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The Dangers of Redemption

Richard Rorty on Religion in Pluralistic Democracies

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Introduction

Richard Rorty, undeniably one of the most influential philosophers of the past four decades, wrote a great deal on the challenge of balancing religion, pluralism, and tolerance in liberal democracies. I will argue that applying Rorty's specific brand of pragmatism to the relation between religion and public policy can reduce the tension between the need to explore and express new and developing religious and spiritual commitments and the need to achieve a democratic consensus that allows for effective public action across religious divides. Specifically, I will defend the claim that abandoning the correspondence theory of truth will facilitate the continued development of pluralistic democracies by increasing tolerance and thereby making religious difference less problematic. One can reasonably ask how Rorty, a vocal advocate of public secularism, could suggest a role for religion that believers would find satisfactory. I will argue that many Rortian attitudes toward religion are misrepresented and I will highlight several overlooked comments that Rorty made about the potential value of certain forms of religion.

I will weigh the inconveniences that the transition to a Rortian perspective may involve for certain types of religious believers against the potential benefits that the adoption of this perspective can yield for a democracy as a whole. I find these inconveniences to be highly manageable in pluralistic democracies that enjoy a sufficient degree of existential security. For this reason, members of secure and pluralistic democracies are the intended audience for the arguments presented here. More specifically, in addition to connecting Rorty's work to religion in general, I make a number of brief connections between Rortian philosophy and the sociology of religion. It is my hope that my arguments will convince sociologists of religion of the potential benefits of incorporating Rortian themes into future research on the role of religion in democracy.

I will devote chapter one to discussing Rorty's philosophical stance on the issues that are particularly relevant to the relationship between religion and public discourse. My main goal here will be to present Rortian philosophy and to make my own interpretations of Rorty's work explicit. While the topics discussed are relevant to religious issues, this first chapter will emphasize Rorty's philosophical work, leaving most of the debate around the points of tension between Rortian philosophy

and religion for later chapters. While one could argue against opening a thesis that is largely about religion with a chapter that does not focus on religion, I strongly believe that a Rortian analysis of religion cannot be effective without first spending time examining how Rortian philosophical themes are intertwined. These themes include Rorty's views on the function of philosophy, the relation of truth and justification to belief and reality, and our potential for social and moral progress. Not only are Rortian arguments against the appearance-reality distinction key in understanding the criticisms of religious authority presented in chapter two, a degree of familiarity with Rorty's arguments against the correspondence theory of truth is necessary to understand the points I will make in chapter three about the potential for a Rortian vocabulary to diminish the tension between science and religion.

Chapter two will focus on Rorty's treatment of religion and the unconventional ways in which he used religiously charged terms like "redemption", "polytheism", and "divinization". This chapter will also deal with Rorty's unique suggestions as to how developed societies might privatize religion without undermining its value for our more idiosyncratic projects. I will apply Rorty's public-private split in order to highlight the potential drawbacks of certain types of religious authority structures in the public sphere. I will also discuss Rorty's hope that we might avoid these drawbacks by replacing existence claims about supernatural beings with claims about the social desirability of certain practices. Throughout this chapter I will also engage several critiques of this Rortian approach.

I will begin chapter three by reviewing of some of the findings of Norwegian sociologists of religion in regards to data collected on the attitudes of Norwegians towards religion in the 1991, 1998, and 2008 World Values Surveys. While there will be some discussion around my choice of this particular set of data, this discussion will be marginal as my primary reason for including this data is to balance my arguments about the value of Rortian philosophy with scholarly descriptions of a concrete cultural-political situation. The first section of this chapter will focus on religious trends in Norway and how Rortian philosophy can be used together with the Norwegian sociological analysis to better describe the attitudinal shifts observed. The second section will compare Rorty's critiques of scientific realism to his critiques of religion. This comparison is important for two reasons. Firstly, it helps to clarify exactly what Rorty found dangerous in religion and what he saw as potentially positive. Secondly, Rorty's treatment of scientific realism suggests how a society like

Norway might keep religion and science out of each other's way without diminishing the value of either. The final section of this chapter will explore Rortian terms such as "irony" and "final vocabulary" and discuss how these concepts are specifically applicable in Norway.

In chapter four I will further explore some of Rorty's religious critics that I engaged in chapter two. I do so in order to give concrete examples of religious scholars who support the conception of religion that I argue against. This discussion will address both the practical difficulties of imposing unshared religious authority structures on public cooperative projects and the difficulties of holding a Rortian position. After discussing several objections to Rortian philosophy and offering potential counterarguments, I will use Rorty's work with Catholic philosopher, Gianni Vattimo, as an example of the potential for productive cooperation between Rortian philosophy and religious thought. I will conclude this chapter with some final remarks, inspired by Vattimo, on the unique suitability of Rortian philosophy to the study of countries like Norway, and on the benefits of treating rational behavior as roughly synonymous with the charitable interpretation of foreign belief systems.

Chapter One: The Infamous Philosophy of Richard Rorty

In this chapter I will begin by explaining how Rorty viewed the potential functions of philosophy. I will then outline some of the core elements of Rortian philosophy while presenting my interpretations of how these elements hang together. I will conclude by suggesting the role for the sociology of religion that I believe is implied by a Rortian philosophical system. I will focus, as much as possible, on providing a philosophical background for my later discussion of religious issues; leaving the bulk of Rorty's engagement with religious themes for chapters two, three, and four.

The Functions of Philosophy

Early in his writing career, Rorty distinguished between what he called systematic philosophy and edifying philosophy. He wrote, "Great systematic philosophers, like great scientists, build for eternity. Great edifying philosophers destroy for the sake of their generation." (Rorty, 2009: 369-370). The difference between systematicity and edification parallels the gaps between construction and deconstruction, rationality and imagination, or what Thomas S. Kuhn referred to as the distinction between normal and abnormal science (Kuhn, 1996: 10). In other words, systematic philosophy works within a paradigm that is fairly well established and aims at making said paradigm more secure. Edifying philosophy, on the other hand, problematizes the work being done in dominant paradigms and attempts to make the shift to new paradigms seem appealing. Edifying philosophy tries "to take us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness", making our presuppositions explicit and then showing how a given society might benefit from moving past these presuppositions (Rorty, 2009: 360).

Rorty's work was unquestionably on the edifying side of this spectrum. Rorty held that, "Interesting philosophy is... a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things" (Rorty, 1989: 9). A Rortian and edifying philosopher is thus one who is on the lookout for established norms or practices that are no longer

facilitating the achievement of a given society's goals, and one who can draw on a certain set of texts in order to redescribe the accepted practice in a way that makes change desirable. This is not to say that edifying philosophy is more important than systematic philosophy. It is simply to say that edifying projects are the projects Rorty preferred and were those he found most useful in achieving his vision of a pluralist democratic utopia.

Given that the majority of Rorty's work was reactive and aimed at dismantling established philosophical paradigms, one must ask which assumptions Rorty thought we would be better without. One of his primary targets was the correspondence theory of truth. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines the correspondence theory of truth as "any view explicitly embracing the idea that truth consists in a relation to reality" (David, 2002: intro). This relation between truth and reality is, as implied by the name of the theory, a relation of correspondence or accurate representation of objective facts. In other words, this theory suggests that truth is achieved by representing accurately in the mind a reality outside the mind- by making our mental pictures of the world match the world itself as precisely as possible. This epistemological notion that we access truth about the world by getting in touch with an outside reality is sometimes accompanied by the view that we access moral truth by getting in touch with an inner reality, namely reason or our essential human nature. Rorty called for a rejection of both of these views.

In a manner reminiscent of Sartre, Rorty claimed that the desire for ultimate objectivity, in regards to our questions about reality or morality, is a desire to escape the human condition- to escape the responsibility of having to choose a description of one's circumstances and oneself and navigate the consequences of that description (Rorty, 2009: 376). Rorty suggested abandoning a conception of philosophy as discovering a method of accurate representation that would mirror the true nature of the world or the self, and instead offered a holistic, pragmatic alternative. On this view, philosophy should not task itself with answering Descartes' skeptic or ahistorically grounding human practice. It should instead work to clear the way for a democratic politics that is grounded only in the contingent needs and values of the relevant communities. In order to argue that philosophical and political systems that offer alternatives to the correspondence theory of truth are better suited to the further development of pluralistic democracies, I now turn to an examination of the

implications of both the correspondence theory of truth and a Rortian conception of truth and belief.

Causation, Justification, and Representation

Rorty provided an excellent summary of the representationalism, implied by the correspondence theory of truth, that he wanted to move beyond, writing:

The traditional picture of the human situation has been one in which human beings are not simply networks of beliefs and desires but rather beings which *have* those beliefs and desires.... Beliefs are, on this account, criticizable because they fail to correspond to reality. Desires are criticizable because they fail to correspond to the essential nature of the human self- because they are “irrational” or “unnatural”. (Rorty, 1989: 10)

The idea of a Cartesian theater, a place where the self can view sense data and evaluate beliefs based on this data, is portrayed in the first half of the above quote. This view of the acquisition of belief has been woven into the common sense of Western culture for centuries and this is a large part of what makes representationalism seem plausible. The second half of the above quote drives home the point that there are two normative constraints, or perhaps more accurately “obligations”, on our belief systems suggested by the representationalist view of beliefs and desires. We are obligated to the outside world in the sense that we must represent it as accurately as possible and we are obligated to the inner self in the sense that we must express our essential humanity by conforming to the moral law within us. In other words, we are obligated to not misrepresent the world in our beliefs and we are obligated to control any urges that do not conform to what is “natural” for humans to desire.

Rorty called for the abandonment of this view of beliefs as obligated to the world and the self. He referred to the rejection of this view as a matter of dedivinization (Rorty, 1989: 39). As there is an obvious religious connotation here, I will return to his choice of term in the next chapter. Here I will simply contrast the representationalist view of belief with the pragmatist conception of beliefs as habits of action. On a holistic, Rortian view, individual beliefs are tendencies of a web of beliefs to reweave itself in certain ways in response to encounters with its

environment (Rorty, 1991b: 98). On this model, the self does not reside in some form of Cartesian theater, having and reacting to beliefs, but is simply the totality of a self-reweaving network of beliefs. The web reacts and adapts to causal pressures through the addition of new beliefs, the deletion of old beliefs, or the adjustment of the relations of justification that hold between beliefs, but there is no central self that is distinct from the web itself.

This view dissolves our sense of obligation to the self as an entity distinct from our desires and to which those desires must conform and also makes the relation of the self to the world causal rather than representational. Rorty argued that we should recognize “relations of *justification* holding between beliefs and desires, and relations of *causation* holding between these beliefs and desires and other items in the universe, but no relations of *representation*” (Rorty, 1991b: 97). This argument boils down to the claim that viewing truth as representation confuses causation with justification. By clearly separating causation and justification, we can maintain that although interactions with a non-human reality can *cause* a web of beliefs to be rewoven, they can never fully *justify* the change in beliefs that results from this interaction. We do nothing to ground the addition or deletion of a belief with the claim: this adjustment in belief is justified because of the way the world is.

We cannot appeal to facts or reality as an absolute authority outside of the justificatory structures present in the web of beliefs, because facts are “hybrid entities” (Rorty, 1991b: 81). This means that in the acquisition of a new belief to which we ascribe the status of “fact” there is a causal interaction with the environment, but the nature of this interaction cannot be separated from the justificatory structures present in a web of belief prior to this interaction. Shifts in belief, even when they are conceived of as the acquisition of facts, are not solely the result of a stable non-human reality impressing itself upon a web of beliefs. The reaction of the web to the causal stimuli will depend on the composition of the web. This returns us to the point implied earlier- that belief-acquisition is dependent upon the proclivities of the individual web to react in certain ways to the addition or deletion of other beliefs. Thus, on this holistic view, there is no longer a direct or value-free path from the pressures of causal forces to the normativities that fuel our justifications.

Viewing truth and belief in this way allows us to separate the relations of justification that exist between our beliefs and the relations of causation that exist

between beliefs and non-beliefs. The attempt to conflate causation and justification is another example of the attempt to escape the human situation. It is the attempt to force the descriptive vocabulary that we use to talk about our environment to *contain* normative attitudes at its core rather than simply *implying* normative attitudes within our specific social context. Keeping in mind the context-dependent nature of belief acquisition, we can see that upon being confronted with novel stimuli we are always navigating the interaction of a specific environment with a specific web of beliefs. For this reason, appeals to “The way the world is” can not settle disputes about which of two different reactions to causal stimuli is justified.

The Appearance-Reality Distinction

One drawback of viewing the acquisition of true beliefs in the representationalist manner implied by the correspondence theory of truth is that this can lead to a desire to get from one side of a Platonic dualism to the other. This can take the form of trying to move past the subjective to the objective, past opinion to knowledge, or past appearance to reality. If one views knowledge or truth as accuracy of representation then one must use dualisms of this sort in order to have one realm of perception from which to represent another. If, on this dualistic model, one views the goal of inquiry as achieving objective truth, then it is only a matter of time before one tries to push one’s way over to the other side so that rather than simply representing the True, the Objective, or the Real one will have direct access to it. From a pragmatist perspective, this is yet another example of the urge to escape taking a stand in a world of contingency- an urge to make our dynamic experience static and thereby find eternally valid attitudes towards everything. This urge embodies the search for what Rorty called “redemptive truth”, a set of beliefs so complete and all-encompassing that it, “would end, once and for all, the process of reflection on what to do with ourselves” (Rorty, 2007: 90). Rorty suggested what I believe to be a more productive goal writing, “The end of humanity is not rest, but rather richer and better human activity” (Rorty, 1991b: 39). In this sense, Rorty was encouraging the replacement of a search for redemption with an open and productive conversation between diverse groups.

In order to facilitate this change in goal, we should drop attempts to get outside of our particular situation and grasp the universal or to get past our subjective

experience and achieve objective knowledge. For Rorty, to the extent that we talk about degrees of objectivity, we are referring to what we can get the relevant group of inquirers to agree upon, and how easily we can do so. Rorty described this position, writing, “To say that values are more subjective than facts is just to say that it is harder to get agreement about which things are ugly or which actions are evil than about which things are rectangular” (Rorty, 1999b: 51). One of the benefits of viewing truth or objectivity in this way is that, if the beliefs we consider objective or true are simply those that do not have live competition within our community of inquirers at the moment, then there is no need to make all truths hang together in one view, “no need to attempt to see reality steadily and as a whole” (Rorty, 1999b: 270).

In other words, there is no longer a need to find redemptive truth. If the acquisition of truth is no longer conceived of as requiring us to bridge the gap between appearance and reality, to enter into something like the world of Platonic forms, then we are free to simply achieve consensus on what is to be done in response to individual challenges. If the existence of truth does not require there to be one vocabulary that contains all truths, then we are only bound to the extent that we must balance expediency and our contingent values when deciding what to do. Rejecting the correspondence theory of truth can thus relieve us of our dual obligation towards the self and the world, and relieve truth of its obligation to aim towards redemption. This Rortian view of different belief systems as the results of different goals has the benefit of allowing for increased tolerance in pluralistic societies. While we are still free to fight passionately for what we believe in, a shift towards this more pragmatic view makes it easier to conceive of an influx of new belief systems as a potential resource rather than as a threat to the achievement of redemptive truth.

Against Accusations of Relativism

One criticism of philosophers who, like Rorty, abandon the correspondence theory of truth is that they are relativists (Baghramian et al., 2015: section 4.4.1). Rorty was met with such criticisms from at least 1979, the year he published *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, onward. These criticisms are easy to make if one takes a short section from one of Rorty’s books, out of context, and presents it within a representationalist framework. The more of Rorty’s work one has read, however, the more clear it becomes that these accusations are unfounded. This is part

of the reason that I have chosen to spend this entire chapter outlining the features of Rortian philosophy that I find important and showing how these fit together before moving on to the application of Rortian philosophy to religion and to religious trends in Norway.

In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines relativism as a view that “truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning, and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them” (Baghramian et al., 2015: intro). If one were to use this definition then one could make a strong argument that Rorty is a relativist. However, Rorty perceived the accusations of relativism directed against him as more specific, and usually rejected the label of relativist by distinguishing between the following claims:

1. Every belief is as good as any other.
2. Truth is a social construction.

For the purposes of this discussion, we can operationalize the sense of relativism that Rorty was adamant to insist did not capture his philosophy as the belief that accepting the second claim leads to accepting the first. Rorty agreed with this second claim, which will be the focus of the next section, but disagreed with the first claim (Rorty, 1999b: XV). The reason that this first claim is attributed to Rorty stems from his rejection of the appearance-reality distinction. One can argue that if we cease to conceive of inquiry as the attempt to filter out our subjectivity and pierce the veil of appearances, then each individual is left to his own devices and is under no obligation to make his claims or beliefs correspond to the way the world is. Again this epistemological stance has a moral corollary, whereby one can argue: if we abandon the notion of a universal moral law or an essential humanity that guides all of us and to which we are all ultimately responsible, any action becomes as justifiable as any other.

The stability of our attitudes towards moral and scientific truths might seem especially important to those who see philosophical attitudes as grounding the fields of science and ethics. Rorty, on the contrary, believed that most human behavior is not heavily influenced by “what we philosophy professors eventually decide to be the least problematic way of describing the relationship between human inquiry and the rest of the universe” (Rorty, 1998: 75). Rorty saw philosophers as academics, familiar with a certain set of texts, supplying one more perspective on how we might deal with

social issues. Philosophy is, on this view, no more about grounding other disciplines than literary criticism or poetry are. I believe that Rorty would have made the same claim about the sociology of religion.

Rorty viewed the humanist values of postindustrial liberal democracies, which the representationalism suggests we may lose should we slide into relativism, as products of social evolution rather than as the culmination of a properly grounded conception of scientific and moral inquiry (Rorty, 1998: 303). Rorty's focus on social evolution leads to what can be called a Darwinian view of the interaction between beliefs and non-beliefs. This view can be contrasted with the more Platonic view that is implied by the correspondence theory of truth. This view is Platonic in the sense mentioned earlier- that viewing truth as accurate representation will lead to the desire to move from one side of a Platonic dualism to the other in the search for redemptive truth. I argue that, although viewing truth as getting in touch with objective reality or viewing moral behavior as getting in touch with our core humanity may have been helpful over the course of our social evolution, this perspective that allowed us to cope with previous environments have become obstacles to coping with the challenges of more pluralized societies. This is because the correspondence theory of truth implies that one perspective on reality or morality "gets things right" in a more philosophically pregnant sense than achieving the most effective temporary solution in a given social context. This diminishes the incentive for a majority to give a fair hearing to the contributions of a minority in regards to how our social goals should develop and thus limits a democracy's access to potential resources for social and moral progress.

Replacing the Platonic view of beliefs and the quest for redemptive truth with a Darwinian approach, one that views beliefs as habits of action and clearly distinguishing between relations of causation and relations of justification, removes the fear that experimenting with new truths will sever the contact between our beliefs and reality. As Rorty put it, if we accept a Darwinian perspective, "there is simply no way to give sense to the idea of our minds or our language as systematically out of phase with that lies beyond our skins" (Rorty, 1991b:12). From this point of view, the individual is a self-reweaving web of beliefs that transforms itself through constant and unavoidable interactions with its non-human environment. Rorty's Darwinian and causal conception of the relationship between beliefs and non-beliefs thus removes

the need for the idea that there is a philosophically important justificatory gap to be bridged between subjective human experience and objective physical reality.

I have now described a view from which one can see a society's support for certain values as a result of these values having been woven into their cultural identity over the course of social evolution, rather than having been discovered and maintained through careful analysis of- and correspondence to- a static reality or morality. This approach shows how one can avoid the implication that adopting a Rortian standpoint on truth leads to epistemological or moral anarchy by pointing out that "... a belief can still regulate action... among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent, historical, circumstance" (Rorty, 1989: 189). For example, the belief that it will benefit our society to be as tolerant as possible will not disappear if we begin to view this belief as the result of the social progress we as a community have made, through hard work and trial and error, over the centuries instead of viewing this belief as a representing an ahistorical moral truth.

