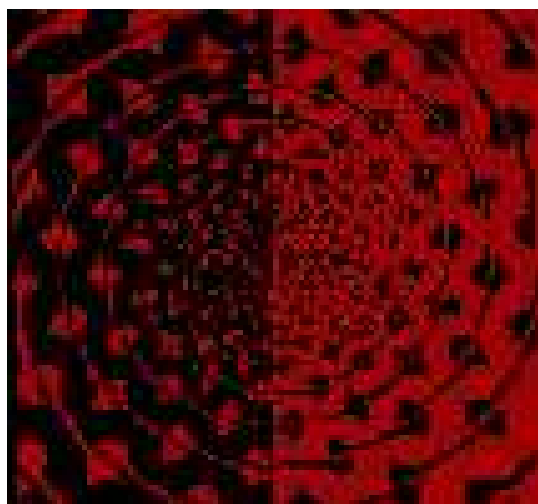


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**THE VOICE OF RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE.
A RECONSIDERATION OF RORTY'S ARTICLE.**

“RELIGION AS A CONVERSATION-STOPPER”.

INTRODUCTION.

In his article, *Religions et démocratie délibérative: Comment sortir de l'impasse ?*, Marc Maesschalck reflects on the difficulties associated in the contemporary democratic society with the governance of religion in the public space based on the deliberative model which he calls *deliberativism*. In his article he defines the problems and the inadequacies of the same deliberative model. He points out that it is time also to realize that the difficulties associated with the governance of religion in the public space are not solely due to the nature of religion herself but also due to the nature and limitations of the public space herself¹. In the words of Jurgen Habermas, the deliberative model seeks the resolution of problems and the governance of the society inserted into a deliberative social process which is realised in the discussions and the debates which take place both in the parliaments and also in the political public space².

Maesschalck also states that a method of re-questioning the deliberative method is necessary because the current situation of things shows that the separation of the state and the church has not actually solved the problems connected to religion and its expression and governance in the public space. He indicates that the links created so far between religions and the structure of modern political authority do not seem to be adequate in containing new forms of religious

¹MAESSCHALCK, M., *Religions et démocratie délibérative: Comment sortir de l'impasse ?* in *Les Carnets du Centre de Philosophie du droit*, Université catholique de Louvain Louvain-la-Neuve, décembre. 2005, Carnet No. 120, p. 1

² HABERMAS, J., *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen, Studien zur politischen Theorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M., 1996, p. 288 (trad. française, Fayard, Paris, 1998, p. 270), cited in MAESSCHALCK, M., *Religions et démocratie délibérative.*, p. 1

expressions and the attendant problems. Besides this, the encouragement of tolerance between the religions has not stemmed the radicalization of certain forms of fundamentalism and the proliferation of some dangerous sects that have become social nuisance manifested in the form of terrorism and extremism;-all which weigh heavily on social security³.

In his own way of responding to this problem of the governance of religion in the public-square, Richard Rorty gives the impression that religion is a major danger to the democratic political process. In 1994, Rorty wrote an article titled, *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*. In this article, he proposes therefore that religion remain outside the public-square. His reason was that in all discussions, in all conversations, any reference made to one's faith in public debates stops the conversation because religious opinions are neither susceptible to confirmation nor provable. They have therefore nothing to do with the public-square and the debates which take place in it.

Rorty's presumption is that religion is too dangerous to be brought into public discussions because it is a conversation-stopper⁴ and a danger to democracy and liberty⁵. In such a situation religion and the voice of religion will no longer be heard in public debates. And so will all positions; be it moral or political based on them. According to him, religion especially in its institutionalized form has become a public danger; so dangerous that it would be best for them eventually to wither away⁶ so as to prevent them from determining actions and morals.

Different authors have criticised Rorty for his position in this debate. Among them, Nicholas Wolterstorff in his article, '*Religion and Democratic Culture: The Role of Faith in Public Discourse*', holds that, "the fundamental question to which a liberal democratic society offers an answer is this: How can persons who embrace such profoundly different comprehensive perspectives... nonetheless live together as equals in a just, stable, and peaceful society?"⁷. This means that it is not in keeping the voice of religion out of the public-square that one finds how to 'live together as equals in a just, stable, and peaceful society', but rather in making sure that each citizen become a participant in her debates freely and equally.

³ MAESSCHALCK, M., *Religions et démocratie délibérative.*, p. 3

⁴ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, England, 1999, pp. 168-174, see p. 171

⁵ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, pp. 170-171

⁶ RORTY, R., *Anticléricalisme et théisme*, in *L'avenir de la religion : solidarité, charité, ironie /* Richard Rorty, Gianni Vattimo ; sous la direction de Santiago Zabala ; traduit de l'italien par Carole Walter. Bayard Editions, 2006, pp. 45-66, see p. 52

⁷ WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, in *Journal of Religious Ethics, Inc.* JRE 31. 1:129-139© 2003, p. 130

Since some years now, Richard Rorty has started to improve on his ideas by identifying the problems connected to his position in keeping the voice of religion out of the public-square. With some concessions and changes made through the years, but without recognizing them clearly, Rorty has at last brought religion and metaphysics back to the public-square after having understood that whatever be our world-view, there is always behind them a faith and hope⁸ which perhaps are susceptible or subject neither to absolute confirmation nor prove but which animate them. This newly found faith in Rorty's case is the Romantic Polytheism which has as its god, the United States of America, or the future man or simply humanity⁹.

In this paper, we intend to investigate Rorty's general idea of philosophy, pragmatism and truth, their connection to his conception of religion and his reasons for asking for its complete privatization. We shall expose his current position on religion and its implications. We shall criticize and evaluate it with the ideas of other philosophers who are though in support of the church/state separation, but do not find it just or necessary to silence the religious voice in the public-square.

