
PRAGMATISM AS ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM

Author(s): Richard RORTY

Source: *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, MARS 1999, Vol. 53, No. 207 (1), LE PRAGMATISME / PRAGMATISM (MARS 1999), pp. 7-20

Published by: Revue Internationale de Philosophie

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/23955790>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*

JSTOR

PRAGMATISM AS ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM

Richard RORTY

1. SIN AND TRUTH

There is a useful analogy to be drawn between the pragmatists' criticism of the idea that truth is a matter of correspondence to the intrinsic nature of reality and the Enlightenment's criticism of the idea that morality is a matter of correspondence to the will of a Divine Being. The pragmatists' anti-representationalist account of belief is, among other things, a protest against the idea that human beings must humble themselves before something non-human, whether the Will of God or the Intrinsic Nature of Reality. Seeing anti-representationalism is a version of anti-authoritarianism permits one to appreciate an analogy which was central to John Dewey's thought: the analogy between ceasing to believe in Sin and ceasing to accept the distinction between Reality and Appearance.

Dewey was convinced that the romance of democracy, a romance built on the idea that the point of a human life is free cooperation with fellow humans, required a more thorough-going version of secularism than either Enlightenment rationalism or nineteenth-century positivism had achieved. As Dewey saw it, whole-hearted pursuit of the democratic ideal requires us to set aside *any* authority save that of a consensus of our fellow humans. The paradigm of subjection to such authority is believing oneself to be in a state of Sin. When the sense of Sin goes, Dewey thought, so should the duty to seek for correspondence to the way things are. In its place a democratic culture will put the duty to seek unforced agreement with other human beings about what beliefs will sustain and facilitate projects of social cooperation.

To have a sense of Sin, it is not enough to feel guilty. It is not enough to be appalled by the way human beings treat each other, and by your own capacity for vicious actions. You have to believe that there is a Being before whom we should humble ourselves. This Being issues commands which, even if they seem arbitrary and unlikely to increase human happiness, must be obeyed. When trying to acquire a sense of Sin, it helps a lot if you can manage to think of a specific sexual or dietary practice as forbidden, even though it does not seem to be doing anybody any harm. It also helps to anguish about whether you are calling the divine Being by the name he or she prefers.

To take the traditional correspondentist notion of Truth with full seriousness, you must agree with Clough, that "It fortifies my soul to know/That, though I perish, Truth is so." You must feel uneasy at William James' suggestion that "ideas... become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience." Those who resonate to Clough's lines think of Truth — or, more precisely, Reality as it is in itself, the object accurately represented by true sentences — as an authority we must respect.

To respect Truth and Reality in Clough's way, it is not enough to adjust one's behavior to changes in the environment: to come in when it rains, or to shun bears. You must think of Reality not just as an assortment of such things as rain and bears, but as something which, so to speak, looms behind such things — something august and remote. The best way to get into this way of thinking is become an epistemological sceptic — to start worrying about whether human language is capable of representing the way Reality is in itself, whether we are calling Reality by the right names. To worry in this way, you need to take seriously the question of whether our descriptions of Reality may not be all too human — whether Reality (and therefore Truth as well) may not stand aloof, beyond the reach of the sentences in which we formulate our beliefs. You must be prepared to distinguish, at least in principle, between the sort of belief which embodies Truth and beliefs which are merely tools, beliefs which merely increase your chances of happiness. You must read James' remark that "the trail of the human serpent is over all" as a confession of despair.

Dewey was quite willing to say of a vicious act that it was sinful, and of "2+2=5" or "Elizabeth the First's reign ended in 1623" that

these sentences were absolutely, unconditionally, eternally, false. But he was unwilling to gloss “sinful” or “falsehood” in authoritarian terms. He did not want to say that a power not ourselves had forbidden cruelty, nor that these false sentences fail to accurately represent the way Reality is in itself. He thought it much clearer that we should not be cruel than that there was a God who had forbidden us to be cruel, and much clearer that Elizabeth I died in 1603 than that there is any way things are “in themselves”. He viewed the theory that truth is correspondence to Reality, and the theory that moral goodness is correspondence to the Divine Will, as equally dispensable.