A core part of our cultural identity is not abandoned because of the results of debates between representationalists and anti-representationalists, but rather because of the arrival of a more attractive set of beliefs that perform most of the functions of the old beliefs with less of the perceived disadvantages. Being open to new social options and contextualizing the value of a belief through its function in a specific culture, whether one wants to call this relativism or not, does not lead to the conclusion that every belief is as good as any other. It simply suggests that as our goals change so do the truth-values of certain beliefs. Put another way, beliefs, if seen as habits of action, can still be argued for and ranked in terms of how effectively they help a society achieve their current goals without assurance that this ranking applies to all societies in all situations.

In summary, the claim that once we give up on overcoming the subjectivity of our beliefs we will no longer be forced to conform to reality and will be left out of touch with the world, presupposes the notion of belief as a representational medium between the self and the world that Rorty argued against (Rorty, 1999b: XXIII). If we view truth as a function of beliefs and if we see beliefs as habits of action developed and adapted through our constant causal interaction with the world, rather than something constrained by simultaneously representing the world and authentically expressing the self, then there is no way for our beliefs to be out of touch with reality.

We can make this move without suggesting that any belief is as good as any other as long as we are willing to accept that various degrees of “goodness” are determined contextually by how effective certain beliefs are as tools for dealing with a specific environment. It is important to specify here that beliefs-as-tools should not replace beliefs-as-representations as a representational medium between the world and the self. To avoid falling back into a version of the appearance-reality distinction we must not conceive of beliefs-as-tools as selected by a central self in something like the Cartesian theater based on how well they fit with the world. We can avoid this by seeing each tool as a node in a web of beliefs rather than as a tool that is used by a central self that is distinct from this web. We must also be careful to conceptualize belief-as-tools as dynamic methods of coping with an environment, portraying the “fit” between a belief and an environment as functional rather than representational. This “fit” is a matter of contextual efficiency and not a matter of representing a stable truth.

If we keep all of this in mind, we can abandon the fear of being out of touch with the world. Tools cannot be out of touch with what they are interacting with. They can, however, be better or worse suited to certain tasks. The difference between a Rortian view and a representationalist view does not lie in their respective abilities to rank human needs and assess the usefulness of beliefs in regards to those needs. The difference lies in whether an obligation to an ultimate, non-human reality establishes this hierarchy for us or whether we are free to tailor our beliefs and values to the specific needs of our community. Rorty’s choice of the latter option leads us to the second belief that can also warrant accusations of relativism- the belief that truth is a social construction.

The Social Construction of Truth

I have now discussed Rorty’s arguments for replacing a view of true belief as accurate representation with a view of beliefs as habits of action- as evolved tools for interacting with our environment. I have also touched on Rorty’s view of human beings as self-reweaving webs of beliefs and desires. These webs of beliefs are subject to causal pressure, but the relationships that bind these beliefs are relationships of justification. For Rorty, both justification and truth are functions of language (Rorty, 1999b: 48). However, this should not imply that there is an essential

nature of language, the discovery of which would reveal a set of redemptive truths; or that there are no non-linguistic causal forces that inspire beliefs or changes in our belief-systems. Rorty's focus on language was an expression of the conviction that there is no way to crawl out of our own minds or our own cultural contexts to access objective truth or the facts of the matter. On a Rortian view, truth is a property of sentences or propositions, not of the world. Rorty wrote that, "nothing is gained by talking about 'conceptual systems' that could not be had more easily by just talking about change in linguistic behavior" (Rorty, 1991b: 156). This view suggests that talking about how we might change our behavior, instead of arguing about which conceptual systems capture the true nature of objective reality, might shift focus away from ideological differences and towards the shared and concrete challenges facing a society.

I interpret Rorty's description of the self as a totality of the self-reweaving web of beliefs, combined with his discussion of our ability to adopt and adapt different perspectives or vocabularies within different contexts, as suggesting that the self is composed of multiple identities. Remembering that once we have abandoned the appearance-reality distinction we are released from the obligation to hold all truths within one coherent vocabulary, we can view the adoption of a perspective as the isolation of a certain set of beliefs in response to a certain context. Another way to describe this isolation of a perspective is as the assumption of one of many identities—an act of approaching a situation while conceptualizing one's goals in that situation through the beliefs that are most relevant to one of the specific communities or sets of values with which one identifies. Those beliefs, in propositional form, combined with the justificatory structures that are agreed to hold by those who communicate within the relevant context, constitute a vocabulary and the truth values which apply to certain statements within that context.

On this view, there are material, social, and conceptual structures that comprise a historical and cultural context, and descriptions of these structures are abandoned, altered, or reproduced by agents. While one should acknowledge the individual's ability to connect and reorganize these structures using the power of redescription, thereby creating new values, priorities, and possibilities, it is important to remember that establishing meaning is largely a social phenomenon. This is to say that although agency is a major factor in the process of self-reweaving, mastering the navigation of the justificatory structures necessary for the eventual development of

more idiosyncratic redescriptions requires a degree of social acculturation. On a Rortian view, although identity formation can be discussed and understood at the level of the individual, the function of language is to exchange marks and noises with others in order to justify, predict, and explain behavior (Rorty, 1989: 15). For this reason, the claim that truth is a social construction does not mean that we are not answerable to our peers and does not mean that, within an actual action context, any statement is an equally valid truth candidate.

On a social constructivist view, agents create truth and meaning within various communal contexts, but they cannot “describe away” causal forces. Despite being constrained by causal forces, however, truth is not a matter of getting past descriptions of what happened in the terms of our community to achieve an account of the objective facts of a situation. In other words, we can find common denominators among the interpretations available or say that one is the most useful for our particular goals, but we are matching one interpretation against another rather than matching an interpretation against objective reality. We cannot peel away the interpretations of the actors involved in an event to reveal a theory-independent version of the event itself. Rorty expressed this point when he wrote, “what counts as an accurate report of experience is a matter of what a community will let you get a way with” (Rorty, 2007: 11).

For example, our assessment of the accuracy of a report that a man hit his wife because a demon poisoned his heart will not depend on objective reality or empirical data, but on the predisposition of our community to accept such reports as true. In this sense, the beliefs that individuals have about actions cannot be separated from explanations or descriptions of these actions. The “truth of the matter” cannot be separated from our beliefs and our language. As Rorty wrote: “since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths” (Rorty, 1989: 21).

The reason that this view can imply the type of relativism that I mentioned earlier is that, on a representationalist view, ‘truth’ can be seen as more or less synonymous with ‘reality’. By this I mean that if one sees the achievement of truth as breaking through appearances to reality then true contact with reality is roughly equivalent to accessing redemptive truth, the imagined vocabulary that encompasses all true statements and makes static and understandable every aspect of our experience in an irrefutable way. The Platonistic urge to access something like the

world of the forms suggests that accessing truth is a matter of seeing the world for what it is outside of our subjective experience of it. This metaphor is carried on, to some extent, in the representationalist urge to make truth and reality match each other and thus become identical.

In this sense, representationalism suggests that at the end of inquiry, when we have achieved redemption, truth and reality are synonymous. Therefore, if one views truth and reality in this way, statements like “truth is a social construction”, can be interpreted as meaning that “reality is a social construction”. This later point is clearly not the one that Rorty tried to make, as demonstrated when he wrote:

It is one thing to say (absurdly) that we create objects by using words and something quite different to say that we do not know how to find a way of describing an enduring matrix of past and future inquiry into nature except in our own terms (Rorty, 2009: 276).

Here we see that Rorty was not trying to suggest that we speak reality into existence, or make any other such relativistic claim, at least not in the operationalized sense of relativism that I have been using here. We can thus interpret the belief that truth is a social construction as a claim that, once we stop looking at knowledge as contact with objective reality, assessing the truth of a statement can only be achieved by seeing how that statement fits in with the rest of our beliefs. In Rorty’s words: “there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence” (Rorty, 2009: 178).

I have now distinguished between the social constructivist view that Rorty advanced and the type of relativism he did not want to be associated with. As I have argued, and will continue to argue in chapter three, the confusion here comes from conflating truth with reality and justification with causation. It is not the case that claiming, “truth is not the discovery of the ahistorical nature of reality” cuts us off from the world because we are constantly in causal contact with the world. It is also not the case that claiming, “we do not have value-neutral access to the world” cuts us off from truth because truth is a function of language, not of the world. Again, there is an enormous difference between saying that truth would not exist without human beings and saying that the world would not exist without human beings. Rorty

believed the former to be the case (Rorty, 1989: 21). I do not know of any respected philosopher alive today who would make the latter claim.

Making Progress

One of the most powerful arguments against a Rortian rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and the appearance-reality distinction can be summarized by the questions: If, as you say, our community of inquirers is not aiming at ahistorical truth, how can we know that we are making progress? How can we know that our beliefs are better than those of our ancestors or better than those of other societies? How can we know that we are headed in the right direction? Remembering that, for Rorty, justification is locally and historically conditioned and beliefs are best seen as tools or habits of action, we can understand the pragmatic view of progress he expressed here:

When we say that our ancestors believed, falsely, that the sun went around the earth, and that we believe, truly, that the earth goes around the sun, we are saying that we have a better tool than our ancestors did. Our ancestors might rejoin that their tool enabled them to believe in the literal truth of the Christian Scriptures, whereas ours does not. Our reply has to be, I think, that the benefits of modern astronomy and of space travel outweigh the advantages of Christian fundamentalism (Rorty, 1999b: XXV).

Here we see a concrete example of Rorty having ranked the usefulness of two different vocabularies by referring to the needs of specific communities rather than by judging which of them corresponds to the way things *really* are. So the short answer on the topic of progress goes back to Rorty's belief that "The end of humanity is not rest, but rather richer and better human activity" (Rorty, 1991b: 39). Rather than aiming at a final or redemptive truth, we can simply support our current view of the solar system if we believe that we have no alternative view available that might propose or facilitate other projects that seem to us to be more worthwhile.

However, not everyone is satisfied with contingent and subjective criteria of progress. Those who want to conceive of inquiry as more constrained by non-human reality, may reasonably ask, "What do you mean by better human activity? Better by what standards?" to which a Rortian philosopher has no better short reply than "better

by our standards” (Rorty, 1989: 57). The argument here is that we would not be undone if we aimed at a human society that was better by our current standards rather than aiming at the discovery of universal standards upon which to build a perfect society. Having given up on the hope that a non-human reality will let us know that we are on the right track to redemptive truth, a pragmatist can instead hope for agreement among members of her community, and where this is not possible hope for interesting, productive, and non-violent disagreement (Rorty, 2009: 318). Importantly, the point being made here is not that engagements with non-human reality cannot inform us that we are achieving our current goals. Rather the argument is that non-human reality cannot let us know that our goals are worth achieving based on standards that are higher than our local contingent ones- reality cannot assure us that our goals are the best possible goals to have.

As I mentioned earlier when discussing the importance of distinguishing between causal and justificatory relations, a Rortian approach to truth and belief-acquisition does not remove our contact with non-human reality or the constraints put on us by our causal environment. Instead it attempts to distance us from the belief that there is one right way for our beliefs to relate to reality, namely representationally, which is dictated by the ahistorical nature of reality itself. Rortian philosophy distances us from the idea that if we got our subjective goals, desires, and beliefs out of the way that we might perceive unfiltered objectivity. We should distance ourselves from this idea and from representationalism because both are unhelpful when pluralistic societies that view tolerance as deeply important to their cultural identities are trying to establish a public space that minimizes difference and allows for cooperation. In societies that need to create space for a wide range of belief systems, worrying about how to accommodate each other is more important than arguing over which group’s habits of action capture the value-free nature of the world.

Rorty argued that the best foundation for a liberal democracy would be the view that every belief system deserved a hearing (Rorty, 1991a: 19). In his later work with Gianni Vattimo, which I will examine in chapter four, he described this as a prioritization of charity (Rorty et al., 2005: 59). One can get a clearer picture of the charity that Rorty thought we should have more of by viewing his philosophy as replacing redemption with conversation. Rorty believed that, rather than trying to find an airtight set of beliefs, we should strive to maintain as much free and open

conversation as possible and foster a willingness to adopt the vocabularies of others. This pluralist view of truth acknowledges that there are many valuable forms of life and tries to increase intercultural interaction rather than keeping different cultural groups out of each other's way (Rorty, 1999b: 268, 276). This stance leads to two claims: that we will create the most useful justificatory structures, institutions, and policies for our pluralistic democracies if more voices are heard and less topics are off limits, and that abandoning the correspondence theory of truth will facilitate this type of open conversation. Promoting conversation over redemption has the benefit of increasing tolerance, to the extent that we are able to humanize the other through conversing with him and being open to adopting his perspective, and the benefit of solidifying our community, to the extent that these interactions produce new ideals that can be incorporated into a shared cultural identity.

This social progress can be distinguished from moral progress. When redirected from social needs to moral dilemmas, the question of progress that I began this section with, reads something like this: If, as you say, there exists no intrinsic human nature or universal moral law that we can access through properly guided introspection, how do we know that our current moral practices are leading us in the right direction? Rorty believed that "moral obligation is a matter of conditioning rather than of insight. We decent, liberal, humanitarian types", he argued, "are just luckier, not more insightful, than the bullies with whom we struggle" (Rorty, 1999b: 15).

"Just luckier" was perhaps an unfortunate choice of phrase as it could be read as removing some of our responsibility for personal development. This misreading can be avoided by noticing that Rorty contrasted luck with insight. This suggests that his point here was that we are better off without a sense of self-righteousness when comparing ourselves to other moral communities. We are better off without recourse to a demonization of the foreign based on the belief that our formulation and implementation of the values that we cherish is the result of our superior use of a universal compass called "human nature" or "reason" or "moral law". Instead, we can see liberal humanitarian values as only possible in combination with a certain degree of what Norris and Inglehart call "existential security"- a sense that our basic physical and psychological needs are not under a sustained threat (Norris et al., 2001: 4). As this type of security is not distributed based on the extent to which various

communities or individuals embody what is truly human, we will be best served by listening to the perspectives of others and interpreting these perspectives charitably.

Since Rorty argued that learning a given cultural perspective is a matter of social acculturation, this naturally applies to our moral outlook as well (Rorty, 1991b: 2). But how then are we to justify our moral principles when confronted with alternatives? A Rortian approach suggests that navigating tensions between sets of truths is a matter of looking at newly encountered beliefs in light of the beliefs we already hold. One potentially negative consequence of not being obligated to conform to a moral law whose source lies outside of our contingent processes of justification is that it becomes “neither irrational nor unintelligent to draw the limits of one’s moral community at a national, or racial, or gender border”. Fortunately, Rorty continued, “it is undesirable- morally undesirable” (Rorty, 1999b: 81). This moral undesirability however, has no foundation other than the fact that many liberal democracies have found it useful to avoid drawing such limits. We may detest the actions and values of those who have drawn such limits in the past and we may be ashamed when reminded that most our ancestors are guilty of this in one way or another, but these attitudes need not suggest that the members of such groups embodied humanity any less than we do ourselves.

As with any belief, the fact that our desire for tolerance is a product of our particular group’s social evolution does not make it unreal or less compelling unless one requires morality to be grounded in a non-human reality. If we agree with the Rortian arguments presented thus far, we should turn our focus away from trying to make our beliefs conform to various versions of non-human reality or to attempt to ground our desires in a conception of what is truly human. Instead we should turn our attention to increasing our sensitivity to new types of human realities. One can argue that turning away from a representationalist view of truth might decrease our sensitivity to other humans. The fear that abandoning a view of truth as static will lead to an inability to compel people to conform to the humanitarian values that we value so highly is one of the main objections to pragmatic philosophies like Rorty’s. However, as I will show in the next section, Rorty argued that pluralistic democracies were in a position to make this move without sacrificing their moral standards (Rorty, 1991b: 2).

Healthy Ethnocentrism

A Rortian view, in which morals and values are seen as contingent upon local customs, entails a sort of ethnocentrism in the sense that humans are unable to escape the context-dependent nature of their interactions with their environment. Rorty saw humans as unable to test new information except by placing it within the vocabulary of one of the communities we already identify with (Rorty, 2009: 276). For Rorty, this condition was both inescapable and unproblematic. He believed that a sufficiently democratic society could combine this type of ethnocentrism and humanitarian values by striving to be “open to encounters with other actual and possible cultures, and to make this openness central to its self-image” (Rorty, 1991b: 2). In other words, we do not need tolerance to be an ahistorical moral value if it is morally relevant to us regardless. Certain privileged democratic societies have managed to cultivate a cultural identity that prides itself on tolerance, and those who are members of these cultures find this reason enough for acting tolerant.

Rather than trying to rise above sentiment to reason and rise above the morality of our particular culture to a universally valid sense of morality, we can try to be more sensitive to marginalized groups and we can try to expand the boundaries of our community to include new groups. The boundary between “homosexual” and “heterosexual” used to be relevant when deciding who could get married in Norway. The label “Jew” used to be relevant when deciding who could come into the country. As our cultural identity developed and new belief systems were introduced that offered redescriptions of the importance of such distinctions, these particular labels became irrelevant to those particular purposes. Similar questions can be raised today about what sorts of religious distinctions should be relevant to our current public projects and about what degree of influence our religious institutions should have on the rights of groups that view religion or politics in previously unheard of ways.

Applying a specific type of expertise in order to propose new descriptions of these challenging situations, and thus make certain distinctions seem more or less relevant, is what Rorty hoped for from both the philosopher and the sociologist (Rorty, 2011a: 202). The Rortian sociologist of religion is one who is on the lookout for established religious norms or practices that are no longer facilitating the achievement of a given society’s goals, and one who can redescribe these accepted practices in ways that makes change desirable. The edifying sociologist is one who is less concerned with putting sociology on the secure path of a science or with finding

the right methods to uncover the ultimate conditions of human experience than with understanding and helping her community to reweave its identity to allow for a more inclusive sense of “us” and a richer and more diverse arena of conversation. Rorty claimed that, “What we hope for from our social scientists is that they will act as interpreters for those with whom we are not sure how to talk” (Rorty, 2011a: 202). As our societies navigate inevitable changes and developments in their conceptions of religion, I imagine that Rorty hoped that the sociologist of religion would act as a watchdog for habits of action that allow certain groups to be disenfranchised. In the next chapter I turn to Rorty’s analysis of religious authority structures and the obstacles that he believed the religious search for redemptive truth presented for the efficient functioning of the public sphere in pluralistic democracies.

Chapter Two: A Rortian Reconception of Religion

Having provided an outline of Rortian philosophy, I will now proceed to discuss Rorty's reconception of religion. For several reasons, this discussion of religion will be primarily in reference to Christianity. The first reason for this is that most of Rorty's more specific criticisms of religion were directed at Christianity. Second, those who have critiqued Rorty's conception of religion are predominantly Christian. Third, as Christianity is the dominant religion in Norway, and I wish to move on to a discussion of Rortian philosophy and Norwegian religious trends in chapter three, this seems an appropriate way to narrow the scope of my project. I will present several aspects of Rorty's treatment of religion and review the consequences of the adoption of his views. This presentation will be interspersed with some religiously based criticisms of Rorty's work as well as responses to these critiques. However, the majority of my engagement with Rorty's critics will be saved for chapter four.