I. ON RORTY'S PRAGMATISM.

1. A Criticism of Truth as Correspondence.

According to Rorty, *pragmatism* provides a way of circumventing the need to talk about truth in representational terms. In the *pragmatists'* parlance, *truth* is purely *practical*, it is what works or in Rorty's words, *whatever that enables us to cope in the relevant situation*¹⁰. Rorty's position seems to reduce truth to the mundane size of human interests with the attendant implications and consequences. Rorty regards the *correspondence theory* as a philosophical *mirage* resulting from the tradition which ran from Plato to Kant, which according to him, succeeded in *enskying* truth and so obscured its down-to-earth practical nature. By his *pragmatism*, Rorty advocates the adoption of a *new framework* in which truth is determined according to its practical import and no one borders whether it conforms to any 'truth-independent reality' or not. In this Rortian project, the justification for believing something is, as he puts it, "a social phenomenon rather than a transaction between the knowing subject and

⁸ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, in *First Things : A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, (electronic version) (<http://www.firstthings.com/>) No. 143, May, 2004, pp. 24-30, see p.27

⁹ RORTY, R., *Achieving Our Country*, (1999) *Leftists Thought in the Twentieth-Century America*, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 18, 22

¹⁰ MALACHOWSKI, A. (ed.) *Richard Rorty: in Sage Masters of Modern Social Thought*, Cambridge University Press, England, 2002, Vol. 1, p. XI

reality”¹¹. Also for him, statements are taken to be true only if they deliver the appropriate goods¹². Rorty developed his idea of truth as *pragmatic* from the ideas of/and his interpretations of W. V. Quine and Donald Davidson¹³. For Rorty, there is nothing like an intrinsic nature apart from a thing’s relation to *human needs, consciousness or language*¹⁴. Thus for him truth is inseparable from its social context.

Rorty offers a re-description of culture, moral, etc in which new ideas spring up, fresh themes capture our attention and most of the philosophical and metaphysical verities like universal ideas, moral absolutes, objectivity and realism, transcendental notions and all that go to support the traditional idea of religion simply fade away¹⁵. In his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty further suggests that the presumed perennial problems of philosophy like the *soul-body relationship, appearance and reality*, etc are rather *contingent, optional* and not *inevitable or necessary*.

In his alternative vocabulary, he recommends that we speak of for example, *language* as something we shape to cope with our environment, of the *self* as something we construct out of the disparate materials of our private fantasies and of our *social life*, and of *community* as something we build on the basis of fellow feeling or ‘solidarity’. Thus all these are reduced to ‘human creations’. And there is nothing constraining in the nature of things except what we say is there¹⁶. According to Rorty, this move will then free us from such ideas as God or some other metaphysical notions like *reality* etc. Rorty’s pragmatism adopts an image of man as an animal different from others just because of the complexity of his behaviour and his exceptional cleverness¹⁷. The human search for knowledge is an illusion because their search is just like that of their fellow animals only that it is differentiated by its complexity. He has no knowledge of any reality behind appearances since there is in fact no reality hidden to be seen behind appearances as he claims.

¹¹ RORTY, R., *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1980, p. 9

¹² MALACHOWSKI, A. (ed.) *Richard Rorty*: Vol. 1, p. XII

¹³ In a paper presented in 1951, titled “*Two Dogmas of Empiricism*”, Quine demolished the traditional dichotomy and description of the nature of truth as either *contingent* or *necessary*.

¹⁴ RORTY, R., *World without Substances or Essences*, in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin, 1999, pp. 47-71, see p. 50

¹⁵ MALACHOWSKI, A. (ed.) *Richard Rorty*., Vol. 1, p. XX

¹⁶ RORTY, R., *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays: 1972-1980*, USA, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p. 165

¹⁷ RORTY, R., *Ethics without Principles*, in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, England, 1999, pp. 72-90, see p. 72

2. Rorty's Ethical Ideas without Metaphysics: A Consequence of his Pragmatism.

For Rorty, morality is a question of and a product of tradition, habit, custom, social practices, circumstance and times and has nothing to do with a *self* or *soul* different from experiences and routine¹⁸. The contrary idea is rather a religious platonic and Kantian idea that confuses rather than clarifies with its distinction between the true self and the false self, connected as it is to what Dewey in Rorty's reading called the 'belief in the fixity of the simplicity of the self' created by theologians¹⁹. Instead of pursuing this quest for moral laws and stipulations that are ready-made for completed selves, Rorty speaks of 'the secular equivalent of faith in God...(which) is faith in the human community and its evolving procedures-in the prospects for many-handed cognitive ambitions and moral hopes'²⁰. Morality is therefore about the creation of and re-creation and "re-making of human selves so as to enlarge the variety of the relationships which constitute those selves" envisaging as an ideal something like the Christian and Buddhist accounts and ideas of sainthood, which implies one for whom the suffering of any human being or animal is painful²¹. It is a matter of increasing sensitivity so as to include more and more groups of people, or "taking the needs and interests and views of more and more diverse human beings into account"²². It is never an issue of obedience to God's will. In moral discourse, such phrases as, obedience to the will of God, unconditional moral obligation, inalienable human right invoked as unmoved movers, are all ways of confessing the end of our argumentative resources. Ethical, religious or theological discussions that are fashioned like the

"talk of the *will of God* or of *the rights of man*, like talk of '*the honour of the family*' or of '*the fatherland in danger*' are not suitable for philosophical analysis and criticism. It is fruitless to look behind them. None of these notions should be analysed, for they are all ways of saying, 'Here I stand: I can do no other'. These are not reasons for action so much as announcements that one has thought the issue through and come to a decision"²³

¹⁸ RORTY, R., *Ethics without Principles*, pp. 76-77

¹⁹ DEWEY, J., *Human Nature and Conduct: The Middle Works of John Dewey*, Carbondale, Illinois, Southern Illinois University Press, 1983, vol. XIV, p. 96, see, RORTY, R., *Ethics without Principles*, p. 77

²⁰ BAIER, Annette, *Postures of the Mind*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 293 see RORTY, R., *Ethics without Principles*, p. 78

²¹ RORTY, R., *Ethics without Principles*, p. 79

²² RORTY, R., *Ethics without Principles*, p. 82

²³ RORTY, R., *Ethics without Principles*, pp. 83-84

Rortian pragmatism agrees with Nietzsche that ideas like the *will of God*, *human rights* and *brotherhood of all men*, *idea of common humanity* are rather superstitious but useful contrivances sometimes put forward by the weak to protect them from being shoved around by the strong. Rorty insists however that they have no connection to anything outside or independent of our social practices²⁴. And once this is accepted, then we “...we shall confine ourselves to debating the utility of alternative (moral) constructs”²⁵.

