For Professor Allen, language is merely historically contingent. (There is no "eternal Logos." But then there are also no words in which our disagreement can be stated. The debate can not even get off the ground.) For us, the book must seem a sort of igno-ratio elenchi. Most of the specific disagreements turn on this point: Is language, in some sense, "transparent?" Is there truth? If so, then those who speak of "adequation" are on the right path, even if the term is not without its difficulties. What Professor Allen calls 'onto-logic' is not so much one giant assumption, to be debunked, as a series of gropings, in the right direction. The other Western assumption Professor Allen sets out to destroy is that Truth is a good thing. He supposes that Nietzsche was the very first to raise this question of the value of Truth. Is this historically correct? Why should a critical philosopher accept Nietzsche's megalomania as truth? (There is much of value in Nietzsche, if taken cum grano salis.) If Truth is that which measures (without being itself "measured"), then Nietzsche's "question" about Truth may be absurd. Not all questions are good questions. Our doubts can be as fallible as our certainties. If Professor Allen gave one tenth the effort to understanding Aristotle, he gives to Heidigger, this book would not have been written. (If truth is "political," why does Professor Allen ignore Heidegger Nazi connections?) One could point out specific flaws. For example, on page 21, he suggests that lovers of Truth approve of torture. Reading this book is a sort of "torture" for those of us who see it as mainly "sophistry and illusion," even though it is interesting at times (if only as a "know your enemy" guide).

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Richard Rorty is arguably the most controversial voice in American philosophy. In his wonderfully lucid and trenchant assessment of Rorty's work, David L. Hall achieves an excellent balance between a sympathetic and critical perspective of Rorty's overall vision. Hall not only carefully and clearly analyzes central tenets in Rorty's philosophy, he compares and contrasts Rorty's work with both modern and postmodern philosophical movements. This analysis includes major figures in America and Europe such as Davidson, Quine, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, to name a few. Having read every one of Hall's and Rorty's books, it is interesting to see both points of departure and decisive overlaps between their philosophies. In short, both Hall and Rorty offer fascinating, yet controversial, critical studies in the history of ideas and in the culture of contemporary philosophy.

The major themes in Rorty's work that Hall focuses on are: (1) nominalist historicism, (2) the new version of pragmatism, (3) the radical distinction between private and public life, (4)
the critique of the role of science in society, (5) liberal ironyism, and (6) his antimethodological stance. It is not possible to provide a thorough commentary on Hall's treatment of these themes here. I will simply make some observations concerning both Hall's assessment of Rorty and how this assessment reflects central ideas in his own philosophy.

A major philosophical attitude that is shared by Hall, Rorty, and many analytic and European postmodern thinkers is a disdain for metaphysics or any systematic approach to philosophical issues. It is fashionable today to support some type of metaphysical agnosticism. Let me say right off that neither Rorty nor Hall, for example, have offered a persuasive enough argument to deter those like myself from trying to establish some reasonable, though admittedly hypothetical, metaphysical beliefs. Although I cannot argue the point here, I do not believe that the trendy criticisms of systematic philosophy are not significantly relevant to schools of thought such as classical pragmatism and process philosophy, for they are both nonmodernist and nonpostmodernist orientations. Rorty's work and Hall's book on Rorty tend to evade any deep discussion of the classical pragmatists and process philosophers. Like Rorty, Hall's critique of the great caretakers of the philosophical enterprise seems to entail a modus operandi of keeping modernity on endless trial. Peirce, Dewey, and other classical pragmatists have done a sufficient job of critiquing ancient and modern philosophical projects long ago. With this in mind, as I read this book, I continued to wonder why contemporary philosophers should feel compelled to face only two alternatives (ones that classical pragmatists and process philosophers have circumvented): modernity or postmodernity. Even Hall admits that postmodernity is in an endless cycle of theories about theories, rather than getting down to the business of philosophy, theories about things. There is no need to be labelled a "foundationalist" for approaching important philosophical issues in a responsible, theoretical, and methodological way. However, due to the excellent scholarship in this book the reader is compelled to take seriously the problems with epistemological and metaphysical projects. This, of course, entails the recognition of the importance of irony for the the philosophic attitude. While reading this provocative book one should come to an appreciation for Rorty's broad and detailed knowledge of the history of ideas and how his own vision is an intricate part of, and response to, our Western philosophical heritage. Hall enables the reader to both criticize and sympathize with many points in Rorty's project. For those who are highly critical of Rorty's seemingly antiphilosophical attitude, there is much in Hall's book that force the reader into the realization that Rorty's vision cannot be easily dismissed. Rorty's irony can be a valuable antedote to the hysterical rigidity and concern for consensus and structural coherence that is often found in systematic philosophy.

It became clear to me as I read through Rorty's work and Hall's book that Rorty is overconcerned about problems invented by philosophers and too little concerned about problems of human
beings and of society in general. One question that comes to mind is exactly what case has been made as to why we should replace science and morality -- "order disciplines" -- with narrative sensibilities which we find in poetry and literature? Given the importance of moral, social, and political concerns, philosophy cannot be reduced to play and irony, or as Rorty calls it, conversation. Philosophy is a perennial struggle between eros and irony. Eros is that intensive drive toward order, consensus, and wholeness of understanding. Irony is the mode of thinking that knows the failure of complete system and celebrates this realization. While Hall and Rorty give priority to irony, it would seem more compatible with a truly aesthetic sensibility to see eros and irony in harmonious play with each other.

Anarchy, or the idea that reality is comprised of a "chaos of contingencies," is based on a metaphysical assumption that the fundamental status of things is radical pluralism and disjunction. So, the plausibility of Hall's and Rorty's philosophical anarchism rests with the plausibility of their metaphysical or ontological assumptions, hence it all comes back to theory. Rorty's commitment to "nominalist historicism" extends to and significantly effects the other major themes I mentioned at the beginning. The way Hall unpacks these themes is extremely worthwhile reading.

In conclusion, I heartily recommend this book to anyone interested in Rorty and the connections between Rorty's thinking and other important contemporary philosophical movements. I leave you with one final comment that summarizes my opinion of Rorty. Although I admire Rorty and have learned a lot from his work, if he truly is the prophet and poet of the new pragmatism, I say, "no thanks, I'll take the old pragmatism."

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An edited volume is difficult to review in a short space and do justice to each of the essays and this book is no exception to that difficulty. The essays are widely different in focus and appropriateness to a volume such as this, but Aboulafia does justice in his preface as to why he has selected them as he has. Simply put, the volume addresses Mead's thought in relation to "behaviorism, functionalism, linguistic analysis, socialism, and psychoanalysis," but not phenomenology, Marxism, or feminism, according to the editor.

There are many good essays which need to be studied at length, but the Introduction provided by Aboulafia and the