

RORTY'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION¹

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Abstract: Richard Rorty interpreted religion as a historically constituted part of culture. As a philosopher, he sought primarily to understand religion's socio-cultural nature and role. His approach was socio-critical, intellectually sympathetic and humanistic. The paper provides an account of Rorty's key phases in his philosophy of religion. During phase one (the 1990s), he was primarily interested in whether, in a democratic society, religion should simply be a private matter or also one of public concern (and if so, then in what way and to what extent). During phase two (post-2000), his thinking on cultural politics developed more broadly, and he wrote about 'romantic polytheism' and the future of religion, etc. In his writing from phase one, he portrays himself as a 'secular humanist' as well as an atheist and, in his writing from phase two, as a 'non-theist' and 'anti-clericalist'.

Key words: religion; Richard Rorty; conversation; democracy; romantic polytheism; cultural politics.

Introduction

Rorty took religion seriously. He considered it to be a historically constituted part of culture, though—as with any other cultural form—he could imagine human history without it. As a philosopher, he sought primarily to understand religion's socio-cultural nature and role. In his youth, he had even considered studying theology and later, when he first began teaching, he enthusiastically embarked on a course on the philosophy of religion, reading the work of Paul Tillich with his students (Gross, 2008, p. 195). His left-wing family upbringing guided him towards atheism; nonetheless, he could not have been unaware of the role of his grandfather on his mother's side, the influential American theologian Walter Rauschenbusch (whom, having died in 1918, Rorty never met). It was not until almost the very end of his life that Rorty acknowledged him in a short afterword to the centenary edition of Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. As a 'secular humanist', he paid tribute to the social and moral legacy of the Social Gospel movement of which his grandfather was a leading proponent. For Rorty, this legacy was the struggle for a socially-just society, like the 'Kingdom of God' created here on Earth and in this life. The hopes Christians and

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humanists had of such a society being created were to remain unfulfilled as developments unfolded in a completely different direction:

One hundred years ago there was still a chance that the Christian church would play a central role in the struggle for social justice – that Christian, rather than Marxist, ideas would inspire radical socio-political change...against the backdrop of a consensus, in the West, that building a global egalitarian society was a moral obligation. With a bit of luck, Rauschenbusch's dream could have come true, despite the 'sinfulness of the human heart'. But our luck was bad, and Christianity has probably missed its chance (Rorty, 2007b, p. 349).

The forms of religion that were on the ascendancy in the twentieth century, and which continue to evolve today, had, according to Rorty, 'little to do with hopes for a cooperative commonwealth' (and nor would any of the communist forms of ideology lead to such a prospect). Here too, Platonism prevailed, diverting Christian attention away from solving the problems of this world and enabling a rather odd blend of asceticism and mammonism to emerge (Rorty, 2007b, pp. 347-348).

Elsewhere Rorty describes how the two great prophecies—Christianity's the *New Testament* and Marxism's the *Communist Party Manifesto*—were never fulfilled, disappointing the hopes of the masses. Nevertheless, neither had lost its inspirational force as 'expressions of the same hope: that someday we shall be willing and able to treat the needs of all human beings with the same kind of respect and consideration with which we treat the needs of those closest to us, those whom we love' (Rorty, 1999, pp. 202-203). Reading the first treatise teaches us about human fraternity, and the second about social equality; while reading both together helps us become better people, despite all the peripeteia and cataclysms that history has sent to test these two great tracts.

