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The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond

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This collection of essays by American philosopher Alain Locke (1885-1954) makes readily available for the first time his important writings on cultural pluralism, value relativism, and critical relativism. As a black philosopher early in this century, Locke was a pioneer: having earned both undergraduate and doctoral degrees at Harvard, he was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, studied at the University of Berlin, and chaired the Philosophy Department at Howard University for almost four decades. He was perhaps best known as a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance.

Locke's works in philosophy—many previously unpublished—conceptually frame the Harlem Renaissance and New Negro movement and provide an Afro-American critique of pragmatism and value absolutism, and also offer a view of identity, communicative competency, and contextualism. In addition, his major works on the nature of race, race relations, and the role of race-conscious literature are presented to demonstrate the application of his philosophy. Locke's commentaries on the major philosophers of his day, including James, Royce, Santayana, Perry, and Ehrenfels help tell the story of his relationship to his former teachers and his theoretical affinities.

In his substantial Introduction and interpretive concluding chapter, Leonard Harris describes Locke's life, evaluates his role as an American philosopher and theoretician of the Harlem Renaissance, situates him in the pragmatist tradition, and outlines his affinities with modern deconstructionist ideas. A chronology of the philosopher's life and bibliography of his works are also provided. Although much has been written about Alain Locke, this is the first book to focus on his philosophical contributions.

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