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**Sandra B. Rosenthal**. *C. I. Lewis in Focus: The Pulse of Pragmatism.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. xii + 184 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21895-7.

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The Historical Record and C. I. Lewis: A Work In Progress

In *C. I. Lewis in Focus*, Sandra B. Rosenthal reminds us that the underappreciated and somewhat forgotten pragmatist philosopher Clarence Irving (C. I.) Lewis was born 125 years ago in 1883 and died in 1963. According to Rosenthal, Lewis studied at Harvard under the new realist proponent Ralph Barton Perry, and after earning a doctorate in 1910, he taught at Harvard from 1920 until retirement in 1953. His noteworthy publications include *Survey of Symbolic Logic* (1918), *Mind and the World Order* (1929), *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (1946), *The Ground and Nature of Right* (1955), and *Our Social Inheritance* (1957).

This is about as historical as Rosenthal gets in her philosophical reassessment of Lewis's work. I do not mean to imply, however, that her work should not be of interest to historians. Lewis is a relatively neglected figure in the historical record of pragmatism and early twentieth-century philosophy in general. The reasons for his less-than-prominent stature are not readily apparent. It might be explained by the fact that he is not mentioned in foundational accounts such as Frederick Copleston's *A History of Philosophy* series (1946-74) and Lewis Perry's *Intellectual Life in America: A History* (1984). But more recent works also generally ignore Lewis. Two essays by Hilary Putnam and Alexander Nehamas, published in Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske's 1997 edited collection *American Academic Culture in Transformation*, mention Lewis only once. Putnam and Nehamas additionally demonstrate Lewis's lack of influence among professional philosophers in the last half of the twentieth century.[1] Lewis also fell outside the chronological boundaries of Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (2001). Despite holding philosophical views that were quite friendly to history (see below) and negotiating sticky objectivity-subjectivity issues, Lewis earned only brief mention in Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (1988).

However, Lewis does not escape the attention of all late twentieth-century philosophers and historians. In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), another Harvard philosopher, John Rawls, found use in Lewis's *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* when trying to explain classical utilitarianism's relation to his own thinking on justice.[2] Bruce Kuklick, in *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (2001), devotes a fair amount of attention to Lewis. Calling Lewis "the most capable and influential American thinker of the inter-war period," Kuklick attempts to position him between idealist and realist thought–although favoring the realist side (discussed between Arthur O. Lovejoy and Wilfrid Sellars in Kuklick's history).[3] Kuklick acknowledges the strong influences of Immanuel Kant, Josiah Royce, Perry, Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead, and Charles Sanders Peirce during Lewis's growth as a philosopher and Harvard professor. Kuklick labels Lewis a neo-pragmatist for his development of the "pragmatic a priori."[4] It was that and his analysis of "the given" that dominate Kuklick's explanation of Lewis's contribution to philosophy.[5] *Mind and the World Order* served as Lewis's most important text for Kuklick.

This brings us back to *C. I. Lewis in Focus*. Rosenthal's work provides a richer view of Lewis's development and philosophy than the studies by scholars mentioned above. Using a wider range of primary (published) sources, Rosenthal situates Lewis's "distinctively pragmatic vision" between "Royce's idealism and [Ralph Barton] Perry's realism"–even though Lewis's philosophy "negates or undercuts the very dichotomy between idealism and realism" (p. 13). The more explicit recognition of Perry's influence separates Rosenthal's and Kuklick's recounting of Lewis's development. But, since Rosenthal's work is focused on Lewis's philosophy rather than on how he got there, historical development is still less important to her work than explanation. She is not concerned with how context, whether social or familial, fac-

tored into the development, for instance, of Lewis's ethical dimension. Rosenthal wants us to understand why Lewis's philosophy matters, why it transcends his time.

There is a reason why *explanations* dominate studies of Lewis: his influences were varied and complex, and his texts were dense. Clearly, Lewis considered his primary audience to be other philosophers. Rosenthal attempts to sort his ideas out by synthesizing a multiplicity of his writings under her own meta-categories, signaled by the book's chapter headings: "Rational Certitude and Pragmatic Experimentalism," "Empirical Certitude and Pragmatic Fallibilism," "Through Experience to Metaphysics," "The Process of Valuation," and "Morality and Sociality: An Evolving Enterprise." Rosenthal's goal is to catalogue the "systematic significance and interrelatedness" of Lewis's thought (p. 24).