Rorty's general approach

These two examples testify to the fact that Rorty's approach to religion was socio-critical, intellectually sympathetic and humanistic. His was the attitude of an intellectual, a philosopher, who reflected deeply on these issues. Hence, the main thrust of his intellectual critique was linked to the very reason he criticised western philosophy: its ambition—much like that of the metaphysical and theological traditions, varying only in the paths they followed—was to seek out a non-human (divine) buttress which would shore up human fate such that it would be safeguarded. Rorty's beliefs, from his humanism to his anthropocentrism, were, however, philosophical convictions on which humankind depends, just as the individuals in a society depend on one another for cooperation and support. Hence, they are only responsible for one another. There is not sufficient reason or even evidence to support supernaturalism, and any religious or theological vocabulary containing this term is simply one of our sociocultural creations. The fundamental question then is—as it is in the case of the philosophical vocabularies—what purpose do they serve and what benefits do they bring? Rorty's pragmatic anti-foundationalism and his anti-authoritarianism could not but take a critical view of a human culture created by an authority conferred with a superhuman and super-historical status. His attitude was deeply democratic and tolerant, emphasising that culture was fundamentally about conversing broadly and freely on all

issues. His intentions were therapeutic, not only in regard to philosophy but also to culture as a whole, insofar as they were concerned with eliminating archaic vocabularies and ways of life that lead to unnecessary cruelty between people. Thus it is better when philosophy and other forms of culture inspire rather than simply discipline, control and punish. Culture's humanistic mission is that we should become better, freer, more responsible and more creative citizens of democratic society. We are beings who cannot simply step outside our culture and history, and thus escape time, chance and all that shapes our human destiny. Worst of all, according to Rorty, would be to shirk the responsibility for shaping our own lives. Seen from this perspective, all practices, regardless of form or content, are problematic; what are important are the consequences they have on our lives. To avoid responsibility is to avoid humanity.

That pragmatism and religion are compatible has been clear since the classicists began developing this philosophy. For Peirce religion is an expression of 'evolutionary love', while for James it is an expression of pluralism and meliorism. According to Dewey, it is an expression of respect for something that transcends us, and for Rorty it is an expression of social hope (Rosenbaum, 2003). Rorty's interest in attitudes to religion is not epistemic (as it is in relation to knowledge) but is political, moral and cultural—his interest is in religion as a doctrine seeking to inspire and mobilise people to create good, both of an individual and collective nature. Although this function of religion may well now seem out of date and old-fashioned, Rorty cannot entirely see what could replace it—certainly not science, perhaps art—and so a better approach would be to reform it so it is compatible with the nature of a democratic culture. It is from this democratic culture perspective that he interprets the phenomenon of religion.

Rorty's conception of religion evolved partly in relation to the kinds of issues he was discussing. During phase one (the 1990s), he was primarily interested in whether, in a democratic society, religion should simply be a private matter or also one of public concern (and if so, then in what way and to what extent). During phase two (post-2000), his thinking on cultural politics developed more broadly, and he wrote about 'romantic polytheism' and the future of religion, etc. In his writing from phase one, he portrays himself as a 'secular humanist' as well as an atheist and, in his writing from phase two, as a 'non-theist' and 'anti-clericalist'.

Conversation stopper

Metaphysics blocks our openness to things new. It is the equivalent of denying freedom and responsibility. The search for a definitive metaphysics blocks change and innovation, and inquiry and conversation. At the same time, 'normalising' this kind of discourse 'freezes' culture, which, for Rorty, is the equivalent of dehumanising people. It arises out of an ambition for transcendence, the desire to immortalise one discourse as the only rightful one that fully corresponds to reality as it should. The type of discourse—philosophical, scientific, political or religious—is unimportant since it will always have dehumanising consequences. It turns the person into a subservient 'part' and only recognises its own values. For Rorty, most depressingly of all, it risks preventing the possibility that human life can be lived as poetic self-creation. Central to this self-creation is free conversation. This is the hermeneutic backdrop to the position that led him to his first reflections on religion.

