



Richard Rorty's New Pragmatism: Neither Liberal nor Free (Bloomsbury Studies in American Philosophy)

Edward J. Grippe

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This book is a study of Richard Rorty's New Pragmatism on its own terms, and a critical analysis of its implications for contemporary thought. As an anti-foundationalist and a liberal, Rorty's version of pragmatism is designed to promote personal freedom and democratic solidarity. Having as his target the stultifying effects of Western philo-scientific tradition, encrusted with the barnacles of metaphysical essentialism and epistemic foundationalism, Rorty writes to liberate the contemporary mind and to promote the growth of individual creativity and social tolerance. Admirable as the goals of greater personal creativity and tolerant solidarity are, it is Edward J. Grippe's contention that Rorty fails to achieve either of them. Liberated from the notion of essentialism, Rorty develops a vision of self that is radically unfettered in its originality. So, to forestall the misanthropy that would inevitably emerge, a "solidarity of forbearance" is to be inculcated. But given his anti-foundationalist stance, Rorty cannot appeal to a rational consensus to ground tolerance. With only a Darwinian struggle between competing constructs, sophisticated persuasion must be the deciding factor as to which narrative "works." And since there can be no ultimate or "final" vocabulary as arbiter, those that control the meaning of words control the basis for pragmatic conversation, i.e., what counts as "a working solidarity." Thus, the book concludes that Rorty's pragmatism is self-defeating, suppressing genuine conversation and ultimately constricting creativity.

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