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Carlin Romano, UnPhilosopher of the Philosophical Landscape

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Abstract: Carlin Romano has identified an approach to philosophizing widespread in the United States especially on the margins of and outside of professional philosophy, with roots in pragmatism and the ancient Greek philosopher Isocrates, and with emphasis on flexibility and openness to diverse experiences. This approach has parallels to marketplace thinking and practices and provides opportunities for teaching and for popularizations of philosophy, but also contains problems for potential loss of rigor and precision in philosophical discourse. William James' philosophy offers complementary support for Romano's goals especially for the mediation of body-mind contrasts implicit in many of the unconventional philosophizers in his book.

Keywords: Romano, Carlin; unphilosophy; precision; direction; James, William; pragmatism; Western philosophy; American philosophy; popular philosophizing; marketplace culture; rational thinking; non-rational thinking.

Geoffrey Holder was a man of many talents. A Trinidadian-American of African descent born in 1930, he became a photographer, painter, dancer, choreographer, costume designer, director, and most famously, an actor. His painting earned him a Guggenheim Fellowship; he danced with the Metropolitan Ballet in New York; he won two Tony Awards in 1975 for direction and costume design; and he performed many memorable movie roles including in *Doctor Dolittle* (1967), *Live and Let Die* (1973), and *Boomerang* (1992). For all his ebullient creativity, he has been perhaps most widely remembered for his brief 1970s gigs presenting the clear lemon-lime soft drink 7-Up as the "uncola." The commercials, produced by J. Walter Thompson, were a platform for Holder to present his trademark combination of refined dignity and utterly charming friendliness, capped by his robust hearty laugh. Advertisers still praise this series of ads as attention-grabbing "chunky word smoothie[s]" and remember them for challenging cultural norms. In a nation newly assimilating the rights revolutions of the 1960s, Holder presents himself with forceful authority sitting in a wicker chair at an unnamed tropical locale, while offering the audience simple instruction: "These are kola nuts," he states with precise diction while holding one brown nut gracefully for the camera; they are "used to make kola-flavored soft drinks." Offering a simple if quirky comparison, Holder then holds up a lemon and a lime, stating calmly: "These…are unkola nuts; they grow here too." He adds, they are "a bit different from kola nuts; rather larger, for one thing, rather juicier too, I'd say." Then comes the commercial pitch: "We use them, of course, to make the uncola 7-Up"; they are marvelous little nuts with a "fresh, clean taste." They are "wet, wild, all of that...it's even prettier than

a cola, nuttier than a cola."[1] Then the camera fades out while Holder leans back and wordlessly summarizes this whimsical drama with his joyful baritone laugh.

In gathering the astute and lively philosophical reasoning that circulates in American culture often without the name "philosophy," Carlin Romano is the Geoffrey Holder of philosophers, even if his advertisement for these outsiders, agitators, and philosophical lucubrators in many fields is rather larger than a 7-Up ad (the possibility still beckons for such a brief dramatization of this book!). In *America the Philosophical*,[2] Romano presents a broad and crowded stage where philosophizing circulates in diverse fields; he offers fresh ideas, larger in fields of coverage, often juicier or at least with theories sometimes less disciplined than those cultivated among their uptown cousins in professional philosophy; and some might judge that this philosophizing is simply nuttier because not qualifying as true philosophy. Regarding this, Romano argues that philosophy is as important for its work in the culture as it is for its finer points of precision; or, to borrow some of Holder's words: "Just try making that" kind of cultural impact from mainstream professional philosophy, and you will not get as far as you can with the robust thoughts that have generally been ignored or dismissed as unphilosophy.

The seeming unphilosophy of *America the Philosophical* calls for attention, Romano explains, because it has offered flexible and practical thinking in the academy and throughout the culture, especially in our time, and because it has important philosophical precedents on the United States landscape and with a pedigree in ancient Greece, no less, in the philosophy of Isocrates. The particular ways of thinking in "America the Philosophical—the country, not the book" (*AP* 23)—are therefore not so much non-philosophical as another way to be philosophical beyond the mainstream discourses of professional philosophy. Like the word "impressionism" that emerged in critique of paintings with vibrant scenes created using approaches that defied academic traditions for visual representations, the label "unphilosophy" describes a way of thinking that some might regard as beneath the standards of professional philosophy, but that Romano shows to be lively philosophical discourse. In particular, for his ambitious and sprightly book, Romano offers sturdy support for philosophizing often without the name, but with thinking that provides personal and cultural direction. And in support of his eclectic cast of characters, I also endorse his tacit suggestion that this primal orienting task for the study of insight and wisdom offers great philosophical importance, albeit often for different purposes, alongside the more formal philosophical task of achieving rigorous precision.