Dedivinization and Polytheism

In chapter one I presented Rorty's suggestion that we should avoid the correspondence theory of truth by abandoning a view of the individual as dually obligated to authentically express the true nature of the self and accurately represent the true nature of the world. Rorty described the removal of the individual from this position of dual obligation as a dedivinization of the world and the self (Rorty, 1989: 21). Rorty's choice of the term "dedivinization" had obvious religious undertones, expressed explicitly when he wrote:

The very idea that the world or the self has an intrinsic nature... is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation, the work of someone who had something in mind, who Himself spoke some language in which He described His own project... (Rorty, 1989: 21)

Here we see how Rorty described the specifically religious version of the desire to escape our finitude. By humanizing a divine creator we create a literal God's-eye-

view, a perspective towards which our language and our beliefs should aim. Despite the religiously charged nature of terms like “divinization” and “redemption”, these attitudes were not inherently religious for Rorty. Rorty specified in the above quote that divinization is a *remnant* of the religious belief that a divine being created the world. This suggests that one can have a view that includes the divinization of the world and the self without being a religious believer. However, one can easily imagine how attitudes towards divinization could have emerged from or been incorporated into a Christian model. The obligation to be true to the world can be seen as an obligation to come to know God by studying his creation and the obligation to be true to the self can be seen as an obligation to discover God’s plan for us through receiving guidance from the Holy Spirit or through some other form of divine revelation.

A Rortian philosophical outlook requires us to reject the notion that there is one universally correct description of reality and of the self. In *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, Rorty described one aspect of this move as an adoption of “romantic polytheism”. He explained:

You are a polytheist if you think that there is no actual or possible object of knowledge that would permit you to commensurate and rank all human needs... you do not have to believe that there are non-human persons with the power to intervene in human affairs. All you need do is abandon the idea that we should try to find a way of making everything hang together, which will tell all human beings what to do with their lives, and tell all of them the same thing... (Rorty, 2007: 30)

One could argue that Rorty’s choice of the term “polytheist” to describe this attitude is unfortunate because, despite his clarification that his version of polytheism does not necessarily imply belief in the existence of supernatural agents, the term carries an obvious and potentially misleading religious connotation. Rorty’s creative uses of the terms redemption, divinization, and polytheism are each only treated in relatively small portions of his work. This opens the door for both believers and religious scholars, even those who have read a number of Rorty’s books, to misinterpret Rortian quotes based on the assumption that he is using more standardized definitions of these terms.

On the other hand, one advantage of Rorty's unconventional use of religiously charged terms, especially in connection to non-religious beliefs and institutions, is that his use of these terms can show that the targets of his critiques are not religion as such, but rather the specific traditions and authority structures that encourage divinization, monotheism, and the search for redemptive truth. Rorty's conception of monotheism was essentially the acceptance of the belief that inquiry should aim at redemptive truth, a belief that is arguably implied by a divinization of the world and the self. As these three terms were not large parts of Rorty's work and were not all explicitly connected to each other, there is a degree of overlap. Regardless, Rorty's unique use of these terms opens up potential connections between Rortian philosophy and alternative spiritual communities that distance themselves from traditional or monotheistic religion.

Many people who describe themselves as "spiritual, but not religious" instrumentalize religion for the sake of personal development rather than striving to conform to universal truths (Schmidt et al., 2010: 60). Such an approach arguably falls under Rorty's definition of polytheism and is thus less opposed to Rorty's democratic vision. This shows that, even though he fought for a privatization of religion and a further secularization of the public sphere, Rorty did not see abandoning all forms of religious truth as a necessity. His very choice of the term polytheism, rather than for example atheism, as the rejection of what he saw as problematic in religion suggests that Rorty saw certain forms of religious belief as unproblematic for pluralistic democracies. I will return to this point and to an additional advantage of Rorty's creative use of religiously charged terms, namely the ability of a dual application of his philosophy to both science and religion to diminish the tension between the two, in chapter three.

We can now define a monotheistic approach as one that supports the quest for redemptive truth and the desire to pierce the veil of appearances. Here we encounter what I believe to be the core of the tension between Rortian philosophy and monotheistic religion. A Rortian vision of social and moral progress requires accepting different truths in different situations and "compromising your principles in order to form alliances with groups about whom you have grave doubts" (Rorty, 1998: 52). This becomes difficult if the ultimate aim of our discussions with others is seen as "getting the world right" rather than finding mutually beneficial temporary solutions to social problems. The public sphere of Rorty's ideal liberal democracy, in

which such discussions would take place, “would have no room for the notion that there are nonhuman forces to which human beings should be responsible” (Rorty, 1989: 45). Here I interpret Rorty as using the term “responsible” to mean “obligated to” and I therefore read this passage as a warning against a divinization of the world that supports monotheism.

I have argued that a monotheistic belief in an omniscient being necessitates the existence of redemptive truth- a perspective or vocabulary that holds every truth together in one vision. Regardless of the extent to which a religious individual believes that human beings can partake in this divine vision, the desire to do so is unavoidable and leads one right back to the correspondence theory of truth. This is because a monotheistic view makes escaping human finitude seem desirable and thus diminishes the importance of dealing with the concrete problems that we are faced with as a community. In other words, a monotheistic paradise begins upon the arrival of a complete set of redemptive truths that are universally self-evident, while the Rortian democratic utopia praises difference and the creation of new truths that allow us to continually re-weave our identities in new and exciting ways.

While monotheists hope that we will someday be united with the infinite or the absolute, Rorty hoped that we might give up on our various attempts to get outside of our finitude (Rorty, 2011b: 14). I believe that this difference in goal is what leads philosopher of religion, Roger A. Ward, to criticize Rorty for providing us with “no ‘later’ against which reflection works in the present” and to argue that Rorty’s “sense of narrative identity collapses into meaningless succession without a conception of an end.” (Goodson et al., 2013: 22). For Rorty, the “later” was the not so distant future in which he imagined a more democratic and tolerant society might emerge (Rorty et al., 2005: 40). This does not seem final enough for Ward. It seems that he and his fellow monotheists want our activity to be oriented towards a divine plan, a non-human future, whereas Rorty wanted us to stay focused on our human future- on leaving the room and the resources for the next few generations to reweave their identities in ways that will make new things possible and desirable (Rorty, 1989: 39).

Clearly, redemptive and pragmatic social visions are at odds and thus their conceptions of what counts as social and moral progress differ. Rorty summarized the core of this tension between democratic and monotheistic commitments writing, “Your devotion to democracy is unlikely to be wholehearted if you believe, as monotheists typically do, that we can have knowledge of an ‘objective’ ranking of

human needs that can overrule the result of democratic consensus” (Rorty, 2007: 33). Additionally, Rorty claimed that, “the most appropriate foundation for a liberal democracy” should be the policy that “no belief or desire is held so sacred that a metaphor which endangers it is automatically rejected” (Rorty, 1991a: 19). To keep both the monotheistic sense of the sacred and the monotheistic belief that we can universally rank all human needs out of the way of democratic social progress, Rorty believed that a form of privatization of religion was necessary (Rorty, 1998: 96-97).

The Public-Private Split

In order to understand what the privatization of religion meant to Rorty, we must first understand his distinction between public and private projects. Rorty referred to public projects as “projects of social cooperation” and private projects as “projects of individual self-development”, where “Intersubjective agreement is required for the former projects, but not for the latter” (Rorty, 2007: 35). It is important to note here that a certain project may be appropriate to the public sphere in one type of society, while the same project might be deemed private in another society. This is because the deciding factor is the degree of intersubjective agreement on the issue at hand and, naturally, different societies will often agree to radically different things. In regards to the private or public functions of religion in various societies, Rorty held that, “The search for private perfection, pursued by theists and atheists alike, is neither trivial nor, in a pluralistic democracy, relevant to public policy” (Rorty, 2007: 170). Here we see that Rorty did not see the privatization of a set of beliefs as a trivialization of those beliefs.

It is important to keep in mind that Rorty’s suggestion that religious authority should be irrelevant when crafting public policy was offered to pluralistic democracies and not to humanity at large. I believe that Rorty limited his arguments about the privatization of religion to pluralistic democracies because a primary goal of this privatization was an increase in tolerance and openness. Agrarian societies may need a more public religion to hold their members together. A prioritization of tolerance and openness in societies where one’s safety is not guaranteed could be devastating and even deadly. Norris and Inglehart’s line of argument supports this interpretation. They argue that in cultures that are not economically or existentially secure, religious belief can “reduces stress, enabling people to shut out anxiety and

focus on coping with their immediate problems” (Norris et al., 2011: 19). Rorty clearly advocated a prioritization of the problems at hand in any given society and would therefore have agreed with Norris and Inglehart’s assessment that “Under conditions of insecurity, people have a powerful need to see authority as both strong and benevolent- even in the face of evidence to the contrary” (Norris et al., 2011: 19).

With the audience of his critiques of religion in mind, we can turn to one of Rorty’s more famous criticisms of religion- that it functions as a “conversation-stopper” (Rorty, 2007: 171). By this Rorty meant that when one lives in a pluralistic democracy and one is attempting to establish public policies that will allow for peaceful cohabitation among people with fundamental disagreements on religious matters; referencing the authority of an unshared religious tradition can put a stop to productive discourse and thereby inhibit projects of social cooperation. Rorty often advocated a secular public discourse, but specified that, “‘restructuring arguments in purely secular terms’ just means ‘dropping reference to the source of the premises of the arguments’” (Rorty, 2007: 173). In other words, one can use the lessons one has learned from religious practice in public discourse, but grounding the validity of those lessons in unshared religious authority will often function as a conversation-stopper.

I find that Rorty’s portrayal of cultural development as a conversation that we should try to keep going mirrors his polytheistic commitments. If one believes that there is no single vocabulary or perspective which contains the relevant truths necessary for the success of all possible human communities, then there can be no other goal than keeping a conversation going between groups with different visions in the hope that we can come to understand and tolerate each other without resorting to violence. The monotheistic urge, on the other hand, is to try to reach a point where the conversation stops- where the same truths are revealed to everyone and further conversation is no longer necessary. This desire to reach a final place of rest, Rorty argued, ought to be replaced with a desire to enrich and redescribe the ongoing dialogue of human development (Rorty, 1991b: 39).

As Rorty never opposed the freedom of religion, his approach to the privatization of religion still allows religion a role in public conversation. Although Rorty would have worded things differently, I think he would have agreed with the gist of professor of Religious Ethics, Jacob L. Goodson’s suggestion that “‘reasoning from the will of God is a ‘conversation stopper’ in public debate, whereas reasoning from the wisdom of God is not” (Goodson et al., 2013: 126). I think that Rorty would

certainly have agreed with this statement if the second “God” were replaced with “religious texts and practices”, as this wording would better complement his pragmatic view of beliefs as habits of action. Making room for religious contributions to the conversation should not suggest that appeals to the *authority* of religious texts and practices as sources of divine revelation are unproblematic in pluralistic democracies. However, reference to such practices can be helpful in public debates if one offers such a set of practices, and one’s experience of the consequences of adopting them, as a suggestion, on equal authoritative footing with all other suggestions, as to how we might redescribe ourselves in order to deal with the problems that currently face us as a community.

Here we can see that Rorty’s privatization of religion was not meant to remove the possibility of religious belief or even to prevent that belief from affecting people’s politics. There is an enormous difference between saying that religious belief should not influence our attitudes towards public policy and saying that religious authority cannot effectively ground arguments about public policy in religiously diverse democracies. We should be free to explore religious beliefs that might benefit our projects of individual self-creation, as long as we acknowledge that the religious forms of justification that seem valid to us- or to certain communities with which we identify- are not valid in certain larger groups in which, at times, we need to operate. It is critical to note that when Rorty justified the need for religious privatization he maintained that:

It is never an objection to a religious belief that there is no evidence for it. The only possible objection to it can be that it intrudes an individual project into a social and cooperative project... Such intrusion is a betrayal of one’s responsibilities to cooperate with other human beings, not of one’s responsibility to Truth of Reason (Rorty, 2007: 35).

The above quote demonstrates how a Rortian reconception of religion aids in a dedivinization of the world and the self that removes our obligation to discover redemptive truth and frees us to focus on human cooperation. This quote also provides an excellent response to the argument made by professor of Theology and Philosophy, David O’Hara, that Rorty’s “criticism of religion depends on the claim that religions aim at something that is not demonstrably the case” (Goodson et al., 2013: 149).

One can interpret O'Hara as saying that Rorty criticizes religion based on a lack of evidence of the truth of religious belief, in which case we can see in the block quote above that Rorty says the exact opposite. A more charitable reading of O'Hara's critique might interpret him as rejecting Rorty's suggestion that things that are "not demonstrably the case" or, in more Rortian terms, "topics that lack publically available norms for regulating discussion" cannot be effectively used to generate authority in public projects. If O'Hara is making this latter critique then I believe that a Rortian counterargument would hinge on the importance of setting aside our individual views on ultimate truth to allow for democratic progress. This highlights the fact that Rorty's goal of privatization was not aimed exclusively at religion, but rather at all of the idiosyncratic passions that we cannot justify to our relevant peer groups at the moment.

These passions and beliefs are not inferior in nature to those that achieve higher levels of intersubjective agreement. They may even some day be presented to a new group or in a new way and become integral parts of our cultural identity. However, until this happens, appeals to the authority of such passions are unhelpful when our goal is public cooperation. It is also important to realize that the line between the public and the private is dynamic and constantly being negotiated. Theology professor, Keith Starckenburg, failed to understand the dynamic nature of Rorty's distinction between the public and the private when he critiqued Rorty by arguing, "religious beliefs simply are not private beliefs- they are as public as any other kinds of beliefs" (Goodson et al., 2013: 89).

For Rorty, there are no beliefs or belief systems that are inherently public or private. As I mentioned earlier, the distinction between the public and the private goes back to requirements of intersubjective agreement. For this reason, every belief is on equal footing with every other belief until a society collectively takes a stance on it. Even after a society takes an authoritative stance on the status of certain beliefs, this stance can be changed by the emergence of a new description of the system in question. In response to Starckenburg, one can say that religious beliefs are as public as any others in the sense that they are submitted to the same public standards as any others. A society can determine if religious beliefs should primarily *influence* either the public or the private sphere and how they should do so, but not whether the beliefs themselves are public or private.

I see no problem, on a Rortian model, with religious authority becoming a part of a democracy's public policies, assuming that this authority could be implemented in a way that allowed the society in question to maintain enough of the benefits that the previous system afforded it. These benefits might include freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and a continual integration of tolerance and openness into the cultural identity of a society. If everyone in a given society were in agreement about the authority of the Bible, for example, then scripture would be an acceptable authority for grounding decisions about public policy. However, if one looks at contemporary pluralistic democracies, it seems that such agreement is both highly unlikely and, for those who see a continued conversation between different belief systems as a resource, undesirable.

The function of the Rortian public-private split is not to draw a universal line to establish what should be public and what should be private for everyone. This is important when framing the Rortian argument about the privatization of religion and when explaining why it is so important to limit this type of privatization to certain types of societies. I interpret Rorty's argument that the privatization of religion will help pluralistic democracies *now*, as in no way barring the path for religious authority to re-enter the public spheres of these democracies should their needs change. The public-private split should be seen as a tool that we can use to argue about which beliefs will help us achieve effective public action and which are better used as inspiration for private attempts at self-creation based on the context that we find ourselves in at the moment.

Thus far, I have focused primarily on keeping private passions out of cooperative projects in which it is important to arrive at publically agreed upon goals. Critics, like Starckenburg, resist Rorty's restriction of appeals to unshared religious authority to the private sphere, because this privatization can be seen as a demotion of these beliefs to a lesser status. However, Rorty specified that, for the individual, public commitments should not automatically overrule private commitments. He wrote, "Responsibilities to others constitute *only* the public side of our lives, a side which competes with our private affections and our private attempts at self-creation, and which has no *automatic* priority over such private motives" (Rorty, 1989: 194).

This passage suggests that we are free to describe ourselves as individuals, as members of small homogenous communities, or as members of large diverse communities. The one source of identity is not inherently more important than the

other. Once we give up the monotheistic conviction that Truth is One and the often concomitant belief that getting in touch with the One True Moral Law is a matter of reason-guided introspection, we can describe ourselves as navigating multiple moral identities formed through our commitments to diverse groups and conflicting ideals. Even more importantly, we can see this multiplicity of identities as unproblematic. On a Rortian view, discrepancies between our various private and public commitments should be seen as inevitable consequences of the complexity of human existence and not as signs of irrationality or a lack of moral or intellectual responsibility (Rorty, 1999b: 270).

One benefit of dynamically applying the public-private split is that one can describe a given perspective as either public or private based on how one contextualizes it. One can apply the split to describe, for example, one's own desires as private in relation to the more public goals of a small group, the relation of those goals as private in relation to national cooperative projects, and those national goals as private when compared to international or global senses of identity. This use of the public-private split strays from Rorty's original definition of public projects as requiring intersubjective agreement and private projects as not requiring such agreement. While the privatization of religion is best conceived of using Rorty's definition, I bring up the potential for even more dynamic uses of the split to drive home the point that the distinction between the public and the private is not something that is set once and for all and that no belief or set of beliefs is inherently or acontextually private or public.

The fact that Rorty attached such high value to our private projects is a solid response to critiques that certain beliefs are too important to be confined to the private sphere. However, in addition to being critiqued for devaluing the private, Rorty was also critiqued for overvaluing it. For example, professor of Theology and Philosophy, Eric Hall, rejects a Rortian public-private split on the grounds that if we accept it, "The individual's project of self-creation constitutes both the means and the ends for any politic" (Goodson et al., 2013: 100). It seems clear to me that Rorty's claim that private projects should not *automatically* be subordinate to public projects does not mean that private projects should always take priority or that private freedom should be the ultimate aim of all public projects. Freedom to conduct our private projects in peace is thus not, as Hall suggests, *always* the end towards which pragmatic social projects aim.

The type of self-creation that Hall is talking about sounds more like self-actualization. While democratic politics should aim to facilitate private projects of self-actualization, there can only be room for these projects if our more basic needs are already provided for. The difference that I am trying to highlight here is that self-creation includes dealing with our more basic needs while self-actualization can only occur when those needs are already met. Thus when Rorty used the public-private split to suggest that some belief systems should take precedence over others in certain situations, I do not read him as either diminishing the importance of unshared beliefs or suggesting that all programs should prioritize individual projects of self-actualization. The application of the public-private split is best conceived of as a tool for making suggestions that are not necessarily relevant outside of the context created by the specific needs that are currently being addressed.

Applied to the privatization of religion, this means that appeals to religious authority, while sometimes valuable, should be acknowledged as hindrances when a pluralistic society is trying to adjust authority structures by changing public policy. This does not mean, however, that our more idiosyncratic beliefs are less important to our processes of redescription. Thus the critiques of Rorty from either side appear unfounded. I see resistance to his suggestion that we should privatize unshared beliefs as stemming from a fear that we will lose the freedom to describe ourselves in the way that we see fit, and I see the resistance to his suggestion that private needs should not automatically be subordinated to the public needs as stemming from a fear that if people lean too heavily on their unshared beliefs then we will be unable to maintain social order.

Rorty took these fears seriously, but believed that a commitment to democracy, fairness, and tolerance could be maintained by beliefs that did not reference the intrinsic nature of reality or humanity, assuming an appropriate degree of existential security was in place. Rorty's use of the distinction between the public and the private was, among other things, a suggestion as to how we might maintain a balance between these two threats. The distinction is a tool to aid in processes of risk-management where there are no guidelines other than comparisons between concrete alternatives. Rorty dubbed this kind of public risk-management "cultural politics" (Rorty, 2007: 6).

Against the Religious Circumvention of Cultural Politics

In the previous section we saw that Rorty did not try to argue that we should reject public religious authority on the grounds of religious truths being indemonstrable. Additionally, because Rorty wanted to allow people to privately hold onto truths that they could not justify to their peers, as long as the practices inspired by these truths did not infringe upon the rights of others, he chose not to critique religious doctrine on the grounds of internal incoherence (Rorty, 2007: 136). Rorty also refrained from critiquing religious belief as irrational or as inherently misguided. He argued instead that,

Seeing ourselves as participating in the divine life by describing ourselves under the aspect of eternity is not an illusion or a confusion; it is just one more attempt to satisfy one more human need... it is one more human project which may, like all human projects, eclipse the possibility of other, more desirable but incompatible projects (Rorty, 2007: 61).

