Foreword

In the several decades I have been giving talks abroad on pragmatism and editing a quarterly in this area of scholarship, I have witnessed a remarkable growth in interest in American philosophy outside the USA. Although even in the 1960s there was much more knowledge of the history of American philosophy among non-American scholars than is commonly recognized (Germany, France, the Soviet Union, Canada and Great Britain were notable examples), no one can doubt that the publication in 1979 of Richard Rorty’s Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature accelerated this growth. One of the chief reasons that Rorty’s work greatly increased interest in pragmatism abroad was that his publications moved pragmatist philosophy for the first time into several of America’s most prestigious universities. Only in the 1980s did pragmatism acquire a “bully pulpit” in the most prestigious universities of a nation that economically, militarily and culturally enjoyed global hegemony.

Although this hegemony is, for obvious reasons, troubling, it has led to there being more scholars with expertise in pragmatism scattered around the globe outside the U.S. than there are inside the country. The essays contributed to this volume are impressive examples of this worldwide scholarship. The organizers of the Central European Pragmatist Forum are especially to be congratulated for nurturing pragmatist philosophy that is genuinely critical—critical of pragmatism as well as of other philosophical outlooks. Self-correction is in the spirit of classical pragmatism. My hope is that this pragmatist correction will continue to be a mutual one between American philosophers and pragmatists outside the U.S, that cultural imperialism will not prevent American philosophers from learning as much from philosophers in other countries as the latter learn from their American colleagues. Certainly we Americans have much to learn from philosophers abroad. For example, philosophers in Western, Central and Eastern Europe are more in touch with the worlds of literature and the arts than philosophers in the U.S. Partly as a consequence of that fact, in Europe philosophy is a far more powerful cultural force than it is in the U.S. I urge our pragmatist brethren outside the U.S., including those whose work is included in this book, to aid their American colleagues in enriching the pragmatist tradition.

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