Romano's characters offer innovations that are at least rhetorical (in offering fresh ways to communicate the ideas of philosophers) and often in content as well (in supporting a turn away from dualism, which has dominated mainstream Western philosophy and the current philosophy profession). To these characterizations of Romano the supporter of philosophic innovation and defender of direction over exact analysis, I also add a warning and a suggestion. The warning is that this philosophical orientation circulates unabashedly in the marketplace, and that setting offers rewards but can also exact a price—a price that cultivation of some precision can help to remedy. And my suggestion is to give attention to some more points of linkage with the work and the example of William James who already plays a role in Romano's account; James not only lends support to the directional thinking that Romano spotlights, but also, he offers precursive ways to cope with the challenges it has faced.

Unphilosophy—
A New Name with Abundant Precedents

The term "unphilosophy" is a way to describe thinking outside of professional philosophy which is, nonetheless, philosophical in character. Philosophizing outside the discipline of philosophy also predates the formation of disciplines. Romano sets this philosophical tradition deep in the American grain. Before their philosophical expression, these ways of thinking had been predominant cultural traits, noticed by Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Alexis de Tocqueville and Frederick Jackson Turner, who observed that Americans are impatient with authority, more flexible than rule bound, tolerant of differences, eager to greet strangers without either deference or lordly superiority, and

[1] Geoffrey Holder, 7-Up commercial, c. 1970s, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JinBKqSCSac; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXmc7DG4uu8; and Smosh, "Five Most Pointlessly Strange Ad Campaigns," http://www.smosh.com/smosh-pit/articles/5-most-pointlessly-strange-ad-campaigns; accessed June 11, 2016.

[2] Carlin Romano, *America the Philosophical*, New York, NY: Knopf, 2012. [Henceforth cited as *AP*]

ready to ignore contradictions, to avoid debates over fundamentals, and to shun dogmatic arguments. While Romano readily recognizes exceptions to these traits, which have included adherence to Constitutional rules, abundant examples of intolerance, and deep values debates, he is providing some patterns that provide a kind of template for thinking that has been not universal but fairly common in the United States. And indeed, the existence of freedom of speech and general tolerance have meant that there is wide acceptance of critical views, at least as measured by the relative lack of political violence. Members of defeated parties are not banished, imprisoned, or killed, but become the loyal opposition in minority positions. Romano places the figures he studies within this cultural tradition in dedicating his book "To all who seek to persuade without violence and dogmatism" (*AP* ix). In fact, the very lack of overt ideological warfare has actually invited cultural warfare: that more stylized conflict, even when conducted with intense drama and frustrating policy gridlock, is generally safe from political violence.

Romano detects this way of thinking, this philosophizing without the name, appearing notably in social commentaries, as well as in philosophy with strong social concerns and among philosophers ready to use their wares for purposes outside philosophy. His characters are "different on the surface" but "linked at their depths" in the shared "recipe" of his central theme. He identifies political theorist Michael Walzer as a critic "in defiance of the established powers," but without aloof alienation from the public; instead, he represents "the effective critic [who] remains within his community" (*AP* 57). So this philosophical social commentator uses the tools of philosophical thinking but wields them lightly to remain engaged with citizens untrained in the subtleties of academic philosophy. Romano also detects this philosophical recipe appearing among some contemporary professional philosophers. Social and political philosopher Lucius Outlaw grew up African American and poor in the Deep South; during the 1960s and 1970s, family and friends found his interest in philosophy puzzling, but then Outlaw himself found the mainstream analytical philosophy abstract and disconnected from the very concerns that drove him to philosophical inquiry. Romano quotes Outlaw, "folk are trying to figure out how to stop a war; people are trying to figure out how to get racial justice….I didn't come out of Mississippi to analyze sentences" (*AP* 35-6). Outlaw represents the convention-defying philosophy that Romano detects even in the academy, among not only African Americans, but also Native Americans, women, and gays, as many philosophy professors use their inquiring minds to diagnose social ills embedded in habituated thinking, and wake up students and readers about ways to deal with them. Romano features Louis Marinoff who is trained in philosophy, but now applies that learning to philosophical counseling, which offers a philosophical approach to medicine and psychiatry. This interdisciplinary work has offered a chance to apply "philosophy's usefulness in everyday life" (*AP* 31), even though the mainstreams in his adopted field generally dismiss such philosophical counselors because they consider them "the least qualified" practitioners for offering patients substantial improvement (*AP* 30). His popular book, *Plato, Not Prozac*, sets out a sharp alternative view, yet Marinoff recognizes the need for a range of different approaches; his goal is to add the mental tools that philosophical inquiry can provide for people's therapeutic needs, by teaching "how the ideas of the world's great thinkers can shed light on the way [patients] live" (*AP* 28). Marinoff's work suggests the significant insights that can emerge when a philosophical approach is applied to other fields; his own work provides a broadened perspective on when and how to use the powerful tools of modern scientific medicine.

