

some of its other parts (chs. 9–10) an impulse toward quick philosophical definitions that would presume authority where no philosopher should, or even really could, have it. The philosopher gains authority not by containing conceptuality in carefully caged definitions, but by proposing creative new concepts that mobilize in new ways the severe work of thought. (I admit that I here sound Deleuzian, but I would also insist that this thought is very much Peircean and Jamesian too). Burke's conception of operationalist pragmatism does just that. It is therefore a work from which all pragmatists can and, I would add most certainly should, learn.

Colin Koopman
University of Oregon
koopman@uoregon.edu



THOMAS M. ALEXANDER

The Human Eros: Eco-Ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence

New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. xii + 436 pp.

The Human Eros is an outstanding accomplishment, a work of genuine wisdom. It combines meticulous scholarship with an enviable mastery of cultural and philosophical history to address pressing concerns of human beings, nature, and philosophy itself. While comprised of essays spanning over two decades, the book presents a powerfully coherent philosophical vision which Alexander names, alternately, “eco-ontology,” “humanistic naturalism,” and “ecological humanism.” Whatever the name, the approach is humane and intellectually compelling, offering insight and direction to pragmatism, aesthetics, existentialism, environmental philosophy, and anyone in search of wisdom. It is an immensely readable book, too, leavening argument with down-home illustrations and providing the historico-cultural background necessary to transport readers into the alternative “spiritual ecologies” where important aesthetic stakes are at play. While much here is of direct interest to academic philosophers, this book nourishes anyone concerned to “care for their soul,” as Socrates might put it. *The Human Eros* speaks not just to individuals, but to any global citizen wishing to care for the planetary ecosystem and create “the basis for mutual understanding between diverse peoples in a world verging toward overpopulation” (53).

The book is comprised of an introduction, sixteen chapters organized into four major parts, and a brief but helpful bibliographic essay about incorporating Native American myth and philosophy into contemporary philosophical work. Part I, “Nature and Experience,” advances Alexander’s views on eco-ontology by contrasting John Dewey’s

conception of nature (and more generally, being) with Mādhyamika Buddhism and with Justus Buchler. It also delves into two pivotal claims by Dewey: (1) that knowing can only be understood as emerging from a larger, existential, domain of living, and (2) that his “method” of experience (the “denotative empirical method”) is not identical with the scientific method. (I expand on Alexander’s discussion of these claims below.) The essays which comprise Part II, “Eros and Imagination,” investigate the nature of imagination and education to correct neopragmatist misreadings by Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish, while championing imagination as both embodied and a precondition of reason (drawing upon the recent work of Mark Johnson). Understanding the work imagination does for meaning-seeking beings (“human eros”) clarifies why it is central to both ethics (in contrast to standard pragmatist and non-pragmatist ethics) and to the creation of a genuinely democratic culture (via the humanities). Part III, “Aesthetics of Existence,” examines various proposals for constructing meaning in life, including those by Dewey, George Santayana, and R. W. Emerson, along with examples from Chinese philosophy and Native American thought. Alexander does a superlative job analyzing and connecting the imaginative ways these different “wisdoms” can bind cultures together. Finally, Part IV, “Spirit and Philosophy,” examines the “general orientation of human existence to nature” (23) and contrasts the different approaches of Dewey and Santayana. In a powerful rejoinder to the prevailing consensus, Alexander offers an innovative argument for a renewed appreciation of the central place that “spirituality” and *A Common Faith* deserve in Dewey’s corpus.

While the book is long (429 pp.), chapters stand profitably on their own; the book’s larger vision is present in microcosm throughout. Separately and together, the chapters articulate what Alexander calls an “aesthetics of human existence,” one which carefully selects ideas from movements (“pragmatism,” “naturalism”), figures (Peirce, James Dewey, Emerson, Buchler, Santayana, Royce, Mead) and diverse traditions (especially Native American and Buddhist) to create a “philosophy of experience” where “experience” connotes something more akin to *culture*: a “shared, embodied, symbolic life, *the meaningful ways we inhabit the world*, and not as sensations, nerve stimulations, or brain events” (4). When philosophy self-consciously seeks to understand the nature and conditions capable of producing experience of this richer kind, it returns to its original quest for wisdom, a way of satisfying our “human eros” or drive to live meaningfully and purposefully.

