

# Resenha

## *Book Review*

ANDERSON, Douglas R. and HAUSMAN, Carl R. *Conversations on Peirce: Reals and Ideals*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012, 256 pp. [Conversas sobre Peirce: Reais e Ideais.]

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Philosophy needs more conversations – real ones where both parties hear, listen, and carefully respond – and fewer arguments and monologues. In *Conversations on Peirce*, Douglas Anderson and Carl Hausman explore the unique possibilities that emerge in philosophical dialogue, and it is, at least indirectly, a powerful reminder about where American philosophy came from and a suggestion about where it might go next.

Classical American philosophy did not arise in a series of disjointed essays or books, but was founded in sustained and thoughtful conversation. In the 1840's, Margaret Fuller organized her semi-formal philosophical meetings at Elizabeth Peabody's West Street Bookstore in Boston. In 1855, the Saturday Club was established just around the block at the Parker House, and it is here where Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry James, and Benjamin Peirce would spend a monthly evening out. The more famous Metaphysical Club was founded in 1872 as the attempt of William James and Charles Sanders Peirce to extend the philosophical conversation initiated by their fathers. In many cases, teachers and students would come together at these meetings to discuss their philosophical differences and, interestingly, emerge from these discussions as fellow travelers. This is the case with Anderson and Hausman, who began their conversation on Peirce when Anderson was still Hausman's student. Anderson, in turn, invited his own students, Peter Groff (Chapter 1) and Michael Levine (Chapter 8 and Addendum), to join the discussion. At the end of the Preface, Anderson invites "readers to join the conversation we have enjoyed for the last twenty-five years." It is, for a number of reasons, one worth joining.

The book is divided into the three "Conversations." The first addresses Peirce's attempt to straddle and rework the realism-idealism divide (Chapter 1-5). These chapters carefully negotiate (and perhaps put to rest) large parts of a longstanding debate in contemporary Peirce scholarship. The second focuses on the relationship between perception and Peircean inquiry (Chapters 6-8). This conversation will be particularly valuable to readers who wish to acquaint themselves with Peirce's theory of inquiry. The final conversation (Chapters 9-12) turns to the way that Peirce's philosophy, described in the opening chapters, sheds light on cultural issues and practices, particularly those that bear on religion and nature. These closing chapters

are accessible to non-specialist readers, and, as such, serve as an example of how to write in the Peircean grain for a broader audience.

Certain ideas are particularly well-suited for conversation. More pointedly, some ideas can *only* be expressed accurately in dialogue. One of these may be the idea that Peirce was both an idealist and, simultaneously, a realist of a certain stripe. At different points in their *Conversations on Peirce*, Hausman and Anderson place different emphases on these two aspects of Peirce's thought, but, like good conversationalists, do so without overwhelming alternative explanations. Anderson tends to underscore the idealism of Peirce's thought while Hausman extends the realist interpretation that he articulated in *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy* (a book published in 1993 that deserves the additional attention it is given in *Conversations*). What we get through their interaction is not a description of Peirce's "divided-self" but a deeper understanding of the way in which idealism and realism stand in live and productive tension within Peirce's corpus.

Hausman and Anderson, therefore, refuse to engage in an either-or debate. They show us that today's arguments over the status of reals and ideals in Peirce's thought should not be settled definitively with a clear winner or loser. If they *are* settled in this fashion, it will be American philosophy that is the real loser. Indeed, this is the type of realization that Peirce himself offers his reader repeatedly – first in regard to the nominalism-realism debate that was initiated by the ancients and carried on through to Roscelin to Abelard (35), and then in terms of a similar (if not identical) debate that raged at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century about the "true" definition of pragmatism.

As Anderson explains in Chapter 2, Peirce's attempt to maintain different strands of idealism and realism led him to take up a philosophical position between Josiah Royce's "absolute pragmatism" and John Dewey's "Chicago School." Peirce shared with Royce the belief in the reality of generals, and with Dewey the belief that this generality must account for contingency and possibility. Interestingly, he shared affinities with both of these thinkers, thinkers who had extremely little love for one another. How was Peirce able to maintain this mediating position between antagonistic parties? Anderson explains that for Peirce,

Pragmatism as a method of thinking is a general class that is produced naturally and historically. As such, it takes on a life of its own. It embodies real generality precisely because it is able to hold together such different thinkers as Royce and Dewey. It acknowledges real possibility just insofar as pragmatism remains open to growth and development in the future. In short, Peirce in his very defining of pragmatism revealed his commitment to both real generality and real possibility. (23).

This is a revealing insight about how to read Peirce, but like many of the points that Anderson and Hausman make, it is also a useful suggestion about how contemporary American pragmatism might come to view itself.