For Dewey, both theories add nothing to our ordinary, workaday, fallible ways of telling right from wrong, and truth from falsity. But their pointlessness is not the real problem. What Dewey most disliked about both traditional “realist” epistemology and about traditional religious beliefs is that they discourage us by telling us that somebody or something has authority over us. Both tell us that there is Something Inscrutable, something toward which we have duties, duties which have precedence over our cooperative attempts to avoid pain and obtain pleasure.

Dewey, like James, was a utilitarian: he thought that in the end the only moral or epistemological criteria we have or need is whether performing an action, or holding a belief, will, in the long run, make for greater human happiness. He saw progress as produced by increasing willingness to experiment, to get out from under the past. So he hoped we should learn to view current scientific, religious, philosophical and moral beliefs with the scepticism with which Bentham viewed the laws of England: he hoped each new generation would try to cobble together some more useful beliefs — beliefs which would help them make human life richer, fuller and happier.

2. CLASSICAL PRAGMATISM

AND THE NEED TO RECONCILE SCIENCE WITH RELIGION (1)

So much for an introductory statement of the theme which I shall be developing. Shortly I shall rehearse this theme in another key by

(1) This section incorporates some material from my article “Pragmatism” in the forthcoming *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward Craig.

bringing in Freud. But it may be useful if I first say something about the similarities and differences, particularly in regard to their views about religion, between Dewey and the other two classical pragmatists: Charles Sanders Peirce and William James.

Peirce kicked pragmatism off by starting from Alexander Bain's definition of belief as a rule or habit of action. Starting from this definition, Peirce argued that the function of inquiry is not to represent reality, but rather to enable us to act more effectively. This means getting rid of the "copy theory" of knowledge which had dominated philosophy since the time of Descartes — and especially of the idea of intuitive self-knowledge, knowledge unmediated by signs. As one of the first philosophers to say that the ability to use signs is essential to thought, Peirce was a prophet of what Gustav Bergman called "the linguistic turn in philosophy".

Like 19th-century idealists such as T.H. Green and Josiah Royce, Peirce was anti-foundationalist, coherentist, and holist in his view of the nature of inquiry. But he did not, as most of Hegel's anglophone followers did, think of God as an all-inclusive, atemporal experience which is identical with Reality. Rather, as a good Darwinian, Peirce thought of the universe as evolving. His God was a finite deity who is somehow identical with an evolutionary process which he called "the growth of Thirdness". This quaint term signifies the gradual linking of everything up with everything else through triadic relationships. Rather strangely, and without much in the way of argument, Peirce took all triadic relationships to be sign-relations, and vice versa. His philosophy of language was intertwined with a quasi-idealistic metaphysics.

James and Dewey both admired Peirce, and shared his sense that philosophy must come to terms with Darwin. But they sensibly paid little attention to his metaphysics of Thirdness. Instead they focused on the profound anti-Cartesian implications of Peirce's development of Bain's initial anti-representationalist insight. They developed a non-representationalist theory of belief acquisition and testing which culminates in James' claim that "'The true'... is only the expedient in our way of thinking'. James and Dewey both wanted to reconcile philosophy with Darwin by making human beings' pursuit of the true and the good continuous with the activities of the lower animals — cultural evolution with biological evolution.

All three of the founding pragmatists combined a naturalistic,

Darwinian view of human beings with a distrust of the problems which philosophy had inherited from Descartes, Hume and Kant. All three hoped also to save moral and religious ideals from empiricist or positivist scepticism. It is important, however, not to be blinded by these similarities, and by the fact that the three men are always treated as members of a single "movement", to the fact that they had very different philosophical concerns.

