introvert, the brooder with a “storm under the skull” that Victor Hugo spoke of when epitomizing
the mind of a writer. This powerful chapter should not, however, mislead us to interpret the
subsequent chapters, rich in contingent and vernacular detail from farms to social clubs, as mere
diversions outlining the route Emerson had to take through cultural life before and while he tried
to discover himself as the solitary thinker and poet whom he had always known himself to be. He
discovers himself in and through these lanes, roads, and coves, markets and schoolyards. The
physical concreteness and metaphysical depths of Emerson’s life are as indebted to these sites
and their inhabitants as to the thousands of books he read, the books his father did not expect him
to read when he remarked, “Ralph does not read very well.” But as we see in the chapter,
“Books,” Ralph really came around to reading. In educational circles they refer to this as a
“delayed outcome.” Robert Richardson, Emerson’s biographer, would call it the mind on fire.

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with appendices and index.

Douglas McDermid has written a fascinating little book relating traditional pragmatism—
especially in the guise of Jamesian thought—to its reinvention in the work of Richard Rorty. The
Jamesian title might mislead readers a bit since the book does not pretend to cover and assess in
any detail the history and development of a variety of pragmatisms. The project is much more
focused and sets out: 1. To reveal for contemporary readers what most scholars of pragmatism
have known for many years, that pragmatism is not averse to some version of
representationalism that allows for an intelligible discussion of truth; 2. To establish Rorty’s
various reasons for a rejection of epistemological projects, and 3. To show that the old
(especially James) and the new (Rorty) are not at all the same notions of pragmatism. In the end
McDermid hints at his own temptation to side with the earlier pragmatism. Indeed, he says many
things that are reminiscent of Peirce’s work, making one wonder why he did not include more
direct conversation regarding Peirce. The book is clearly and cleverly written in a philosophical
language that should appeal to mainstream philosophers.

The book is divided into two sections. The first deals with early pragmatism and its
relation to the correspondence theory of truth. The second considers Rorty’s neo-pragmatic
resistance to something one might call pragmatist epistemology. The first section raises the
standard nominalistic complaints concerning the correspondence theory of truth—that there is no
thing called a world to which our language is comparing itself and, that if there were, the
language could not escape itself to make the comparison. McDermid is adept at showing that
criticisms developing along these lines do not really address Jamesian and Deweyan pragmatism.
He sees the subtlety in James’s work and provides a good analytic antidote to Bertrand Russell’s
caricatures of James and Dewey. He notes the various places where James respects the idea that
there is a real that constrains our perception and our thought even if it is not simply mimicked by
our ideas. James’s pragmatic realism is nevertheless, as he shows, tempered by the Kantian
notion that the inquirer plays a role in the interpretation of the constraining real and, most
importantly, in selecting what is to be observed. The upshot for McDermid is “that the brand of
constructivism espoused by the classical pragmatists—unlike that advanced by some
contemporary neo-pragmatists—is actually consonant with the cause of realist correspondence”
In short, the pragmatists have tried to stake out a middle ground between various “copy” theories of truth and the varieties of anti-realism of the late 20th century.

This of course will not be news to many readers of classical pragmatism, and it is fair to say that McDermid might have done well to draw on the early work of R.B. Perry regarding James’s realism (among other sources). However, McDermid’s style is not to present a heavily historically contexted reading of James and Dewey. Instead, he focuses directly on the arguments he believes are at stake. His instincts seem very good here. Unlike some readers who remove text from its initial setting only to bastardize its meaning, McDermid has an excellent grasp of the whole picture. He simply allows it to work in the background while he presents a close argumentation in a method and style reminiscent of the late scholastics. He clearly reveals the separation between the pragmatists and traditional British empiricism. It is in conflating these that many commentators go astray, attributing to James and Dewey ideas that are not theirs. Perhaps most importantly, McDermid acknowledges that for Dewey and James “perception is not so much a state as it is a purposive activity; to observe means, above all to look for something: the beast in the jungle, the figure in the carpet, the needle in the haystack, Pierre in the café” (68). It is short step from here to James’s insistence that truth is a relation, not an entity or simple state of being. McDermid might have pursued this a bit more closely; nevertheless, his handling of James’s arguments shows that he implicitly acknowledges James’s shift in describing truth. The section closes with a sketch of what a pragmatist epistemology might look like and includes two usual and significant suspects: fallibilism and anti-foundationism. McDermid’s conclusion is that traditional pragmatism looks in part like 20th century realism (as it should since American realism was itself developed by students of James, Royce, and Peirce), and that it also looks in part like neo-pragmatism. This provides an opening to the second section where McDermid elucidates the middle ground staked out by the classical pragmatists by disclosing the important differences between the old and the new pragmatisms.