II. RORTY ON RELIGION.

1. Rorty’s Pragmatism and Traditional Religion.

Richard Rorty’s aversion to traditional religion is well known. In the year 2000, he told students and former colleagues at the University of Virginia that he was a “militant secularist” and that the *Enlightenment* was “right to suggest that religion is something that the human species would be better if it could outgrow”²⁶. Rorty wrote of his early disenchantment and rejection of traditional philosophy and religion in his essay, *Trotsky and the Wild Orchids*.

In his article, *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, Rorty considers the religious believer’s right to believe. He considers “whether the religious believer has a right to her faith,-whether (when) this faith conflicts with her intellectual responsibilities”²⁷. From his reading of William James’ *Pragmatism*, Rorty concludes and agrees that, the religious talk or any other talk of obligation and responsibility to any being,-be it God, truth, reason,-other than sentient beings most of whom are human beings means nothing. Such talks must therefore be replaced with talks of our responsibility and obligations towards our fellow human beings²⁸. This will later be connected to Rorty’s idea of *solidarity* and the gratification of certain widespread human desires²⁹.

The problem then with religion is that it subordinates these widespread desires to other less widespread desires, or rather to other private desires and thus submits itself to questions about justification of its beliefs. And not only that, it also oversteps its bounds in claiming objective knowledge of the Divine Will. Thus “a suitably privatised form of religious belief might dictate neither one’s scientific beliefs nor anybody’s moral choices save one’s own. That form of

²⁴ RORTY, R., *Ethics without Principles*, p. 84

²⁵ RORTY, R., *Ethics without Principles*, pp. 85-86

²⁶ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 24

²⁷ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance in Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, England, 1999, pp. 148-167, see p. 149

²⁸ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 148

²⁹ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 149

belief might be able to gratify a need without threatening to thwart any needs of any others, and would thus meet the utilitarian test”³⁰ and also to some extent the pragmatists’ test. For Rorty and utilitarianism, the problem lies in the attempts of science and religion in claiming to be sources of objective and real knowledge. He envisages that religions and religious hypotheses will lose their interests for many people if we cut off from them the promise of seeing one’s loved ones after death, just as science will lose its appeal if disengaged from the claim to know reality as it is in itself³¹.

2. Religion in the Public-square. On the Privatisation of Religion and Religion as a Conversation-Stopper.

In his article, *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, Rorty agrees with Habermas, that the secularisation of the public life is the greatest achievement of the *Enlightenment*. He sees also that the duty of present day intellectuals who appreciate this achievement is “getting (their) fellow citizens to rely less on tradition, and to be more willing to experiment with new customs and institutions”³². This achievement stemmed from the fact of accepting that human beings have only bodies and no immortal souls to be stained, to be saved or damned. The resulting secularisation or this-worldliness made them receptive to the idea of the acceptance of a shift in moral emphasis away from sexuality as traditionally held by religion.

According to Carter, this secularisation of the public-square and her principles “seem most comfortable thinking of religion as a hobby, something done in privacy, something that mature, public-spirited adults do not use as the basis for politics”³³. Rorty confirms the rightness of this position. Carter criticises further “the effort by the contemporary liberal philosophers to create a conversational space in which individuals of very different viewpoints can join dialogic battle, in accord with a set of dialogic conventions that all can accept”³⁴. Carter sees as unjust the “efforts to limit the conversation to premises held in common (which) would exclude religion from the mix”; an exclusion which Rorty held rather as just since he envisages no compromise better than this. Rorty also held that this exclusion is necessary because Contemporary Liberals Philosophers are of the opinion that “we shall not be able to keep a democratic political community going unless the religious believers remain willing to trade privatisation for a

³⁰ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 150

³¹ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 157

³² RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, p. 168

³³ CARTER, Stephen, L., *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*, cited in RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, pp. 169-170

³⁴ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, p. 170

guarantee of religious liberty”³⁵. Rorty as an atheist extols also the virtues and validity of the *Jeffersonian compromise* reached with the religions which, “consists in privatizing religion, i.e.-keeping it out of ...‘the public-square’, making it seem bad taste to bring religion into discussions of public policy”³⁶. He adds thus that “the main reason (why) religion needs to be privatised is that, in political discussion with those outside the relevant religious community, it is a conversation-stopper” since its premises, presumptions and conclusions etc do not submit themselves to further discussion and argumentation³⁷.

In opposition to Carter’s presumption of religion as a source of moral knowledge, rather than a source of moral belief, Rorty restates his agreement with Rawls, Habermas, Dewey and Pierce in holding that, due to the controversial nature of religious claims as a source of knowledge as opposed to the relative level of certainty in the sciences like physics etc,

“the epistemology suitable for such a (liberal) democracy is one in which the only test of a political proposal is its ability to gain assent from people who retain radically diverse ideas about the point and meaning of human life, about the path to private perfection. The more such consensus becomes the test of a belief; the less important is the belief’s source”³⁸.

In line with the above, Rorty holds that arguments must therefore be rid of their religious tone, or that religious believers should be forced “to restructure their arguments in purely secular terms before they can be presented”³⁹ in the public-square. Taking such a secularising position with reference to religion and the public-square is presently necessary seeing that in the past, the search for God made men look up “to a power not ourselves”. But current human progress and democracy have made it now that humanity does “not have to look beyond nature to the supernatural, and beyond life to an afterlife, but only beyond the human past to the human future”⁴⁰.

3. Rorty’s Reconsiderations & His Religious Turn.

In forsaking rationalistic analytic philosophy for neo-pragmatism, Rorty realised that what pragmatists offer is a vision for public life in which democracy serves as “a metaphysic of the relation of man and his experience in nature”⁴¹. With

³⁵ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, pp. 170-171

³⁶ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, p. 169

³⁷ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, p. 171

³⁸ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, p. 173

³⁹ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, p. 173

⁴⁰ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 162

⁴¹ DEWEY, J., *Maeterlinck’s Philosophy of Life*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 6, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, p. 135, cf. RORTY, R., *Achieving Our*

such a definition of democracy, pragmatists, Rorty included, offer something that also satisfies Paul Tillich's definition of religion as that which we designate as our "symbol of ultimate concern". Rorty admits that his philosophical purposes are "ultimately spiritual" and their adoption would effect a real change in peoples' self-image just as any other religious faith claims⁴². Following John Dewey, his pragmatist mentor, Rorty believes strongly that we might usefully substitute faith in human potential for retrograde faith in a benevolent God. In his essay, "*Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*", Rorty criticizes all definitions of religion which retain "the notion of something nonhuman which is nevertheless on the side of human beings"⁴³.