The first piece of writing he published on this theme was an article entitled 'Religion as Conversation-stopper' (Rorty, 1999, pp. 168-174). In it he defended the classical Jeffersonian idea he had previously discussed: that religion has no place in the public sphere since it may—owing to its nature—create unnecessary difficulties for human co-existence, trigger conflicts and controversies, do harm, be a source of cruelty and, chiefly—given its categorical dogmas—block discussion, seek to close down rather than expand debates not subsumed within its doctrines, and so forth. If the essence of democracy is to ensure that everyone in the public sphere has an opportunity to express themselves and prevent unnecessary conflict or even harm or cruelty, then it is better if religious faith is 'banished' to the private sphere where it will be freer to pursue its role in the search for meaning in people's lives, enabling their self-development, supporting them in life's difficult situations, etc. It is clear that Rorty's position was unable to reconcile religion's entitlement to access the public sphere with its desire to influence people's public and private good—not through violence—as his grandfather, Rauschenbusch, had done before him. His position is, equally clearly, influenced by the Enlightenment attitudes of the secular intellectual, which, in seeking to advance the modernisation of society, subsequently usurped the whole of the public sphere. When Rorty argues against the American professor of law S. L. Carter, at whose behest he penned the article, and stated that it would be better for religion if each person were to 'privatise' it, since it could then be used to pursue the goals of personal development and solace, he is still unaware of the untenability of his argument. A secular defence of democracy that comes at the price of excluding religious believers is just as poor a defence as the witch-burning carried out by fanatical believers that pre-dated the ascendancy of secular modernity. It assumes—as J. Dewey had grasped and rejected—that religion and its followers are the a priori enemies of democracy, and that there can be no tolerant, empathetic people amidst their number. That is not the case. Rorty's arguments as to why religion should not gain access to the public sphere can be summarised thus: 1. Religion is best suited to the search for and creation of personal happiness in private lives; 2. Its categorical dogmas mean religion is a threat to the continuation of the conversation that lies at the heart of democratic public life; 3. Religion is not a source of moral knowledge, as its followers claim, but simply a conviction that is just as subjective as all other moral convictions (Rorty, 1999, pp. 171-173).

Faith, responsibility, and romance

Rorty submitted further arguments in favour of his utilitarian, Enlightenment conception of religion in a second piece entitled 'Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance' (Rorty, 1999, pp. 148-167). These arguments emerged as he was interpreting W. James's key work, 'The Will to Believe'. The interpretation differs from his previous one and is influenced by Davidson with whom Rorty is in agreement when he talks about responsibility in relation to other human beings rather than in relation to 'Truth and Meaning' (Rorty, 1999, p. 148). Although he attempts to draw on James's strategy of privatising religious faith, ultimately he encounters its limits and does not adopt it fully. He begins by establishing the difference between religion and science, which leads him to the idea that if religion is 'something done in privacy', it cannot inflict damage on science or other cultural matters.

The main distinction generally drawn between science and religion is that science has to justify its claims while religion does not. Whilst both James and Rorty accept this, it leads them to an entirely different conclusion from the standard Enlightenment one, which is basically the maxim of a scientific culture: that anything that cannot justify its claim, either rationally or empirically, is fundamentally at doubt. James and Rorty (and others) reject this rationalist, scientific, Enlightenment maxim, ultimately, justifying religion on a different basis. Not on the basis of conviction as is the case with knowledge but on desire as is the case with life; its function is not to control the world but to offer hope for life. By positioning them one against the other or one above the other, we create a dualism with negative consequences (Rorty, 1999, pp. 152-153). It is a false dualism that posits the cognitive against the non-cognitive, and the rational against the emotional, implying that, on the one hand, we have science with its pursuit of truth and, on the other, religion (and other cultural forms, such as philosophy and art) with its pursuit of happiness. Positioning one against the other, or subordinating one to the other, is unlikely to lead to anything other than unhappiness. Rorty disagreed with James over this, who thought that the search for truth could also be a search for happiness (Rorty, 1999, pp. 155). Rorty, however, never doubted that James's entire philosophy came down on the side of happiness—on the side of romance, which had no need to justify itself to the other rationalist side, requiring only protection from it and the space for self-realisation. James's 'will to believe' also comes down firmly on this side, as does Rorty.

