

Alan Malachowski

The New Pragmatism.

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This book could easily serve as a template for scholars wishing to introduce a larger public, philosophical or otherwise, to the often dense and ever expanding catalog of works regarding pragmatism. Marrying the lucid and conversational merits of James with the vigor of F. C. S. Schiller, Malachowski succeeds more often than he fails in making the claim that there is something new in the New Pragmatism. While you might not agree with all he has to say, you will find yourself taking a second (and perhaps third) look at the authors and ideas Malachowski discusses.

The book, comprised primarily of six chapters, is an object lesson in brevity. It also includes a preface and conclusion, as well as a detailed index, well thought out chapter notes, and a short list of suggested readings relating to New Pragmatism. While the discussion never bogs down in minutiae, Malachowski also makes sure to not sacrifice clarity.

Malachowski's goal is apparent from the onset. In the preface he makes clear that New Pragmatism is distinct from classic, or traditional pragmatism, in two ways: it trades problematic talk of 'experience' for a focus on language; and it eschews any notion that there is 'such an epistemically sweet thing as scientific method' (ix). He is also careful to address the limits of his project. Malachowski goes to great lengths to explain that his goal is to introduce readers to the merits of New Pragmatism. Where some scholarly readers might wish for more technical and historical details, he notes they will end up frustrated. It is on this point, too, that his tone becomes clear. It is a tone in keeping with his understanding of New Pragmatism's strengths. Rather than deal in an excavation of all of classic pragmatism's battles and interlocutors, Malachowski's goal is to move New Pragmatism forward. Why? New Pragmatists 'do not believe philosophy is like inoculation. There is no need to inject readers with a dose of its problems in order for them to be able to avoid them in the future' (xi).

The first chapter, 'Introducing the New Pragmatism', continues this blend of concise and lively discussion. What are New Pragmatism's signal differences? Malachowski posits three: it has thrown off the overly American vestiges of its lineage, roaming across borders both national and disciplinary; it avoids the feedback loop of philosophical disputes about philosophy and instead focuses on the issues and ideas its proponents find compelling; and, by leaving behind historical disputes and quaint provincialism, it 'has become more attuned to the present-day ethos' (3). Which isn't to suggest that New Pragmatism completely disowns its heritage. In contrast to critics who claim that its practitioners are either selling out the historical benefits of its origins or

paradoxically denying them only to claim them as their own, Malachowski's response is decidedly Jamesian: disputes, philosophical or otherwise, 'are best tackled by trying to identify the respective practical consequences of the different viewpoints at stake and then making distinctions accordingly' (7). Simply put, New Pragmatism doesn't rehearse dated arguments that keep some proponents of traditional pragmatism trapped in amber.

The second chapter, 'Leaving Classic Pragmatism Behind', doesn't spare the originators. Peirce is faulted for writing in a manner that 'lacked the clarity and crispness that might have made his views more readily accessible to a wider audience' (19). James, while providing 'colorful and insightful ideas that remain fresh and instructive to this day' (20), opened himself up to the critics who found him more tender than tough. Dewey is faulted for being faulted, for being so quick to adopt the mantle of the scientific method that critics misread his actual explanation that it was but one amongst many methods to be considered (23).

Malachowski does, however, strike a conflicted pose regarding New Pragmatism's use of the triumvirate. While 'it leaves classic pragmatism behind' as regards engaging in petty squabbles, it 'continues to be motivated by the original example' of the same (29). Motivated in some very particular senses by some very specific advocates: Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam. The next three chapters frame the discussion so as to suggest that Putnam's philosophical attachments provide continuities with and extensions from pragmatism's past, while Rorty's forward-thinking insights are presented as the foundation upon which to build the New Pragmatism. Malachowski's *rhetoric*—though he uses the term in ways that suggest a mistaken sense of its meaning for those of us in Speech Communication or English—is not subtle, nor is it grating. The third chapter, 'Rorty Against the Tradition', frames the sage of New England as (almost) fully embracing the New Pragmatism project. Rorty avoided the pitfalls of the classic pragmatists by 'philosophizing in a new mode without looking back over his shoulder to see how the tradition was reacting' (45). In so doing, Rorty assumes a 'postanalytic' posture that avoids the traps of involving oneself in needless squabbles over endless puzzles of import to only the philosophers who choose to engage them (57). Rorty, in short, moves pragmatism *beyond* philosophy.

Consider, then, how Malachowski frames the fourth chapter, 'Putnam's Contributions'. Some of these contributions are trenchant, as when Putnam takes Russell to task for his misreading of James (66). Others are insightful, such as Putnam's focus on how exigence relates to Dewey's approach to ethics (74). All serve to promote New Pragmatism. But the fifth chapter, 'Putnam and Rorty: Pragmatism without Reconciliation', makes clear that the priority resides with the latter and not the former. Malachowski's discussion focuses on the debates between the two philosophers. And while he notes that there is no need for the two to agree, Malachowski implies that the future is with Rorty. Who, though providing spirited support for the New Pragmatist banner, nonetheless gave rise to mischaracterizations picked up by those who would continue to challenge pragmatism's philosophical legitimacy? Putnam. Who, after all is said and done, will provide New Pragmatism with 'new ways of saying philosophical things that are efficacious in practical terms and carry with them their own alternative

modes of imagistic and metaphorical attraction' (89)? Rorty. Though Malachowski goes to great lengths to show that the New Pragmatism is big enough to compass both scholars his rhetoric leans towards one more than the other.

The final chapter, 'Prospects', is curious. Malachowski argues that pragmatism 'has the best chance of flourishing if it makes further progress outside of philosophy' (100). So he lays out the six areas where New Pragmatism 'has been successful...or...is poised to achieve notable results' (101): literature, law, feminism, education, politics, and religion. Putting aside the fact that the book is meant to herald a new name for an old way of thinking, one is left noticing just how old these areas are in terms of pragmatic engagement. On this point, Malachowski is at least consistent. While Dewey is well known to have pushed education forward, Malachowski makes a persuasive case for expanding the range of influence to include the ideas of Rorty. He is also right to note that Rorty is to New Pragmatism what Cornel West was to (old) pragmatism: a clever integrator, one of those 'peripheral pragmatists' who add to the discussion and shade the implications of philosophy in general. But one is also left wondering: who are the new New Pragmatists? Though the book is introductory, reference to more than a handful of the trailblazers engaged in this productive venture would seem necessary.

If there are other criticisms to be leveled regarding Malachowski's engaging read, they are—pardon the pun—philosophical. They boil down to a simple question: is this really New Pragmatism or simply pragmatism as it has organically developed? The earliest of the pragmatists recognized that pragmatism was a revisable and evolving method for considering problems ranging from psychology to schooling, politics to purported prophets. As new materials were gained, new approaches would be developed. Granted, and as Malachowski rightly notes, not all the classic pragmatists were as capable of evolving as their proclamations suggested. But is it a Whiggish fallacy to suggest that they should be held to our understandings even as the New Pragmatists take and graft the best of what they offered? Again, Malachowski's case would seem stronger if he chose to reference more examples of New Pragmatists, or if he delved a bit deeper into the new variations of pragmatism found in works such as Dickstein's *The Revival of Pragmatism* (1998), which he only briefly mentions in his cursory list of suggested readings.

Thankfully, these criticisms are largely academic. The reason is simple. Malachowski raises issues, and raises them in such an energetic way, that they will engage defenders and critics of all the different variations of pragmatism. But he has done more. Malachowski has penned a book that promises to introduce *new* readers to pragmatism in a way that does justice to all the iterations he covers.

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