As a religious faith Rorty proposes instead,

"a faith in the future possibilities of moral humans" arising from the "third stage" of religious consciousness in which humans put their faith no longer in a 'God' but, "in the future possibilities of moral humans, a faith which is hard to distinguish from love for, and hope for, the human community. ...(a) fuzzy overlap of faith, hope, and love (which Rorty calls) 'romance'. Romance in this sense, may crystallize around a trade union as easily as around a congregation, around a novel as easily as around a sacrament, around a God as easily around a child"⁴⁴. He also calls it "social hope", "solidarity", and "a religion of democracy"⁴⁵.

Rorty and his fellow neo-pragmatists offer what Rorty has lately begun to acknowledge does resemble religious faith, as it fills the void of meaning that the relationship with "God" or "Truth" once filled. This realisation, understanding and acknowledgement is a welcome development for Rorty since with this his recent discovery of romantic polytheism, Rorty has satisfied his long time yearning for reconciling his longing for the transcendent and sublime with a desire for human solidarity, thus creating as he said, a single vision that would help him "hold reality and justice in a single vision"⁴⁶.

Earlier before this, Rorty hoped that with a logical language for philosophy, one devoid of confused concepts as embedded in much traditional philosophical language, philosophy might be put on a surer footing. But before the publication of *The Linguistic Turn*, Rorty realised that no foundation was less problematic

Country, (1999) *Leftists Thought in the Twentieth-Century America*, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 18

⁴² BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 24

⁴³ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 160, see also, p. 166, note 24

⁴⁴ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, pp. 160-161

⁴⁵ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 24

⁴⁶ RORTY, R., *Trotsky and Wild Orchids* (1992) in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, England, 1999, pp. 3-20, p. 12, 13, 19

than any other⁴⁷. This contributed to his public break with mainstream analytic philosophy and his conversion to American pragmatism which has rather given him as he realised later,

“perhaps inadvertently at first, but now more intentionally,-a new religious faith that gives him the unified picture of the universe he has always longed for. Rorty has come to accept that all competing worldviews are ultimately competing commitments to some orienting faith, and that no conflict between worldviews can be resolved by an appeal to reason or objective standards of truths. At their core, all worldviews require faith and hope”⁴⁸.

The culmination of this line of thought occurred the year 2003 in the pages of the *Journal of Religious Ethics* in his article, *Religion in the Public-square: A Reconsideration*. In this article, Rorty issued further a long and overdue *mea culpa* for past diatribes against Stephen Carter’s frequent defence of the religious voice in the public-square⁴⁹. After reading Nicholas Wolterstorff’s article, Rorty admits that his earlier response to Carter was rather “hasty and insufficiently thoughtful”⁵⁰. Since Rorty has realised that his own world-view is just one of the many competing world-views and faith systems, none of which has any more or better claim on objectivity than any other, his efforts have become how to make his own *religious faith* win against others as the culturally and politically dominant worldview⁵¹. In his book, *Achieving Our Country*, (1999) and in his essays: *Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism* and *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, Rorty describes a uniquely American faith whose adherents included Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Abraham Lincoln. Rorty calls this faith a “religion of democracy” or “romantic polytheism”. Rorty does not by this his most current position or faith, reject entirely his arguments in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* in which he held that one’s self-creation cannot and should not be made to harmonize with common public purposes. Rather he sees *romantic polytheism* as being able to conduct this supposedly unacceptable fusion between public and private projects without negative social consequences⁵².

Because of these realisations and shifts therefore, in his recent essays and books, Rorty has expressed the optimism and hope that his new-found faith, the

⁴⁷ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 26

⁴⁸ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 27

⁴⁹ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 27, CARTER, S., *The Culture of Disbelief*, 1994.

⁵⁰ RORTY, R., *Religion in the Public-square: A Reconsideration*, in the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Inc. JRE 31. 1:141-149© 2003, p. 141

⁵¹ RORTY, R., *Religion in the Public-square*, p. 144, 146, Cf. BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 27

⁵² BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 27

“romantic polytheism” will sooner come to serve as America’s new religious centre. In clear abandonment of his earlier position and predications in his earlier writings that religion would one day wither away, Rorty now proposes a new public religious faith⁵³ a faith in a social solidarity which is a sort of a “communion of saints” in the form of a democratic community, meaning “a community in which everybody thinks that it is human solidarity, rather than knowledge of something not merely human, that really matters”⁵⁴.

III. THE ROMANTIC POLYTHEISM. THE NATURE & STRUCTURE OF RORTY’S NEW FOUND FAITH AND RELIGION.

Realising the presence in most men a natural urge to get connected to a God-figure, which for Rorty is rather an urge to create a God-figure, he agrees with Allison who says that,

“There is a place where we are always alone with our own mortality, where we must simply have something greater than ourselves to hold onto,-God or history or politics or literature or a belief in the healing power of love, or even righteous anger. Sometimes I think they are all the same thing. A reason to believe, a way to take the world by the throat and insist that there is more to this life than we have ever imagined”⁵⁵.

The lesson that Rorty draws from this tendency is that ‘what matters is the insistence itself, the romance, the ability to experience overpowering hope, or faith, or love (or sometimes, rage)’, in a state which ‘carries us beyond argument’, and ‘beyond presently used language’ and ‘beyond the imagination of the present age of the world’⁵⁶. Rorty shares with Allison, her dream of literature acting as the guiding hand shaping this system of belief in an atheistic, polytheistic and non-transcendental religion based on literature with its belief neither in a transcendent God, nor in an other-worldly God, but in an immanent god which is “the progress of human society as demonstrated in its fiction”⁵⁷. This ‘progress of human society’ of course leaves the possibility of many things capable of being God since according to William James, “the divine can mean

⁵³ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 24

⁵⁴ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 27

⁵⁵ ALLISON, D., *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class and Literature*, Ithaca, New York, Firebrand Books, 1994, p. 181 cited in RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 161

⁵⁶ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 161

⁵⁷ ALLISON, D., *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class and Literature*, p. 166, cited in RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 161

no single quality, it must mean a group of qualities, by being champions of which in alternation, different men may all find worthy missions”⁵⁸.