Religion in the public square

In his third piece of writing in this vein entitled 'Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration' (Rorty, 2003), and in response to work by his fellow philosophers and theologians (particularly N. Wolterstorff), Rorty refines his conception of religion to one that consider it a private matter. He explains that when understood in this way, religion is basically the consequence of a compromise between secular democratic government and the clergy, clearly dating back to the Enlightenment era. His reflections lead him to consider it better to advance this compromise than to preserve it, although not at the highest level of the church but at the lower end—in the parishes—in support of local democracy (Rorty, 2003, pp.141-142). Thus he shifts the problem from the level of doctrine to that of institution, defending the political idea that democracy has the right to protect itself against the possible dangers of upheaval (Rorty, 2003, pp. 147). Nonetheless, he broadens his conception of doctrine and free debate when he accepts that people of a religious persuasion may enter into public and political debate and freely present their arguments just as liberals do, without being regulated by liberal legislation. This does not apply to public opinion, morals and customs, where a more sensitive response is required, when, for example, an individual arguing on religious grounds causes distress or harm or is cruel to homosexuals (Rorty, 2003, p. 143). If religious supporters and activists acquire the freedom to present their views in the public sphere, the same rules apply to them as do to all participants. They are responsible for ensuring that they do not inflict malice or cover it up (Rorty cites the Jewish pogroms as an example). Thus if religious believers possess and desire a democratic instinct, then they themselves must learn and accept the rules of democracy. Then there will be no reason to protest against their participation in public debate. Rorty concludes his liberalised approach

with a very strong anti-authoritarian message: those who decide to engage in democratic conversation cannot argue their case by appealing to an authority, regardless of whom or what that authority may be—the Bible or J. S. Mill. The rules of democracy require us to justify our position not cite an authority (Rorty, 2003, p. 148).

Romantic polytheism

In phase two of his reflections on religion, Rorty came closer to accepting that religion had a sociocultural role. The first piece of writing in which he did so was ‘Pragmatism as romantic polytheism’ (Rorty, 1998). Although his primary concern was to defend his new pragmatism, he did so by describing pragmatism’s proximity to romanticism, and religion’s proximity to poetry and the thinking of Mill, James and Nietzsche. In short, he unveiled the basis of his pragmatist philosophy of religion to which he had alluded in previous writing (Rorty, 1998, pp. 27-29): 1. if beliefs are habits of action rather than representations of the world, they need not form a single integral whole, since the goals of actions are varied and require a variety of beliefs; 2. if there is no point in having a will to truth independent of the drive for happiness, then contrasting the cognitive with the non-cognitive and the serious with the non-serious becomes a pointless exercise; 3. if science and law are primarily used in the project of social cooperation, then art and religion can be used in the project of individual self-development; 4. if what has traditionally been referred to as the ‘love of truth’ is more love of intersubjective agreement, it cannot be used to argue against religion, which is equally concerned with responsibility to others through social cooperation; and 5. if the traditional love of truth is a way of seeking a single great authority upon which one can depend, then when it acts as a barrier to human fraternity, it is a betrayal of that very ideal.

Rorty thought ‘Polytheism’ seemed to provide a good, pluralistic ‘bridge’ between the atheists, non-theists and theists in contemporary modern culture. The Christian notion around which they could integrate was human fraternity. Pragmatist philosophers such as James and Dewey developed a non-theistic idea which was compatible with the notion of human fraternity: anti-authoritarianism, which rejects the notion that people should bow down to a non-human authority (Rorty, 1998, pp. 31-33). Logically then, the only possible authority is people themselves, providing they recognise each other as equal ‘brothers’ who know their lives will only be as good as they can make them together.