Although the three knew and respected the other two, the motives that drove them to philosophy were very different. Peirce thought of himself as a disciple of Kant, improving on Kant's doctrine of categories and his conception of logic. A practicing mathematician and laboratory scientist, he was more interested in these areas of culture than were James or Dewey. James took neither Kant nor Hegel very seriously, but was far more interested in religion than either Peirce or Dewey. Dewey, deeply influenced by Hegel, was fiercely anti-Kantian. Education and politics, rather than science or religion, were at the center of his thought.

Although he viewed most metaphysical and theological disputes as, at best, evidence of the laudable diversity of human temperament, James hoped to construct an alternative to the anti-religious, science-worshipping, positivism of his day. He approvingly cited Giovanni Papini's description of pragmatism as "like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an atheistic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith; in a third a chemist investigating a body's properties... they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it." His point was that attention to the implications of beliefs for practice offered the only way to communicate across divisions between temperaments, academic disciplines, and philosophical schools. In particular, such attention offered the only way to mediate between the claims of religion and those of science.

Dewey, in his early period, tried to bring Hegel together with evangelical Christianity. Although references to Christianity almost disappear from his writings around 1900, in a 1903 essay on Emerson he still looked forward to the development of "a philosophy which religion has no call to chide, and which knows its friendship with science and with art." The anti-positivist strain in classical pragmatism was at least as strong as its anti-metaphysical strain.

Dewey saw changes in individual attitudes, in public policies, and

in strategies of acculturation as three interlinked aspects of the gradual development of freer and more democratic communities, and of the better sort of human being who would be developed within such communities. All of Dewey's books are permeated by the typically nineteenth-century conviction that human history is the story of expanding human freedom, and by the hope of substituting a less professionalized, more politically-oriented, conception of the philosopher's task for the Platonic conception of the philosopher as "spectator of time and eternity." He thought that Kant, especially in his moral philosophy, had preserved that Platonic conception.

In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920) Dewey wrote that "under disguise of dealing with ultimate reality, philosophy has been occupied with the precious values embedded in social traditions... has sprung from a clash of social ends and from a conflict of inherited institutions with incompatible contemporary tendencies." For him, the task of future philosophy was not to achieve new solutions to traditional problems, but to clarify "men's ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day." This historicist conception of philosophy, which developed out of Hegel's and resembled Marx's, has made Dewey less popular among analytic philosophers than Peirce or James. His intense concern with parochially American political and social issues has also served to limit interest in his work. Yet precisely because of his self-conscious historicism Dewey was, I believe, the classical pragmatist whose work will have the greatest utility in the long term.

Whether or not Dewey is the most useful of the three classical pragmatists, Peirce seems to me the least useful. My main reason for thinking Peirce relatively unimportant is that he does not become engaged, in the way in which James and Dewey did become engaged, with the problem which dominated Kant's thought and which was at the center of 19th century thought in every Western country: the problem of how to reconcile science and religion, how to be faithful both to Newton and Darwin and to the spirit of Christ. That problem is the paradigm of the sort of conflict between old ways of speaking and new cultural developments which Dewey took it to be the philosopher's task to resolve.

The need to reconcile science and religion was all-important for Dewey during his first thirty years, and for James throughout his life. By contrast, Peirce's discussion of it consists of rather banal remarks

— remarks which were the commonplaces of 19th-century thought. We find him saying, for example, that the apparent clash between these two areas of culture is the result of “the unphilosophical narrowness of those who guard the mysteries of worship.” He rejects the suggestion that he is “to be prevented from joining in that common joy at the revelation of enlightened principles of religion which we celebrate at Christmas and Easter because I think that certain scientific, logical and metaphysical ideas which have been mixed up with these principles are untenable”. (6.427) He says that the only distinctive thing about Christianity is the idea that love is the only law (6.440-1) and that Christianity’s ideal “is that the whole world shall be united in the bond of a common love of God accomplished by each man’s loving his neighbor”. (6.443) This is a pretty standard 19th-century anglophone way of following up on Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. It amounts to saying that you can have Christian ethics without Christian theology, and therefore without interfering with Newtonian cosmology or Darwinian accounts of human origins.