She prospers somewhat in this effort. Rosenthal helped me to appreciate Lewis's work by finding a middle ground between John Dewey's instrumentalism, Ralph Barton Perry's realism, Josiah Royce's idealism, and Immanuel Kant's various philosophical contributions. My direct exposure to Lewis prior to this review was clearly minimal (based on my citations above). Nevertheless, Rosenthal successfully introduces the reader to Lewis's vocabulary and major ideas.

I found her final chapter, "Morality and Sociality," to be quite rewarding. Rosenthal's hard work throughout the text reaps rewards for long stretches in her discussion of Lewis's ethics. The following serves as a demonstration of both her synthesis and writing style: "What cements Lewis's position as a thoroughgoing pragmatic naturalism is that the roots of what we call rationality are to be found in the consistency required to engage the world in which we live. …The rule-guided action it sanctions is ground-up, not top-down…. And, just as the a priori arises from past experience but is held legislative for future experience, so the rules of rightness arise from the interactions of past experience and prescribe ways of acting in the future. Neither are absolutes handed down from on high…. These rules cannot be true or false, but rather, like the a priori in general, they issue constraints on our decisions, actions, or interpretations while held, but may be rejected if experience shows them to be ill suited in the furtherance of human knowledge and the enrichment of human existence…. The imperative of consistency, 'Be Consistent,' is the first imperative of action" (pp. 151-152). The rest of the chapter explains Lewis's social ethic in relation to logic ("the critique of consistency"), "prudential and moral imperatives" (i.e., justice), equality, consequences, freedom, and community (pp. 153-164).

History itself is also an object of thought for Lewis. The last few pages of the book reveal his positive view of the historian's endeavor. Rosenthal summarized: "We learn from the cumulative 'social recollection' of the successes and failure of past generations, using these as guides for the shaping of our goals and ideals. Human decisions are shot through with social recollection, for social memory molds individual intelligence. In this sense we are members of the only species that *has* a history. Moreover, this social recollection and the individual intelligence it molds in turn feeds into and modifies our very apprehension of our own history. Through institutions, as through imperatives in general, we make use of the successes of the past to anticipate the future" (p. 164). These affirmations and speculations should pique the historian's interest on Lewis's place in U.S. intellectual history, and even within historiography. His intersubjective philosophy of history (my phrasing) might have helped late twentieth-century historians in their navigation of objectivity questions.

But if *C. I. Lewis in Focus* was meant to make Lewis more accessible to either the populace or even attentive, careful historians, the reader will likely require further assistance. The book needs more interspersed summaries–a bit more repetition. Many of Rosenthal's sentences are too long (as per above). I must confess that I even found Rosenthal's connections to other pragmatists (i.e., Dewey, Peirce, and William James) to be less than satisfactory. Because of these weaknesses, I came to believe that the historian of ideas will likely benefit as much from direct exposure to Lewis's books. It seemed that Rosenthal was primarily trying to make Lewis accessible *to philosophers* today–or to remind them that Lewis is still relevant. I leave it to reviewers in that field to judge whether she succeeded. Considering the paucity of references to current or more contemporary philosophers, I am skeptical of the prospects. For instance, Rosenthal connected Lewis, at one point, to the analytic/linguistic philosopher Donald Davidson (1917-2003), but that kind of cross-referencing was rare.[6]

For those interested in historical development–even of ideas on the particular U.S. intellectual social matrix–Rosenthal's text will be of limited interest. But that was not her primary goal. Rosenthal seeks to present Lewis from another angle; in that, she succeeds. And because of the limited minimal attention given to Lewis in U.S. intellectual history, there is a broad need for familiarization with his ideas. With that, *C. I. Lewis in Focus* is a necessary prelude to future works by intellectual histo-

rians. Forthcoming studies will make Lewis accessible to a broader range of intellectuals, academicians, and, perhaps, the public in general.

Notes

[1]. Hilary Putnam, "A Half Century of Philosophy, Viewed From Within," in *American Academic Culture in Transformation: Fifty Years, Four Disciplines*, ed. Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 193-226; and Alexander Nehamas, "Trends in Recent American Philosophy," in ibid., 227-241.

[2]. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 187-189.

[3]. Bruce Kuklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 214.

[4]. Ibid., 215.

[5]. Ibid.

[6]. Jeff Malpas, "Donald Davidson," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/davidson/ (accessed April 24, 2008).

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