How we create our lives together is also about how we use language and talk about the world and one another. These are our ‘cultural politics’, and in his analysis entitled ‘Cultural politics and the question of the existence of God’ (Rorty, 2007a, pp. 3-26). Rorty considers it to be central to the way we conceive of and practice religion. He concludes that cultural politics is everything that we do in society; hence all our sociocultural practices—both linguistic and non-linguistic—are political because it is through them that we shape our conditions and way of life. We define the possibilities, that is, what we can and cannot do, as well as what we actually do. If this is the case, then the dualism of science and politics, or of philosophy and politics, becomes a little shaky under foot because neither the ontological question ‘what exists?’ nor the theological question ‘does God exist?’ can be answered without recourse to our sociocultural practices including linguistic ones. Equally we cannot resolve the consequences of our response to the question ‘does God exist?’

without using further practices, for instance, by formulating behavioural norms in linguistic terms; hence, 'if God exists, you must obey him', and 'to obey God means following the Ten Commandments', etc. A social norm is only one of the sociocultural forms created and sanctioned by authorities; institutions are another, and a third is the way we speak. For example, if we establish a discourse in society about God or about science, rationality or morality etc., in such a way that users of the discourse are advantaged over non-users (those who do not talk about God), we create a particular type of sociocultural situation, a life to which we either conform or do not. Altering this would mean altering the discourse; that is, our sociocultural practices, both linguistic and non-linguistic (another interesting question concerns the order in which we would alter them).

Cultural politics

Here, Rorty relies on the theory of social practices developed by his former student R. Brandom, for whom this analysis is self-referential: Brandom (and also Rorty) states that everything we do, including science and religion, is simply sociocultural practice fulfilling the role of cultural politics, based not on empirical evidence but on the recognition that this theory of sociocultural practices (including conceptions of norms, institutions, authorities etc.) is simply yet another part of our cultural politics. From this perspective, in this 'game' called 'cultural politics'—the 'only game in town'—all scientists, priests, judges and other participants do is make decisions based on their opinions of the subject and the consequences of their actions such that, in one way or another, others recognise that decision, i.e., it is approved, agreed, complied with, and carried out etc., (Rorty, 2007a, p. 9). Brandom (and also Rorty) states that we cannot disengage from the game because we cannot step out of our community, culture, language, etc. If that is the case, then it is the goals of the game being pursued that are the deciding factor. If some of the participants of this game establish and develop a discussion in which they speak of God, Truth, Reality etc., as non-human authorities ('revealed', 'given, not created by people'), then it is necessary to look at the goals they are pursuing through the use of these linguistic practices. These goals are very familiar from history and so is the game: some people seek to ensure their social power is backed up by a greater non-human (superhuman) force which others no longer have the ability to oppose. To achieve this they employ two basic methods (or a combination thereof): violence and persuasion. Rorty came to believe that, thanks to the discursive practice of cultural politics, the power of discourse, sustained by the way we talk about the world and ourselves, is equivalent to what traditional representationalist philosophy calls the 'truth': what the prevailing discourse recognises to be the truth. Changing it would mean changing the discourse (Rorty, 2007a, pp. 10-11). In other words, it would mean changing what we say and how we say it as well as how we behave and live in the world. People create many different discourses or 'language games' and compete ('fight') over which one will gain traction. Some have shown that some discourses 'make no sense' (for example, discourses on God, knowledge, etc.) because they do not fit into their language games. Others have demonstrated that those who do not recognise their discourses (for example, discourses on God, knowledge, etc.) are 'mistaken and understand nothing', because they assume that it is possible to step away from these discursive games and demonstrate one's truth by comparing

