

## ABSTRACT

An abstract of the dissertation of David E. McClean for the Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy, presented May 7, 2009.

Dissertation Title: Richard Rorty and Cosmopolitan Hope: A Critical Analysis of Rorty's Ironism and Antifoundationalism and Consideration of Their Uses in Forging Cosmopolitan Sensibilities

Richard McKay Rorty (October 4, 1931 - June 8, 2007) was one of the most interesting philosophers of modern times. Placing himself within the pragmatist philosophical tradition, Rorty was perhaps most famous for his exploration and defense of what he and others called the "linguistic turn" in philosophy. Rorty paired his commitment to the "linguistic turn" (which has cognates outside of pragmatism) with his commitment to pragmatism. This led him to conclude, *inter alia*, that a wholesale rethinking of philosophy, as a field of inquiry with its own subject matter, was in order. Beyond this, Rorty's philosophical antifoundationalism, his commitment to Western liberalism, and his own version of ironism led him to abjure *a priori*, dogmatic or religious touchstones for settling matters of public policy or morality. Likewise, he criticized philosophical empiricists for overemphasizing the place of the senses in knowledge formation. Knowledge, for Rorty, was a wholly linguistic affair. These conclusions set him at odds with many of his contemporaries, from John McDowell to Richard John Neuhaus.

Nonetheless, Rorty's thought is useful for cultural and moral deflationists who labor to bring about a greater understanding of (and a greater *desire* to understand) alterity. This links-up with the ideas and goals of modern moral and political cosmopolitans. Yet, for Rorty's neo-pragmatism to be put to the best uses, certain excesses and problems in his philosophy must be explored – and excised. Certain critical questions must be put to his versions of irony, antifoundationalism, pragmatism and liberalism. This includes questioning Rorty's characterization of religion as "a conversation stopper." This dissertation considers (i) where and how Rorty's philosophy is quite valuable to modern cosmopolitan thought, as well as (ii) where and how it actually creates needless hindrances to the achievement of the robust forms of cosmopolitan liberalism Rorty hoped would one day be commonplace – if not ubiquitous.