Rorty believes therefore that all Westerners are polytheists since they all hold to the existence of several and various goods and no overarching good. Like gods, goods are plural and serve different people in different ways, hence no need to rank them. This gives Rorty the *polytheistic* idea. The term “*romantic*”, “serves for Rorty as a more evocative term than “secular”, since it suggests that atheists might speak just as inspirationally about their faith in human potentiality as theists speak about the movement of God in history”⁵⁹.

On the level of particular beliefs, according to Rorty, a “pragmatist theist”, i.e. one who wants to make his private religious beliefs publicly relevant, must therefore distance himself from implausible beliefs which are so to speak mostly monotheism’s most miraculous and particularistic beliefs. He must learn how and be willing to give them up or interpret them “ ‘symbolically’ in a way which...must prevent them from providing premises for practical reasoning”⁶⁰. Thus a “Romantic polytheist” according to Rorty, must get along without creeds⁶¹. For this his non-creedal creed, Rorty suggests a non-scriptural canon relying mostly on literature and poetry which have helped sustain his “atheist’s faith” and religion just as they have done also for Dorothy Allison⁶². In this Rortian religion, poets will serve to fill the vacancy left by priests as “the maker(s) of the new words, the shaper(s) of new languages, as the vanguard(s) of the species”⁶³.

Just as Rorty realised that he cannot completely do away with priest-craft and canons held as sacred, he realized also that he cannot do away with churches as ecclesial communities either. Rorty suggests the existence of quasi-churches serving a national religion or church of romantic polytheism. For this, Rorty recommends three kinds of denominations that may serve to propagate this polytheistic faith to form a temporal communion of saints forming so to speak, his three kinds of denominations. These are Churches that are committed to the Social Gospel, the American Universities or High Education System, the Fraternal Community of American Democracy itself:

⁵⁸ WILLIAM, James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 384, cited in RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, pp. 161-162

⁵⁹ Cf. BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 27

⁶⁰ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance*, p. 156

⁶¹ RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance*, p. 156, cf. BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 27

⁶² RORTY, R., *Achieving Our Country*, p. 132; RORTY, R., *Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance*, p. 161

⁶³ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 28

1. Rorty's three kinds of Denominations.

- **Churches that are committed to the Social Gospel.** Rorty holds that churches that qualify as quasi churches forming part of the romantic polytheism are churches that teach that the greatest source of suffering is still, as always, economic inequality, not spiritual or bodily impurity⁶⁴.
- **American Universities or High Education System.** American universities or high education system should be a sort of surrogate church since it has already started transforming itself into a social institution that does the sort of work once done by churches.
- **The Fraternal Community of American Democracy itself.** According to Rorty's program, American Democracy should serve as a kind of substitute church emphasising human solidarity in the absence of transcendental and mystical union and communion. This leads the society to a return to civil religion in which "we redefine God as our future selves"⁶⁵. The deeper meaning of democracy and this polytheistic and romantic faith is that humanity is alone in the universe and has only one another as reference points for truth and for meaning.

2. Implications of Rorty's Religious Turn.

From his earlier *Linguistic Turn*, Rorty later made recently his *Religious Turn*. The summary of this turn is that contrary to his earlier position as noted in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, in which he left the two spheres, the public and private spheres separate, just as in his article, *The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy*, in which he praises the genius of democratic liberalism because it insists on keeping apart the two spheres so as to keep the public-square free from irresolvable conflicts of worldviews, believes and metaphysics, the later Rorty has clearly brought metaphysics and religion back into public discussion while insisting that there is in 'fact' no God⁶⁶. His romantic and polytheistic faith couched in patently religious terms seeks to comply with this 'fact'.

The implication of Rorty's religious turn is that when orthodox theism conflicts with the American civil religion of democracy, traditional religious belief must yield⁶⁷. Yet his works do not furnish enough reason why Rorty's *religion*, the romantic polytheism must replace any other religion. But this shows us perhaps

⁶⁴ Cf. BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 28

⁶⁵ RORTY, R., *Achieving our Country*, p. 22

⁶⁶ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 30

⁶⁷ BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 30

clearly or vaguely that one cannot or may not easily replace religion or God both in the heart of man (i.e. as religious sentiments or as the urge to find something absolute on which to cling) and in the public-square except with *something* that is more or less like God or religion and of course with its presumptions and unproved and perhaps un-provable *presumptions* and *conversations-stoppers*, having and requiring at its base and core, faith and hope just like all other world-views⁶⁸. Rorty thus started with criticising religion and the idea of God but ended up multiplying both gods and religions. He started by defining himself as a militant atheist and ended up as a religionist, a romantic polytheist.

IV. EVALUATION.

1. On Rorty's Relativism.

According to Johnsen, to a great extent, Rorty's work seems to threaten rather than enhance or help the prospects of democratic liberalism⁶⁹. His denial of metaphysics and his position against religion and all trans-temporal values in ethics etc and his *ethics without foundation and principle*⁷⁰ make life in Rorty's polity just a little less than brutish. This denial of trans-cultural values permitted him to liken the Nazi decimation of peoples simply to the struggle of animals for ecological niche in a single ecological space; the Nazis being simply one type of animal and the Jews etc, another type⁷¹. Hence Relativism can encourage cruelty and barbarism or simply remain indifferent and neutral with regard to their perpetration, neither condemning nor justifying them⁷². Such indifference favours the perpetrators at the detriment of the victims.