discourses with 'reality' (empirically, scientifically, practically etc.). Cultural politics enables us to create a world in which mixed-race marriages, for instance, are accepted or, equally, a world in which believing in God or in the existence of consciousness is accepted because neither can claim a higher level of proof in experience or in reality. What one discourse considers to be unacceptable and impossible, another takes to be the opposite (Rorty, 2007a, pp. 13-14). For us humans, there is no 'neutral' point beyond us from which we could make 'neutral' decisions about which discourse is better, which is worse, which is true and which is not, etc. We have to decide all this 'according to ourselves', i.e., 'subjectively', on the basis of our goals, needs and interests, and any such 'neutral point' of which we might speak is simply an artefact, just like all the other things we seek to compare it with (for example, discourses about God, consciousness etc.). From a cultural politics perspective, all the things we talk about are 'on the same level,' in the sense that they are just different forms of discourses, linguistic practices and games, and none is any more privileged than another simply because it is 'ontological' and the other not or because it is 'theological' and the other not, etc. There is no exception—not even what we refer to as the 'object' of our investigation or activity; even that is the result of our social practices (Rorty, 2007a, p. 15). So, before we even begin to 'solve' ontological or theological questions, we would do better to ask other questions: 'Is it good to discuss ontological or theological questions?', 'What is it good for?', 'Why do we need to discuss these?' and 'Don't we know how to discuss things differently?' And even if we provide meaningful, positive answers to these questions that does not mean that our answers will be valid for all eternity. For cultural politics is historical, and nothing exists beyond it that would once and for all pin down one particular answer which could only be the result of a specific practice (politics). If such a thing were possible, it would mean setting in stone a specific practice (politics) in its historical form for all 'eternity' or what is known as the 'end of history'.

Changes in cultural practices take place through changes in cultural politics in the space W. Sellars called the 'logical space of reasons'; however, this space also creates cultural politics. It is not a closed circle, though, because history—and indeed progress—exists and is manifest within this change when people with imaginations appear ('strong poets'), capable of innovating our discourse such that others accept it. Rorty comes to see that our discourses also contain 'bad questions', not because we are not capable of formulating them linguistically or of talking about them but because we have not created a 'logical space of reasons', rational norms we could use to create meaningful answers. One such question is 'Does God exist?' (Rorty, 2007a, p. 21). Language makes it possible for us to formulate questions which we, as people, have no possibility of answering. What does this mean? For the anti-metaphysicians, it means having to look at the way we use language; for metaphysicians, it is a mystery and perhaps also proof of our 'higher essence', of which we have only a mystical awareness. For the anti-metaphysicians group, it means that it may be better to substitute discussions on these kinds of questions with other, more rational, comprehensible ones; for the metaphysicians, it means continuing to have mystical discussions. For the anti-metaphysicians, it also means that language is a human creation that cannot contain anything mystical in it; for the metaphysicians, it also means that people and language are mystical enigmas we ourselves are not capable of understanding or explaining. Our choice of discourse (language games, linguistic practices, cultural politics) and the

reasons we choose it are linked to ‘how we understand ourselves’, which simply means we interpret ourselves according to the particular discourse we have adopted. Yet decisions

about what language games to play, what to talk about and what not to talk about, and for what purposes, are not made on the basis of agreed-upon criteria. Cultural politics is the least norm-governed human activity. It is the site of generational revolt, and thus the growing point of culture – the place where traditions and norms are all up for grabs at once (Rorty, 2007a, p. 21).

The substance of cultural politics is a discussion on the kinds of ‘logical spaces of reasons’ we create and the purposes for which we create them (Rorty, 2007a, p. 22). Just as we create these spaces socioculturally, their boundaries and internal coordinates shape our traditions and norms as the established parts of our discourses, or the institutions established thus far as part of our extralinguistic practices. There is no other ‘mystique’ behind our discourses. None of the ‘objects’ of our discourses—God, atom or state—shapes our discourses such that they dictate the manner in which we should talk about them. If anything dictates this to us, then it is the discourses themselves and some of the structural elements that we have embedded in them (traditions, norms, institutions). The problems arise when, for example, we mix different types of discourses together and especially when we cause internal norms of one type to illegitimately ‘transgress’ into another (scientific norms into philosophical ones etc.).