This easy compromise struck James and Dewey, as it struck Nietzsche, as *too* easy. This is because these men took religion a lot more seriously than Peirce ever did. Peirce was raised an Episcopalian, claimed that that was the only religion for a gentleman, and never interpreted the various personal crises he experienced in religious terms.

James, by contrast, was raised by his eccentric father on a kind of idiosyncratic blend of Swedenborg and Emerson. Though he and his siblings had the good sense not to take their father’s idiosyncratic theological *ideas* with any great seriousness, William took his father’s religious *experiences* very seriously indeed. He suffered the same sort of spiritual crises as had afflicted Henry James, Sr., and was never sure whether to describe them in psychological or religious language.

Dewey was the only one of the three classical pragmatists to have had a really strenuous religious upbringing — the only one to have encountered religion, so to speak, in its full fury. He was also the only one who ever swallowed it full strength. His mother continually asked him “Are you right with Jesus?” and his biographers agree that belated resentment at his mother’s meddling piety was central to the formation of Dewey’s mature thought.

Despite the fact that James never had to cast off an orthodoxy

imposed in his youth, the need to bring his father into the same intellectual universe as that inhabited by his scientifically-oriented friends (such as Peirce and Chauncey Wright), was very important in shaping his thought. I suspect that we owe the pragmatist theory of truth of truth to this need. For the underlying motive of that theory is to give us a way to reconcile science and religion by viewing them not as two competing ways of representing reality, but rather as two non-competing ways of producing happiness. I take the anti-representationalist view of thought and language to have been motivated, in James' case, by the realization that the need for choice between competing representations can be replaced by tolerance for a plurality of non-competing descriptions, descriptions which serve different purposes and which are to be evaluated by reference to their utility in fulfilling these purposes rather than by their "fit" with the objects being described.

If James' watchword was tolerance, then Dewey's was, as I have said, anti-authoritarianism. His revulsion from the sense of sinfulness which his religious upbringing had produced led Dewey to campaign, throughout his life, against the view that human beings needed to measure themselves against something non-human. Dewey used the term "democracy" to mean something like what Habermas means by the term "communicative reason": for him, the word sums up the idea that human beings should regulate their actions and beliefs by the need to join with other human beings in cooperative projects, rather than by the need to stand in the correct relation to something non-human. This is why he grabbed hold of James' pragmatic theory of truth.

Although James will always be the most sympathetic and most readable of the three classical pragmatists, Dewey was, I think, the most imaginative. This is because he was the most historically-minded: the one who learned from Hegel how to tell great sweeping stories about the relation of the human present to the human past. Dewey's stories are always stories of the progress from the need of human communities to rely on a non-human power to their realization that all they need is faith in themselves; they are stories about the substitution of fraternity for authority. His stories about history as the story of increasing freedom are stories about how we lost our sense of sin, and also our hope of another world, and gradually acquired the ability to find the same spiritual significance in cooperation between finite

mortals that our ancestors had found in their relation to an immortal being. His way of clarifying “men’s ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day” was to ask his contemporaries to consider the possibility that weekday cooperation in building democratic communities could provide everything “higher” — everything which had once been reserved for weekends. His way of making practise prior to theory was to say that both philosophy and religion were of value only insofar as they put the traditionally “higher” to everyday use.

3. PRAGMATISM AS LIBERATION FROM THE PRIMAL FATHER

Freud’s account of the origin of conscience provides a good handle by which to grasp Dewey’s motives. For the dialectical standoff in contemporary analytic philosophy between pragmatists and their “realist” opponents (Nagel, Dworkin, Searle, et al.) is usefully thought of as the reciprocal unintelligibility to one another of two very different types of people. The first are those whose highest hopes are for union with something beyond the human — something which is the source of one’s superego, and which has the authority to free one of guilt and shame. The second are those whose highest hopes are for a better human future, to be attained by more fraternal cooperation between human beings. These two types of people are conveniently describable in Freudian terms: they are the people who think subjection to an authority-figure is necessary to lead a properly human life and those who see such a life as requiring freedom from any such subjection (2).

