

## **A World without Substance or Essences**

Richard Rorty

### **Abstract**

The most widely regarded works of European and American philosophers overlap to a great extent. Both attempt to break away from the metaphysical dualism of the Western philosophical tradition which was inherited from Plato's focus on the duality of essence and accident, substance and property and appearance and reality. The philosophical slogans "everything is a social construction" and "all awareness is a linguistic affair" reveal the expectation of surmounting entrenched dualism. These two slogans unveil the pragmatic viewpoint: all knowledge is merely a linguistic representation adapted to the contemporary goals of society. This concept is a specific characteristic of Dewey's pragmatism. If using the perspective of Dewey's pragmatism, one must avoid a Platonic quest for truth, which is an attempt to get behind appearance to the intrinsic nature of reality. This kind of exploration, while plainly used by Kant was abandoned by Hegel. Pragmatism as a generalized form of anti-essentialism helps us find an important middle ground between Darwin's evolutionary theory and more traditional Platonic philosophy.