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## [Introduction to] Believing and Acting: The Pragmatic Turn in Comparative Religion and Ethics

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# Believing and Acting

The Pragmatic Turn in Comparative  
Religion and Ethics

G. Scott Davis

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## Preface

This book has its origins in a Princeton dissertation defended in the fall of 1983. I almost immediately switched areas, but my friends kept remembering it and, starting about seven years ago, began asking for papers that went back to those earlier issues. Papers turned into essays and when Tom Perridge approached me in January of 2009 I thought that I could string them together into a little book. That didn't work for me and so after a year of ineffectual tinkering I started on page one and wrote it straight through. Vestiges of the "precursor" essays remain, but many of those vestiges go all the way back to the original dissertation.

The best thing about the long lapse of time has been a closer acquaintance with history, anthropology, science, and art. In none of those fields am I expert, but it has been helpful to me to be able to weave in issues and examples to illustrate the continuity, as I see it, of interpreting religion with the same issues in the rest of the humanities and social sciences. An earlier version was heavily loaded with even more examples than remain, and my readers owe a debt of gratitude to Lizzie Robottom, Tom's assistant editor, and to Robert Segal, who read the initial draft for the press. Segal also read the original proposal, as did Jeff Stout, and I owe them both a great deal, not only for their help with this book, but for their work and guidance over many years.

The book is, I suppose, a paean to my teachers, living and dead, who belong, at least in my telling, to the tradition of Aristotle, Peirce, and Wittgenstein. Some—Geertz, Douglas, Baxandall—I've known mostly through their works. Others—Pols, Rorty, Stout, Proudfoot—were and are teachers, colleagues, and friends of long standing. Herbert Fingarette, whose works I've been reading since the 1970s, became a virtual friend over a decade ago, when we began an e-mail correspondence that remains one of my great pleasures. He is a brilliant and wonderful person.

The book is dedicated to Murphy, who appears as a character in various chapters. We've been friends for a very long time.

Richmond, Virginia

2 May 2011