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Christopher Hookway, *The Pragmatic Maxim: Essays on Peirce and Pragmatism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. x+245 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-958838-1. Cloth, US \$76.00; €57,80; £40.00.

Reviewed by Dale Jacquette

## **Review: *The Pragmatic Maxim: Essays on Peirce and Pragmatism*, by Christopher Hookway**

Dale Jacquette

This is an excellent collection of eleven historical-philosophical studies of the philosophy of Charles Saunders Peirce. Christopher Hookway, with the large corpus of Peirce's writings at his fingertips, looks carefully both into what Peirce actually says about an interesting choice of topics, and whether what Peirce says is reasonable and instructive. I learned an enormous amount from Hookway's book about the development of Peirce's thought, from the earliest writings through the later published works, manuscripts, lectures and correspondence. Hookway's writing is clear and exact, and his thinking rigorous. He asks the kinds of questions a reader should also want to know about how several lines of thinking came together historically in Peirce's pragmatism-pragmaticism, especially in his theory of signs or *semeiotic*, and in his logic and epistemology of knowledge-ampliative abductive inference. Hookway does not settle for quick answers or let Peirce off too easily when explanatory difficulties prevail, but wants to understand how every piece fits together.

Hookway's collection spans fifteen years of active research on Peirce's pragmatism, and his understanding of Peirce is nourished by serious study of such satellite figures as William James and John Dewey, and their contemporaries, intellectual precursors and followers, along with more recent and contemporary philosophical pragmatists. Hookway is comfortable with many fields and figures in the history of philosophy, making the book rewarding at

several levels, and good reading for educated non-specialists as well as experts on Peirce and American pragmatism. The more so as Hookway's lucid, individually self-contained and intelligently organized papers on Peirce and pragmatism read easily from topic to topic, continuously from first essay to last, reflecting the continuity of Hookway's decade-plus investigations of what he variously calls Peirce's pragmatic or pragmatist maxim or maxim of pragmatism. One of the pleasures of the text is that the articles as Hookway presents them can be read almost seamlessly, as much like the chapters in a single well-conceived book as distinct essays written over some years on an expanding progression of philosophical interests in Peirce scholarship.

The pragmatic maxim is the thesis Hookway attributes to Peirce, as a way of understanding certain of his texts, that 'any meaningful proposition is potentially action guiding' (225). This makes it somewhat confusing that Hookway, despite the book's title, almost never uses the exact phrase 'pragmatic maxim' in discussing Peirce's philosophy. The terms Hookway generally seems to prefer are 'pragmatist maxim' or 'maxim of pragmatism'. The only major exceptions are, again, the book's title, and footnote 2 on page 166. As the table of contents reproduced below reveals, Hookway during the course of writing even the new and previously unpublished essays 4 and 11 seems to have preferred the terms 'pragmatist maxim' and 'maxim of pragmatism' to 'pragmatic maxim'. The meaning of the latter phrase is arguably inapposite for Hookway's purpose in the essays anyway, because it suggests a maxim adopted purely for expediency sake, rather than for the furtherance of a pragmatist or pragmaticist philosophy. The confusion is minor, but has the reader wondering whether there might not be a technical difference between the meanings of these

terms, which in a book like this is an unnecessary distraction from an already demanding subject matter.

Of course, there is much to do if you consider 'any meaningful proposition' to be 'potentially action guiding'. What is an action? In what sense can a proposition guide anything? What is it for a proposition to guide action? What is it for a proposition to potentially guide action? If reason alone rather than emotions or the will listens to the asserted content of propositions, then what is it for reason aided by propositional information to guide action? The very concept of guiding action calls for a deeper analysis than Peirce seems to have ventured anywhere. The trouble is that even in ordinary usage the words 'guide' and 'guiding' are used in several different and slightly incompatible ways. We speak of being guided between external limits, like the narrow guide-rails intended as a walkway for cattle, and of being guided by intelligence and experience in finding our way forward by making good choices in the acquisition and use of resources to meet our needs and desires.