However, it is something encouraging that though Rorty has no trans-cultural values, or reasons to condemn Nazi genocide, he still encourages us to condemn it as something wrong, a mistake despite the fact that there is no 'moral facts of some sort in virtue of which they are true or false', good or bad, right or wrong⁷³. The condemnation is just simply a condemnation which is *just* but not with

⁶⁸cf. BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 27, RORTY, R., *Religion in the Public-square*, pp. 148-149

⁶⁹ JOHNSEN, Bredo, *On Richard Rorty's Culs-de-sac*, in *Philosophical Forum*; Summer / June 1999, Vol. 30, Number 2, pp. 133-160, see p. 134

⁷⁰ In actual fact, in the book, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, England, 1999, pp. 73-90, Rorty includes an article titled, *Ethics without Principles*.

⁷¹RORTY, R., *Putnam and the Relativist Menace*, in the *Journal of Philosophy*, Number 90, September, 1993, pp. 443-461, p. 451

⁷² SIMON KIRCHIN, *Quasi-Realism, Sensibility Theory and Ethical Relativism*, in *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 43, No. 4, December 2000, pp. 413-427, p. 418

⁷³ JOHNSEN, Bredo, *On Richard Rorty's Culs-de-sac*, pp. 149 & 156

reference to any scheme or matter of fact. Rorty's ideas on moral lightness are too dangerous and threaten to undermine seriously the prospects of democratic liberalism in a world still fertile to dangerous and murderous ideologies⁷⁴.

In questioning the Rortian position, Karl Otto reasons that in our changing world there is real need for a post-metaphysical and ultimate foundation for morality though he admits that the single weakness of metaphysics is that it can only intimate this foundation but not prove it⁷⁵. And as at now for many, this ultimate foundation is intimidated by metaphysics and or religion.

2. Rorty's dismissal of Metaphysics and Religion.

Rorty's dismissal of metaphysics as an unnecessary search for necessary truths beyond time is not justified from a careful reading of the history of philosophy⁷⁶. According to Hartshorne,

“finding necessary truths is not the same as “escaping from time and history”. Eternity (and) absolute necessity ... (are) the most abstract aspect of becoming and cosmic history. A truth is necessary and eternal if it characterises becoming as such, otherwise not... ”⁷⁷.

In this context, *necessary* and *eternal* become what will obtain no matter which possibilities are actualised either with reference to truth or to time. As to the possibility of understanding the meaning of necessary truth and eternity, Hartshorne holds that if we presume not to understand their meanings no matter how dim, then contingent and temporal might as well mean nothing to us⁷⁸. Thus, “to abandon not only the metaphysical realist's view of truth and rationality, but truth and rationality themselves, is to make it impossible to retain any coherent understanding of ourselves”⁷⁹. In his analysis of modern times, Hartshorne held that the anti-metaphysical culture, created by the scepticism of academics and intellectuals is balanced by the waves of popular religiosity and

⁷⁴ JOHNSEN, Bredo, *On Richard Rorty's Culs-de-sac*, p. 157

⁷⁵ APEL, Karl-Otto, *From a Transcendental-Semiotic Point of View*, Manchester, UK, 1998, p. 81

⁷⁶ HARTSHORNE, C., *Rorty's Pragmatism and Farewell to the Age of Faith and Enlightenment in Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to his Critics*, (ed) Herman J. Saatkamp, USA, Vanderbilt University Press, 1995, pp. 16-36, see p. 17

⁷⁷ HARTSHORNE, C., *Rorty's Pragmatism and Farewell to the Age of Faith and Enlightenment*, p. 17

⁷⁸ HARTSHORNE, C., *Rorty's Pragmatism and Farewell to the Age of Faith and Enlightenment*, pp. 17-18

⁷⁹ JOHNSEN, Bredo, *On Richard Rorty's Culs-de-sac*, p. 156

superstition which suggests that humanity is not yet ready to accept a merely positivistic or merely anthropocentric view of reality as the be-all and end-all⁸⁰. Thus in Rorty's philosophy, the really enduring problems of philosophy are ignored and despised. For Rorty, in reality there is no meaning in life to be sought outside what we put into it. Rather than searching for meaning in life, he sees human life and, "the course of human history as a long swelling, increasingly polyphonic poem,-a poem that lead(s) up to nothing save itself"⁸¹.

Precisely on *religion* and its importance, Whitehead writes that,

"religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within the passion flux of immediate things; something which is real, yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest"⁸².

Religion is "our one ground of optimism" which saves human life from degenerating into a "flash of occasional enjoyments lightning up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience". It claims worship which in turn is "an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable". It is this "high hope of adventure"⁸³ and its attainment that keep religion alive. As part of its contribution, religion tells us that "our existence is more than a succession of bare facts" and that we live in a world of mutual adjustments and of value concentrated on the self and yet directed beyond the self⁸⁴. Thus religion gives to bare facts new visions of possibility and value. Its value is beyond what Rorty attributes to it.

3. On the Privatization of Religion.

Rorty's insistence that religion be kept in the private domain and that its suggestions be not brought into arguments in the public place, shows in a way the fear associated currently with religion in the back-drop of the religious wars,

⁸⁰ HARTSHORNE, C., *Rorty's Pragmatism and Farewell to the Age of Faith and Enlightenment*, p. 20

⁸¹ RORTY, R., *Response to Hartshorne*, p. 33

⁸² WHITEHEAD, A. N., *Science and Modern World*, New York: The Free Press, 1967, pp.191-192

⁸³ WHITEHEAD, A. N., *Science and Modern World*, p.192, cf. SUMI, Atsushi, *Whitehead on Religion, Civilization, and Adventure in Religion in a Pluralistic Age, Proceedings of the Third International Philosophical Theology*, (ed) by Donald A. Crosby & Charley D. Hardwick, New York, 2001, pp. 357-373, see p. 361

⁸⁴ WHITEHEAD, A. N., *Religion in the Making*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1996, p.80

past and present, the present connection between the ‘manifestation’ of religious fervour, fanaticism and violence. In the last decades, there has been a recovery of importance in some parts of the world where religion has for long been suppressed. But ironically “this recovery of importance is often accompanied by an increase in the number of conflicts (which makes it seem) almost as though the ‘return of the sacred’ is condemned to go hand-in-hand with a return of intolerance”⁸⁵ and violence. Considering therefore the violence and other difficulties connected to religion, there is a basis for concern about the governance and role of religion, religious ideas, opinions and sects in the public-square. But this poses rather a more serious duty on the part of the governments of liberal states, a duty of vigilance and not that of suppression of religion or of opinions connected to religion in the public-square⁸⁶.

