



Roberto Gronda\*

*Symposium on Dewey's Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy, edited and with an introduction by P. Deen, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 2012.*

The *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* is pleased to host a symposium on Dewey's "new" book *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*. To speak of Dewey's new book will seem strange to anyone who is not well-acquainted with the history of the text, which is rather adventurous and unique. In the summer 1941 Dewey started working on a book in which he purported to present a comprehensive view of his philosophical position. The work kept Dewey busy for more than a year. At the end of 1942 the manuscript that we can now read was substantially finished. However, Dewey abandoned the completion of *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* in order to undertake different projects –in particular, the composition of *Knowing and the Known* with A. Bentley. He started working again on the book more than three years later. In 1947 he was attending to it when the manuscript went lost. Legend would have it that Dewey left the manuscript on a cab while going back to his house in New York City. Other versions say that it was stolen or left in the Nova Scotia Cabin in which Dewey had spent the summer. What is beyond question is that the book was never published until now. We owe to Phillip Deen the merit for having brought it to life again.

However, Dewey's *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* is not a *finished* book, and should not be read as we read his other works. Some sections are missing –for instance, no manuscript is numbered as chapter 5–, and some chapters are more similar to a collection of notes than to a consistent discussion of a group of related theme. In his *Introduction* Deen explicitly acknowledges this point: "Dewey never completed the book that he had hoped to write" (xviii). This fact is important because it sheds some light on the nature of the four contributions that constitute the Symposium. The aim of the contributors – Hickman, Deen, Steiner, and Gronda– is neither that of providing an overview of the book nor that of discussing how the different parts hang together in a consistent whole. For those interested in a general presentation of the contents of the book, we recommend Dicker's insightful review appeared on the last number of our Journal (Vol. 4, No. 2, 2012). On the contrary, the goal of the Symposium is to 'exploit' the text with the aim of highlighting the traits of originality of Dewey's thought that the contributors believe they have found in *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*. It cannot be excluded that in some cases such goal has been achieved to the detriment of a rigorous fidelity to the letter of the text.

The search for the novelty contained in the book explains the selective character of the four essays, as well as their somehow provocative nature. Thus, if one has not read *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* yet, we recommend to take a look at Dicker's review *before* starting reading the Symposium. Finally, please keep in mind that the authors of the papers will be satisfied if they will succeed in supplying the ongoing discussion on the significance and value of Dewey's philosophy with new ideas and new suggestions.

---

\* Roberto Gronda, Scuola Normale Superiore [roberto.gronda@sns.it]