



Experience As Philosophy: On the Work of John J. McDermott (American Philosophy)

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The philosopher John J. McDermott comes out of the long American tradition that takes the aim of philosophical inquiry to be interpretation of the open meanings of experience, so that we might all live fuller and richer lives. Here, the authors of these nine essays explore his highly original interpretations of philosophy's various questions about our shared existence. How are we to understand the nature of American culture and to carry forward its important contributions? What is the personal importance of embodiment, of living in the realization of death? How does our physical and personal environment nourish bodies and spirits? What does the deliberate pursuit of a morality offer us? How can we carry forward the fundamental tasks of education to enable those who follow us to use our shared past to address their civic and spiritual problems? What are the possibilities for community? Together, these essays offer a clear, multi-layered understanding of the compelling vision that McDermott has presented over the years. In an Afterword, McDermott responds to the authors' queries and concerns, offering a restatement of his understanding of the American philosopher's task. These essays indicate, and McDermott's response confirms, that for him philosophy is not a purely cerebral activity. Philosophy is, rather, an intellectual means of exploring the fullness of human experience, and it functions best when it operates in the context of the broad sweep of the humanities. Similarly, for McDermott the self is no given substantial entity. On the contrary, it is relational, rooted geographically and socially in its place and its fellows, and damaged when these life-giving processes fail. Further, McDermott does not accept any ultimate canopy of meaning. The human journey is a personal project within which provisional meanings must be created to sustain our advance.

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