The philosophy offered here, then, is akin to “aesthetics” in an older and sager sense. More comprehensive than either ethics or epistemology, this aesthetics (or eco-ontology) would discover how to make a beautiful life. That question requires investigations into human beings and their environment—both natural and cultural. While the cultural

arena is typically part of traditional aesthetics, for Alexander (and his heroes, such as Dewey), the usual cultural exemplars of beauty (events, rituals, symbols, and objects) must not be disconnected by analysis as separate *identities*—as special instances of forms or subjective capacities. Rather, we must understand them as integrated *continuities* with nature and culture. Inquiry into such continuities is the work of “philosophical anthropologists” (419) because it acknowledges how a rich, living context is productive of such meaningful events and (aesthetic) objects.

By and large, aestheticians and philosophers have forgotten this larger search for wisdom. Instead, philosophers have been drawn toward “philepistemy,” the love of knowledge and truth in a narrow, epistemic sense. The result has been a myopic privileging of science over art, language over experience, and cognitive knowing over imagination and feeling; moreover, Western philosophy has neglected the resources of other wisdom-traditions (banishing them as mere narratives or “myth” rather than logic and argument).

To correct these dualisms and discontinuities, Alexander revivifies and foregrounds the importance of imagination in philosophical analyses of human beings and their environments (both natural and cultural). While offering trenchant criticisms of approaches premised too rigidly on such dualisms (including some identified with neopragmatist, analytic, and continental traditions), Alexander does not engage in dialectical tit-for-tat; instead, his critiques contribute to larger, constructive purposes: “explorations of a wilderness” which construe “human intelligence as aesthetic and moral as well as cognitive,” set into an ontology of a nature that is “interactive, evolutionary, and non-reductionistically emergent” (95).

While the work will be noticed and read by many pragmatists, *Human Eros* aims to show how key ideas of Classical American figures must be pressed beyond conventional boxes. Typical categorizations of these figures (e.g. as “pragmatist”) perpetuate the false impression that their ambitions were mainly epistemic, and this stifles the fecundity of their ideas for new purposes:

For James and Dewey pragmatism was only part of a much larger, complex philosophy of experience. . . . [T]he *meaning* of existence is not limited to, much less co-extensive with, *knowledge*, not even knowledge that is “pragmatically” acquired. . . . Philosophy for Dewey was “love of wisdom” in the sense it had for the ancient Greeks: a path to a choice-worthy life. . . . This is a lesson that still needs to be learned by many now flocking to what glibly passes as “pragmatism.” (3, 4)

Space restricts me from limning *Human Eros*'s rich panoply of ideas, insights, illustrations, and stories, so I confine myself to highlighting three especially powerful and original points.

1. Dewey and Emerson.

Alexander provides a persuasive account of an intense linkage between Dewey and Emerson as philosophers of experience and democracy. Dewey famously called Emerson “the philosopher of Democracy,” but Alexander cements their connection profoundly. Emerson was, for Dewey, “the archetype” of the philosopher he hoped to become (386, 388). In “Qualitative Thought” (LW5) Dewey’s central claim, Alexander reminds us, is that “our conscious or cognitive processes, our instrumental reasonings, depend on a vast, submerged sense of our whole embodied comportment in a situation” (42). That comportment is, fundamentally, aesthetic: “Our experience is pervaded with a *sensed* texture of order, possibility, meaning, and anticipation. The world offers itself to us through our capacity to be lured into its aesthetic orders, which in turn become lived meanings” (139). Emerson, too, situated knowing in a wider field of experience, allowing him to argue for a *common* basis which the creation of ideals possible:

Emerson would restore to “the common man” the primacy of human experience and its capacity to embody ideals concretely. . . . What Dewey appropriates from Emerson is the significance of the prereflective but tacitly intelligent context out of which thought itself arises, upon which it depends and which it serves to illumine. That is, Emerson taught *faith* in ordinary experience . . . and the *duty* of thought to reveal and actualize those possibilities; thought follows from experience, not the other way. (42–3)

Today, Richard Rorty is well known for preferring “strong poets” over philosophers as “re-describers” of contemporary life; Alexander argues that Dewey (and Emerson) offered a less binary alternative. Dewey and Emerson endeavored to recover philosophy-as-*poiesis*—to fold its professionalizing vectors back into an earlier wisdom-incarnation. “The poet is at the heart of the philosopher,” Emerson taught Dewey (43) because “reason and intuition, philosopher and poet, are not ultimately opposed” (389). Emerson made possible Dewey’s admonition (mentioned earlier) that philosophers limit “the role of knowledge to make room for the ontological significance of meaning” (62).

