, however, get very much of that. What we do get is some brilliant explication of the ideas of James and Dewey, but too few reasons to think that the ideas Levine is taking from them are true.

Further, a lot of the argumentative load, such as it is, is borne by invoking certain terms, frequently found in the specialized literature on James's and Dewey's pragmatisms, which are invoked but not sufficiently explained so that the reader can see the role they play in the argument. To take just one example, there is the concept of 'funding' or 'to fund' in presenting Dewey's view. The word is evocative, and I can see why it is an attractive one, but I'm afraid its use conceals some specific philosophical claims that might be criticized if they were open to view. I myself am an admirer and scholar of Dewey's work, and even I have yet to really understand what 'x funds y' means when used by most writers on Dewey; and often I get the sense that it is not only concealing some operative ideas but also *distinct* ideas from one writer to another. Unless and until I know what the relationship of 'funding' is, I don't know what to make of the view presented. This is especially so here, because Levine's view is supposed to avoid falling into the Myth of the Given. Crucially, Levine invokes the 'funding' relationship between meaning and habit to show that the role he wants habits to play in his account is not an instance of the mythical Given (229). But unless I know exactly

what the 'funding' relation is, it's not clear that he hasn't used it to sneak the Given in under an assumed name.

Speaking of the Given, Levine's interpretation and use of that Sellarsian idea plays an extremely significant role in the argumentative structure of the book. What is lacking is his justification of what exactly he takes the mythical Given to be, nor does his take on just what the Mythical Given *is* play nearly the role it should in the presentation of the book. His entire argument, in a sense, hangs on whether or not his conceptions of *Erlebnis*-experience and Deweyan habits, are examples of mythical Givenness. So, just what Levine takes Givenness to be looms over the whole book, casting a shadow under which it is not clear whether his arguments succeed or fail in their task. It's clear that, like most post-Sellarsian pragmatists, he wants to avoid the Given. And it's clear from what he says in the book that his interpretation of that notion is such that both Deweyan 'habits' and Jamesian *Erlebnis* experiential episodes are not instances of it. Nonetheless, he *does* argue that both of these are 'rationally articulated' and so objectivity ensuring, but yet non-conceptual. That is precisely a mythical Given on some interpretations of that notion. Surprisingly, his full articulation of what he means by the mythical Given does not occur until page 228 (of 242 total pages of the book). However, this reading of the Given is not fully argued for; and indeed, on other—more plausible, in my view—interpretations, the notions of 'habit' and 'experience' to which Levine appeals *are* instances of Givenness. If he had argued for his interpretation of Mythical Givenness at the start of the book, then at least it would be available for critique as a basis on which to build his pragmatist view, and pragmatists may disagree. As it is, the nature of the Given looms over most of the book, a lurking presence that is not sufficiently acknowledged even when it is finally brought into focus.

However, none of these issues stands in the way of my recommendation of this book. Notwithstanding my criticisms above, I think that this book is exactly the sort of work that pragmatists should be doing. Indeed, everyone working on these topics, whether pragmatist, idealist, or those strait-laced analytics who make it their aim to push back against rising pragmatist and idealist tides, ought to read this book. Although I can't help but be let down some by the book's positive argument, it's possible that this is just my own failure to be objective. I invite other readers to the experience of reading the book so they can decide for themselves.

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