Scott R. Stroud. *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India: Ambedkar, Dewey, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction*. The University of Chicago Press, 2023. 312 pp. $29.00. (Paperback 9780226824321).

The story of pragmatism is often framed as a distinctly American one, with minor forays and moments of appreciation in Europe and elsewhere. *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India* helps to revise and reframe that hoary narrative. Stroud, associate professor of communication at the University of Texas at Austin, offers an illuminating exploration of an under-examined figure in pragmatism's variegated history.

The book's layout is simple. The table of contents is followed by a contextually useful and detailed introduction. The main body of the book is composed of five chapters. The conclusion is followed by acknowledgements that point to the depth of research involved in this project, detailed endnotes, and a brief index.

The introduction is what its title suggests, a framing device 'Exploring the Evolution of Pragmatism in India'. More to the point, it introduces the reader to the impressive life of educator, politician, lawyer, and religious reformist Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956), the 'architect of the Indian constitution in the 1940s' and the promulgator of Buddhism as the antidote to the caste system (1). This is also where Stroud firmly maps out two strands of the chapters to come. First, the influence of John Dewey's pragmatism on Ambedkar, starting as it did when the former first taught the latter at Columbia University in the mid-1910s (6). Second, the ways in which that philosophical inspiration was integral to Ambedkar's 'revisioning of Indian traditions such as Buddhism' (12). Central to this exploration is Stroud's use of rhetorical analysis, whereby the arguments made are placed into contexts that help to examine their persuasive force (14-15).

The first chapter proper, 'Ambedkar and Dewey at Columbia University', builds upon the strengths of the introduction. Initially framed to show how the caste system in India shaped his 'search for dignity and community' (21), the discussion quickly focuses on how Ambedkar forged a largely intellectual, and not personal, relationship with Dewey while at Columbia University. Here Stroud does a deep dive into the actual materials that Ambedkar encountered while at Columbia, ones that likely played more of a role in the evolution of his thinking than Dewey's published works (25). The remainder of the chapter largely focuses on the courses of Dewey's that he attended: one semester of Psychological Ethics (Philosophy 231) and the two-course/semester series Moral and Political Philosophy (Philosophy 131-132), with the latter receiving most of the coverage. The former point of contact is formative, however, because the psychological point of view that Dewey taught at this time 'emphasized the kind of *self* we make through our own actions and through the influence of our society' (29), or what Stroud later refers to as a 'complex meliorism' (38). The two-semester experience in some specific ways reverses the focus of Dewey's previous course, examining 'the group or social community surrounding, and comprised of, individuals' (41). Ambedkar's takeaway from all of this was to meld Dewey's reflective reading of the points of contact/conflict between society and the individual to the circumstances of the 'South Asian context' to which he was returning (66-67).

In 'The Genesis of Ambedkar's Reconstructive Rhetoric', Ambedkar returns to Bombay in 1917—after a brief detour to London—and finds the world at war. He also finds the situation at home in upheaval, with the British increasingly focused on the home front and Ghandi championing his version of peaceful protest. Ambedkar initially takes tentative steps to enter India's political world, developing 'the prototype of what become his fully employed reconstructive rhetoric' by placing Dewey's inspiration into conversation with another important philosopher of the time, Bertrand Russell (75). What emerges is an approach to both the Indian independence movement and its caste system that emphasizes pragmatic *force*, insofar as it weds the 'hope for change and betterment to activities that can create change' (87). It is also rhetorical to the extent that Ambedkar is arguing that reconstruction of the society in which he lives can't be predicated on passivity or coercion, but on '*persuasive* force' that informs and directs individuals and the communities in which they live (101).

Chapter three, 'Reconstructive Rhetoric, Appropriation, and the Strategic Use of Reference', is mainly focused on a singular event: the discussion of *franchise*, or voting, whereby Ambedkar gave testimony to the Southborough Committee on January 27, 1919. Stroud argues that this is the first concrete example of his 'reconstructive pragmatist rhetoric being applied to a specific situation of caste-based social injustice' (104). What follows, then, is a detailed examination of how his testimony was both an explicit and implicit adoption of Deweyian concepts in service to his sociopolitical context. Stroud concludes this chapter with a seven-point detailing of what said theory would look like in practice.