These suggestions are made more explicit as Anderson and Hausman take on the neo-pragmatic interpretations of Peirce that have gained increasing visibility in recent years. Both authors take issue with Joseph Margolis's reading of Peirce's realism. They argue that Margolis focuses on Peirce's external realism ("the view that inquiry

is directed toward a structured system of laws that is real in the sense of existing apart from mental processes”(45)) but in so doing Margolis pointedly overlooks the “cosmic realism” with respect to Peirce’s “conception of the evolutionary structure of the universe” (45). This avoidance of Peirce positions on the “dynamical object” and continuity is Margolis’s attempt to obviate many of the pitfalls of traditional metaphysics. According to Hausman and Anderson, “Margolis and many constructivists presumably believe that they have avoided (them). However, in assuming their purity, they ignore their own myths” (56). Constructivists have adopted a particular angle of vision, a specifically antimetaphysical one, that they assume is universally correct, thereby repeating the problems of traditional metaphysics that they have tried so desperately to overcome.

If Margolis neglects one side of Peirce’s realism, Richard Rorty is to be blamed for dismissing it on the whole. This is the thesis that Anderson presents in the fourth chapter of *Conversations*. Rorty was famously dismissive of Peirce, stating that Peirce’s “contribution to pragmatism...was merely to have given it a name, and to have stimulated James” (68). Unfortunately – for the history of pragmatism – Rorty preferred to emphasize the nominalism of James and Dewey and downplay the realism that both of them had inherited in one form or another from Peirce. Interestingly, this nominalism (the sort that Rorty endorsed) is precisely the aspect of pragmatism that Peirce was most wary of. Anderson outlines this point in detail, one that should give contemporary pragmatists a bit to think about as they trace their philosophical inheritance back to Rorty.

The second set of conversations opens with Hausman’s description of the role of the “dynamical object” in Peirce’s realism. This may be the most important chapter in the book. Those familiar with Hausman’s *Evolutionary Philosophy* know that the densest sections are the most worthwhile and that many of these sections bear directly on the function of the dynamical object in Peirce’s thought. In chapter five of the *Conversations*, Hausman distills, in a very clear fashion, five ways of understanding the overlapping functions of the dynamical object. And argues that an integration of the fourth and fifth interpretations of the dynamical object are the most promising. The fourth interpretation of the dynamical object holds that the dynamical object must be regarded as “effective within particular experience” (what Peirce calls the real object) (88). The fifth suggests that the dynamical object is the “teleological condition toward which all interpretation or inquiry is headed.” (93) The conclusion of this chapter is fertile ground for the next generation of Peirce scholars to explore.

The sixth and seventh chapters focus on Peircean inquiry and would serve nicely for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in acquainting them with two often overlooked aspects of Peirce’s theory of knowledge: the role of perception and that of interpretation. The first of these chapters explains the way that a type of immediate perception (akin to James’s) is related to the conditions that limit semeiotic processes (100). In the following chapter, Hausman draws a reader’s attention to exactly how “dynamical objects and thus percepts manage to act so that they are effective in interpretations” (130). In Chapter Eight, Anderson talks things through with Michael Rovine in order to contrast Peirce’s realism with the nominalism of Karl Pearson, the British mathematician and philosopher of science. The implication is clear that the debate between constructivists (nominalists) and realists that defines contemporary debates in American philosophy covers much of the same ground that

Peirce traversed at the turn of the century. Only a little historical legwork is required to realize this fact. A reader might wish that the addendum (which also addresses the work of Peirce and Pearson, this time in regard to statistics) to be integrated into this valuable chapter.

The final set of conversations takes what may, at first, look like an unexpected turn – into the pragmatic importance of Peirce’s religious writing. Upon reflection, however, a reader should not be surprised. Anderson and Hausman have long held that coming to grips with Peirce’s metaphysical position (that was shot through by the religious culture of his upbringing) is vital to accurately describing his strain of pragmatism, in all of its concreteness. Religion, for Peirce, “is not a momentary madness, but a deeply habitual feature of Peirce’s outlook on life” (150). Religious belief, the belief in the reality of God and in the creative force of love (agape), was useful, indeed vital, for guiding action (157). More specifically, Hausman and Anderson suggest in Chapter Ten and Eleven that Peirce’s description of agape, operative in his speculative cosmology, provides a useful framework for understanding human creativity, specifically how artists participate in creation without dominating their works of art. This is an extension of Anderson’s recent work with Michael Ventimiglia in *Philosophy Americana* (2006) and both of his earlier books on Peirce’s philosophy.

In the final chapter of *Conversations on Peirce*, Anderson warns against what might be the single greatest threat to meaningful conversation: the rise of fundamentalism. Peirce objects to the “unscientificness of fundamentalism” and by extension, to the exclusively narrow-minded communities that support it. Fundamentalism works against the force of evolutionary love and severely constrains the possibilities that it might afford. Fundamentalism is an intellectual illness to which philosophers are supposed to be immune. Indeed, they are supposed to be inoculated against it at an early age. If this is the case we should hope for – nay, expect – more fruitful conversations like the one that Anderson and Hausman have given us.

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