While these reaches of Romano's detection of philosophizing beyond conventional philosophy still remain within the academy, he presents still more dramatic applications of the philosophical in America. It is a strain of thinking suited to our times, when more people are not only thinking without formal philosophy language, but also thinking without books. No worries that "people don't read books much anymore," suggests cyber-libertarian John Perry Barlow who does not miss their sustained explanations, since books are more important as symbols of a line of thought; authors and advocates use them to "wave at one another as totemic objects" (*AP* 468). An array of cyber-skeptics counters his enthusiasm for the liberating power of the web with sharply contrasting interpretations of the virtual world, including worries about losses of freedom, increased security measures, and reduced employment opportunities, problems that they argue will emerge with increased reliance on technology. Enthusiasts and skeptics contend in sharp cyber-philosophy debates, largely taking place outside of academic philosophy, bringing the advocates of high technology with promises of ever-more prosperity and freedom of expression in our digital future, against those who warn

us that those same trends will bring cultural conformity and power concentrated toward those who manage the flows of information.

These recent trends, both inside and outside of the academy, show philosophical vigor in tune not only with American culture, but also with the characteristically American philosophy of pragmatism. This is the central philosophical orientation of Romano's *America the Philosophical*, and pragmatism has likewise faced its own charges for being unphilosophical, for presenting ideas beneath the standards of professional philosophy. From the point of view of Romano's book, pragmatism is the impressionism of philosophy, a philosophical commitment to the consequences of ideas and their relations with practical experiences that strays from the standards of much professional philosophy. Romano readily claims pragmatism for "America the philosophical" in two ways: first, its theories put words on an already-present "tendency in American thought [for] openness to experience [and] resistance to cookie-cutter precision about the imprecise," that is, a philosophy geared toward recognition of the robust range of experience, a range not readily summarized in concepts; and second, the ideas of the pragmatists further amplified those tendencies, having won "a permanent hold over many American minds" (*AP* 76). John Dewey offered a bridge from the academy to the public in presenting philosophy as "a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men," his words for the problems of all people (*AP* 88). Romano also detects support for his cavalcade marching away from conventional philosophy even in the work of rigorous scholarship itself; biographies, in reporting on the human details that accompany thought, "give us philosophers with flesh on their bones" (*AP* 65). This awareness can reinforce Romano's intention to undercut the exalted positions of the philosophical few, and it supports his hopes to identify philosophy's usefulness.