The reason Rorty worked to reduce the influence of religion on democratic politics was that he believed that religious appeals to authority in the public sphere would impede the types of interactions and conversations that he saw as necessary to expanding our sense of community and our desire to become more tolerant. He maintained that religious *authority* should remain in the private sphere in pluralistic democracies at least until our needs change or a religious authority structure can replace a secular democratic institution while continuing to fit in with surrounding practices and while producing greater perceived benefits.

Let me emphasize again that Rorty did not describe religious belief as irrational. He has been critiqued for doing so, despite having written things like “The claim that... we are appealing to reason, whereas the religious are being irrational, is hokum” (Rorty, 2007: 172). This suggests that Starkenburg’s argument that, “belief in God is as rational as other kinds of belief (*and not as irrational, as it is with Rorty*)”, stems from an insufficient familiarity with Rorty’s work (Goodson et al., 2013: 72). It is therefore important for me to point out that whatever reasons certain critics may have for attributing to Rorty the belief that religion is irrational, they do not come from his writings. In chapter three I will discuss how Rorty argues that appeals to reason or rationality can, in certain situations, be as unhelpful as appeals to the authority of supernatural agents.

Despite his antagonism towards monotheism, Rorty acknowledged several benefits of religion, for example Christianity's propagation of the ideal of human fraternity (Rorty, 2007: 39). However, Rorty imagined that we would be better served if we used "the energy that past human societies had spent on discovering God's desires on discovering one another's desires" (Rorty, 1998: 16). Rorty did not base this suggestion on a claim that he had discovered any evidence against God's existence or accessed any essential truths about humanity. He firmly held that, "It is no more evident that democratic institutions are to be measured by the sort of person they create than that they are to be measured against divine commands" (Rorty, 1991b: 190).

I believe that the sense in which Rorty used the word "evident" here meant "evident on the basis of something universally accepted". The conclusion that societies should in fact be measured by the sort of person they create and that we would be better off trying to embrace and understand an increasingly large portion of the human race rather than trying to transcend our humanity is one lesson, among many, that could be drawn from human history. One can defend this conclusion passionately, but it is important to note that Rorty never argued that his view had a more stable foundation than its competitors, at least not in the sense that he saw his view as better grounded in reality or in the true nature of things. Rorty simply argued that his view would probably lead to more desirable consequences for pluralistic democracies (Saatkamp Jr., 1995: 195).

In the following passage, we can see one example of the social implications that Rorty imagined further secularization might have on western democracies. He wrote:

The Christian who believes that God will punish him with hellfire if he lies under oath will, in the short run, do the same thing as the atheist who believes that he will be unable to live with himself if he betrays the social contract by committing perjury. But in the long run it may make a lot of difference whether a society is regulated by its members' fear of nonhuman sanctions or by secular sentiments of pride, loyalty, and solidarity (Rorty, 1998: 76).

Here Rorty is clearly suggesting that religious beliefs can have undesirable social consequences, but I read this as the full extent of his critique. He makes no mention of religion "getting the world wrong" or being fundamentally unsuitable as a motivator

for moral action. Rorty believed that the function that religion should have in a society ought to be determined through cultural politics. Cultural politics is what Rorty called public assessments of the pros and cons of competing narratives in response to disagreements about what sorts of justifications or what sources of authority should be relevant in a given situation (Rorty, 2007: 6).

Cultural politics can be best understood through the way Rorty, drawing on the work of philosopher Robert Brandom, divided culture into three areas (Rorty, 2007: 7). In the first area, the individual is the ultimate source of authority. An example of this might be when we ask someone what he or she is thinking about. The individual's response will, in most cases, be taken at face value. In the second area, the non-human world is the ultimate source of authority. Rorty used the example of using litmus paper to determine whether a solution is an acid or a base (Rorty, 2007: 7). In the third area, society "retains the right to decide for itself. This is the arena of cultural politics" (Rorty, 2007: 7). Cultural politics is thus a society's established methods for deciding which laws or authorities are relevant in situations where there is disagreement on how a conflict should be resolved. Although each society has standardized ways of dealing with certain types of cases, everything, including these standards themselves, is up for grabs in the arena of cultural politics. Any system or practice can be replaced if one can convincingly present an alternative practice that would perform roughly the same task as the current one and might lead to more desirable results (Rorty, 2007: 19-20).

In chapter one, I discussed Rorty's argument that the ascriptions of "True", "Real", or "Good" to certain beliefs or reports, are reliant on our social practices and the beliefs that are already incorporated into our lives. On this constructivist view, the three terms above are not properties of the world but rather compliments paid to concepts that have been integrated into our social systems and proven to be consistently helpful. "When these practices are being contested, it is of no use to say that reality or truth is on the side of one of the contestants" (Rorty, 2007: 6-7). Such claims will be meaningless because cultural-political debates are about offering arguments for why established views should be replaced with new ones. If "true" or "real" simply mean "established within our social system", then no substantial content is added to a defense of certain beliefs or descriptions by calling them real or true *in the context of cultural politics*.

Rorty maintained that all matters of privilege and authority are established socially by comparing concrete options and choosing which narratives or justificatory structures a community wants to strengthen or replace. Rorty argued, “All attempts to name an authority which is superior to that of society are disguised moves in the game of cultural politics”, and here we find one of his major qualms with religious appeals to authority (Rorty, 2007: 9). People who try to legitimize arguments using the authority of “God” or “Divine Law” in areas where a society has not established the authority of these terms, or where a society has not agreed on one interpretation of what such authority dictates, are just trying to circumvent cultural politics. For the same reasons given above about the emptiness of the terms “real” or “true” in the arena of cultural politics, appeals to God are vacuous and distracting when deciding whether the authority of a religious belief should become or should remain socially established.

If we all agreed on how to incorporate divine authority into our current practices, there would be no need for debate in the first place. While a debate about the role or the legitimacy of this authority is underway, the authority is by definition not agreed to be in place and thus appeals to it are unhelpful. If a society is debating whether or not to follow a Divine Law then clearly the authority of God is in question, or at least under interpretation. If we accept Rorty’s description of all authority and privilege as socially established, it becomes as circular to claim the authority of God as a reason for submitting to a Divine Law as it is to list the truth of a statement as a reason for believing it.

Existence vs. Social Desirability

As I have been showing, one can use Rortian philosophy to argue that we should work to minimize the distinctions between different religions when public projects require cooperation across religious divides. One can argue that talking less about God and religious authority in these situations will further our shared democratic ideals. The problem, however, is that taking this type of pragmatic attitude towards the function of religion will strike many religious people as missing the point. “The point, they would insist, is that God *exists*, or perhaps that human beings really *do* have immortal souls” (Rorty, 2007: 4). The difference between focusing on the existence of gods or souls and focusing on the social desirability of talking about

these subjects is a major point of contention between redemptive and pragmatic approaches to social issues.

Rortian cultural politics and the belief that we should focus on the social desirability of certain topics rather than arguing about existence claims, leads us towards what Robert Brandom called “the ontological primacy of the social” (Rorty, 2007: 8). Prioritizing social needs over ontological foundations means seeing all authority as socially constructed and then allowing cultural-political questions to replace ontological ones. If one accepts the ontological primacy of the social, “the question of the existence of God is a question of the advantages and disadvantages of using God-talk over and against alternative ways of talking” (Rorty, 2007: 8). Here I think that Rorty should have written “the cultural-political question” rather than simply “the question” or should have written, “should be replaced by the question” rather than “is a question”. His wording, when not put within the context of the rest of his work, can open him up to the accusations of the type of relativism that I discussed in chapter one. This is because he can be interpreted as suggesting that ontological questions might be universally reduced to questions about the benefits of linguistic behavior. It is passages like this that provoke critics to claim that Rorty believed what he repeatedly denied: that we create, rather than redescribe, the world by deciding what to talk about (Rorty, 2009: 276).

In one of the more extreme versions of this critique, Starkenburg argues that, “If Rorty is right... then one way to solve problems such as AIDS or to deal with the suffering imposed by rulers such as Pol Pot is to convince your peers to let you get away with saying such things simply do not happen” (Goodson et al., 2013: 76). I find this interpretation to be entirely unfair as Rorty expressed that he had “no sympathy with the notion of nature as malleable to thought” and that he rejected “the inference from ‘one cannot give a theory-independent description of a thing’ to ‘there are no theory-independent things’” (Rorty, 2009: 279). Rorty’s suggestion that questions about the social desirability of certain belief systems should replace questions of existence when we are engaged in debates about social issues was not intended to imply that society decides what exists. Rorty simply argued that when there is disagreement within a society about how to interpret the causal forces that we constantly interact with, we will be more productive if we debate concrete cultural-political questions than if we search for universally valid ontological foundations for our beliefs.

I therefore interpret Rorty as having argued that: *if* we accept the ontological primacy of the social *then* the question of God's existence can be replaced by, although not universally reduced to, the question of the desirability of God-talk *in the arena of cultural politics*. Interpreted this way, Rorty was offering a pragmatic suggestion as to how we might increase happiness and productivity in certain kinds of communities. When discussing the positive effects of dedivinization on our attitudes towards truth, adopting the polytheistic view that there are many truths and that we should not try to capture the eternal essence of either the world or the self, Rorty wrote:

To say that there is no such thing as intrinsic nature is not to say that the intrinsic nature of reality has turned out, surprisingly enough, to be extrinsic. It is to say that the term "intrinsic nature" is one which it would pay us not to use, an expression which has caused more trouble than it has been worth. To say that we should drop the idea of truth as out there waiting to be discovered is not to say that we have discovered that, out there, there is no truth. (Rorty, 1989: 8)

This stance can easily be transferred from the more anti-essentialist epistemological claim above to an anti-realist ontological claim that illuminates Rorty's intentions when he advocated both the ontological primacy of the social and a privatization of religion.

One can adjust the above quote to argue: "To say that we cannot usefully discuss the existence of God when engaged in deliberations about public policy is not to say that the source of existence has turned out, surprisingly enough, to be our social norms of justification. It is to say that appeals to "the authority of God", while we are engaged in public projects, have caused more trouble than they have been worth. To say that we would be better served by focusing on our concrete cultural-political options than by attempting to prove or disprove the existence of supernatural agents is not to say that we have discovered either that there is no "God" or that there is no objective reality". This phrasing emphasizes that Rorty's suggestion was to replace attempts to develop universal ontological foundations with cultural politics and that he did not try to suggest that culture should be our new starting point for the development of new universal ontological foundations. This view leaves room for those who find ontology interesting to continue to explore ontological questions as a

part of their projects of self-creation, just as the original quote leaves room for people to try to discover truths about the intrinsic nature of things they find important if their private projects are benefitted by doing so.

Rorty concluded that questions like “Does God exist?” are undiscussable, although certainly not unanswerable, because there are no neutral criteria by which a pluralistic democracy might judge them (Rorty, 2007: 20). One can answer such questions in perfectly rational and coherent ways, but one cannot compare any of the different possible answers except by reference to the utility of these answers in a specific social context. The potential coherence of religious thought and argumentation does not make appeals to religious authority helpful when settling cultural-political disputes. Rorty pointed out that,

Talk about numbers is ideally coherent, but this coherence does not help us discuss the question of whether the numerals are the names of real things. Nor does the coherence of Christian theology help us discuss the existence of God. But this is not because of an ontological fact about numbers or God, but because of sociological facts about the unavailability of norms to regulate discussion. (Rorty, 2007: 23)

This passage suggests an interesting point about the role that a Rortian sociologist of religion might play. Such a sociologist would study and point out how certain religious groups behave, and would analyze the norms and authority structures that are born from various behaviors. The sociologist could then study how widespread the acceptance of this authority is, point out when disagreements in regards to this authority are not being discussed in productive ways, and offer suggestions as to how we might adjust our social norms to maximally accommodate all of the groups involved. One could argue that this is already what some sociologists of religion are doing, but a replacement of the hope that we might eventually achieve redemptive truth through either honing our social-scientific methods or by truly capturing the nature of religious engagement with the hope that we might facilitate greater degrees of tolerance and open conversation would, I believe, help to move sociological research in the right direction.

If we return to the three areas of cultural authority that were outlined earlier, we can imagine how different societies might use religious authority. A society where the existence of God was determined by the authority of the non-human world would

have to equate God with phenomena that were publically observable and whose meanings were agreed upon by all relevant members. A society where the existence of God was confirmed through the authority of the individual would have to allow anyone to make any religious existence claims they wanted to. As neither of these first two options is likely to come about in the public sphere of a pluralistic democracy, I agree with Rorty that we should leave questions about the role that we want God to play in our society to the arena of cultural politics. In other words, we must let each society negotiate its own norms for discussing the existence of supernatural entities. With as much disagreement as we encounter on religious matters, it is easier and more productive to talk about what place discussion of supernatural beings should have in our society than it is to determine whether or not such beings exist.

Again I would like to emphasize that Rorty's endorsement of cultural politics and the ontological primacy of the social was directed towards pluralistic democracies. He did not argue that a society that incorporated religion into their public policies would be objectively inferior to one that didn't. He believed that, "When a culture wants to erect a logical space that includes, say, the gods and goddesses of the Olympian pantheon, nothing stands in its way" (Rorty, 2007: 19). However, "to ask, after such a culture has become entrenched, 'are there *really* gods and goddesses?'" is not a useful question unless one is asking this as part of a cultural-political attempt to compare the current authority structures to concrete alternatives that could connect to the other established authority structures present in the society in question and function as replacements (Rorty, 2007: 20). Asking whether something *really* exists has no place in cultural politics because, again, in that context, "real" only means "entrenched in current social practice" and the pros and cons of social practices are precisely what is in question during cultural-political debates.

However, this does not mean that the hypothetical society that had incorporated the Greek gods into their social practices would have spoken these gods into existence. What they would have created, as Rorty pointed out in the above quote, is a logical space of reasons- a system within which certain claims are justifiable and others are not. Here we can again see the importance of the distinctions between truth and reality and between causation and justification. On a Rortian model, human societies can change the truth-values of certain existence claims by

adjusting their descriptions of what they are doing, but this does not mean that they are changing the objective nature of nonhuman reality. If we abandon truth as correspondence then relations of justification determine the truth-values of existence claims, not the causal relations between beliefs and reality. In other words, even though the truth of existence claims is determined by the justificatory structures inherent in the language we use, the existence of the world is not.

However, if you tell someone who sees truth and reality as identical under ideal circumstances that “the truth of the claim ‘X exists’ is determined by a community’s relevant social practices”, they may very well hear “The existence of X is dependent on a community’s relevant social practices” and charge you with suggesting that non-human reality is malleable to thought. This is because, if one adheres to the correspondence theory of truth, then something is only true if it picks out real things in the external world. As Rorty did not view truth in this way, he would have been free to respond to Starckenburg’s earlier critique about speaking the world into existence by saying: While we cannot, by changing our linguistic behavior or our public policies, talk the problems of devastating STDs or despotic rulers out of existence, we can change the truth values of propositions that directly influence our attitudes towards these problems. Starckenburg can then no longer make the leap from Rorty’s claim that “what counts as an accurate report of experience is a matter of what a community will let you get away with” to an interpretation of Rorty that suggests that we can speak things in our out of existence (Rorty, 2007: 11).

In summary, adopting a Rortian standpoint suggests that, in situations that require cooperation across religious boundaries, we should work to minimize the importance of religious difference as this will further our shared democratic ideals. One unique advantage of the way in which Rorty uses religiously charged terms like redemption, divinization, and polytheism to describe phenomena that are also present in non-religious communities and belief-systems is that this highlights the fact that the problematic elements that Rorty saw in religion are not unique to religious beliefs or traditions. Rorty also avoided critiquing the content of religious belief as irrational, indemonstrable, or incoherent and instead focused on the social consequences of attempts to use religious authority in the public sphere. This is advantageous because we will be better equipped to argue for the privatization of religion if we can do so while taking religion seriously and acknowledging the aspects of religion that are democratically unproblematic. Taking religion seriously is important because

religious belief and practice can be helpful in our private projects and because religious tolerance is important in avoiding unhealthy ethnocentrism. Having now reviewed Rorty's treatment of religion, as well as the benefits of his approach, I will turn to an analysis of the Norwegian religious landscape and present the ways in which I believe Rortian terms can expand our vocabulary for describing religious individualization and alleviate some of the tensions that result from this individualization.

Chapter Three: Implementing Polytheism

In this chapter I will begin by reviewing some of the findings of Norwegian sociologists of religion who have analyzed the results of 1991, 1998, and 2008 World Values Surveys in the book *Religion in Today's Norway: Between Secularization and Sacralization*. As this book is written in Norwegian and there is not an English translation available, the translations provided are my own. There are several reasons for my choice of this particular data. One reason is that the authors have analyzed, presented, and supplemented the survey data with the goal of capturing the relation of the Norwegian people to religion and religiosity. Their goal is to research religion as people in Norway see it (Schmidt et al., 2010: 9). I find this approach conducive to my project, as my main goal is to make normative arguments about how individuals and communities should conceive of religion in order to adjust their attitudes towards social norms and institutions and to allow for increased tolerance and openness. While engaging this survey data balances my normative arguments with concrete descriptions of specific social developments, the fact that the authors of *Religion in Today's Norway* emphasize the relations of large-scale shifts to individual uses and interpretations of religion allows for an easy connection to a Rortian public-private split.

Another reason that this book is especially helpful is that it provides the insights of eight Norwegian sociologists of religion on the longest large-scale survey of attitudes towards religious belief and practice available. Data analysis is a minor part of my project as this data is brought in largely to provide a practical example for Rortian philosophy to sink its teeth into- specifically an example of a country that I will argue is becoming increasingly polytheistic. The main drawback of using a treatment of the World Values Surveys is that the most recent batch of results was collected in 2008. I plan to publish an article relating my work here to the 2018 results when those become available next year. Until then, I still see the benefits of this large-scale longitudinal study as outweighing the lapse in data from 2008 to the present. I also fill in this gap using Norwegian census data that track religious trends through 2015.

After discussing the Norwegian scholars' treatments of the survey data, I will draw several parallels between emerging Norwegian attitudes towards religion and Rortian polytheism. I will show how the Rorty's unique version of religious privatization can be applied to the individualization of religion being seen in Norway and facilitate a healthy relationship between religion and public policy. I argue that a Rortian philosophical outlook best equips Norwegians to navigate a rapidly changing spiritual and cultural landscape. The application of Rortian themes like redemption, polytheism, and irony also provide a clearer picture of recent developments and these ideas resonate with the descriptions provided by both Norwegian citizens and Norwegian scholars. After drawing connections between Rortian philosophy and *Religion in Today's Norway*, I will show how the goal of increased cooperation and conversation can be aided by a dual Rortian critique of science and religion that dissolves much of the perceived tension between the two. I will discuss the reduction of this tension at an abstract philosophical level, as I believe that it is important for democracies in general, and then I will conclude the chapter by returning to how this approach relates to the Norway specifically.

Between Secularization and Sacralization

Before I move on to a more detailed treatment of *Religion in Today's Norway*, it is important to comment on the general tone of the book in relation to the main question that it addresses. This question is: Is Norwegian society becoming increasingly secular or is Norway a post-secular society in which religion is being rejuvenated (Schmidt et al., 2010: 9)? At times, the authors answer definitively as, for example, when Jan-Olav Henriksen and Ulla Schmidt write, "Our findings disprove the claim that we are in a post-secular society or that the secular society is retreating" (Schmidt et al., 2010: 92). Elsewhere, however, other authors are more hesitant to interpret the survey data in such a conclusive manner. For example, drawing on Jose Casanova's theory of religious privatization, Pål Kjetil Botvar argues, "there are reasons to question theories of secularization that claim that a privatization of religion and an accompanying weakening of religious belief and practice are taking place" (Schmidt et al, 2010: 95).

