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978-0-521-64973-5 - Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity

Gary Gutting

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PRAGMATIC LIBERALISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY

In this book Gary Gutting offers a powerful account of the nature of human reason in modern times. The fundamental question addressed by the book is what authority human reason can still claim once it is acknowledged that our fundamental metaphysical and religious pictures of the world no longer command allegiance. If ethics and science remain sources of authority, what is the basis of that authority?

Gutting develops answers to these questions through critical analysis of the work of three major philosophical voices in our time: Richard Rorty, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Charles Taylor. His own position is defined as “pragmatic liberalism”. Epistemologically, pragmatic liberalism shows that an understanding of rationality as the social practice of reason-giving is consistent with a realism about both the commonsense and scientific worlds. Ethically, it shows that we can make sense of our ethical commitments without asserting the objectivity of values. In contrast to other versions of liberalism, pragmatic liberalism accepts the value of traditions without privileging one absolutely, and is also open to religion as an ineliminable possibility of our mysterious existence.

This robust defense of the modern ideal of Enlightenment reason will appeal to a broad swathe of readers across the humanities and social sciences, especially in such fields as philosophy, literature, and political theory. The interpretations of Rorty, MacIntyre, and Taylor will make the book suitable as a coursebook for those teaching the history of modern philosophy.

Gary Gutting is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. His previous Cambridge books are *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason* (1989) and *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (1994).

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations will be used for frequently cited titles:

- AV: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd edition, 1984.
- CIS: Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- EHO: Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- ELP: Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- ORT: Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- PMN: Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- SS: Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- TP: Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- TRV: Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990.
- WJWR: Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.