Hookway's compilation of essays on Peirce addresses some of these major issues centering around the maxim of pragmatism. The contents of the book include: Introduction: The Pragmatist Maxim, the Method of Science, and Representation; 1. Peirce and Scepticism; 2. Fallibilism and the Aim of Inquiry; 3. Truth, Reality, and Convergence; 4. Interrogatives and Uncontrollable Abductions; 5. Normative Logic and Psychology: Peirce's Rejection of Psychologism; 6. 'The Form of a Relation': Peirce and Mathematical Structuralism; 7. 'A Sort of Composite Photograph': Pragmatism, Ideas, and Schematism; 8. Pragmatism and the Given: C.I. Lewis, Quine, and Peirce; 9. The Principle of Pragmatism: Peirce's Formulations and Examples; 10. Logical Principles and Philo-

sophical Attitudes: Peirce's Response to James's Pragmatism; 11. How Peirce Argued for his Pragmatist Maxim. The essays are followed by a Bibliography and Index, and preceded by a note on Texts and Abbreviations. Essays 4 and 11 are previously unpublished, whereas the others have appeared in books and journals, the earliest beginning in 1997. We see especially in the opening suite of essays Hookway's emphasis on Peirce's epistemology and metaphysics of truth and reality as in Immanuel Kant's sense-regulative concepts.

Peirce is well-known and highly regarded as a premier American Brown Decades logician and pragmatist philosopher of science. Although Peirce might agree with this as describing an important emphasis in his philosophy, he undoubtedly considers these aspects of his thought to be complemented also by and integrated into a more comprehensive conceptual, cognitive, moral, and metaphysical system. Hookway succeeds at identifying interesting central and seldom discussed themes and problems in the whole diverse body of Peirce's writings over three decades, and in skillfully knitting these together into an absorbing narrative that maintains contact with Peirce's holistic integrated system-building thought as it developed. Hookway poses difficult questions in each of Peirce's texts he examines, and tracks down relevant replies that Peirce elsewhere gives or might have given, reasonably, consistently and strategically, according to Hookway's interpretation of the general framework of pragmatism Peirce sought to promote. Hookway's substantial bibliography includes many books and articles by himself and others on these topics, and the present collection, although it certainly stands on its own, nicely complements Hookway's (2000) *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism:*

*Themes from Peirce*, where essential background matters are also introduced.

There is an admirable economy of expression in much of what Hookway has to say in proceeding through Peirce's fallibilistic pragmatic epistemology, the regulative concept of truth in the teleology of an ideal community of scientific inquirers, Peirce's affinity for a structuralist but anti-nominalist metaphysics of mathematics, anti-psychologism in the formal sciences, logic and mathematics, the role of Peirce's own existential graphs in defense of what Hookway calls the pragmatic (pragmatist) maxim, and three-level Peircean semeiotic, firstness, secondness, and thirdness, the dynamical object, and the utility of abductive reasoning. Here is just one example that typifies Hookway's elegant style. In distinguishing between William James's pragmatism and Peirce's retaliatorily renamed pragmaticism, Hookway writes: 'Peirce saw his pragmatism as part of a philosophical system which was realist in its orientation and grounded philosophy in a system of categories; James embraced his pragmatism as a means of overcoming this conception of philosophy' (185). The idea is beautifully put and rich in further resonances. It makes the reader wonder next why it should be that pragmatism can be quite so flexible a way of doing philosophy that it serves both the desire to construct a correct philosophical system and the contrary desire to repudiate and abjure the very idea of a philosophical system altogether.

Peirce's multiple references to composite photographs as a metaphor for the mind's cognitive and conceptual capabilities are investigated in one of the book's most interesting and original essays. The idea in the early days of photographic technology was for negatives with different images to be overlaid in the printing process to produce a single image composed of the two originals.