This skepticism seems unfounded based on the data being analyzed. In chapter one we are presented data that clearly show significant decreases in registered

believers, church attendance, and prayer (Schmidt et al., 2010: 15-18). In addition, these trends have continued since the last set of data was collected from the World Values Surveys. An article on the Church of Norway, in *Statistics Norway*, titled “*Steady decline in number of church attendances*”, shows yearly drops in attendance, membership, baptisms, confirmations, and every other measurement of religious engagement from 2011 to 2015 (Statistics Norway, 2016). One could argue that, due to changes in the nature of religious engagement, this documented decline fails to capture new areas in which religion is becoming increasingly relevant. One could also interpret Botvar as siding with Casanova in challenging the suggestion that there is a direct link between religious privatization and the decline in religious practice and belief, rather than interpreting him as denying the decline itself. Regardless, I find it important to stress somewhat more strongly than some of the authors that, by our current measures, Norway is seeing a clear decline in *traditional*, or what Rorty would call monotheistic, religious belief and practice.

However, if Botvar is trying to make the Casanovian point that we should not jump to conclusions about a direct connection between religious privatization and religious decline, this can be seen as compatible with a Rortian outlook. Rorty’s public-private split facilitates a public secularization and a privatization of religious authority, but this does not need necessitate a drop in religious engagement in the private sphere. However, I read Rorty as having been less concerned than Casanova with whether religious belief was in decline and more concerned with what authority structures were being used to justify and propagate religious traditions, among other practices. While Rortian philosophy makes room for religious belief, our democratic goals are not impeded by an unforced move away from religious engagement. This is not to say; returning to the main question asked by *Religion in Today’s Norway*, that there could not be a post-secular society with a rejuvenated sense of the spiritual that was governed by Rortian principles. However, the data showing a steady decline in monotheistic religious belief and practice leads me to conclude that Norway is not an example of such a society.

One other general point that I wish to address is that Norway is arguably not a religiously pluralized society. I have consistently mentioned throughout chapters one and two that Rorty’s claim that religion should be privatized was directed towards pluralistic democracies. Ulla Schmidt points out that, as of 2009, 81% of Norwegians were members of the Norwegian State Church (Schmidt et al., 2010: 25). She does

add that, in addition to group membership, the value placed on religious diversity is also an important dimension of religious pluralism. However, I agree with Schmidt's conclusion that Norway cannot be accurately described as a religiously pluralized country despite its steady movement in that direction (Schmidt et al., 2010: 42). An excellent example of this movement is the fact that, since *Religion in Today's Norway* was published; the Church of Norway has ceased to be the state church. Still, the membership quoted in the Statistics Norway article mentioned earlier was nearly 3,8 million which is almost 75% of the total population (Statistics Norway, 2016). Thus the question of the appropriateness of Norway as a subject for a Rortian treatment of religion presents itself.

I argue that Rortian philosophy can still be usefully applied to recent religious trends in Norway despite the fact that the majority of Norwegians are members of the Church of Norway. I base this claim primarily on two observations. The first is that when Rorty used the phrase "pluralistic democracies" the pluralism referred to was not exclusively religious pluralism. The second is that I find it highly unlikely that Norway will not continue to experience an influx in religious diversity. As this happens, a Rortian conception of religious privatization will become increasingly important and aid in the understanding of the socio-religious shifts that take place as a result.

Shifts in Norwegian Attitudes Towards Religion

The fact that such a large percentage of Norwegians are members of the Church of Norway, might lead one to believe that the Norwegian population is religiously active and that most people have a positive view of the influence of religion on society. The data presented in *Religion in Today's Norway* tell a different story. Despite high membership, traditional religious practice has seen a sharp decline. In fact, the 2008 World Values Survey results showed that only six percent of the registered members of the Church of Norway attended church services once a month or more (Schmidt et al., 2010: 188). But we are not simply witnessing a decrease in attendance. There are clear shifts in attitudes towards religion as well. Both the 1998 and 2008 World Values Survey results revealed that roughly 80% of Norwegians agree with the claim that religion leads to more conflict than peace and

around 75% agree that people with strong religious beliefs are often intolerant (Schmidt et al., 2010: 89).

This latter opinion is supported by the fact that, of the Norwegians who answered that they do not believe in God, twice as many answered that they could, without reservation, accept a relative of theirs marrying a member of another religion compared to those who answered that they do believe in God (Schmidt et al., 2010: 90). The importance of the distinction between members of different faiths when deciding whom to marry is an excellent example of a distinction that a Rortian sociologist might argue should be diminished. One could counter that this statistic merely shows that believers are more concerned with matters of religious belonging than non-believers, but the data certainly does not help to contradict the popular Norwegian view that strongly religious people are often intolerant. Henriksen and Schmidt conclude that,

At both an individual and a societal level, religion is seen as having problematic consequences for a shared society and a shared public sphere. Even among the religious we find a majority who think that religion has negative effects on a society where people with different views and perceptions of reality must live side by side. (Schmidt et al., 2010: 89)

This conclusion paints a picture of a society in which a majority, including believers, is opposed to a more public religious presence or is at least wary of the effects of religion on society at large. However, other aspects of the survey data show that this is not the whole story. Among young, highly educated, urban Norwegians, a group that Botvar describes as “tone-setting” for the rest of Norwegian society, “religion in the public sphere is not seen as incompatible with democratic ideals, but rather as a part of a modern and pluralistic society” (Schmidt et al., 2010: 99).

Of all the data reviewed in *Religion in Today's Norway*, the combination of a majority view that religion is harmful, or at least potentially harmful, to Norwegian society with a willingness to incorporate religion into democracy was the most interesting to me. At first glance it can be difficult to understand how these two attitudes are not mutually exclusive. How can religion be agreed to cause conflict and intolerance but also be seen as compatible with democracy? The answer to this question lies in recent shifts in the Norwegian conception of religion and religious authority. Schmidt argues that an individualization has occurred in much of the post-

industrial world and that this has led to the idea of “being an authentic self” as having superlative value (Schmidt et al., 2010: 36). This has contributed to the emergence of a range of alternative approaches to religion where “the individual acts as the supreme authority on religious questions” (Schmidt et al., 2010: 13). Drawing on Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead’s work on individualization, Botvar and Henriksen argue that, in today’s Norway:

More weight is placed on the individual and less on shared frameworks for activity and identity formation... the foundational norms of what is right and good are grounded to a high degree in the individual’s evaluations and decisions and in the individual’s experience of what is authentic or “real”... memories, feelings and passions, sensory and bodily experiences, dreams, and one’s inner voice become integral sources of what is seen as meaningful and what has authority. (Schmidt et al., 2010: 60)

If one applies this attitude to religious activity then one is left with a more instrumental view of religion, in the sense that religious traditions are increasingly evaluated based on the degree to which they resonate with an individual’s private commitments. As Botvar and Henriksen conclude, “We see a transition from religion as grounded in something outside the individual that gives religious experience its authority to forms of religion where the individual is its own authority” (Schmidt et al., 2010: 62). An instrumental approach to religion also makes the hybridization of traditions increasingly unproblematic. Thus, to the extent that traditional religion is still being used, this use is increasingly piecemeal and guided by the individual’s experience of the validity of each aspect of a given tradition rather than by the appeal of the doctrine as a whole.

I see this shift as an excellent example of the kind of privatization of religion that Rorty advocated. Remembering that Rorty described public projects as those that required intersubjective agreement and private projects as those where no such agreement is required, this shift in the source of religious authority is, on a Rortian model, the transfer of religious activity to the private sphere. The shift towards an individualized religious authority that is being seen in Norway makes Rorty’s suggestion that religious authority be applied only to private projects look unproblematic for a growing portion of the Norwegian population, including religious

believers. For this reason, if religion continues to move in a more individualistic direction, I believe that Rortian philosophy will become increasingly relevant.

As long as religious authority is being exercised at an individual level for the purposes of self-development, it is unproblematic for a Rortian democracy. Despite Rorty's many critiques of monotheistic religion, he never suggested that religion cannot be usefully integrated into an individual's private projects or that such projects might not be deeply benefitted by the adoption and instrumentalization of religious beliefs. In fact, it was critical for Rorty that the right of the individual to explore various paradigms be facilitated, as long as such experimentation did not infringe upon the rights of others. Rorty wrote:

The increasing privatization of religion during the last 200 years has created a climate of opinion in which people have the same right to idiosyncratic forms of religious devotion as they do to write poems or paint pictures that nobody else can make any sense out of. It is a feature of a democratic and pluralist society that our religion is our own business- something we need not discuss with others, much less try to justify to them, unless we feel like doing so. (Rorty, 2007: 25)

Here we see how a Rortian version of religious privatization works nicely alongside the picture of Norway that is painted by *Religion in Today's Norway* and the World Values Survey data.

One plausible interpretation of the data is that Rortian philosophy and popular Norwegian opinion are aligned in regards to the belief that religion can be compatible with democracy but that religion should have limited authority in the public sphere due to its potential to cause unproductive conflict. Both attitudes can be read as emphasizing respect for the religious needs of others and the importance taking religious beliefs seriously, while at the same time imposing limitations on the contexts in which the expression of religious authority is seen as legitimate. Despite this openness towards certain types of religion, we should not infer from the belief that there is room for religion in democracy that religious authority should be appealed to during the democratic process or that Norwegians support less individualized and more traditional or monotheistic forms of religion. As Botvar and Henriksen point out,

If it has become an ideal that each individual should find their own religious path based on their own experience-grounded presuppositions, then ideological elements and forms of practice grounded in the Christian tradition will come under great pressure. (Schmidt et al., 2010: 63)

Schmidt argues that this pressure is already being felt in the form of large scale and increasing skepticism towards traditional religion in Norway (Schmidt et al., 2010: 202).

This skepticism can be seen in Norwegian attitudes towards religious authority and the public sphere. Even among the strongest believers, those who claim that they believe in God and have no doubts about this belief, 71% agreed that religious leaders should not attempt to influence voting and 48% of the strongest believers agreed that religious leaders should not attempt to influence any public decisions, compared to 82% and 68% agreement with these two statements in the total population surveyed (Schmidt et al., 2010: 83). Schmidt suggests that this skepticism may be connected to increases religious pluralism and a desire to limit the political influence of other religious groups (Schmidt et al. 2010: 85). Although this sounds plausible, the skepticism towards religion in the public sphere remains undeniable, leading Schmidt to claim that “If religion is to become acceptable in the public sphere it will have to undergo a thorough internal secularization” (Schmidt et al., 2010: 202). I envision this internal secularization as involving the acceptance of a key Rortian argument, namely that appeals to religious authority in the arena of cultural politics are unhelpful and should be avoided. Rorty’s description of religious arguments as secularized when they simply drop any reference to the supernatural sources of the premises of the arguments, seems like a reasonable way to implement the type of secularization that Schmidt mentions (Rorty, 1999b: 173).

This type of secularization would allow religious people to defend the value of their practices in the public sphere, but would prevent them from claiming that this value is grounded in anything other than the practical benefits of their traditions and beliefs. Having offered a perspective that sees a degree of congruence between Rortian philosophy and the emerging attitudes towards religion in Norway, we can now turn to one of the unique ways in which Rortian philosophy clears the way for the continued development of countries like Norway. This stems from the parallels that can be drawn from comparing Rorty’s critiques of realist science and his critiques

of religion. I believe that these two critiques can dissolve certain aspects of the religion-science dichotomy and make more room for individualized and polytheistic religion in democratic societies like Norway without bringing religious authority into the public sphere. This argument will initially be made at a more abstract level and will be reconnected to the specific case of Norway at the end of this chapter.

Redemptive Truth in Science and Religion

Rorty's criticisms of religion and his support for a continued secularization of the public sphere in pluralistic democracies may well leave one with the feeling that Rorty lands firmly on the side of science in the "science vs. religion" debate. Taken out of context, there are certainly passages from Rorty's work that could lend credence to this conclusion. One example is the following is Rorty's remark on the relation of philosophy to both science and religion:

The scientific question is "how do things work?". The religious question is "what should we be afraid of?" and the philosophical question, "Is there something non-human out there with which we need to get in touch?" All three are questions about the whereabouts of power, and they obviously interlock. If it turns out that things... work without the intervention of invisible persons, we may eventually have less to be afraid of than we once thought... We shall become secularists, who let art and politics fill the gap left by God. (Brandom, 2008: 215)

This is a rich passage about which much could be said, but for the purposes of the current argument what I wish to point out is that, while there is no doubt that Rorty encouraged a privatization of religion and an expansion of secular public culture, he suggested replacing public concerns about religion with concerns about art and politics rather than science. Thus, it was inaccurate when Rorty's former philosophy professor, Charles Hartshorne, wrote: "Rorty holds that only science can inform us about nature" (Saatkamp Jr., 1995: 20).

One can understand, to a certain degree, Hartshorne's assessment that Rorty thought that we should turn to science for our information based on, for example, Rorty's claim, in regards to the triumph of scientific belief over religious belief during and following the enlightenment era, that "It was a good thing for both religion and science that science won that battle. For... science gives us the means to carry out

better cooperative social projects than before” (Rorty et al., 2005: 39). The key to understanding Rorty’s point here is that he specified that his preference for science over religion applied to *cooperative social projects*- in other words, the public sphere. If one pays attention to this detail, one can see that Hartshorne was mistaken in believing that Rorty saw science as the only path to legitimate information.

Elsewhere, Rorty wrote that “science and religion are *both* respectable paths for acquiring respectable beliefs, albeit beliefs which are good for quite different purposes” (Rorty, 1999b: 36). On a Rortian model of truth, in which all our habits of action do not need to be epistemologically compatible with each other, we do not need to limit ourselves to only ever using one set of purposes or the other. The continual navigation of the public-private split was Rorty’s dynamic solution to deciding which purposes should be prioritized in which contexts. In light of Rorty’s criticisms of religion, the respect for religious belief portrayed by the above quote may seem strange to some. The balance between his critiques of- and respect for- religion becomes clearer when we examine the way in which Rorty critiqued realist science for leading to many of the same inconveniences as monotheistic religion. I will show that Rortian philosophy allows one to instrumentalize both religious and scientific truths- seeing the value in both but also acknowledging the limits of each paradigm.

How then did Rorty see realist science as similar to monotheistic religion? The core of the comparison is adequately captured by Rorty’s claim that “the problem with religious people and scientists is that they think it important not simply to create, but to get something right” (Saatkamp Jr., 1995: 34). This point can be related to the earlier distinction between conversation and redemption. The search for redemptive truth is a mistake of which Rorty thought many religious people and many scientists were equally guilty. If we are responsible for aiming towards redemptive truth then we must always be contributing towards the development of a final system. This does not make room for edifying projects in which, Rorty argued, “We might be just saying something- participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry. Perhaps saying things is not always saying how things are” (Rorty, 2009: 371).

Experimenting with speaking in different ways in different contexts in order to experience new types of conversation is totally acceptable if one is not aiming at redemption. This attitude may seem reckless to some as, if we are not responsible to

truth, especially moral truth, then what stops us from acting in selfish ways that are detrimental to society? Rorty could counter that one can feel responsibility towards one's community without having to feel responsibility towards redemptive truth. We have, in most postindustrial, liberal democracies, already incorporated the notions of tolerance and moral responsibility into our cultural identities. We are then equipped to continue acting responsibly towards our fellow human beings without needing to feel obliged to something non-human.

I interpret Rorty not as having taken issue with all of religion or all of science, but rather as critiquing the aspects of both belief systems that encourage us to apply the same criteria to all contexts- to try to get something right at a level higher than a local and contextual, human level. Rorty argued that,

The realist conviction that there just must be a non-human authority to which humans can turn has been, for a very long time, woven into the common sense of the West. It is a conviction common to... atheistic natural scientists who say they love truth and fundamentalists who say they love Christ. (Rorty, 2007: 135)

The similarity between these two belief systems that Rorty referenced here is the belief that properly conducted human behavior, be it scientific inquiry or religious practice, will or could eventually lead to redemptive truth. In essence, this is the belief that we may one day settle the disagreements between people with different perspectives once and for all, and that this goal is worth working towards. It is the belief that, if we can, we should stop the conversation. I have already discussed in chapters one and two how monotheistic religious belief can lead to this view. Let me briefly put into pragmatic terms how scientific realism can lead to this same stance- a stance that Rortian philosophy helps us avoid.

I interpret the difference between the correspondence theory of truth and Rorty's social constructivist view of truth as largely hinging on the relationship between truth and efficacy. The correspondence theory of truth suggests that the relationship between these two is roughly that efficacy approximates Truth. By this I mean that representationalism offers a description of reality in which one uses the available information to interact with one's context, and suggests that one's success in such interactions will depend on how accurately this context and the relevant concepts within it are being represented. Thus by "efficacy approximates truth" I mean that, on

the representationalist model, becoming increasingly effective in navigating one's environment should be interpreted as getting closer to the true description of reality—getting closer to redemptive truth. This description matches certain types of scientific realism, which measure the accuracy of scientific theories through, “the successful reference of theoretical terms to things in the world, both observable and unobservable,” (Chakravartty, 2011: sec. 1.1). This realist view of science is clearly inspired by the correspondence theory of truth.

I interpret Rorty as suggesting that this relationship between truth and efficacy can be reversed and thus that truth can be described as a product of efficacy, although reality cannot. Truth can be described as a product of efficacy in the sense that when groups form that agree upon goals and effectively achieve them, their beliefs, seen on this view as habits of action, become entrenched. If one accepts this description then one can argue that it is not the entrenched-ness and unyielding existence of truth that makes it such that our causal reality forces us to have a functional way of referring to features outside of the web of beliefs. Instead, one can argue that it is the nature of the beliefs we label as “true” that they have become entrenched and are thereby not casually discarded in the face of new evidence.

This view is completely nonsensical unless one is careful not to equate truth with reality. We are obviously still constrained by causal reality on a social constructivist view, but we are not constrained by the need to make all of our representations of reality aim at the same set of truths. We can adhere to one set of entrenched beliefs in certain contexts and adhere to another set in others. As long as these different sets of beliefs are kept out of each other's way they can all remain true in the sense that they can all stay entrenched due to their continuing efficacy. This model allows the same individual to, for example, establish religious truths that inspire her private practices and attempts at self-betterment while also accepting democratic truths when engaging in cooperative projects. The tensions that are caused when commitments to these different truths are at cross-purposes can be seen, from a Rortian perspective, as practical problems to be worked out through trial and error—not as philosophical problems that might be solved by discovering redemptive, epistemological foundations for one's beliefs.

The difference between a Rortian multiplicity of truths and the correspondence theory of truth parallels the difference between the vaguely Platonic approach and the more Darwinian approach to the nature of concepts that I mentioned

in chapter one. On the more platonic model, inspired by the view of knowledge as accurate representation, we approximate truth by adjusting our representations to be closer to reality as it is in itself- by adjusting the concepts we use to describe things so that these concepts match up with the things they are describing. On the more Darwinian model, there is no denial of the fact that accounting for, and learning to effectively predict and describe, the causal forces around us is necessary. The difference is that Darwinians are satisfied with calling “true” those behaviors that allow us to effectively predict and control causal forces, and achieve other goals, without equating “truth” with “objective reality”- without needing all of our truths to approximate a final and, in Rortian terms, redemptive truth.

