

beneficial to include another essay on alternate approaches to supplement Tan's excellent piece.

The volume is also noticeably narrow at points. It fails to include any essays dedicated to aesthetics, philosophy of religion, or the ways American studies of the history of philosophy affect current debates (for example, Kant and Hegel studies in America); an odd omission both since there is a lot of fruitful work being carried out in these areas in leading philosophy departments in America, and since the classical pragmatists themselves were greatly interested in aesthetics and value inquiry, philosophy of religion, and the history of philosophy.

To conclude, there are two virtues that ought to recommend this volume to two different readerships. First, it contains many new, clear and expansive essays that provide an introduction to and survey of some of the most important figures and areas in Anglophone philosophy. In this respect, this volume would make an ideal first reference point for any students wishing to begin readings in classical pragmatism, as well as numerous other core areas in Anglophone philosophy. On this score, the volume also contains several new essays on somewhat marginal figures, such as Thorstein Veblen, Alfred North Whitehead, Sidney Hook (see Talisse's essay), and George Santayana, who tend to be glossed over or too easily assimilated into mainstream classical pragmatism in other anthologies. More importantly, this volume tells a story; a story that appears at times coherent and powerful, and at other times deeply complex and inconsistent; a story that draws attention to the development, clarification, rejection and resuscitation of several powerful ideas. As analytic philosophy in the Anglophone world continues to become more self-aware and attempts to articulate a precise and energizing account of its roots and direction, professional philosophers will do well to reflect upon stories like the one that emerges from Misak's volume.

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Richard Rorty. *An Ethics for Today: Finding Common Ground Between Philosophy and Religion*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
Pp. 72 + xxii. Cloth ISBN: 978-0-231-15056-9.

This little book is well aware that its author has died. Though Richard Rorty's name features prominently on both its front cover and binding, only eleven pages of the text are his. The rest of the book is made up of three pieces that seek to situate those eleven pages, which were originally given as a 2005 lecture in Turin, Italy. The shortest of the companion pieces is Gianni Vattimo's

original introduction to the lecture; the longest is G. Elijah Dann's conclusion, which takes up more than half the book's length and attempts to give an assessment of what we can say for religion and philosophy in the wake of Rorty's work.

The third included piece is Jeffrey Robbins's foreword, which undertakes some of the work normally done by a book review: giving a general sketch of where this piece falls in Rorty's broader intellectual corpus. It also rehearses both Rorty's central philosophical commitments and opinions of him within the profession and culture. The tone throughout is retrospective; Rorty has written all he will write, and now the task is to see what threads and themes can be teased out and to what use we can put them. Robbins carries this task out by walking through and commenting on the central theses of Rorty's major texts, especially *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. To those already familiar with Rorty's work, the foreword is a pleasant reminder of both the biographical impulses that fueled his positions as well as his intellectual insouciance. To those without prior exposure to Rorty, perhaps brought to this book by its timely and ambitious title, the foreword is welcoming and hospitable, giving readers the background necessary to jump right into Rorty's already easily consumable lecture.

Starting from Rorty's status as America's "best-known public philosopher," Robbins claims that no one other than he "was better equipped to write an ethics for the lay person" (xvii). The lecture at this book's center, Robbins argues, provides an example of just such an ethics, particularized to the topic of religious authority. In order to discover what a broader Rortian ethics for today might look like, readers can presumably generalize from Rorty's words here, along with the included explanations of his anti-foundationalism and pro-democratic thinking. Robbins is careful to note that the late career remarks on religion offered here do not square with all that Rorty wrote on the subject. This topic is taken up more directly in the book's conclusion. Of special importance is the question of whether religion is a conversation stopper, as Rorty famously argued, and then whether it is possible and perhaps even necessary to keep having conversations about those subjects which putatively stop our conversations. The lecture at this book's center is evidence Rorty ultimately considered such discussions to be worth having.

Two of Rorty's last three books – *The Future of Religion* (2005) and the work presently under review – are overtly concerned with the question of religion's place in society. Each of these texts includes a selection from Gianni Vattimo, the Italian philosopher, and readers who are interested in how Rorty's thought lines up with this sympathetic but vaguely religious respondent will do well to read the two pieces together. Vattimo's piece in *An Ethics for Today* serves only to introduce Rorty to those assembled for his lecture, and it is from him that we learn that Rorty's pragmatism is concerned with achieving ends "toward our happiness" (4).