Throughout the second section, McDermid rightly insists that, in word at least, Rorty does not consider himself an anti-realist nor does he argue that language veils us from reality. Rorty hopes not to become a “theorist” and simply believes these ideas are derived from questions that are no longer meaningful or relevant. The idea of the neo-pragmatist is not to solve old puzzles but to make an end run around them. Even as McDermid acknowledges this dimension of Rorty’s work, he closely tracks Rorty’s arguments to show just how effective such an end run can be. He does not dismiss Rorty’s neo-pragmatism: he argues with it. As he did with James in the first section, McDermid lines up extracted claims made by Rorty and traces their import and their consequences. In short, he analyzes Rorty’s arguments to see where they run into equivocation and inconsistency, and most importantly to reveal where they fail to answer the questions they are intended to address. For example, McDermid shows that Rorty’s arguments against representationalism hinge on a conflation of three separate positions: a theory of correspondence, a truth-conditional theory of meaning, and a theory embracing a scheme/content dualism. The slippage, he maintains, allows Rorty to look like he has a knockdown refutation of representationalism when in fact he is simply rounding up related but not mutually supporting claims. Thus, after working through a variety of Rorty’s resistances to traditional and pragmatist epistemology, McDermid concludes by agreeing with McDowell that Rorty provides “an object lesson in how not to rid ourselves of the illusory obligations of traditional philosophy” (135). And, he seems to suggest, if we have not rid ourselves of
epistemology, it is worth taking another look at James and Dewey to see where their work might lead.

Readers already convinced of the ideas sketched here will nevertheless find McDermid’s book an interesting read. He doesn’t duck the tough issues and he presents his arguments lucidly and with precision. He forces the historian to track the inferences closely and he forces the analyst to pay attention to what James (and Rorty) actually said. These are both virtues. As we move into the 21st century, conversation between old school pragmatists and new school pragmatists, and between historicist philosophers and analytic philosophers, become inevitable. Indeed, these categories are fluid and are in transition as the next generation of scholars comes on the scene. McDermid’s book is a nice place to begin to consider how those conversations might be successfully launched.

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The present volume concludes the eight volumes of The Letters of George Santayana. These Letters lie within the more encompassing series of The Works of George Santayana. Special recognition is due to Daniel Cory, first publisher of Santayana’s letters, and especially to the editors mentioned above.

As a “critical edition,” the present volume is a precious gem. Holzberger offers a masterful Introduction of 26 pages. I find the text factual and flawless. Its footnotes are richly informative—actually, a survey of the history of culture and philosophy. The nine Sections of its Editorial Appendix include a detailed chronology of GS’s life and a full, well-planned Index.

The interesting and lengthy Section of 13 pages, listing GS’s “Addresses,” might mislead a beginner to think of GS as an Euro-American traveler or even a bon vivant. One finds that even during his 20 years at Harvard GS quit Cambridge as soon as possible for a “summer away,” that overall he crossed the Atlantic 38 times, that he often lived in hotels, and that he rarely “settled down.” Yet the more careful reader will notice that at the end of 1893, amid “disconcerting events,” GS underwent “a fundamental change of heart, resulting in a renunciation of the world” (562). This metanoia expressed itself in GS’s art of philosophizing acutely, creating enduring poetry, exercising a refined courtesy, and becoming a significant literary critic. After 1891, GS grew continually in literary and philosophical productivity. After his Harvard period that ended in 1912, his career spanned both World Wars. His writing did not end in 1941 when he retired in a nursing home operated by nuns of the Little Company of Mary in Rome. For there he completed his Domination and Powers, created a one volume compendium of his Life of Reason, and lived in one room, an atheist among nuns, visited by his selected friends, until he died in 1952.

55