Also, in this age when the religions of different races of mankind are coming together because of the fact that humanity is coming closer together, keeping religion out of the public sphere may in a way keep at bay the religious wars of the past, but continued attempt to silence religious voice and sentiments in the public sphere may in actual fact be at the root of violence against the modern state. Perhaps “it is too important for our personal lives and for our common life to permit continued neglect or scorn”⁸⁷.

4. On References made to the Sources of Premises And the Issue of the Language suitable to the Public-square.

Rorty holds that reference to the sources of the premises of the arguments used in the public-square should be dropped as a reasonable and necessary price to be paid for religious liberty in the state⁸⁸. One might as well ask; why in the first place must a price be paid for religious liberty and what lesser right has religion to be practised freely in the state than any other facet of human life like culture, science, philosophy, literature and the writing of poems etc? He rather might

85 FERRARI, S., *The New Wine and the Old Cask: Tolerance, Religion and the Law in Contemporary Europe*, in *Ratio Juris*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 1997, pp. 75-89, see p. 77. Though it remains to be seen whether the problem is really about religion or whether politicians are still using religion for their own ends. See also OLUMBA M., *Toleration in the Political Thought of John Locke*, A Memoir presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for obtaining a Master’s degree in Philosophy and Letters, Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, May 2005, p. 115

86 WILLIAMS, B., *Tolerating the Intolerable*, in *The Politics of Toleration: Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Life*, edited and introduced by Susan Mendus, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999, pp. 65-75., p. 74.

87 FERRE, Fredrick, *Public Religion: Public Metaphysics in Religion in a Pluralistic Age*, *Proceedings of the Third International Philosophical Theology*, (ed) by Donald A. Crosby & Charley D. Hardwick, New York, 2001, pp. 3-19, see p. 19

88 RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, p. 173

have argued better in saying that each proposition presented in the public-square be justified as much as it is possible based of course on the proponents' vision of reality which is always the presumed and unproved premise behind every argument yet cannot completely escape argumentation. The presentation of each position and the arguments that follow in the public-square will then do the shaping and sharpening necessary in order to arrive at some acceptable policy or another for the polity. The price to be paid rather by all facets of life and by all the participants in the debate is the acceptance of the possibility that one's opinion must not be accepted. One must present his opinion to the public with all art possible but with no violence whatsoever.

Besides this, according to Carter, the liberal theory has also not shown that "the will of any of the brilliant philosophers of the liberal tradition, or, for that matter, the will of the Supreme Court of the United States, is more relevant to moral decisions than the will of God"⁸⁹. Rorty agrees that this has not been shown and in fact it does not need to be shown. Rather what is necessary to be shown is that all moral decisions of a liberal pluralistic and democratic state are to be made by the public discussions in which all voices in the state despite the claim of their sources, -be they scientific, religious, or reason- "are put on a par with everybody else's"⁹⁰. If we accept this condition stated by Rorty, then, no human voice should actually be thrown out or excluded from democratic debates except the one which rejects the existence and participation of the other voices in the polity.

On the issue of the language suitable to the debates in the public-square, I would rather argue that instead of demanding each participant to use secular language, or to restructure his arguments in a secular language, that each participant make his arguments understandable. Since the terminologies peculiar to each discipline still find a way of being explained so that those that are not experts in these domains can still discuss with their experts, all languages and terms representing the different areas of human endeavour should have right to participate in the debate in the public-square. If the public-square were to permit only the secularists' language, or the poetic language, one might as well ask, why must all use a secular language or what gives the secularists or the poet the right of determining the language of the public-square? One might rather insist that the public-square be open to all languages except the language of violence.

⁸⁹ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, p. 172

⁹⁰ RORTY, R., *Religion as Conversation-Stopper*, p. 172

5. On Religion and disagreements in the Public-square and Rorty's Treatment of Religion.

In his argument about the impossibility of being neutral between Darwinism on one side and Platonic conception of man on the other side, i.e., between a biologist's view on one side and a metaphysical view on the other side, Rorty holds that in the absence of agreements, "all that either side can do is restate its case over and over again"⁹¹ when conversation has stopped. Nicholas adds that this is in actual fact what either side can do *in the last resort* and that often in the interval before this last resort, a lot of things can still be said and done⁹². According to Nicholas, human condition seems to be such that we must always expect this endurance of such fundamental disagreements. And just as remarked by Rawls, under certain conditions of freedom, such disagreements tend to multiply rather than disappear⁹³. And such disagreements are neither due to wicked ecclesiastics nor wicked princes who prevent agreement among the peoples.

Rorty is so much concerned to keep the conversation going to the extent that whatever that will stop it with conversation-stoppers will be excluded from the conversation. He found the victim in religion. Yet Rorty realised that sometimes in a debate or controversy, conversations come to a halt in disagreement when apparently resources seem exhausted, and that "all that either side can do is to restate its case over and over again, in context after context"⁹⁴ without any conceding to the other's side yet without dismissing it either. Rorty accepts this to be the case in the above context, but seeks to avoid it once religion is part of the voices in the debate without really explaining what is bad about reaching an impasse in political debates⁹⁵ which first of all is about finding ways of making common laws for organising societies even when the members disagree on their fundamental beliefs. In his article in which he discusses 'Religion and Democratic Culture: The Role of Faith in Public Discourse', Nicholas holds that,

"the fundamental question to which a liberal democratic society offers an answer is this: How can persons who embrace such profoundly different comprehensive perspectives as do Rorty (a Darwinian pragmatist) and I (a relatively conservative Christian) on reality, human life, and the good,

⁹¹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, p. 129

⁹² WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, p. 129

⁹³ WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, p. 130

⁹⁴ RORTY, R., *Relativism: Finding and Making*, in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, England, 1999, pp. xvi-xxxii; see p. xxxii

⁹⁵ WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, p. 135

nonetheless live together as equals in a just, stable, and peaceful society?”⁹⁶.