Romano's unconventional philosophy has a still deeper history, in the emphasis on rhetoric in ancient philosophy generally and in the thought of the Greek philosopher Isocrates in particular. The Greeks admired rhetoric for its subtle intellectual sophistication and political potency, and Isocrates advocated philosophical reasoning that involved "public testing of ideas, expertise in discourse, [and] knowledge of culture" (*AP* 553). Ancient Greece was also home to a very different philosophical tradition, whose major figure, Socrates, emphasized the centrality of foundationalism; as James points out, it is this tradition that "made our philosophic language."[3] Through Plato, this philosophy became normative for philosophy especially in the Western philosophical tradition, with its emphasis on epistemology and expectations for finding certainty, and with its depiction of rhetoric as merely a poor form of knowledge or worse, a deceptive form of trickery. Romano presents bookends around the triumph of Western philosophy: in fourth-century BCE Greece, philosophy was a contested practice, and what would become the foundation of the Western tradition was just starting to gel, in opposition to competing sophists and rhetoricians. Romano detects a parallel historical moment today, with competing visions of philosophical ways of thinking now veering away from Western foundational assumptions. Isocrates, Romano suggests, is newly relevant for our times. While the Western tradition has come to associate Isocrates and rhetoric with shifty thinking and chaotic outcomes, Romano points out that the mainstream thinking has its own unfortunate baggage. He refers to Isocrates' translator George Norlin who links the Platonic quest for ideals and certainties to the political passion to dominate; and such imperialism breeds "hatred, wars, and an empty treasure" (*AP* 556). By contrast, Isocrates represents a path not taken, and a current opportunity. On that path, for Isocrates as for pragmatists from Charles Peirce to Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas, "right answers emerge from appropriate public deliberation" (*AP* 558), that which persuades people at the end of the road. In these philosophies as with America the philosophical "truth emerges from consensus—from decision as much as discovery" (*AP* 560). These modern philosophers agree with Isocrates: "development of judgment trumps acquisition of knowledge" (*AP* 550). As Romano recognizes, even though the reputation of Isocrates suffered within the field of philosophy, his influence endured in the tradition of the liberal arts, especially in his endorsement of *paideia*, which he envisioned for student learning, but also for the *polis* in general, where deliberative exchange guided by philosophical insight and consistent thinking can enhance civic life.

Warning: Engage with the Market and Be Wary

Romano makes his case for philosophical thinking

[3] William James, "A World of Pure Experience (1904)," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, in *The Works of William James*, gen. eds. Frederick J. Burkhardt, Fredson T. Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1976, p. 44.

taking place in the United States at the outer edges of the philosophical mainstream and beyond those professional boundaries. He finds support in the work of pragmatic philosophers, social commentators, and social outsiders; and he connects their work to a deep heritage in the rhetorical philosophy of Isocrates. The result is a book with compelling stories of philosophical thinking emerging far and wide. He presents his synthetic overview of American philosophy within the Western tradition as a report on the surprising amounts of deep reflection and inquiry emerging in unconventional forms within a nation at the margins of the metropole European world; but Romano goes further in claiming that the United States "towers as the most philosophical culture in the history of the world" (*AP* 6). He then offers a kind of scorecard of America's winning record because it "far surpasses ancient Greece, Cartesian France, nineteenth-century Germany or any other place one can name over the past three millennia" (*AP* 6). This attention-grabbing claim is not necessary to Romano's broader points about the presence and significance of the type of philosophical thinking that has been emerging at the edges of or outside of professional boundaries. Romano provides a clue to the character of his exuberant praise for the American philosophical achievement in his way of measuring that achievement: this is a nation with "an unprecedented *marketplace* of truth and argument" (*AP* 6, italics added).

The exuberance of Romano's claim and the domain of his assessments have invited criticism, which generally misses the deepest significance of his synthetic overview and account of philosophy on the margins of the mainstream. In his evaluation of the book, philosopher Larry Busk, for example, accepts Romano's invitation to examine the terrain of the marketplace of ideas in the United States, and finds that "openness, diversity, a hunt for evidence and information" simply "do not characterize the prevailing culture of the United States."[4] Busk admits that the philosophical traits of Romano's focus can be found in this nation, but they are exceptions, which are "not particularly representative" (*AIN* 52). Therefore, Busk is ready to dismiss Romano's whole enterprise because he has "stretched the meaning of 'philosophy'" (*AIN* 55). But such stretching is Romano's richest point, and it is one that does not require his most exuberant claims. Romano and Busk each pay most attention to different parts of American intellectual life, and then use those parts to define the whole. Romano focuses on the American tradition of participatory democracy, born in challenge to monarchy and in defiance of any form of deference, and ready to think with pragmatic flexibility when facing new experiences and challenges; this sounds like "Shangri-La" (*AIN* 58) idealism to Busk who characterizes the United States as "a geopolitical power [that] has devoted itself to the maintenance of the hegemony of capital" (*AIN* 59) and therefore is best understood not as a democracy but as an empire that "enforces its will through violence and coercion" (*AIN* 58)—and in this setting, claims to democracy serve to distract from the nation's true character. Each of these philosophical commentaries on American culture contain some truth, but only in part, because each points to a particular subculture; the deeper cultural point is that Romano's democratic pragmatic idealists are in constant tension with the militant, pro-corporate, religious right that worries Busk. As William James would say, each has "the legitimacy of…*some*" of the abundant whole, and "it feels like a real fight";[5] and in that contest, both narratives are important, both Romano's hopes and Busk's warnings. In fact, warnings akin to Busk's worries would provide a chastening addition to Romano's goals in identification of the way that philosophical thinking operates in the United States.