Hookway discusses Peirce's intriguing analogy at length in connection with the descriptive psychology of cognition, the nature of general concepts in their relation to experience, and the metaphysics of abstract ideas and Peircean 'dynamical objects'. Hookway's impeccable sense of under-represented themes in the secondary philosophical and historical expository literature on Peirce is here much in evidence. Hookway finds new and creative insights into Peirce's philosophy as a whole, built upon a now dated metaphor that Peirce exploits for its unique explanatory advantages in connection with Kant's category of 'schematism' in the imagination's application of abstract *a priori* principles to concrete intuited situations in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787). Hookway's discussions of Peirce's skeptical epistemology in relation to other thinkers of his day and more contemporary trends in pragmatic philosophy, the norms of inquiry in Peirce, his regulative asymptotic concept of truth, abductive reasoning, stark anti-psychologism, as opposed to Dewey's quixotic efforts at achieving a rapprochement between logic and psychology, structuralist philosophy of mathematics, pragmatism and the given in early recent American pragmatism beginning with William James at Harvard University, and Peirce's developing strategies for defending the basic underlying principle of pragmatism in the pragmatic or pragmatist maxim, shed an interesting light on Peirce's philosophy as it took shape against the background of purposes, historical influences, and, most importantly, throughout, the new problems arising from each distinction and each application with which Peirce experimented in trying to make his ideas clear. Hookway has a refined grasp of the dialectic involved in the progression of Peirce's pragmatism and pragmaticism, the exact boundaries of which might be better clarified and sign-posted in the text, by which Peirce hoped to dis-

tinguish his more scientific philosophy from James's more psychological and humanistic use of the term 'pragmatism'.

There are nevertheless topics touched on in Hookway's essays that I would like to see followed up in more detail. Including Peirce's anti-psychologism. That Peirce is anti-psychologistic cannot be doubted, especially after Hookway's presentation of the concrete evidence from Peirce's writings. What causes doubt thereafter is only the fact that in explaining Peirce's category of ultimate interpretants, Hookway states: 'And my inferences of logical concepts (the conditional, conjunction, disjunction, etc.) may be displayed by the inferences I accept and those that I reject. A capacity to endorse steps of *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* is inseparable from an understanding of conditionals and negation' (229). On the following page, Peirce's concept of the *logica utens* is introduced. 'This *logica utens*,' Hookway continues, 'is the product of experience rather than something learned from the '*logica docens*' produced by theorists' (230).

The dilemma for Peirce, for which in Hookway there seems no hint of a solution or even recognition of the problem, is that if the pragmatic or pragmatist maxim is correct, then *logica docens* depends on *logica utens* as the experiential basis from which its theoretical principles are to be abstracted. A pragmatist methodology does not expect to develop theory, and in this case a grasp of correct logical reasoning, independently of experience. Abstract theory is parasitic on the practical utility of applied principles, against the consequences of which theory is repeatedly tested and against which it is improved and refined. Where matters of practical utility are concerned, we cannot disengage practice, purpose, satisfaction, effort, energy, will, intention, and all that goes into the actual using of a meaningful proposition to guide the conduct of

action, all of which factors are distinctively psychological. We have no available thirdness for theory-building in Peirce without rigorously conducted perception and experiment, which is why the category of general concepts or universals is named thirdness in Peirce's epistemology, and why secondness and thirdness are said to depend on firstness. If all theoretical knowledge relies for its ultimate interpretants on experience, on firstness, as Hookway frequently acknowledges, then in some sense this must include also knowledge of the principles of logic.

In explaining the relation of the formal to the natural sciences Peirce flirts with a variety of possible answers to this thorny problem, but I personally do not see any clear way out of the thicket for his pragmatist philosophy of logic and structuralist mathematics. Hookway alludes to some of these problems only indirectly, but his mention of Peirce's concept of logical interpretants is brief, and has another focus and direction altogether, in its concern to find a strategy involving Peirce's view of logical interpretants in support of the pragmatic or pragmatist maxim. If my sense is right, then Peirce's logical interpretations presuppose the pragmatic or pragmatist maxim, and hence cannot be invoked as an argument in support of the principle. Moreover, I fail to see how any adequate experiential basis in *logica utens* can be found for *logica docens* that does not fall afoul of Peirce's official emphatic denunciations of psychologism. Such themes as these I should have also liked to see Hookway take under his scrutiny and consider in greater depth and detail.