This is the thread that runs through the whole of Rorty's lecture on spirituality and secularism: achieving human happiness is what counts most. Careful adherents to the work of the classical American pragmatists, particularly that of Rorty's philosophical progenitor John Dewey, may be displeased to be reminded that Rorty's pragmatism cashes out as an explicitly hedonic utilitarianism. Gone are intentionally organic metaphors of moral progress as growth and flourishing; for Rorty, "achieving the greatest possible amount of happiness ... is the only moral obligation we have" (8). How we go about reaching this obligation and creating the ideals that make this possible returns Rorty to a Deweyan vein, as he gives this work to human imagination.

The issue of deciding on competitions between our created ideals is one that hounded Rorty throughout his career, with some critics claiming in light of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* that such choices are essentially arbitrary or overly biased. He puts some distance between himself and this difficulty in this piece by drawing an analogy to the experience of falling in love: "When we fall in love with another person, we do not ask about the source or the nature of our obligation to cherish that person's welfare. It is equally pointless to do so when we have fallen in love with an ideal. ... What we cannot do is choose between two people, or between two ideals, by reference to neutral criteria" (9). This experiential appeal may be more persuasive to critics than other explanations of this point Rorty attempted, especially the vaguer and less helpful 1998 "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism."

But this lecture's real argument is set in terms of deciding between relativism and fundamentalism for our society's morality. After defining these positions in less "strawmanned" ways than is common in contemporary debates, Rorty unsurprisingly argues that his form of relativism – "simply the denial of fundamentalism," which he takes to be "the view that ideals are valid only when grounded in reality" (11) – is most compatible with both democratic society and achieving the greatest human happiness. This is because relativism acknowledges "that nothing is sacred because everything is up for discussion" (12), an important hint at the earlier-mentioned concern with conversation stoppers. This openness to talking about our ideals, even those held most firmly, provides for Rorty the precondition for working out which configuration of human desires should be sought; after all, people must express the content of their wants in order to make them discussable. Rorty's ties in this openness for conversation and considerability with what Peter Singer calls "enlarging the circle of the 'we'" (15), a concept related to one Rorty borrowed in other places from Wilfrid Sellars. This is all standard Rorty with no surprises, as are his transcribed responses from the occasionally-meandering question and answer period.

The book's concluding essay, "Philosophy, Religion, and Religious Belief after Rorty," feels a little tacked-on. Though it incorporates quotations from the lecture, its author tries to do much more than give commentary and work out implications, the sort of thing one might regularly expect from a text's conclusion. Instead, G. Elijah Dann provides here a substantial piece in the

philosophy of religion, a bricolage that draws together his own religious experiences with Rorty's positions and then mixes in elements of the writings of Vattimo, Jürgen Habermas, Robert Solomon, Rudolph Otto, and Mircea Eliade. While this is interesting and important work that needs doing, there is something fishy about it appearing at the end of a book of this title; what one finds here is more like a philosophy of religion for today. Of course broader ethical themes do emerge from Dann's discussion, but these are just some of the standard tenets of Rortian liberalism: rationality means intersubjective agreement, and thus enterprises like religion need to be left in the private sphere. This is the message of Rawls and Habermas, among others, because "it isn't clear how these appeals [e.g. to God's will] can be adjudicated" (42). Those looking for an ethics as ambitious as the title suggests may be disappointed by the subdued offerings.

One moment of real interest and promise involves Dann putting Rorty in conversation with members of the "new atheists" (43–45), though only for long enough to indicate that their mostly anti-theistic commitments run afoul of Rorty's position on two points: first, they are still concerned with the really-real, and second, Rorty "had the wordly sophistication to understand that evil comes in many forms" (44). While this is all true as far as it goes, a longer section detailing what a more appropriate atheism looks like would have been nice. After all, as much as "religious belief, even the public sort, will certainly continue into the future" (44), as Dann argues, extreme forms of atheism seem unlikely to abate anytime soon. Because of the seeming stalemate, it is important for a contemporary ethics and philosophy of religion to spend time on both sides of the theism issue and their interrelations.

In summary, then, those looking to this posthumous piece for chinks in Rorty's armor, for evidence of late-life conversion – philosophical, religious, or otherwise – will be sorely disappointed, as will those expecting more from Rorty than a short lecture. This book, however, can function as a good introduction to many Rortian themes, and readers unfamiliar with his ideas will be well-served by how they are here consistently applied to just one issue. Those readers with particular interest in the topic of religion and its place in culture will find these writings attractive but not exactly novel, though the breadth of discussion, especially in the concluding essay, more than makes up for this.

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