In noticing a common philosophical thread among disparate thinkers, Romano finds not only philosophers thinking outside the box of professional convention, but also philosophy in surprising places, including popular culture and on the web, with expressions ranging from the flippant to the earnest. The range of styles used contributes to his point: many different vehicles can convey directional insight. The founding editor of *Wired*, Kevin Kelly, identifies those who circulate regularly in cyberculture as inheritors of

[4] Larry Busk, "Anti-Intellectualism's Not Dead: Romano, Lysaker, and American Philosophy," *The Pluralist* 11/2 (Summer 2016), 49-63, here p. 52. [Henceforth cited as *AIN*]

[5] William James, "A Pluralistic Universe (1909)," *The Works of William James*, gen. eds. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson T. Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1977, p. 41 (italics in original); and William James, "The Will to Believe (1897)," *The Works of William James*, gen. eds. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson T. Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1979, p. 55.

the American frontier tradition whose thought did not dwell on philosophical precision; "still, they wanted to know if they were going in the right direction" (*AP* 475). In a similar way, advocates of cyber-philosophy have "tested hypotheses the way companies tested products" (*AP* 475).

This model for evaluation, along with the public appeal of many of Romano's figures, shows the depths of immersion in the market with this approach to philosophical thinking. This is part of the appeal of America the unphilosophical; many of its theoretical traits are ones that also characterize marketplace dynamics: flexibility, openness to change, resistance to absolutes, and popularity. A theory with wide accessibility is, in effect, one that has potential to grasp wide market share. Popularity is marketplace success. Reaching a large public audience calls for vividness and clarity; this kind of thinking can enrich philosophy. In addition, however, appealing to large numbers, with messages in tune with popular concerns, can hive off other measures of success or other kinds of quality. If market concerns become paramount, the favor of an audience can itself become the measure of quality; conformity to popular views can overshadow the quest for precision and rigor, and also other important philosophical qualities up to and including beauty, goodness, and even truth. So thinking in tune with the market can mean having to adapt to convention, and may even involve turning theories into commodities. It is not just popularizing philosophers who are subject to these pressures; as almost any teacher knows, the need to turn sophisticated theories into lesson plans can involve truncated explanations and appeals to audience interest rather than unalloyed pursuit of rigor or truth. Students, as the generally young microcosms of the public at large, can rest very content with broad and simple versions of complex subjects—contributing to another layer of "un" to unphilosophy. Appealing to this mindset is not a bad thing; in fact, we call it good teaching; and it plays a role in public outreach in general. Yet there can be philosophical significance lost in this pedagogical translation, and so too with philosophy conveyed for general public consumption; because philosophizing in the marketplace includes a spectrum, ranging from helpful clarifications to raw pandering for satisfying popular tastes, Busk's critiques about the pandering can serve as useful gadflies to Romano's hopes for public clarity. For all its virtues in practicality and relevance, theorizing that provides direction can often fall short in precision, rigor, and the robust intricacies of whole pictures. Philosophizing for direction and philosophizing for precision often live in trade-off with each other, even as the Holy Grail of philosophical writing, speaking, and teaching is to retain both.