If the first chapter provides the theoretical inspiration, and the second and third lay out the template for translating that into social action, then the next two chapters discuss what Ambedkar set out to do in his remaining years. 'Pragmatism, Reflection, and the Annihilation of Caste' provides the details of his work to dismantle the caste system and eventual break with Hinduism in the 1920s-30s. Of particular note is how Ambedkar once again takes a conceit of Dewey's—in this case, *reconstruction*—and molds it to fit his belief that 'all in society' should be respected in contradiction of 'tradition-based biases amongst caste systems' (141). Chapter five, 'Education, Force, and the Will to Convert', covers the last decades of his life, tracing how past instances and influences ultimately culminated in Ambedkar's 'advocacy of Buddhism as a replacement for Hindu habits of mind' (213). Throughout this process of advocacy on behalf of others, he is seen to be in conversation with the Deweyian ideas of the past, even when it brought him into conflict luminaries such as Ghandi. Moreover, his conversion was a rhetorical act of modeling for those to whom he appealed, a demonstration 'of self-reconstruction he was asking his followers to enact' (234).

Stroud provides 'The Vision of Ambedkar's Navayana Pragmatism' in the conclusion. In so doing, he stresses that Ambedkar's pragmatism is not Dewey's pragmatism; rather, it is a contextual instance of reception featuring aspects unique to the same. Further, his Navayana Buddhism is informed by both pragmatism and rhetoric. What, then, are the tentative themes Stroud sees at work? First, 'Human Nature is Contingent and Changeable' insofar as 'organisms and species have ways of changing and adapting' to their circumstances (239-40). Second, that

'The Whole Person Emerges Out of the Dialectic Between the Individual and the Collective', or that an 'individual's impulses and desires' are always in contact with the positive and negative constraints of 'some social or natural environment' (241-42). Third, 'Communication and Communicative Habits Matter' to the extent that 'the ideal of democracy encompassed a way of habitually interacting with others' (243-44). Fourth, that 'The Ideal Community is a Social Democracy' to the extent that they emphasized equality and flexibility and 'resisted a reified metaphysics' (245-46). Fifth, 'There is a Plurality of Means to Reach the End of Social Democracy' which stresses variation in method and resists approaches that '*force* or *coerce* individuals towards attitudes of fraternity' (259-60). Stroud ends by reemphasizing that these thematic strands, though animated by a 'distanced, but respectful, relationship to Dewey' (263), were Ambedkar's through and through.

The rhetorical aspects of this work deserve special mention. While it is clear this is an examination of Ambedkar's philosophy and philosophical influences, Stroud does substantial work integrating rhetorical analysis into the discussion. From the very start, he notes that traditional theoretical approaches to rhetoric, such as Donald C. Bryant's, can work alongside more contemporaneous extension to illuminate matters of philosophical import (14). Stroud also references his own previous rhetorical scholarship, particularly in chapter two. Much of this work is cashed out in the conclusion, where he details how Ambedkar's rhetorical approach was a reconstructive and *melioristic* one, predicated on taking theoretical approaches and applying them in concrete ways that impact 'actual individuals and communities' (238).

A review can't fully capture the nuance and detail involved in *The Evolution*. Thus, the critiques below are relatively minor when set against the scholarship already discussed. First, and given that this will be an introduction to Ambedkar for many, a more detailed index—and/or list of supplemental readings—might have proved useful in pointing readers to additional details that would help to frame their reading. Second, the discussion of *appropriation* as *reconstruction* in chapter three (120), while a lucid explanation of Ambedkar's method of advocacy, might strike some readers as a touch too defensive given what Stroud's own evidence suggests. Third, the fourth theme of social democracy in the conclusion reads as somewhat over-stuffed. The discussion of *fraternity* threatens to overwhelm the much more precise discussions of *equality* and *liberty*.

Stroud has built a career on thoughtfully attending to the points of contact between rhetoric and pragmatism. In *The Evolution*, he goes further. By bringing his rhetorical insights to bear in expanding the scope of pragmatism, Stroud offers a piece of scholarship that will be of interest to those who study philosophy and/or rhetoric generally and pragmaticism specifically. Moreover, by focusing on Ambedkar, he offers readers a chance to become acquainted with what the backmatter calls 'one of the most important figures in Indian history'.

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