In such situations as above, the democratic liberal societies take to the process of voting so as to overcome the impasse. According to Nicholas,

“Conversation-stopping (which Rorty fears) is not some appalling evil perpetrated upon an otherwise endlessly talkative public by religious people. Stopped conversation is an all-pervasive feature of political debate in a democracy; and voting is a procedure for arriving at a decision of the body when conversation is stopped”⁹⁷.

Thus democracy is not menaced by stopped-conversations. It is not menaced either by religion which must now shape up by privatising itself.

6. Religion as a Public Menace.

On the issue of being a menace to liberty in the society: Like any other thing that human beings care much about; be it science, ideology and even freedom itself, religion can simply become a menace to freedom, or a pretext for restricting the freedom of others. At worst it can become a source of fanaticism and a motive for physically eliminating others and not just only their freedom. Thus the capacity of religion to pose a threat to liberty is a capacity shared practically by any other issue valued by man. It is a fact therefore that “religion is sometimes a menace to the freedoms of a liberal society”, but that does not exhaust the potentialities of religion. And neither is her capacity for doing good restricted solely to providing comfort “to those in need or in despair”⁹⁸. The prominent role played by religion in the American struggle for civil rights, and in the revolutions in South Africa, Poland, Romania and East Germany may not easily be forgotten so soon (without of course forgetting also the evils perpetrated under the cloak and the name of religion). A more objective reading of history will testify to these while also giving some level of ‘attention to the great murderous secularisms of the twentieth century like Nazism, Communism, Nationalism’⁹⁹ etc. Perhaps since there is nothing like objectivity or reality outside human language, Rorty may reinterpret these historical facts and deny them their rightful glorious or regrettable place in history. Thus the capacity of religion for doing good is not restricted solely to providing comfort “to those in need or in despair” and her capacity of being a danger to the society is a capacity

⁹⁶ WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, p. 130

⁹⁷ WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, p. 136

⁹⁸ RORTY, R., *Anticlericalism et theism*, p. 52, WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, p. 133

⁹⁹ WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, p. 133

shared by many other human endeavours and ideologies including Darwinism and pragmatism.

CONCLUSION

In his articles Rorty admitted the necessity and the pragmatic usefulness and effect of contrivances etc e.g. the idea of *human brotherhood* and *God as a father of us all* and *as the protector of the weak* as contrivances for the protection of the weak. Hence it is really doubtful if his pure pragmatism and ethics without foundation, religion and metaphysics would fulfill his social hopes. Perhaps he never realised that religion and its contrivances may serve better his idea of human solidarity than his pragmatism and Darwinism. If with the idea of God and commonality of human brotherhood, which the generality of humanity do not reject yet, and yet violence obtains, one wonders if the dismissal of these ideas will actually help mankind find greater solidarity as Rorty hopes, either in morality, politics and otherwise and whether the absence of the idea of God will create greater sense of solidarity among men. This makes one doubt the practicality of Rorty's idea.

On religion as a *conversation-stopper*, Rorty has come to agree recently with Stout that,

“it is true that one variety of expressions of religious belief does indeed stop the conversation, as when somebody says, ‘Don’t ask me for reasons. I don’t have any. It is a matter of faith’. As Stout properly reminds us, this kind of reply is not confined to the religious. It is the one I (Rorty) should have to make if I were asked why I believe that the aim of political life should be the greatest happiness of the greatest number. So, instead of saying that religion was a conversation-stopper, I should have simply said that citizens of a democracy should try to put off invoking conversation-stoppers as long as possible. We should do our best to keep the conversation going without citing unarguable first principles, either philosophical or religious. If we are sometimes driven to such citation, we should see ourselves as having failed, not as having triumphed”¹⁰⁰

Rorty's position above shows that any discipline can have as well its conversation-stoppers and therefore the fact of arriving at dead-locks in discussions and stumbling upon conversation-stoppers is tied not just to religion but to the human incapacity of avoiding completely disagreements. It is part and parcel of public or private debates.

¹⁰⁰ RORTY, R., *Religion in the Public-square*, pp. 148-149

On the issue of the correctness of appealing to Darwinism or to religious faith in the debates in the public-square, Rorty's admissions on the difficulties associated with holding dispassionately to any of them as the correct standard for judging and deciding on our conception of man may as well give an insight into his answer when he says that,

“I do not know how to argue the question of whether it is better to see human beings in this biologicistic way or to see them in a way more like Plato's or Kant's. So I do not know how to give anything like a conclusive argument for the view which my critics call 'relativism' and which I prefer to call 'anti-foundationalism' or 'anti-dualism'. It is certainly not enough for my side to appeal to Darwin and ask our opponents how they can avoid an appeal to the supernatural. That way of stating the issue begs many questions. It is certainly not enough for my opponents to say that a biologicistic view strips human beings of their dignity and their self-respect. That too begs most of the question at issue. I suspect that all that either side can do is to restate its case over and over again, in context after context. The controversy between those who see both our species and our society as lucky accident, and those who find an immanent teleology in both, is too radical to permit of being judged from some neutral standpoint”¹⁰¹.

In fact this summarises Rorty's general position on the issue of faith and belief, hope and certainty, knowledge and opinion and proves that as he had come to realise and accept “that all competing worldviews are ultimately competing commitments to some orienting faith, and that no conflict between worldviews can be resolved by an appeal to reason or objective standards of truths. At their core, all worldviews require faith and hope”¹⁰², that behind every world-view there is an animating faith and hope. Rorty has chosen Darwinism and therefore has essentially no reason to stand against one who has chosen a religious faith in a transcendental God as his animating faith and hope. And all these should have equal right to make themselves heard in the public-square. And each should be ready to allow its views subjected to analysis, scrutiny and criticisms. And just as Nicholas indicated above, our efforts amidst all these should be to find a way of living together in a liberal state with our different world-views in peace and equality, in a just and stable state¹⁰³.

¹⁰¹ RORTY, R., *Relativism: Finding and Making*, p. xxxii

¹⁰² BOFFETTI, J., *How Richard Rorty Found Religion*, p. 27

¹⁰³ WOLTERSTORFF, N., *An Engagement with Rorty*, p. 130

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