The rigor of formal philosophy generally has little market appeal, and it has sometimes served rigid hierarchy, but its carefulness and deliberate reckoning with complexity can also provide a bastion for standards of decency and justice. These are just some of the upsides of rigor, which are often overlooked in marketplace thinking. Rigor of analysis can serve purposes as enlightened and even radical as the informal philosophy that Romano celebrates. When philosophers of the formal type are "inclined to argue the fine points of life rather than accept them" (*AP* 38), those mental skills can appear irrelevant to the public because of their countless layers of subtle reasoning, but they can also be directed toward speaking truth to power by means of relentless investigation that can expose self-serving rationalizations and injustices. Witness the rigorous and engaged philosophy of Princeton Professor of Religion and African American Studies Eddie Glaude whose work, in cooperation with Harvard professor of philosophy and public intellectual Cornel West, connecting the philosophical resources of John Dewey to the African American experience, readily illustrates Romano's theme. Glaude applies Dewey's keen awareness of contingency to the precarity of African American lives in the United States; in West's words, the philosopher's "risk-ridden future"[6] is no abstraction, but has been a concrete reality for this enslaved then segregated and often abused population. Glaude's pragmatism both makes use of African American contributions and challenges the current generation to confront and overcome the race-based "value gap…baked into [American] foundational principles"[7] with his support of the Covenant Tours, town-hall meetings that are at once public outreach and philosophical tools for social change.[8]

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[6] Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, New York, NY: Routledge 1993, p. 113.

[7] Eddie Glaude, *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*, New York, NY: Crown Publishing 2016, p. 9.

[8] Eddie Glaude, *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 2007, p. xiii.

Philosophizing in the Key of William James

Romano characterizes the United States in its philosophical expressions as "a place where the battle between dogma and doggedness in seeking answers never ends" (AP 23); this summary phrase points to professionals using mainstream philosophic discourse to inquire with precision in pursuit of definite answers (characterized here as "dogma"), by contrast with countless others outside the mainstream who philosophize without delivery of certainties but instead present ideas with dogged pursuit of useable answers that are themselves changeable and contingent. To capture the sprightly sense of experimentation that Romano is detecting on the American strand, I suggest a supplementary phrase, another alliteration, for depicting American culture: a place where the tension between definiteness and desire about experience never ends. This captures Romano's detection of appetite in America the philosophical, with desire for direction and relevance driving the hunger for challenging the definiteness of tradition and precision even as many still find change distasteful, and with desire driving the swerves of flexibility and contingency in the ranges of philosophical discourses he depicts. And there is a deep philosophical reason why that type of philosophizing happens outside of formal channels: thinking related to desire has not received as much attention as rational thinking in the Western tradition. While mainstream philosophy has operated comfortably with dualisms of body and mind, and other ways of segregating pairs of material and immaterial dimensions of life, the characters living and thinking with America the philosophical do not so readily divide. This is a philosophical turf that includes not just desires, but also intuition, subjectivities, sentiments, assumptions, presuppositions, and tastes. During the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, with a swerve away from mainstream philosophical emphases, Blaise Pascal called these "reasons [of] the heart";[9] in recent years, Catherine Elgin has pointed to the role of such non-rational forms of thought in the formation of metaphors and the framing of hypotheses which are "not only widespread in science, they are often ineliminable,"[10] especially for organizing information and "afford[ing] epistemic access to…features salient" for any particular inquiry (*AAU* 7). Just as Elgin "admits within epistemology's purview" non-rational forms of thought that conventionally "do not belong,"[11] so too many of the philosophical thinkers under Romano's purview consider these dimensions a part of thought rather than just thought on holiday or corruptions of true philosophy; as Elgin puts it, these thoughts are not "mere…embellishment" (*AAU* 5). The thinking that Romano has gathered suggests a philosophical path for mingling of conventionally contrasted rational and non-rational forms of thought.

Romano includes William James within his cavalcade of unconventional philosophies. Even before James expressed the "magisterial thumbnailing of American common sense" (*AP* 75) that would earn him and other pragmatists entry into Romano's book, James developed a philosophy based on his study of psychology. He described his "Sentiment of Rationality" (1879) as a "Psychology of Philosophizing,"[12] which began with his observation that there are many different philosophical positions, each sound and coherent in itself, even as each also exists in sharp contrast with other philosophies. Within those different philosophical domains, there are admirable, even extraordinary, philosophical theories full of deep knowledge, sophisticated reasoning, and precise expressions. Each philosophical achievement encounters other theories often of similar stature, which rest on strikingly different assumptions, each with its own inward character of thought, often never verified, and generally difficult to express. James calls the resting places supporting each theory the sentiments of rationality, which are the subjective marks that make each philosophy seem to be a rational conception from that person's point of view; each sentiment of rationality then serves as the starting point for theorizing in that domain, and each grants the feeling of sufficiency for that theorist and for all who share similar assumptions. James is proposing that whole edifices of philosophy, ideology, and values commitments are built upon subjective cravings for particular rational positions—hence the elegant oxymoron in his title: the sentiments

[9] Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*, transl. William F. Trotter, New York, NY: Collier & Son 1910, # 277.