Peirce's concept of a pragmatic or pragmatist maxim as Hookway identifies it is also not as straightforward as it may at first appear. It is easy then to cast doubt on the question of whether Peirce ever accepted the thesis in anything like the form

Hookway presents, or whether such a pragmatic or pragmatist maxim should finally be charitably attributed to Peirce. We may grant that any meaningful proposition is potentially action guiding. The maxim, like other maxims conditional in form, does not logically imply that only meaningful propositions are potentially action guiding. Explicitly, all we have in the maxim is the conditional proposition that *if* a proposition is meaningful, *then* it is potentially action guiding. This eliminates as meaningless any propositions that are not potentially action guiding, but might in principle allow that there are meaningless 'propositions', or anyway strings of words purporting to express propositions, that could also be potentially action guiding. Consider that if a friend starts babbling absolute nonsense, Green ideas sleep furiously, and Socrates is identical, it is likely to guide one's immediately future action rather definitely with respect to that person. Would we not all try at once to get the disoriented individual some proper professional help? One would have liked also to see more engagement with anticipated criticisms of the pragmatic or pragmatist maxim or maxim of pragmatism, since there seem to be such obvious pedestrian objections to its adequate formulation. One assumes Hookway has answers, but he does not consider them here.

If both meaningful and meaningless word-strings, to use the most neutral terminology for what may or may not turn out to be sentences expressing propositions, are potentially action guiding, then it would appear that any and every word-string is potentially action guiding, whereby the pragmatic or pragmatist maxim reduces logically and semantically to the uninteresting assertion that all word-strings are potentially action guiding. The conclusion seems right, as far as it goes. The trouble is that it also has what for Hookway would presumably be the unwelcome result of making

the maxim theoretically trivial, since it is true anyway on independent grounds that word-strings among other ambient factors are involved in causal interaction with agents when they are exposed to spoken and written language use, where any causal input to an agent is potentially action guiding in the relevant sense of producing a distinctive behaviorally coordinated output within the causal nexus. It is the behavioral output from exposure to language inscriptions or vocalizations, meaningful or otherwise, that lends itself naturally to being interpreted as guiding an agent's action in one way rather than another, due to causal interaction with, indifferently, meaningful or entirely meaningless language use. As general categories, to say nothing of frequency in actual occurrence, the distinction between meaningful and meaningless language, accordingly, does not seem logically relevant to the concept of being potentially action guiding. The concept is too spongy. For all that we are told, anything and everything could be potentially action guiding. A reader would like to know more exactly what being potentially action guiding includes and what it excludes. Otherwise it functions explanatorily only as an emblematic pragmatist talisman.

Hookway in these essays exemplifies enviable standards of historical and critical philosophical exposition. Peirce is often deceptively most complex when he appears the most readily understandable, and there are always further layers of only partly transparent meaning in his arguments, pronouncements and introductions of technical neologisms. Hookway is concerned on every page to explain what Peirce is trying to accomplish, and why he would have reached the apparently inexplicable conclusions he advances. For anyone interested in the concept of knowledge, Hookway makes Peirce's epistemology, philosophy of science and

methodology of inquiry come alive. Along with the significance of Peirce's logic of existential graphs, philosophy of logic and structuralist metaphysics of mathematics, composite photographic metaphor for general conceptualizations, and unswerving commitment to the pragmatic or pragmatist maxim, anti-psychologism, and many other aspects of Peirce's pragmatism, Hookway motivates interest in Peirce's ideas as worth knowing and thinking more about, while painting a detailed canvas of selected main aspects of Peirce's pragmatic-pragmaticist philosophy.

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