

*Pragmatism, Metaphysics and Culture: Reflections on the Philosophy of Joseph Margolis* is the literary culmination of a conference entitled “Metaphysics of Culture—The Philosophy of Joseph Margolis” that was held in Helsinki, Finland on May 20–21, 2013. The volume contains revised versions of papers presented at the conference as well as “several other contributions including Margolis’s own responses to each paper” (p. iv). We are presented with a variety of articles directed toward an analysis and explication of Margolis’s philosophical projects; we are also given the opportunity to read Margolis’s response to each paper—allowing the philosopher himself to frame and evaluate the commentaries. This style of call-and-response philosophical dialogue is reminiscent of the long running Open Court *Library of Living Philosophers* series.

Following the editorial introduction, the volume opens with an article by Margolis himself (“Toward a Metaphysics of Culture”), setting the tone of the conversation as a communal attempt (on the part of Margolis and his commentators) to assess the direction and significance of Margolis’s thought over the last several decades as he has explored themes of philosophical anthropology, a revitalization of American Pragmatism, and the possibility of a “metaphysics of culture.”

Margolis asserts that, to his mind, his philosophy has long been moving in the direction of philosophical anthropology and philosophy of culture, or as he puts it: a “definition of the human self and the analysis of the unique features of the human world and our form of life” (p. 1). Margolis has christened his approach to philosophical anthropology as “artifactualist” (see throughout). An artifactualist approach to philosophical anthropology holds that “the human self is a hybrid, artifactual transform of the primate of our species” (p. 10). As an artifact, the human person is a cultural construct that “emerges” (but does not supervene in the sense of Jaegwon Kim: see p. 16) from the natural animal *homo sapien*.

As an artifactual transform, Margolis explains that the human person should be understood as “second-natured,” which is to say that it is embodied in nature, but has the peculiar property of being “interpretable.” Second-natured artifacts such as person “have (or are) histories rather than natures...” (p. 8). For Margolis, the key that enables the cultural transformation of second-natured artifacts out of natural kinds is the mastery of *language*: “we emerge as persons through the mastery of language” (p. 24).
Accordingly, then, Margolis sees his project as an attempt to outline a philosophical anthropology that is naturalistic (in that it considers persons, and all artifacts, as natural transforms of naturally occurring kinds), empirical, pragmatic, and explicitly “post-Darwinian.” In reading Margolis, post-Darwinian often seems to read as “anti-Kantian”—throughout his article, Margolis takes great pains to distance his project from Kant: “Kant’s entire program, construed as transcendentalist, is completely incompatible with my reading of the philosophical import of post-Darwinian paleoanthropology” (p. 26).

Kant lurks in the background as the ever-present foil in the fight for the soul (and future) of pragmatism. Margolis hopes to situate his work within an account of the history of philosophy that sees pragmatism (and Margolis’s own work) as starting in a Hegelian critique of Kant and passing through the crucible of Darwin. On this account, Dewey and Peirce (but especially Peirce), are responsible for pragmatism as a philosophy born out of a “fresh way of conjoining the Darwinian and Hegelian themes” (p. 33). In particular, Margolis sees what he calls Peirce’s “abductive turn” as successfully extricating pragmatism from the problem of Kant and “obviating completely any appeal to apriorism or transcendentalism” (p. 289).

After Margolis’s essay, we move on to the eleven commentaries, grouped loosely into three thematic divisions. For the sake of space, in what follows I will eschew discussing Margolis’s response to each essay. Instead, at the end of this review I will offer a brief statement about Margolis’s responses as a whole.

In “Margolis’s Pragmatism of Continuity,” David Hildebrand very carefully raises the possibility that Margolis has been too systematic or theoretical in his approach to constructing his brand of pragmatism. Hildebrand suggests that perhaps Margolis has lost sight of what he (Hildebrand) considers to be an essential component of pragmatism—a commitment to an experiential (rather than theoretical) starting point for inquiry.

Dale Jacquette’s “Margolis on the Progress of Pragmatism” argues that the pragmatism that Margolis endorses is better understood as developing out of Kant (when properly understood) as opposed to Hegel, as Margolis’s account would have it. In the present context, the key to a correct interpretation of Kant, according to Jacquette’s argument, is that Kant needs to be understood as arguing for a “conditional a priori” rather than an “unconditional a priori.”

In “The Poverty of Neo-Pragmatism: Rorty, Putnam and Margolis on Realism and Relativism,” Phillip Honenberger carefully compares and contrasts Margolis’s unique strain of realism and relativism with various forms of realism and relativism in Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty.

Sami Pihlström’s “‘Languaged’ World, ‘Worlded’ Language: On Margolis’s Pragmatic Integration of Realism and Idealism” argues that the way Margolis