[10] Catherine Z. Elgin, "Art in the Advancement of Understanding," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39/1 (January 2002), 1-12, here p. 5. [Henceforth cited as *AAU*]

[11] Catherine Z. Elgin, *Considered Judgment*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1996, p. 168.

[12] William James, "Notes for 'The Sentiment of Rationality' (1879)," in *Essays in Philosophy*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson T. Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1978, p. 359.

that shape the attention to and selection of the facts and points of view that support particular rational philosophical positions. Why this should be, he noted in recognition of the advocates for philosophical precision in his time, cannot be said with any scientific definiteness, but it is quite sufficient to present it as an empirical fact. This philosophy coincided with James' research in the psychology of selective attention which formed the basis for his proposition that each sentiment of rationality generates a particular field of focus while ignoring other parts of the same pool of empirical facts, even while a thinker with other theories built upon other sentiments of rationality might select those ignored qualities or other different qualities based upon different centers of attention.

Since the time when the thought of Socrates became the norm for Western philosophical reasoning, what Romano calls Plato's "public relations triumphs" (*AP* 18), formal philosophy has often held sentiments at bay, generally labeling them non-philosophical—the original unphilosophy indeed. The works that Romano cites display striking contrasts with the Socratic tradition in philosophy, and James' ideas offer still more philosophical weight to the philosophizing that Romano celebrates. Here is an example of how James' ideas can reinforce and amplify Romano's points. Romano wrote *America the Philosophical* in 2012; James wrote *Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902. If James had had the benefit of the more recent book, he might have called his book "Popular Religions the Truly Spiritual," to display his focus on forms of religiosity often emerging without mainstream institutional support, which he then examines to find depths of subliminal psychology with spiritual dynamism. In doing so, James also welcomes a marketplace of thinking about a large array of religiosity to be taken seriously, even when outside of ecclesial structures, just as Romano calls for us to take seriously the vast amount of philosophizing happening by other names often outside of institutional philosophy. But James does not just welcome the array uncritically; he also urges consideration of the gravity of the positions being expressed; he judges that authentic religion "says 'hush' to all vain chatter and smart wit." For James' popular religions, as it could also apply to Romano's philosophical, this means sorting for expressions that offer the most gravitas, which means not just seriousness of character, but also plausibility of direction through the thicket of choices that modern culture and its surging market of intellectual propositions provides. Romano's philosophical Americans should be judged, as with James' own array of spiritual beliefs, not on how unphilosophical or popular they are, but by their fruits, based upon whether they lead to sound character, helpful insights, and important directions.[13]

James also suggests a way to sort through the abundance, with a criterion that could serve us well in our kaleidoscope of culture that Romano has identified for its "rough-hewn implementation" (*AP* 23) of philosophy. James offers a distinction that partakes of the advice in the epigraph quotation that Romano uses to guide his own book, with James urging, "The important thing is that our judgments should be right, not that they should observe a logical etiquette" (*AP* xi). In the 1875 book review where James wrote these words, he anticipates his "Sentiment of Rationality" in saying there is "vital heat…a brute blind element in every thought" before being "reflected on."[14] Far from thinking of non-rational desires in contrast with reasoning, James presents these sentiments as the great asset of human reasoning because they provide the power of judgment, with the ability to sort through vast amounts of information to enable the identification of the part most significant for the purposes at hand; as he explains in his *Principles of Psychology*, "in reasoning, we pick out essential qualities."[15] While other philosophies set standards based on precision, this suggestion for direction is based on sound judgment; what it loses in data-driven or formal exactitude, it gains in ability to focus with deliberate purpose based on sound reasoning, whose degree of quality surely needs constant vetting by peers and critics. With this, James' ideas draw upon the thinking of fellow pragmatist Peirce in calling for each community of inquiry to provide a "constant tendency…to correct itself" (*POP* 984) in order to refine theories on their paths toward ever-truer understanding. James' point is not for

[13] James, "Varieties of Religious Experience (1902)," in *The Works of William James*, gen. ed. Frederick J. Burkhardt, Fredson T. Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, pp. 25 and 39.

