school to capture the complexity of human affairs and justice. They address the need to keep permanent options of politics in balance—conservation and progress, refined practical wisdom and popular consent, faith and reason, ambition and service, law and prudence, force and talk. Morrison's study reminds us to engage these questions and to admire the thought and deeds of a statesman whose accomplishments in both realms still set him apart. This work deserves to be studied and debated by political scientists, historians, and public intellectuals concerned with America's fundamental political principles and those of liberal democracy.

–Paul O. Carrese

RORTY'S SELF-CONCEPTS

Neil Gross: *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Pp. xxi, 367. $32.50.)

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Despite its title, this book is not, by the author's account, about Richard Rorty. It seeks instead to provide "a new theory about the social influences on intellectual choice" (xi) and treats Rorty's career as an empirical starting point for the development of this theory. Specifically, the book seeks to improve on previous sociological theories of intellectual choice—most notably those of Pierre Bourdieu and Randall Collins—by considering the "intellectual self-concepts" of the actors concerned. The preface and introduction sketch out these theoretical aims, and the last two chapters cover this ground in detail and then offer the theoretical conclusions that the author draws from the Rorty case.

However, the central part of the book consists of a conventional, though truncated, intellectual biography of Rorty in which questions of social theory play only a minor role. These biographical chapters, which could and, I shall argue, probably should be read independently, are both accomplished and absorbing. Gross was given unfettered access to Rorty's papers, including his private correspondence and unpublished work, and was in contact with Rorty himself up until his death in 2007. He is, therefore, able to construct an elegant narrative that sheds considerable light on the development of Rorty's ideas, even though the ideas themselves are not discussed or analyzed in detail. We learn, for example, that Rorty was not only familiar with but strongly influenced by the thought of Charles Sanders Peirce, despite the dismissive tone of the scattered remarks about Peirce that are

found in his later writings. We learn that he thought of himself as a historian and metaphysician (or *metaphilosopher*) rather than as an analytic philosopher throughout the early part of his career, and indeed that he never wholeheartedly endorsed the analytic project. His seminal book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) is, therefore, less of a *volte-face* than has often been supposed.

Apart from these major insights, there are a number of fascinating details in Gross's narrative. Reading Rorty's characteristically sardonic reaction to the Hutchins-Adler Great Books curriculum that he encountered as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago in the late 1940s is amusing. However, we learn that he was momentarily tempted by Adler's (and Leo Strauss's) insistence on the need for a belief in timeless moral truths. We are given a behind-the-scenes look at Rorty's various career moves—as a student from Chicago to Yale, and as a professor from Wellesley to Princeton (where he was hired to teach Aristotle, of all things) and then to Virginia—with judicious reference to various letters of application, invitation, and rejection. We are also given tantalizing glimpses into university and departmental politics at each of these institutions—especially Princeton—both from Rorty's point of view and from those of his colleagues and superiors. The brief discussion of Rorty's contemporaneous reaction to the student movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, which amounts to a practical application of his "ironist" brand of left-liberalism *avant la lettre*, is worth the cost of the book.

Nevertheless, as Gross admits, his account is truncated such that the book cannot properly be described as a biography. Most notably, the discussion breaks off with the publication of the collection of essays *Consequences of Pragmatism* in 1982 as Rorty was moving from Princeton to Virginia and on the cusp of becoming famous. We therefore learn almost nothing about the last 25 years of his life, during which he became one of the most widely discussed and controversial philosophers in the world. Furthermore, since the book treats Rorty's career as a case study, it badly neglects, even by the standards of intellectual biography, the personal dimensions of his life. We are given only a handful of pages on his childhood and a single paragraph on his two years of military service. We are told only in passing that he had a son and learn very little about his marriage to and subsequent divorce from the philosopher Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. (The story of the divorce is told almost entirely from the perspective of departmental politics at Princeton.) Even less is said about his second marriage to the philosopher Mary Varney Rorty with whom he had two more children. His relationship with his parents, who were notable writers and political activists in their own right, is discussed mostly in terms of the career advice that they offered him, although each of them receives a chapter-length biography.

Despite these limitations, the biographical portion of the book is a success on its own terms. Until a more complete treatment becomes available, it will serve as an indispensable resource for anyone who is interested in the

development of Rorty's thought. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the theoretical chapters. The centerpiece of this analysis is the "theory of intellectual self-concept," which states, "intellectuals tell themselves and others stories about who they are qua intellectuals" and then "develop or attach themselves to ideas that . . . give expression to and tie [these stories] together in a satisfying manner" (263, 272). This amounts to little more than the truistic observation that, all things being equal, intellectuals will try to become the kind of intellectuals that they intend to become; this assertion is not a significant advance on existing views.

Similarly, the 13 "theoretical propositions" with which the book concludes (341–48) will seem rather pedestrian to anyone with even a passing familiarity with contemporary American academic life. Propositions 1, 2, 4, 5, and 9 taken together state, in effect, that the children of intellectuals are more inclined and better positioned to pursue an academic career than the children of non-intellectuals. Propositions 3, 6, 7, and 8 state that graduate programs compete for talented students who fit their intellectual profile, and that these students take courses, seek out advisors, and write dissertations based on their own intellectual interests, qualified by strategic considerations and the constraints of their academic environment. Propositions 10, maintain that one's ability to find academic employment will depend Proposition 12 on the prestige of one's graduate advisor and institution and in part on the perceived quality of one's work. Proposition 11 points out that most academics find jobs at less prestigious institutions than those at which they were educated, and Proposition 12 asserts that untenured scholars tend to do the kind of work that is likely to get them tenure and/or a job at a more prestigious institution—striking a delicate balance in the process between originality and conformity. Proposition 13 suggests that tenured scholars are less constrained by these kinds of considerations. Whatever we may think about this state of affairs, we do not need to study Rorty's career in order to become aware of it.

Gross is a sociologist by training and profession, and no doubt all of this was necessary in order for his book to qualify as a work of sociology. If we judge the book in pragmatic terms, however, we will be tempted to conclude that the sacrifices that he makes for the sake of social theory—a discussion of Rorty's later career and a detailed examination of his ideas and personal life—render it less useful, at least to those who are not sociologists, than might otherwise have been. If we judge it as the author intends, as a contribution to the "new sociology of ideas," then we will be tempted to conclude that the book's rather awkward marriage of social theory and intellectual biography illustrates more powerfully the influence that disciplinary norms exercise over intellectual choice than does the life of its subject.

–Eric MacGilvray