Rorty suggests that instead of asking the ontological question about the existence of God, we should ask about the cultural desirability and usefulness of a discourse on God (Rorty, 2007a, pp. 24–25). He again distinguishes between private and public discourse. Private discourse includes, for example, James’s ‘right to believe’, which seems to be indisputable and comparable to the right to create poetry, paint pictures and so forth. A good liberal society creates sufficient space for these. There are limits, though, to public discourse in a liberal society, as established by J. S. Mill: ecclesiastical organisations may engage in public discourse so long as they do not cause public harm. However, things become complicated when we come to consider what constitutes this harm and who decides (Rorty, 2007a, p. 25). In a democratic society this is again simply a democratic discussion on the kinds of issues Rorty was keen to promote more than a discussion on the existence of God, since it is about human happiness. The cultural community in question has to decide how to resolve these issues; there is no universal human recipe. Each, though, is concerned to maintain a balance between responsibility to itself and to others (Rorty, 2007a, p. 26).

On the future of religion

In an article entitled ‘Anti-clericalism and Atheism’ (Rorty, 2005, Rorty formulates a more personal stance on religion. He begins by pointing out that in the future philosophers may no longer pose these ‘bad questions’ based on notions of ‘timelessness’ (and the ahistorical nature of philosophy itself). Their predecessors are the twentieth-century anti-essentialists such as Derrida, Dewey, Wittgenstein and Heidegger. In part this will lead to the conflict between science and religion being reduced to what can and cannot be rationally justified; to a greater tolerance amongst atheists and believers, and also philosophers and non-philosophers without the philosophers considering the non-philosophers to be intellectually

or morally inferior and *vice versa* (Rorty, 2005, pp. 30-31). It paints a picture of a better, freer, post-metaphysical culture. The idea that atheists are simply those who believe that God's existence has not been empirically proven is becoming clearer and more generally accepted, while many have already grasped what Hume and Kant had already stated: that empiricism is irrelevant in proving whether God exists or not (Rorty, 2005, p. 32). Other 'non-theists' are the 'anti-clericalists', as Rorty now refers to himself (Rorty, 2005, p. 40). This is not an epistemological nor a metaphysical attitude but a political one. Anti-clericalism

is the view that ecclesiastical institutions, despite all the good they do – despite all the comfort they provide to those in need or despair –are dangerous to the health of democratic societies (Rorty, 2005, p. 33).

Again Rorty does not see the political risks as emanating from the religious doctrines but from their institutions, should they, through their activities, begin disrupting the democratic society that makes their tolerated existence possible but also requires them to uphold the democratic culture. In such a culture, however, religion's existence is not contingent upon these institutions; it can easily exist in the private sphere in a form G. Vattimo, who is close to Rorty on this, refers to as 'weak faith', one that is not based on the concept of truth or any other epistemological or 'symbolic' foundation, nor indeed on a power base. Its only foundation is love (Rorty, 2005, p. 35).

There are further issues relating to knowledge and truth and the legitimacy of religion. If religion is something other than knowledge, and the knowledge sphere in modern society is the public sphere, then religion has no place within it. This does not, however, mean that the entire public sphere of knowledge should be occupied by what Heidegger called 'science and technics', i.e. the natural and technical sciences rooted in the rationality and objectivity paradigm. If, however, the rationality sphere is understood to be a 'logical space of reasons' and if, instead of objectivity we talk of intersubjective agreement, then we create a socio-cultural space, based on non-epistemological foundations, that can include religion (Rorty, 2005, pp. 36-37). It is founded on love, clearly part of the private sphere; yet as utopians neither Vattimo nor Rorty can quite shrug off the hope

that some day, any millennium now, my remote descendants will live in a global civilisation in which love is pretty much the only law. In such a society, communication would be domination-free, class and caste would be unknown, hierarchy would be a matter of temporary pragmatic convenience, and power would be entirely at the disposal of the free agreement of a literate and well-educated electorate (Rorty, 2005, p. 40).

Here Rorty is expressing the utopian hope that 'love' will prevail as 'the only law' in society, rather than in the family or in any other private sphere. He considers this to be more important than endlessly discussing what does and what does not exist, not just for the future of religion but for the future of humankind as well. He views the transitions from a metaphysical culture to a post-metaphysical secular culture and from a Christian 'God of power' to a 'God of love' as two parallel processes (Rorty, Vattimo, & Zabala, 2005, p. 56).

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