[14] William James, "Review of George Henry Lewes, Problems of Life and Mind (1875)," in *The Works, 15, Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, gen. ed. Frederick J. Burkhardt, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1987, p. 307.

[15] William James, "Principles of Psychology (1890)," in *The Works, 11, Essays in Psychology*, gen. ed. Frederick J. Burkhardt, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1983, p. 956. [Henceforth cited as *POP*]

support of reason in contrast with sentiments of the heart; instead he provides a portrait of reason inflected with such sentiments as the basis for finding direction in the making of good judgments. This form of reasoning has the ability to sort through a vast array of facts for discerning the key ones for particular purposes—a trait that, as James adds, "geniuses possess…to an extreme degree" (*POP* 984).[16] So if America is to be not only the philosophical but the effectively philosophical, albeit not always the genius philosophical, we need to be aware not only of the abundant sources of creative ideas, but also of keen, sensitive, creative, and sometimes even grave ways of deciding how to choose from amongst them—including for sorting through the kinds of thinking that philosophers such as Busk warn about. Romano has supplied the basis for just this kind of careful judgment through scrutiny of both the academy and the culture with this careful evaluation of philosophical thought. His choices may not satisfy every reader, but he has produced an artful tour of the philosophical dimensions of the United States.

In addition to these cultural and philosophical arguments and in support of Romano's unconventional philosophers, there is an even simpler way to understand his distinctive and creative book. Evolutionary biologists and historians of science make use of interpretive disagreements in their assessments of the vast array of living things. "Lumpers" tend to emphasize relations among creatures for identifying species as large pluralistic collections; by contrast, "splitters" emphasize the differences among those diverse natural facts, and then they group creatures possessing the most similar traits for identification of species as more tightly defined types. Practitioners of precision provide an intellectual service in evaluating differences with refined splitting of subtle distinctions. Romano takes on a different task. In his coverage of a pluralistic array of characters and fields, he is serving the role of philosophical lumper; he could get a patent for identifying the common thread of conventionally unphilosophical thought among those inside and outside of professional philosophy, across many different fields, and among pragmatists and Isocratics. *America the Philosophical* has potential not just to identify the philosophy that Americans have been doing all along without the name, but also to encourage more such thoughtful sorting out of cultural direction. Even without a Geoffrey-Holder-style ad, Romano's approach has potential to reach a popular audience for philosophical thinking—and some so reached might even become convinced to dedicate themselves to philosophical precision. On the spectrum of philosophical purposes that range from the direction giving to the precision rendering, he has provided a guide to the philosophizers of the direction-giving orientation. On his path of outreach, of philosophizing for philosophical direction, I hope this work can heed the advice of William James and kindred philosopher Alfred North Whitehead; to paraphrase their ideas: Welcome the support of philosophers similarly open to judgments of the heart, and seek a broader audience, seek a larger market share, but then distrust it using the critical tools of philosophy.[17] Socrates would likely have appreciated that warning about the market's potential to divert from philosophical thinking. And perhaps Romano's characters are not so different after all from Socrates, who as Plutarch observed, "was the first person to demonstrate that life is open to philosophy at all times, in every part, among all kinds of people, and in every experience and activity."[18] In the mingling of philosophy with everyday life, Socrates sought to leaven everyday issues with philosophical insights, while the characters on America's unconventional philosophical landscape seek to express philosophical insights emerging from the everyday. Romano's philosophical characters are not so much in defiance of Socrates as philosophizing in his honor, by adding another layer to Socratic philosophizing: Romano shows Socratic philosophizing "among all kinds of people." *America the Philosophical* presents Socratic philosophizing 2.0.

[16] Charles Peirce, "A Theory of Probable Inference" (1883)," in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Volume 2*, eds. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1932, p. 729.

[17] Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press 1955, p. 163; his words are "seek simplicity and distrust it."

[18] Plutarch, quoted in Paul Johnson, *Socrates: A Man for Our Times*, New York, NY: Penguin 2011, p. 82.