2. Dewey’s Denotative Method and Wisdom.

The second point is distinct but closely connected to the first. Alexander’s account of Dewey’s denotative-empirical method acknowledges the standard philosophical purposes of his method, but also highlights the stark *challenge* Dewey made to philosophers to re-engage with inquiries germane to wisdom:

Dewey asks the reader to discern between “experience” as a philosophical concept and experience as it is lived, as “had” or “undergone”

and as “done.” . . . [He] wants to theorize about experience, but not in a way that allows the theory to hide experience on its pretheoretical level. The “denotative-empirical method” is given as a method of “disclosing” experience without transforming it into a mere theoretical object. (55)

Like Emerson in the “Divinity School Address,” Dewey is writing for philosophers *both* as philosophers and also as human beings—as embodiments of the human eros. Dewey wished to coax “highly theoretically oriented and conceptually clever thinkers to remember what it is to be alive” (56) and to remind them “that the world which is lived, suffered and enjoyed as well as logically thought of, has the last word in all human inquiries and surmises” (56, 59; latter quoted from Dewey, LW1:372). His denotative method (despite its technical name) is “a method for aesthetic receptivity and openness” and an “art of remembering the world” (59, 61).

3. *The Role of Spirituality in Dewey and Philosophy.*

Finally, mention must be made of Alexander’s interpretation of “spirituality” and the importance this idea has—for Dewey (*qua* philosopher and *qua* person), for pragmatism, and for philosophy. Consonant with the rest of this book, this spirituality would connect human beings not to a transcendent realm or god, but to other persons, the living world, and to *possibilities* rooted in the actual. Such possibilities are key, and they may be given shape and concreteness through imagination and action: “If spirituality has to do with the way we are capable of being related to something with reverence, a spirituality of nature may be essential in our being willing to care for it. Philosophy needs to be part of that impending issue as well as to maintain the widest and deepest awareness of ‘experience’” (353). Dewey’s *A Common Faith* is a much underestimated book, Alexander argues, unfairly downplayed as an application of instrumentalism to religiosity, an analysis of yet another type of experience, a palliative for liberals alienated from traditional religion (but still craving *something* religious), or even another religion substituting democratic values for religious ones. None of these suggestions work. Instead, *A Common Faith* is “a key to Dewey’s philosophy as a whole” insofar as “it stresses the importance of a type of spirituality primarily oriented toward possibility rather than actuality” (354). Dewey’s talk of the “religious” is better understood *not* as a “quality of experience” but rather as an attitude or orientation to “possibility as a fundamental feature of existence” (356). Put another way, we *live* differently in a world that one considers fundamentally “possible” or fundamentally “actualized.” If one orients toward a world understood as radically determinate (made by, say, God) one’s whole self *lives* accordingly—by finding their place, submitting to and fulfilling their role,

etc. If one orients toward a world imbued with “possibility as such,” then one becomes a different sort of self—one who must remain *open* to the qualitative richness and creative opportunities experience might yield. This is, if you like, the problem of every artist facing a blank page or canvas. Like the artist, the spiritual seeker of meaning requires courage to draw from the world materials needed to actively fashion meanings and ideals, accepting existential risk with “courage and resoluteness, but also humility, compassion and a certain ‘tragic wisdom’ about our own finitude. This is what Dewey means by the phrase ‘natural piety’” (359).

David L. Hildebrand
University of Colorado Denver
hilde123@gmail.com



JEREMY CARRETTE

**William James’s Hidden Religious Imagination:
A Universe of Relations**

New York / London, Routledge, 2013, xxii + 235 pp. Index.

Jeremy Carrette is one of the most interesting contemporary scholars writing on James’s philosophy of religious experience. In the present volume the author expands and deepens the scope of his previous researches by investigating the epistemological and metaphysical dimensions of James’s work on religion. The resulting interpretation is an sophisticated and ambitious one: Carrette argues that most accounts of James’s writings on religion—and of his thought as a whole—have been vitiated by a “disciplinary closure” which conceals James’s unbroken effort to “sustain a conversation *across* the disciplinary spaces of philosophy, psychology and the study of religion” (xi). Contrary to this approach, Carrette claims how “a different relational imagination, one established with post-structural antennae, can shift the priorities in reading James on religion and hear a different voice. It can *notice* something previously marginalized or hidden” (15). According to Carrette, this interpretative shift would in fact allow us to appreciate the most distinctive and radical dimension of James’s pluralistic and functional approach to reflective thinking, driven by “*an open attitude to knowledge*, against what [James] sees as a series of *closed attitudes to knowledge*” (23).

Carrette lists a set of very ambitious aims for his book and identifies the success of his reconstructive efforts with the ability to “achieve the richness of James’s reading of religion, break some of the disciplinary constraints in previous readings, and show the dynamic and relational quality of knowledge behind James’s thinking” (xvii). The purpose of

Copyright of Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society is the property of Indiana University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.