Abandoning the search for redemptive truth, combined with a view of beliefs as habits of action, allows one to view efficacy as approximating truth in certain projects while still being free to apply an entirely different perspective to other projects. As Rorty put it, anti-representationalism:

...frees us from the responsibility to unify all our beliefs into a single worldview. If our beliefs are all parts of a single attempt to represent a single world, then they must all hang together fairly tightly. But if they are habits of action, then, because the purposes served by action may blamelessly vary, so may the habits we develop to serve those purposes. (Rorty, 2007: 34)

In other words, without the notion of redemptive truth, there is no one set of truths that all of our beliefs must stand in a certain relation to. This allows our commitments to truth to go both ways, so to speak. In the same way that I argued that Rortian anti-essentialism and anti-realism can still leave room for engagements with epistemology and ontology, I would argue that Rorty’s distaste for the correspondence theory of truth does not prevent him from adopting perspectives that view truth as representation *in certain contexts*. This is because I interpret Rorty’s critiques of monotheistic religion and realist science as directed at the extent to which both try to make their projects redemptive or all encompassing. These belief-systems are only problematic when they impose unshared individual commitments onto cooperative projects or when they try to impose requirements about intersubjective agreement onto individual projects.

Just as there is room for religion after religious privatization, there is room for *metaphors* of representation after abandoning the correspondence theory of truth. One

can describe a metaphor as valuable and deserving of continued use if it “represents” a certain perspective in a helpful way. However, this type of representation is quite different from the type of representation that is implied by a theory of truth. A community that has abandoned the correspondence theory of truth can still agree that a metaphor accurately represents an important truth or perspective, but this is a representation of one perspective among many- a contextual truth as opposed to the ahistorical truths that monotheistic believers or scientists hope to capture.

At a more practical level, imagine hearing someone express their anxieties about your proposed solution to a problem by describing things from the perspective of his or her group. If these anxieties do not convince us to abandon our old view, I interpret Rortian philosophy as suggesting that we respond, “There’s truth to what you are saying, but look at the new things that we can achieve by replacing that perspective with this alternative...” as opposed to responding, “I understand where you are coming from, but you and your group are mistaken about the way things *really* are”. Treating the way someone describes their situation as one metaphor among many, rather than as a part of a theory of truth that is in competition with others, allows us to think about truth when it behooves us and to focus on efficacy when we need to. This approach leaves room for the use of metaphors of representation when they are useful, but avoids conceiving of these metaphors as putting us in touch with reality in a way that other metaphors do not.

Importantly, the argument above should not be read as a call to replace the correspondence theory of truth with a “metaphorical” theory of truth. Rather than offering an alternative, Rorty thought we should do away with the very notion of a theory of truth. He wrote, “The pragmatist does not have a theory of truth... As a partisan of solidarity, his account of the value of cooperative human inquiry has only an ethical base, not an epistemological or metaphysical one” (Rorty, 2011b: 24). I interpret this as an argument that the advantage of increased tolerance that might come from abandoning the search for redemptive truth outweighs the advantage of potentially unifying all of humanity under one paradigm. Against a Rortian view, one could argue that the truth-efficacy relationship cannot go both ways if we have an obligation to accurately represent a divinized version of the world or the self. If there really is redemptive truth then settling for what works is a cop out. Rorty offers us an alternative view in which the desire for redemptive truth is instead a form of cop out- an attempt to escape the contingent nature of our situation.

As I have been arguing, the divinization of the world and the self and the commitment to redemption that Rorty critiqued are not exclusively found in religion. These attitudes can be directed towards a sense of ultimate or objective truth as easily as they can be directed towards God. Rorty suggested that a devotion to Truth “is a secular version of the traditional religious hope that allegiance with something big, powerful, and non-human will persuade that powerful being to take your side in your struggle with other people” (Rorty, 2007: 35). Both devotion to Truth and devotion to God can lead to a “Platonic” model in which an instrumentalization of truth is seen as an attempt to escape from our ultimate calling to search for redemptive truth. I have contrasted this view with a “Darwinian” model where the search for redemptive truth is an attempt to escape the unavoidable contingency of our beliefs and the constant challenge to take a stand on important issues despite the unavailability of universally valid epistemological foundations.

If we follow Rorty, the choice between these two cannot be settled by appeals to reality (Rorty, 2009: 178). We can only offer arguments about how one or the other approach best fits the current needs of our society. One such argument is that, although the scientific enterprise has proven to be an effective tool in many of our public projects, in certain contexts appeals to the authority of “Truth”, “Objective Reality”, or “Reason” can run into similar problems as appeals to the authority of “God”. As I discussed in chapter two, anything that an individual uses to circumvent cultural politics, be it “Truth” or “God, will impede productive discussion in a pluralistic democracy.

Even though the scientific paradigm has a greater influence than religion on many of the established public policies and institutions of post-industrial democracies, this does not give it the right to circumvent cultural politics when the value of those policies or institutions is called into question. As Rorty put it,

...relevance dictated not by the needs of any given community but by human reason as such- seems no more plausible or useful than that of a God whose Will can be appealed to in order to resolve conflicts between communities. It is, I think, merely a secularized version of that earlier notion. (Rorty, 2007: 54)

Here we must remember that Rorty was not accusing the entire scientific community of realism in the same way that he was not accusing the entire religious community of

monotheism. It is also important to remember that Rorty did not believe that one could offer a valid critique of an established practice, in the arena of cultural politics, unless one could also offer a replacement that would fit in with most of the other established practices of a community. We can then see that a Rortian view still allows the scientific community, or any community for that matter, to point to the benefits of western rationalism and our current methods of scientific inquiry when making cultural-political arguments. What Rorty wanted to prevent was the appeal to ahistorical or non-contextual reason, an appeal which becomes tempting if one views oneself as applying essential human faculties to sense data in order to get closer to objective reality. This scientific version of the search for redemption can be just as detrimental to free and open public conversations as appeals to unshared religious authority are.

In the same way that Rorty did not critique monotheism on the grounds of incoherence or inaccuracy, we have seen that Rorty critiqued realist science for potentially causing cultural-political problems rather than for “getting the world wrong”. If reason is divinized and connected with a scientific worldview then it can become dangerously difficult to engage in edifying projects that propose alternatives to our current practices and institutions. The label “irrational” can be used to discredit creative suggestions that do not conform to the western scientific paradigm in the same way that the labels “unnatural” or “un-Christian” were used in the past to discredit imaginative theories that did not conform to religious doctrine. Rorty warned,

Viewing political disagreement as a symptom of moral failure presupposes a moral psychology that goes back to the notion of sin as a free choice of evil, a deliberate turning away from the divine light... irrationality, thought of as a blamable failure to exercise an innate faculty, has thus become the secular equivalent of sin. (Rorty, 2007: 58)

Rorty’s point here was that, in the same way that pointing to the benefits of religious practice or religious institutions can be useful as cultural-political arguments while appeals to religious authority cannot; pointing to the benefits of scientific inquiry and the application of metaphors of representation can be useful as cultural-political arguments but appeals to the authority of reason cannot, at least when there is disagreement about the validity of either source of authority or what this authority

entails. Rorty saw behaving rationally in the arena of cultural politics not as following our innate reason but as being willing “to discuss any topic- religious, literary, or scientific- in a way which eschews dogmatism, defensiveness, and righteous indignation” (ORT, 37). Being rational thus means being tolerant, being charitable in our interpretations of the other side, and striving to use persuasion rather than force.

I have now offered several comparisons between science and religion. Among them: the love of Truth is a secular version of the love of God, irrationality is the secular version of sin, and appeals to the unyielding nature of reality is the secular version of appeals to the power and wisdom of God. Rorty’s critique of realist science shows us that much of what he saw as problematic in religion is not inherently religious. A pluralist democracy should avoid monotheistic authority structures regardless of which metanarrative they are fueled by. In other words, demonstrating how religious authority structures are detrimental when brought into public debate does not imply rejecting all of religion any more than demonstrating how scientific authority structures may limit our creativity implies abandoning all of science.

Rorty’s criticisms of religion and science are both about the unsuitability of one paradigm to dominate all projects. While Rorty acknowledged the value of certain kinds of religion in private projects of self-transformation, he saw appeals to religious authority in the public sphere as attempts to undermine cultural politics. While Rorty acknowledged the value of the scientific enterprise in developing our ability to predict and control our causal environment, he saw the attempt to force edifying projects to conform to scientific rationalism as limiting our creative ability to develop new and better institutions and systems of thought. Both critiques are about optimizing a democracy’s ability to balance the public and the private and to facilitate both edification and systematicity. Rortian philosophy can thus make room for both scientific study and religious practice without destabilizing our ability to act rationally, without oppressing religious believers, and without limiting the individual to always applying the same criteria to every project.

Irony, Polytheism, and Norway

Having now established some of the dangers of relying too heavily on one metanarrative, we can see that one of the potential, positive functions of religion can be to provide us with alternatives to western rationalism. This is one interpretation of

the approach that many Norwegians are taking as they engage in various spiritual practices or read religious texts in the hopes of having new kinds of experiences. Rorty seemed to support this role for spirituality when he wrote, “mystical experience is a way of leaping over the boundaries of the language one speaks” (Rorty, 2011b: 19). Whatever types of experience we use to develop ourselves, an encounter with a new truth system can be an invaluable resource as familiarizing oneself with the perspectives of others is key to the health of a pluralistic society. These encounters are crucial because they can often reveal what is to be gained by altering or letting go of certain practices or beliefs that have been normalized.

Rorty referred to the set of beliefs that were, for each individual, most resistant to adjustment as a final vocabulary. He described this core of the web of beliefs as “the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives”, and he continues to explain that this vocabulary, “is ‘final’ in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse” (CIS, 73). One might describe a final vocabulary as the beliefs and values that one could not change without dramatically altering one’s sense of identity. It is important to point out that it is unproblematic on a Rortian view that these beliefs cannot be justified in a non-circular way. Rorty argued, “the obligation to justify one’s beliefs arises only when one’s habits of action interfere with the fulfillment of others’ needs” (Rorty, 1999b: 149). This view allows us to move away from the search for redemptive truth and towards enriching the quality of human life by becoming acquainted with the other final vocabularies. If we are free from the obligation to make all of our beliefs part of a single project of representing the one true nature of reality, then we can focus our energy on conversations aimed at meeting and understanding our own needs and the needs of others.

Rorty referred to those who were able to hold onto their final vocabularies while still being open to a wide variety of new truths as “ironists”. He described the ironist as fulfilling three conditions:

- (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered;
- (2) she realizes that arguments phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve those doubts;
- (3)... she does not think that her

vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. (Rorty, 1989: 73)

These three conditions connect to Rorty's argument that we should view the self as a web of beliefs rather than as a something distinct from the web. Truths, on this ironist model, cease to be seen as puzzle pieces that fit together to form a clear picture of the one true reality that constrains all possible inquiry. We can describe irony as a rejection of the search for redemptive truth in the hopes of creating an environment in which the beliefs of those who act differently than us are seen as resources rather than threats.

Another way to contrast a representationalist approach to truth with an ironic one is to distinguish between a view of inquiry as unification and a view of inquiry as diversification. The representationalist wants to assemble all and only truths that fit together into a complete set. The ironist, on the other hand, wants to acquaint herself with as many diverse and contradictory sets of truths as possible. The project of finding redemptive truth is facilitated by the first approach, while the project of increasing conversation between diverse groups is facilitated by the second approach. We have here two fundamentally different tactics. The representationalist hopes to hone and refine one perspective that will correctly represent and analyze any encounter with any environment and win any argument with any rational person. The ironist hopes to master a great number of perspectives so that as she encounters environments and rationalities that she is not familiar with, she will have as many angles as possible from which to try to understand and evaluate the new contexts and new types of people.

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, a book written before he coined the phrase "ironist", Rorty wrote,

For hermeneutics, to be rational is to be willing to refrain from epistemology-from thinking that there is a special set of terms in which all contributions to the conversation should be put. And to be willing to pick up the jargon of the interlocutor rather than translating it to one's own. (Rorty, 2009: 318)

This epistemological urge is at the core of the difference between the representationalist and the ironist. For this reason, I think that if he had written this passage later in his life Rorty would have replaced "For hermeneutics" with "For the

ironist”. The above passage nicely summarizes the ironist attitude that Rorty later developed and drives home the point that an ability to navigate a wide array of diverse truths in a non-reductionistic manner can, in certain situations, be more productive than a high degree of familiarity with one set of truths.

Questions of how to operationalize productivity and whether productivity is a noble enough goal will no doubt continue to be debated for decades, if not for centuries. One’s opinion on this matter will be heavily influenced by what paradigms one thinks should dominate our public projects. However, as Rorty put it, “until we discard the metaphor of inquiry... as becoming more unified rather than more diverse, we shall never be free of the motives which once led us to posit gods” (Rorty, 1991b 27). This quote nicely summarizes the point I have been trying to make clear- that both monotheism and realist science are motivated by the search for redemptive truth, a perspective that *unifies* all truths. A more Darwinian or Ironic approach allows us to see progress as branching off and moving beyond some of the core beliefs that we hold now in order to adapt to new and evolving conditions.

I interpret the Norwegian shift away from stable religious truths and towards a conception of religious practice that is inspired by idiosyncratic exploration of one’s self and one’s surroundings as a move towards the polytheistic and ironist approach to truth that Rorty fought for. This shift is particularly Rortian because it moves religious authority to the private sphere without suggesting that we must purge our democracies of religion in order to become sufficiently rational. The apparent desire of many Norwegians to create a place for individualistic religious engagement suggests that they see the value of experimenting with perspectives other than the rationalistic, secular, scientific worldview that has increasingly become a part of the common sense of the developed world. Having now discussed Rorty’s critiques of certain aspects of this rational-secular paradigm and the way in which these critiques parallel his critiques of monotheistic-religious paradigms, it begins to become apparent how Rortian irony might clear the way for the further development of the individualistic religious engagement that seems to be emerging in today’s Norway.

Rorty contrasted his notion of irony with common sense, describing the latter as “the watchword of those who unselfconsciously describe everything important in terms of the final vocabulary to which they and those around them are habituated”. He continued, “To be commonsensical is to take for granted that statements formulated in that final vocabulary suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of

those who employ alternative final vocabularies” (Rorty, 1989: 74). One interpretation of the increase in the number of Norwegians who use religion instrumentally and individualistically is that they are coming to share with Rorty a willingness to describe themselves and their experiences in ways that do not conform to the secular-scientific worldview that has been a part of Norwegian culture’s common sense. We also see in Norway a skepticism towards religious movements that try to establish the authority of religious belief and practice through stable, dogmatic truths that have their foundations outside of the individual’s application of them to his or her private projects. One can interpret this as an adoption of Rortian polytheism and a rejection of the universal authority of science, religion, or any other system that tries to find blanket solutions for diverse groups.

Rorty anticipated that polytheists “will turn away not only from the priests but from such priest-substitutes as metaphysicians and physicists- from anyone who purports to tell you how things *really* are” (Rorty, 2007: 30). Quotes like this one resonate with shifts towards individualized religion and give one a sense of how Rortian terms like polytheism, divinization, and redemption can fit in with and re-contextualize important themes that those studying religion in Norway may find useful in navigating the continued effects of pluralization on religious engagement. A Rortian society that embraces an ironic attitude towards truth and balances concerns about the social consequences of religion with as much religious tolerance as possible would allow for exactly what Norwegians seem to be gravitating towards: democratically unproblematic experimentation with alternatives to the scientific world-view that do not encourage appeals to religious authority in the arena of cultural politics.

I believe that the internal secularization of religion that Schmidt argued would have to take place in order to reverse the Norwegian skepticism towards religion in the public sphere would amount to an acceptance of a Rortian version of the privatization of religion. This would require confining religious contributions to the public sphere to descriptions of the benefits of certain practices and belief systems- descriptions not supplemented by claims to a special sort of authority. I agree with professor of philosophy, Santiago Zabala’s description of Rorty’s valorization of edification as a call for “a renewed awareness that not everything demands to be explained scientifically” as well as Zabala’s conclusion that a balance between edification and systematicity in a pluralistic democracy could allow for individualized

religion to “once again take its place in the modern world alongside science and politics, without aspiring anymore to the absolute” (Rorty et al., 2005: 7). Whether the increased presence of an individualized religion in the public sphere will be beneficial or not remains to be seen. What we do seem to already see, however, is a desire among large groups of Norwegians to experiment using this kind of religion without abandoning their democratic values. I find that a Rortian model facilitates exactly that.

The attitudes presented in *Religion in Today's Norway* and Rorty's philosophy are both benefitted by the connections I have drawn between them. Not only do Rortian themes provide us with an expanded vocabulary for describing these religious trends, Rorty's arguments about the inefficiency of both monotheism and scientific realism as blanket solutions designed to be relevant to all of our projects offer an additional level of explanation as to why Norwegian attitudes may have shifted away from traditional religion while still using religion as an alternative to science in certain private projects. Analysis like that found in *Religion in Today's Norway* is uniquely useful for Rorty scholars as it offers hard data and insights describing populations that are arguably moving towards a more polytheistic version of religion.

Interestingly, Rorty mentioned Norway specifically in a book that I will address in the next chapter. He wrote, “democracy only works if you spread the wealth around- if you eliminate the gap between the rich and the poor. This has actually been happening in certain small Northern European countries like Holland and Norway” (Rorty et al., 2005: 93). This connects nicely with the point made earlier about existential security as a prerequisite for prioritizing tolerance over self-interest and is another example of why Norway is a prime candidate for further Rortian analysis. I will further explore this point at the end of chapter four, after dealing with a few more critiques of the Rortian approach that I have been arguing for thus far.

Chapter Four: Objections to Rortian Polytheism

Due to the interconnected nature Rortian ideas and the necessity of understanding how the many aspects of his philosophy connect in order to grasp Rorty's treatment of religion, I have spent the majority of this thesis presenting the relevant issues in Rortian terms. In order to avoid a one-sided treatment, I will spend the first half of this final chapter discussing additional examples of the objections that religious scholars have to Rortian philosophy. I will deal primarily with critiques from Keith Starkenburg and David O'Hara, both of whom I engaged in chapter two. I have chosen these particular critiques because they both come from Christian scholars, they focus on the religious implications of Rorty's work, and both critiques suggest that our inquiries into belief, truth, and religious practice should be aimed at redemption.

In addition, Starkenburg's critique provides an example of the difficulties of appealing to religious authority in the public sphere of a pluralistic democracy while O'Hara's critique illuminates the dangers of hypostatizing Rortian edification. The second half of this chapter will discuss the productive interactions of Rorty and Catholic philosopher, Gianni Vattimo. This discussion will demonstrate further potential for cooperation between Rortian philosophers and religious thinkers. I will conclude by using Vattimo and Rorty's work to provide some final reflections on the conceptualization of religion that I find best suited to Norwegian society based on the findings discussed in chapter three.

Rorty vs. Starkenburg on What We Can Get Away With Saying

Starkenburg's critique of Rorty is titled "*What the Apostles Will Let Us Get Away with Saying*". This title is a reference to Rorty's interpretation of a Deweyan sense of warranted assertibility as equating truth with "what our peers will... let us get away with saying" (Rorty, 2009: 176). I read this passage as an attempt to make the behavioristic point that if we view truth as a social construction, then the beliefs that are labeled as true can be seen as those that the relevant members of one's community will accept. This should not be interpreted as a claim that we can manipulate the nature of non-human reality by changing our social conventions, but

rather as a claim that we can manipulate the truth-values of certain beliefs about non-human reality by redescribing our social context in ways that make different topics or goals seem interesting and important. As I have discussed at length, one can easily avoid the inference from “Truth is a social construction” to “Reality is a social construction” by separating relations of causation from relations of justification.

Starkenburg rejected Rorty’s claim that the warrant of a given belief is largely determined by the tendencies of one’s peers to accept that belief. He argued that,

Christian belief is warranted because there is a process in which God reveals the great truths of salvation through Scripture and human beings receive those revelations through the internal work of the Holy Spirit... according to the divine design plan that is aimed at truth” (Goodson et al., 2013: 75).

Here we see an alternative to the Rortian description of religious beliefs and practices as socially evolved habits of action. Starkenburg not only demonstrates support for a religious version of the quest for redemptive truth, he also describes truth and warrant as functions of revelations that require the involvement of supernatural agents.

Starkenburg’s subordination of all projects to a “divine design plan” confines him to one true description of reality and one set of goals that all projects should conform to. This limitation is, of course, unproblematic if one believes that there really is such a design plan. However, attempts to ground public projects in the authority of such a plan are rarely productive in religiously diverse societies. As I have argued, public appeals to divine authority are, on a Rortian view, disguised attempts to circumvent cultural politics.

From a Rortian perspective, these appeals undermine a pluralistic democracy by prioritizing conversion over conversation. Starkenburg’s model, on the other hand, suggests that many important human beliefs are warranted through the interventions of non-human agents. Rorty’s efforts to shift our focus away from arguments about the existence and the nature of these supernatural agents and towards secular discussions of social problems can thus be interpreted by Starkenburg and other monotheists as pulling the rug out from under our efforts to access ultimate truth. The short version of a Rortian counterargument has to be: The increase in the potential for open discussion among diverse groups that follows from restricting appeals to supernatural authority in the public sphere outweighs the inconvenience of changing

the way one conceptualizes and legitimizes belief when engaged in cooperative projects. However, the practical advantages of a Rortian approach will not convince many of those who believe that we should be aiming at redemptive truth. Regardless of the potential benefits, a monotheist perspective sees opting for productivity over redemption as a betrayal of one's commitments to both truth and God.

If Starkenburg resisted Rorty by arguing that we undermine the importance of legitimate religious belief when we remove the authority of revelation or divine inspiration from our descriptions of this belief formation, then, despite practical counterarguments like the one above that Rorty could offer in defense of his own approach, Starkenburg would be proposing a coherent alternative that would have the potential benefit of taking the self-identifications of monotheistic believers more seriously. However, Starkenburg's argument does not stop here and I would argue that it could not stop here. This is because, although Starkenburg has proposed an alternative view of truth and belief, he has not yet explained how such a view could be incorporated into and enforced within a modern democracy.

The following passage gives us our first idea of how Starkenburg envisions divine authority being publically established in human communities. He writes, "Christian beliefs are warranted because they cohere with the core beliefs of other Christians... by this I mean the apostles and those who continue to exercise apostolic authority" (Goodson et al., 2013: 84). Although Starkenburg does not mention supernatural agents in this particular passage, this view of warrant and authority supports his conviction that warranted religious belief requires the involvement of the supernatural, whether this is conceived of as God, the holy spirit, or a holy text that provides divine revelation through the word of God. On Starkenburg's model, Christians can feel convinced of the warrant of their beliefs because they can recognize the same beliefs in other true believers and are thus able to see which other people the holy spirit is working through. Christians are thereby able to determine which people are exercising a legitimate apostolic authority that functions as an extension of God's authority and they can then adjust their beliefs to conform to that authority.

Rorty would have objected to bringing this kind of thinking into the public sphere of a pluralistic society as it may encourage believers to delegitimize the beliefs of those who do not acknowledge their apostolic authority. This is especially problematic when one considers that, in a pluralistic society, other religious groups

will often constitute a majority. Despite this danger, Starkenburg continues to argue against Rorty's view of truth and warrant, writing,

Truth is not what your peers will let you get away with saying, and justification is not what your peers will let you get away with saying. Warranted Christian belief is what the apostles (and their successors) will let you get away with saying. (Goodson et al., 2013: 85)

In this passage, Starkenburg moves away from his argument about the necessity of taking seriously the notion of supernatural agents intervening in the development of warranted belief. He focuses instead on the idea that the apostles and their successors determine which Christian beliefs are warranted. Starkenburg presents this apostolic authority as the result of the influence of the Holy Spirit and as recognizable by all other Christians in whom the Holy Spirit works due to the core of belief that is shared by all legitimate members of this group. If one follows Starkenburg's arguments to their conclusion, however, one can see how unwieldy his view becomes in public settings.

Firstly, there is the practical and political problem with Starkenburg's proposed source of authority that it is immensely difficult to get such authority to be accepted by the majority of the members of a religiously diverse society. Secondly, when Starkenburg tries to transfer divine authority onto a particular human embodiment of this authority we encounter an even greater problem. According to Starkenburg, the group "those who exercise apostolic authority" can be demarcated through the recognition of a shared core of beliefs. The problem with this approach, from a Rortian perspective, is that Starkenburg is asking us to submit to the apostolic authority of a group that is impossible to pick out using publically available criteria.

While Starkenburg could argue that the issue of justifying the extension of the group that legitimately exercises apostolic authority can be resolved through appeals to scripture or to the authority of God, an attempt to do so ignores the fact that there is no interpretation of either source of authority that is not value-laden. An appeal to the ability of those "within whom the Holy Spirit works" to recognize apostolic authority is unhelpful and circular. Based on Starkenburg's own definitions, "those who legitimately exercise apostolic authority" and "those within whom the Holy Spirit works" are coextensive. This leads one right back to the same problem of the inability

of a diverse group, even a diverse group of Christians, to agree upon an ambiguous boundary that must be drawn by human regulations in the absence of widespread agreement as to how God's authority should be applied directly to specific social issues.

Obviously, such agreement is incredibly uncommon in religiously diverse democracies. Starkenburg thus provides us with an excellent example of an appeal to supernaturally granted authority that, on a Rortian model, is a disguised move in a game of cultural politics. Starkenburg wants to make an argument for the implementation of a type of an authority structure that is not in place at a public level, and he wants to base his arguments for this implementation on the validity of that same authority structure. It is also worth noting, that Starkenburg's proposed source of religious authority can be easily accounted for using Rortian philosophy in a way that problematizes Starkenburg's alleged opposition to Rorty's view of warrant and belief.

Starkenburg portrays himself as rejecting the claim that truth is what your peers will let you get away with saying. He must do so because truth cannot be established by human communities if its source is non-human. However, in saying that warranted religious belief is based on the authority of the apostles and their successors, Starkenburg makes an unmistakable reference to the authority of his own peer group and what they will let us get away with saying. Starkenburg could respond that this authority comes from God and that only the interpretations that correspond to God's will are truly legitimate. However, a Rortian can easily counter this argument by pointing out that there are no agreed upon norms to regulate public discussion about the will of God. This leaves Starkenburg with no live options for connecting his version of divine authority to public projects in religiously diverse communities.

Starkenburg undermines his own argument when he demonstrates the clumsiness of trying to transition divine authority onto the human authority structures of groups that disagree on how to interpret the will of God. This is the exact type of difficulty that a public-private split can help to avoid. If we follow Rorty then we must insist that cultural-political arguments be phrased in a language that is accessible to all members and that established practices should only be challenged if an effective alternative that can connect with surrounding practices is being proposed. As Starkenburg's arguments fail this test, he must either use his religious beliefs for his own private projects, or adopt a language that does not require appeals to unshared

sources of supernatural authority when arguing for the institutionalization of his religious beliefs and practices. The only way for a religious group to try to enforce divine authority without framing their projects in a secularized language that makes productive, democratic conversation possible is to subordinate political institutions to religious institutions. As this path seems unlikely to be successful, religious groups must make their, potentially legitimate and coherent, arguments without insisting on the importance of the supernatural source of those arguments if their goal is to influence public policies.

Treating Starkenburg's suggestions adds to the Rortian framework that I have established thus far by providing an concrete example that supports the Rortian argument that appeals to supernatural authority in the public sphere are likely to impede the cultural-political process. If a religious group is unwilling to give up their divine agenda, but they are limited to expressing the benefits of submitting to this divine authority through arguments about the interactions of human communities, then they must do something like what Starkenburg does in transferring divine authority onto a specific group that can enforce this authority. In Starkenburg's case, this group is "those who exercise legitimate apostolic authority". But once this move has been made the legitimacy of one's arguments about the benefits of divine authority cannot be grounded in that same authority. This is what must be sacrificed in order to allow for open and productive discussion.

A Rortian response to Starkenburg helps us see that if religious groups want to argue for the implementation of their particular brand of divine authority in the public sphere, they must do exactly what Rortians suggest: argue for the adoption and institutionalization of a certain set of truths based on their experience of the benefits of adopting these beliefs and practices. For this reason, I am not convinced by Starkenburg's arguments against a Rortian view of truth and belief. Starkenburg's suggestion that warranted Christian belief is a matter of what the apostles will let us get away with saying seems to me a clear example of, rather than an alternative to, Rorty's suggestion that truth is a matter of what our peers will let us get away with saying.

Rorty vs. O'Hara on Edification as Religion

If we interpret Starkenburg's view of warrant as similar in form to Rorty's, we are presented with a challenging question: How can one work to reduce the influence of metanarratives that encourage the quest for redemptive truth without offering a new metanarrative that suggests that we have finally pierced the veil of appearances and discovered that there is no redemption to be had? Focusing on the potential for edifying philosophy to turn into disguised systematic philosophy, professor of Philosophy, David L. O'Hara, argues that Rortian philosophy bears similarities to fundamentalist religion (Goodson et al., 2013: 142). O'Hara cites professor of Philosophy, Edward Grippe's, argument that

Rorty is asking for the reader to have faith in his, Rorty's, idiosyncratic repackaging of "pragmatist," and if one does then one will understand, among other things, "an important element in the construction of narratives." Yet this is the pattern of request all religious faiths make... "Believe and you will understand". (Goodson et al., 2013: 142)

O'Hara concludes that Rorty fails to truly reject religious metanarratives, a task O'Hara seems to think may be impossible, and argues that Rortian philosophy instead offers a new, but still quasi-religious, alternative to monotheism (Goodson et al., 2013: 141-142).

The comparison made between the form of Rorty and Starkenburg's arguments at the end of the last section can be interpreted as lending some credence to O'Hara's critique. Both O'Hara and Grippe are right to compare a Rortian view of belief and ideology with religious belief to the extent that both Rorty and scholars like Starkenburg argue that acceptance of a certain attitude towards certain beliefs and values is required in order to understand and attain certain goals. In the same way that one must adopt, or at least understand, a Rortian brand of pragmatism in order to grasp his insights on the construction of narratives and authority structures, one must adopt, or at least understand, the many interwoven elements of religious belief and practice in order to be able to take seriously the importance that religious experience has for believers. There are, however, important differences in the approaches of Rorty and monotheists like Starkenburg, beyond those that were pointed out in the previous section.

Firstly, while Rorty is offering a suggestion as to how we might work together in order to shift our goals towards flexible and temporary solutions to our

current problems, Starkenburg's monotheistic approach to truth requires all of his projects to be grounded in an absolute goal and to, at least at some level, delegitimize forms of belief that do not conform to this goal. If one's goal is redemptive truth then one needs a non-human force to tell us how to rank our needs and beliefs and this force has to tell everyone the same thing. A second important difference lies in the distinction between Rorty and O'Hara's views on belief formation. Rorty saw beliefs as habits of action whereas O'Hara and Grippe describe the argument for adopting either religious faith or Rortian philosophy as "believe and you will understand". This implies a sort of leap of faith that is taken despite a lack of evidence that a belief system has any warrant.

Rorty could respond that "Believe and you will understand" is not an effective argument unless one has already demonstrated some of the benefits of understanding, and thus given a degree of warrant to the beliefs in question. Leaps of faith are not the norm in belief formation and are rarely appropriate to describe the adoption of either a religious or a philosophical attitude. The acceptance of a religious tradition will normally involve being drawn to a community or a practice that is already established and has believing members who can argue coherently with most non-members for the warrant of their beliefs. The same is true of a philosophical outlook. Being convinced by the works of Rorty, or any other author, is better described as the gradual incorporation of a new perspective into one's old beliefs than as a blind leap in the hopes of achieving an ambiguous reward.

If we examine the phrase "Believe and you will understand" within a Rortian framework where beliefs are seen as habits of action, then, if Rorty had written this he would have been saying: "Try, or at least imagine, doing things our way. Develop some new habits and it will become clear to you why we act the way we do and how we justify those actions". Not only is this line of reasoning not religious, as O'Hara and Grippe insinuate; most if not all argumentation has roughly this form. An argument is an attempt to persuade someone to see things from a different perspective and to thereby see the benefits of changing his or her behavior. If beliefs are viewed as habits of actions, the claim "believe and you will understand" is a point about how changing one's behavior will change one's goals, values, and commitments.

However, neither the greater flexibility of polytheism compared to monotheism nor the usefulness of conceiving of beliefs as habits of action can fully refute O'Hara's argument that Rorty is offering a disguised substitute for religion that

retains certain aspects of religious belief. To the extent that Rorty was suggesting that we should exchange any obligation towards nonhuman authority with a commitment to expanding our sense of community, he is offering a replacement for religion. However, the language that O'Hara uses is misleading as Rorty consistently urged that we not put Truth or Science or Philosophy or anything else in the position previously held by God (Rorty, 1989: 5). Rorty offered a competing narrative and suggested that we stop using appeals to the will of God and start using appeals to human interests, but this is not a replacement in the sense of proposing a new entity that claims authority on the basis of having transcended human concerns and accessed a more ultimate truth. Rorty is suggesting neither a set of redemptive truths nor a way to circumvent cultural politics.

Thus, while O'Hara can draw some parallels between Rortian thought and religious thought, O'Hara's critique misses the important point that a Rortian project is more concerned with replacing the monotheistic quest for redemption with a polytheistic commitment to democracy than it is in replacing religion with atheism. The very choice of the term polytheism as a replacement for monotheism should be enough to suggest that not all forms of religious belief are problematic on a Rortian model. O'Hara does, however, help us to highlight the ease with which an edifying and polytheistic project like Rorty's can slide into systematic monotheism. Avoiding this is a matter of being clear that the claim that "we should not aim towards redemption" is not grounded in a discovery of the way the world actually is. Instead it is one suggestion, based on one contingent set of values and practices, as to how we might become more productive and tolerant.

As I mentioned in chapter two, Rorty argued that "To say that we should drop the idea of truth as out there waiting to be discovered is not to say that we have discovered that, out there, there is no truth" (Rorty, 1989: 8). Rorty elaborated on the difficulty of maintaining this position, writing:

Edifying philosophers have to decry the very notion of having a view, while avoiding having a view about having views. This is an awkward, but not impossible position... We might be just saying something- participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry. Perhaps saying things is not always saying how things are. (Rorty, 2009: 371)

The first part of this passage is about being careful to avoid the temptation to replace redemptive truth with an irony that functions “redemptively”. By this I mean that the ironist and the polytheist, if they agree with Rortian arguments against the correspondence theory of truth, have to avoid conceptualizing their project of acquainting themselves with a wide array of final vocabularies as ultimately aimed at a resting place where they will achieve a lasting equilibrium and where the conversation will have stopped.

Polytheism does not help us to avoid the difficulties that monotheism encounters in the public sphere if it simply replaces one approach that is assumed to work in any situation with a new such approach. The entire point of the Rortian move towards polytheism is to avoid dogmatism and encourage innovation as we encounter new kinds of challenges. This move is ineffective if polytheism is conceptualized as a universal formula that yields the correct particular formula in any given situation. Viewing our edifying projects in this way simply raises the goal of piercing the veil of appearances by one level of abstraction.

In other words, there is not a significant enough difference between, peeling away our human desires to access the spark of God within us, or peeling away our subjectivity to access objective truth, and peeling away metanarratives to access raw pragmatic efficiency. Escaping our finitude, or piercing the veil of appearances, and piercing a “veil of metanarratives” are both aimed at a form of redemptive truth. A redemptive conceptualization of edification will lead us right back to the belief that we have, or are in the process of developing, a final vocabulary that will “suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of those who employ alternative final vocabularies” (Rorty, 1989: 74). This unhealthy form of cultural ethnocentrism makes achieving a functioning, pluralistic democracy difficult, if not impossible.

The second half of the block quote above, the claim that we can responsibly participate in a conversation without contributing to an inquiry can raise the concern that if we are not responsible to truth, especially moral truth, that we will be left with insufficient arguments against acting in selfish ways that are detrimental to our community. In this vein, professor of philosophy, Brad Elliott Stone, argued that Rorty’s version of hope in a better human future undercuts itself by refusing to ground itself in something ahistorical. Stone asks, “How can one have hope when there is no argument for it or any tradition upon which to found it?” (Goodson et al., 2013: 166). This concern results from a failure to see that responsibility towards one’s

community can exist apart from responsibility towards truth. If we have already incorporated the importance of tolerance and moral responsibility into our cultural identity we are then equipped to continue acting responsibly even if we no longer believe that we are morally obliged to something non-human, be it God, Truth, Science, Reality, or anything else.

When one frames the claim about saying something without contributing to an inquiry within Rorty's Darwinian approach to the formation of beliefs, his intent becomes clear. I have interpreted Rorty as suggesting that the edifying philosopher, or the edifying sociologist for that matter, is continually on the lookout for accepted institutions, practices, vocabularies, and belief-systems that have outlived their usefulness or that unnecessarily marginalize certain groups. However, when one uses a Rortian redescription of a system or institution that makes an alternative seem preferable, this cannot be based on a claim that we got the world wrong before and now have seen the light. In order to avoid hypostatizing edification into a disguised systematicity, the claim being made must be a Darwinian one: that we have new needs and thus require new ways of coping with the new challenges presented by a new environment.

In this way, we can conceive of edifying arguments against established metanarratives or paradigms not as attempts to bring us closer to redemptive truth, but as suggestions that we have reached a point where our best option is to try something new and see how things play out. Such arguments are more usefully described as claims that the continued use of certain tools is obstructing the evolution of our society than as contributions to an ahistorical inquiry. At this point, we can simply try to communicate in different ways and see what works in the same way that any species that encounters a new environment will evolve through varying attempts at coping in order to find out what works. If beliefs are seen as habits of action then deciding what to believe is simply deciding what to do. If one applies a Darwinian attitude to Rortian philosophy then one can argue that "saying something" does not always have the goal of "contributing to an inquiry", if by that one means gradually approaching the end of inquiry, just as easily as one can argue that biological evolution does not have the goal of reaching the end of evolution.

Rorty, Vattimo, and Davidson on Rationality as Charity

Despite the distaste that many religious scholars have for Rortian philosophy, I believe that it is compatible with many religious attitudes. A commitment to avoiding arguments that revolve around existence claims about supernatural agents when we are engaged in cooperative projects, can go hand in hand with the Rortian belief that “People who find themselves quite unable to take an interest in the question of whether God exists have no right to be contemptuous of people who believe passionately in his existence” (Rorty et al., 2005: 30). This is one of many instances in which we see that religious belief and practice should not be portrayed as inherently irrational or misguided within a Rortian framework. Unfortunately, this charitable attitude towards religion is ignored by many of those who take issue with Rortian arguments.

Towards the end of his life, Rorty worked closely with Catholic philosopher and politician, Gianni Vattimo. Together, the two wrote a book titled *The Future of Religion* in which they discussed the kind of religion that they believed could remain relevant in the modern west. The productive cooperation between these two philosophers is useful in balancing the viewpoints of religious scholars like Starkenburg and O’Hara who see Rortian philosophy and religious belief as opposed to each other. In addition, discussing the interactions between Rorty and Vattimo will be helpful as Vattimo offers an interpretation of the primary function of religion that may be especially well suited to Norwegians.

Rorty wrote of Vattimo, “His theology is explicitly designed for... the sort of people who only go to church for weddings, baptisms, and funerals” (Rorty et al., 2005: 35). While this description obviously does not apply to all religious Norwegians, the low levels of church attendance in Norway, outside of such rites of passage, over the past few decades have been well documented (Schmidt et al., 2010: 17). I will briefly review Vattimo’s work with Rorty and then compare him to Rorty’s critics. I will argue that Vattimo exemplifies both a type of religious commitment that can work with Rortian philosophy and one that accommodates the Norwegian attitudes described in *Religion in Today’s Norway*.

Despite their differences in religious conviction, Vattimo’s views on a number of important religious topics were similar to Rorty’s. For example, Vattimo agreed with Rorty that religious belief and practice were, at least to a large extent, the result of socially evolved traditions and values. Vattimo argued, “It is not a scandal to say that we do not believe in the gospel because we know that Christ is risen, but rather,

that we believe that Christ is risen because we have read it in the gospel” (Rorty et al., 2005: 49). Here we can see that Vattimo’s particular brand of Christianity is not threatened by the suggestion that religious truths might be the results of the socially evolved interpretations of religious texts.

On such a view, there is no need to argue that religious truths are innate in all properly oriented humans or that they are communicated directly by the divine. On the other hand, one could interpret the above quote as suggesting that we receive non-human guidance through the word of God. On this interpretation, even if we admit that we are initially introduced to religious concepts through reading a holy text, religious belief should not be seen as a human construction. However, this reading, or at least an argument that Vattimo placed a great deal of importance on the non-human element in religion, becomes less plausible in light of Vattimo’s belief that the modern west has removed what he calls the mythologized authority of religious metanarratives (Rorty et al., 2005: 54). The demythologizing of religious metanarratives is a process that places religious authority with the individual.

While Vattimo saw this shift as a positive development, one of his main arguments throughout *The Future of Religion* was that, although many Christian traditions have lost their appeal and their public authority, we should continue to cultivate the Christian commandment of charity (Rorty et al., 2005: 54). Using Wittgensteinian terms, Vattimo described his conception of charity as “a metarule that obliges and pushes us to accept the different language games” that we encounter (Rorty et al., 2005: 59). Being charitable, in Vattimo’s sense, thus means being willing to adopt the perspectives of others and it means being tolerant enough to avoid the assumption that one’s own final vocabulary is sufficient in all situations. Vattimo’s definition of charity complements Rorty’s definition of rationality as a willingness to “pick up the jargon of the interlocutor rather than translating it to one’s own” (Rorty, 2009: 318). In *The Future of Religion*, Rorty supplemented Vattimo’s Wittgensteinian description of charity with a Gadamerian description of arbitrariness or irrationality as “the conviction that one’s own social practice is the only social practice one will ever need and that one does not need to fuse horizons with anybody else” (Rorty et al., 2005: 59). This type of irrationality amounts to being uncharitable in Vattimo’s sense of the term.

The connection between rationality and charity in pluralistic societies is made even clearer if one examines philosopher, Donald Davidson’s, uses of these terms.

Davidson suggested that a principle of *charity*, which he also called the principle of *rational* accommodation, was the key to engaging people whose behavior does not immediately fit with the our established theories of belief and meaning. He even went so far as so claim that the principle of charity is a necessary in order to communicate at all (Malpas, 1996: sec. 3.3). When we are confronted with people who are motivated by beliefs that we are unfamiliar with, and who therefore express things that are difficult to understand within the framework that our culture finds commonsensical, Davidson's principle of charity "counsels us to interpret speakers as holding true beliefs (true by our lights at least) wherever it is plausible to do so" (Malpas, 1996: sec. 3.3). Davidson, Rorty, and Vattimo's treatments of rationality and charity can be connected to the idea of giving the utterances of others a "charitable interpretation", to use a more informal terminology.

I interpret the connections between rationality and charity that these three thinkers offer as suggestions that our democratic goals will be better served if we replace the idea that humans distinguish themselves from beasts through their ability to use an innate faculty called "reason" with a view of humanity as a species that is has evolved to a level of complexity that allows for various individuals to be able to invest themselves in a wide variety of beliefs and goals without this variety threatening our ability to engage in cooperative projects. This view portrays rationality as a social virtue and not a human faculty distinct from emotional or non-cognitive behavior in a philosophically pregnant sense. Conceiving of reason or rationality as a defining human faculty tempts the inference from the observation that certain groups or individuals are not behaving in a way that our society considers "rational" to the conclusion that these groups are not full fledged members of "humanity".

This in turn can encourage groups to shun, oppress, or convert those whose behavior they deem insufficiently rational, rather than engaging them in conversation. This attitude can be fueled by monotheistic religious metanarratives that portray deviations from what a religious group has agreed to be the will of God as sinful moral failures or by interpretations of scientific realism that suggest that deviations from western rationalism are similarly a type of moral failure. Rationality as a social virtue, on the other hand, encourages charitable interpretations of foreign perspectives. Redefining rationality as roughly synonymous with charity is thus an important move in allowing for the increase in tolerance that pluralized societies need

in order to settle disagreements through cultural politics rather than through force. The idea of “rationality as charity” being an evolved social virtue also helps to combat the suggestion that those who fail to act “rationally” are purposefully acting against the collective goals of the human species.

It is important to specify that Rorty only found a lack of charity to be irrational or arbitrary for members of pluralistic democracies who could take a certain degree of existential security for granted. When we remember that rationality-as-charity can only develop when our more basic needs are already met, it is easier to see the “irrationality” of the members of cultures that we are unfamiliar with as a result of a their social context rather than as a lack of decency. One should also note that, for Vattimo, charity is a “Christian” value only in the sense that he saw it as an integral part of cultures that have been largely influenced by Christian institutions (Rorty, et al., 2005: 53). Reading the label “Christian” in this way is crucial as Vattimo insisted that religion in the modern west should be non-missionary. It is therefore not the case that religious conversion is necessary in order for a society to incorporate “Christian” charity into its cultural identity (Rorty et al., 2005: 66).

Vattimo’s call to follow certain religious principles without requiring those who follow them to be members of a church is highly compatible with the instrumentalized version of religion that I discussed in chapter three. Vattimo’s apparent acceptance of the idea that individual religious attitudes or practices can be usefully adopted based on the extent to which a specific practice resonates with an individual’s sense of authenticity allows him to achieve what he might refer to as “religious goals” without making inherently religious arguments. This attitude allows for a type of religiously motivated public action that does not undermine the democratic process, as the desirability of the goal rather than the motivation- religious or otherwise- for undertaking a certain project is emphasized. Vattimo’s prioritization of the commandment of charity therefore harmonizes with Rorty’s arguments for irony and polytheism.

Rorty suggested that we see Vattimo’s sense of charity as “a willingness to take one’s chances, as opposed to attempting to escape one’s finitude by aligning oneself with infinite power” (Rorty et al., 2005: 56). This could also be described as a rejection of the quest for redemption. We can thus interpret Vattimo’s non-metaphysical and demythologized version of Christianity as a step towards polytheism and thus largely compatible with the Rortian conviction that we should

focus on concrete practical problems rather than aiming at redemptive truth. Vattimo provides us with an excellent example of the kind of religious attitude that makes the claim that there may be room for certain types of religion in the public spheres of pluralistic democracies seem plausible.

The differences in priorities that we see between Vattimo and, for example, Starckenburg, illustrate the contrast between a non-metaphysical, non-missionary, and individualized Christianity that can work within a Rortian framework, and a metaphysically grounded and missionary Christianity that can undermine democracy by prioritizing conversion over conversation. My treatment of Starckenburg in this chapter provides us with an example of a religious attitude that I have argued is incompatible with cooperative democratic projects at a practical level. My engagement of Vattimo, on the other hand, builds on the Rortian framework that I have been arguing for by providing an example of a commitment to religion that focuses on human interactions, namely treating others charitably, instead of attempting to achieve redemption. Vattimo's version of religion could easily be an effective force in the public sphere of a pluralistic democracy by making arguments about the love and devotion to charity that a further investment in certain types of religion could yield, while still being open to hearing the perspectives of atheists, agnostics, and those who engage religion differently.

Charity, Agapeism, and Norway

The contrast between Vattimo and Starckenburg helps to illustrate the point that a religion that tries to directly connect its sense of divine authority to political power will clash with the democratic commitments of a pluralistic society, while a religion that is interested in expanding the opportunities for diverse groups to have meaningful conversations in which they interpret each others' differences charitably is entirely unproblematic on a Rortian model. A Rortian criticism of attempts to institutionalize divine authority in the public sphere still leaves room for what Rorty called "Religions of love". Rorty wrote,

I think that the religion of love has gradually moved out of the churches and into the political arena. That religion is in the process of being transfigured into democratic politics. What is left behind in the churches is the fear that

human beings may not be able to save themselves without help- that social cooperation is not enough. (Brandom, 2008: 218)

This passage is noteworthy because it highlights the fact that Rorty saw a religiosity that focused on love for our fellow human beings as a natural part of the development of democratic politics while also contrasting this religion of love with a more clerical version of religion that aspires to ground this love and cooperation in redemption.

While some monotheists might argue that love not coupled with redemption does not constitute religion, I would argue that a focus on love is entirely compatible with both pragmatism and religion. C. S. Peirce, one of the most influential pragmatists of all time, used the concept of “agapeism” or “evolutionary love”, which nicely highlights this compatibility. This concept portrays the originally Christian notion of “Agape”, a term that refers to the charitable love that exists between God and man, as “the most fundamental engine of the evolutionary process” (Burch, 2014: sec. 5). Peirce’s use of this religious term to describe the evolutionary process helps to connect the more pragmatic claim that acting charitably when interpreting others is crucial to the peaceful coexistence of diverse groups and the more spiritual claim that showing love for others can help us to transcend the limits of our own perspectives and connect at a deeper level with our fellow human beings. Vattimo’s focus on charity lands him firmly on the side of this type of this Agapeistic form of religion. Rorty also demonstrated an affinity for this form of religion when, in a somewhat uncharacteristic manner wrote, “My sense of the holy, insofar as I have one, is bound up with the hope that someday, any millennium now, my remote descendants will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law” (Rorty et al., 2005: 40).

I read Rorty, especially in his work with Vattimo, as acknowledging the possibility that a polytheistic religion can provide one path to a democratic society in which love is the only law. With this in mind, we can return to the analysis of the World Values Survey to make the argument that an emphasis on charity will allow for the healthy coexistence of religion and democracy in Norway. Henriksen and Schmidt approvingly observe an attitude of charity when they write that, in Norway:

There is a broad acceptance of pluralism... partially because Norway is a secular society in the sense that religious status, authority, position, or

orientation should not determine whether or not one can participate in public projects. (Schmidt et al., 2010: 91)

Henriksen and Schmidt are careful to say that there is a general belief that this *should* be the case and not that it necessarily *is* the case. Still, as discussed in chapter three, it does seem that Norwegians are increasingly open to non-traditional religious views that are grounded in an individual sense of religious authority rather than in a shared tradition. I read the above passage as an argument that as long as one has existential security and culturally established values in place, a further sense of grounding, based on a desire for a universally held epistemology or ontology, is not necessary for maintaining democratic values. A Rortian view suggests that attempts at such grounding may in fact be detrimental to these values.

Interpreted this way, Henriksen and Schmidt seem to think that Vattimo's sense of charity is already a core part of Norwegian sensibilities. The value placed on charity, interpreted as an avoidance of the belief that "one's own social practice is the only social practice one will ever need", will become increasingly important as we see a continued rise in religious diversity (Rorty et al., 2005: 59). Norway will need to adjust and redescribe its cultural identity as the country becomes increasingly pluralistic, but we should be careful not to lose a sense of charity as we do so. In particular, charity can be destabilized by an influx of new groups that are perceived as less willing to reciprocate this charity. In this sense, charity is partially dependent on our ability to trust that others will reciprocate our charitable attitudes. The arrival of groups of people who are unaccustomed to the levels of existential security that many Norwegians take for granted will undoubtedly test our ability to act charitably. The Rortian views on truth and belief that I have argued for will be helpful in maintaining a healthy balance, as Rorty portrays conversations with others as valuable opportunities to expand our familiarity with new final vocabularies.

Conclusion

The main argument made in this dissertation has been that Rortian philosophy, specifically the consequences of replacing the correspondence theory of truth with a holistic and pragmatic account of truth and belief, helps to conceptualize the relationship between religion and political deliberation in a way that allows for a greater degree of tolerance and productive cooperative action in pluralistic democracies. I have used Rortian philosophy to argue that the plausibility of the correspondence theory of truth stems from a conflation of causal and justificatory relationships and from an unnecessary and unhelpful conflation of truth and reality. If we follow Rorty, we can acknowledge that the acquisition of beliefs that we call “facts” is not value free, as the types of statements that the relevant group of inquirers in a given situation is predisposed to accept largely influences the process of integrating these new beliefs into our worldview.

If one conceives of individuals as webs of belief and beliefs as habits of action, a pragmatic and Darwinian attitude can replace the correspondence theory of truth and the desire to bridge the gap between Platonic dualisms. One advantage of this move is a dedivinization of the world and the self which allows us to focus on how to best meet the needs of human communities rather than feeling obligated to either a non-human authority or to an innate and essential sense of humanity that exists apart from our practical commitments to each other. For Rorty, a Darwinian view of progress suggests a prioritization of the goal of continually adapting our beliefs and commitments in order to dynamically accommodate the vast array of needs that emerge in rapidly changing, pluralistic democracies. On this view, efforts to arrive at a redemptive truth that will end the conversation between different cultures by uniting humanity in the recognition of ahistorical truths are dangerous to the health of our democracies as they leave insufficient room for giving radically different perspectives a fair hearing.

I have provided arguments, primarily in chapter two, for rejecting the claim that a Rortian version of social constructivism leads to an inability to act morally or to the belief that we can speak real problems out of existence. The treatment of Keith Starkenburg’s critique of Rorty in chapter four also demonstrates how attempts to ground truth in something non-human encounter major difficulties in the public

spheres of religiously diverse societies. Due to the unwieldy nature of attempts to publically establish divine authority, I have argued that when there is disagreement within a society as to how we should interpret the causal forces that we constantly interact with, we will be more productive if we debate concrete cultural-political questions than if we search for universally valid ontological foundations for our beliefs. Once this type of productivity has been prioritized, public appeals to unshared religious authorities become nothing more than disguised attempts to circumvent cultural politics.

One of the primary benefits of Rorty's pragmatic attitude towards religion is that his version of religious privatization still allows for us to seek redemption on our own time. Rortian philosophy takes the importance of the beliefs and activities that facilitate our private attempts at self-perfection seriously and, although this is sometimes overlooked, does not portray religion or spirituality as irrational or based on false premises. Rortian arguments against public religion are purely pragmatic and based on the inefficiency of religious appeals to authority in religiously diverse societies. While the application of a Rortian public-private split does have the consequence of excluding appeals to unshared sources of authority, religious or otherwise, from the public sphere; this approach does not threaten the freedom of religion, especially the type of individualized religion that seems to be becoming more prevalent in the west.

Norway provides an excellent example of a pluralistic democracy that is moving in a direction that is compatible with a Rortian view of religion. The analysis of the 1991, 1998, and 2008 World Values Survey data reviewed in chapter three suggests that Norwegians are distancing themselves from religious traditions that try to ground our behaviors, beliefs, and sense of morality in static religious truths. Combined with Norwegian census data, we can see that factors like church attendance, church membership, baptisms, confirmations, and prayer have been in steady decline among Norwegians, and there is little to suggest that the momentum of this trend is slowing or reversing. Despite moving away from dogmatic religious narratives, Norwegians continue to use religion by instrumentalizing individual religious beliefs and practices from various traditions. The authors of *Religion in Today's Norway* argue that, to the extent that religious belief is still relevant, Norwegians are gravitating towards uses of religious truth that are held together by the authority of the individual and the search for unique forms of personal expression.

This individualized religion is not negatively influenced by the establishment of a public-private split as, to the extent that we can still talk about “redemption” within this type of religious attitude, this redemption is about transcending individual boundaries and becoming acquainted with new perspectives rather than uniting all of humanity under one final, redemptive set of truths.

In addition to the ease with which the public-private split can be implemented in societies that enjoy a high degree of existential security and have individualized their religious engagement, Rortian analysis of monotheistic religious authority can also defuse the tensions between religious and scientific projects. This is done both by showing which of these narratives is most helpful in private projects and which is most helpful in public projects, and by curbing the monotheistic impulses of both religion and scientific realism that have been integrated into the common sense of many westerners. By highlighting the dangers of applying any one paradigm to all projects we can see that a Rortian critique of religion is not about universally replacing religion with science, but rather about restricting the applications of both. Rortian concerns about the effects of monotheistic religion on the health of our democracies should apply equally to a science that sees its goal as accessing redemptive truth. On this view, religious belief is out of place in public projects that aim to predict and control objects in space and time, while scientific belief is out of place when it is used to tell people that they have no right to believe in God after having learned how to scientifically predict and control non-human reality.

The Rortian critiques of science and religion show the extent to which these programs meet very different sets of needs and that both approaches are ill suited to address both sets. It is important for both science and religion to respect the private-public split, although institutions on both sides should be able to fight to negotiate where the line is drawn and re-drawn, assuming that these arguments are phrased in a language that is amenable to the cultural-political processes of a given society. When scientific realists or others push for religious belief to be rejected on the grounds of intellectual irresponsibility or a lack of evidence they will inspire religious people to bring their religious commitments into the public sphere in order to defend their private rights. In the same way, the more religious people try to impose religious authority on the public sphere, the more important it will seem to privatize religion- perhaps leading rationalists to make more arguments about intellectual irresponsibility and the need for secularism.

I have argued that Rortian philosophy is helpful in breaking this cycle, assuming that a majority of a population can agree on which projects are primarily the domain of which institutions. The Norwegian data suggests that the population of Norway may be approaching a position from which such agreement might be possible. This is largely due to the widespread belief that religious status, authority, position, or orientation should not determine whether or not one can participate in public projects (Schmidt et al., 2010: 91). I have argued that this attitude can be captured by the senses in which Rorty, Vattimo, and Davidson connect a democratic sense of rationality to the notion of charity.

As my thesis has focused primarily on presenting philosophical reflections to support theoretical and normative arguments, I have spent less time evaluating the survey data and sociological analysis that I have used, and more time demonstrating the potential connections that can be drawn between Rortian philosophy and this particular set of data. While relating Rortian philosophy to the data on Norwegian religious trends provides a degree of balance, there are other methodological approaches that could have helpfully engaged this topic at an even more practical level. My main goals have been to present Rortian philosophy, use this philosophy to engage religion, and discuss the potential advantages of continued engagement with Rortian themes. With these goals in mind, I find that additional sources of empirical data or lengthy discussion of the gathering of this data would have been unnecessary in this particular project.

While I have provided data that suggests that the movement away from traditional or monotheistic religion in Norway has continued, I am eager to see what the 2018 World Values Survey data will add to this discussion. I am also hopeful that readers of this dissertation will be encouraged to apply Rortian themes to their own studies, both in Norway and globally. One specific area in which I would like to see a Rortian conception of the relationship between religion and democracy applied would be to the recent, nationalist, political movements that have affected the United States of America, Great Britain, and that are continuing to manifest themselves, for example in the upcoming election in France. These situations are prime candidates for Rortian analysis, as the utility of Rortian philosophy lies in its ability to increase the potential for tolerance.

I have argued that the elimination of appeals to unshared religious authorities in our public, cooperative projects will still leave room for the expression,

exploration, and development of the important spiritual needs that many members of pluralistic democracies have. I have also argued that this move helps us to avoid essentializing what it is to use reason can equip us with a view rational behavior as roughly synonymous with tolerant and charitable interpretations of others. This focus on charity is compatible with commitments to religion and with commitments to democracy. Being irrational on this model amounts to suggesting that things like religious status or sexual orientation should exclude people from the democratic process. Rortian philosophy is an excellent tool for allowing this charitable rationality to flourish despite the challenges of ongoing religious pluralization. We can accomplish this goal by rejecting the correspondence theory of truth, privatizing religious authority, and abandoning the monotheistic search for redemptive truth in all its forms.

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