Hans Blumenberg has argued that the Renaissance was a period in

(2) For a good example of this contrast within recent anglophone moral philosophy, see some remarks of Thomas Nagel at pp. 206-207 of his “Reply” to Cristine Korsgaard, included in Korsgaard’s *The sources of normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). There Nagel says that a self-description, a sense of one’s own moral identity — a sense that one could not live with oneself if one performed a certain action — is not a sufficient account of the reason why one should not perform that action. “The real reason,” Nagel says, “is whatever would *make* it impossible for him to live with himself...”. Nagel goes on to say that unless there is some non-empirical Kant-style, universalistic, account of what moral identity one *should* have, then “morality is an illusion.” Dewey, early in his career, rejected Kantian in favor of Hegelian ethics. After he read Darwin, he abandoned Hegelianism in favor of a naturalistic account of the rise of democratic societies and of the emergence of the Enlightenment ideals which Hegel and Kant shared. Eventually his *bête*

which people turned from eternity to futurity. This turn is the one which, in my view, is fully accomplished, in the area of philosophy, only by pragmatism. The de-eternalization of human hope had to wait four hundred years to become philosophically explicit. The representationalist tradition in philosophy which was dominant in those four hundred years hoped that inquiry would put us in touch, if not with the eternal, at least with something which, in Bernard Williams' phrase, "is there anyway" — something non-perspectival, something which is what it is apart from human needs and interests. Pragmatists do not think inquiry can put us more in touch with non-human reality than we have always been, for the only sense of "being in touch" they recognize is causal interaction (as opposed to accurate representation). So in their view the only question is: will human life be better in the future if we adopt this belief, this practise, or that institution?

Freud, in his last and wackiest book, *Moses and Monotheism*, offers us an account of human progress which complements Blumenberg's. There he tells the story of how social cooperation emerges from parricide, from the murder of the primal father by the primal band of brothers:

It must be supposed that after the parricide a considerable time elapsed during which the brothers disputed with one another for their father's heritage, which each of them wanted for himself alone. A realization of the dangers and uselessness of these struggles, a recollection of the act of liberation which they had accomplished together, and the emotional ties with one another which had arisen during the period of their expulsion, led at last to an agreement among them, a sort of social contract.

[But] recollection of their father persisted at this period of the 'fraternal alliance'. A powerful animal — at first, perhaps, always one that was feared as well — was chosen as a substitute for the father... On the one hand the totem was regarded as the clan's blood ancestor and protective spirit, who must be worshipped and protected, and on the other hand a festival was appointed at which the same fate was prepared for him that the primal father had met with. He was killed and devoured by all the tribesmen in common... (S.E., v. 23, 82-3)

noir became the doctrine which Nagel makes explicit: that something less contingent and more universal than the empirical, environmental conditions which shape a human being's moral identity is necessary if morality is not to be an illusion.

Freud goes on to argue that totemism was “the first form in which religion was manifested in history”, and to claim that “the first step away from totemism was the humanizing of the being who was worshipped”. This humanization produced first a mother-goddess, and then polytheism of mixed genders. Polytheism was succeeded by the great patriarchal monotheisms, through a process which phallogocentrists call “purification” and which Freud regarded as a recapturing of psycho-historical truth. In these religions, the murdered father was restored to his rightful role as one who demanded unconditional obedience, although he was now banished from the earth to the sky.

Platonism, one can imagine Freud saying, was a depersonalized version of this sort of monotheism — a further attempt at so-called purification. In this depersonalized form, proper respect for a dehumanized father-figure is shown not by obedience to him but by an attempt to become identical with him. We do this by surrendering everything in us which separates us from him (such as space, time, and the body). We good sons aim at becoming identical, so to speak, with good, kind, loving, generous aspects of father, while ignoring the violent and willful aspects. Platonism gives us a way of imitating, so to speak, all that was great and good and admirable in our fathers without having to imitate their unpleasant idiosyncrasies. We wish, by purifying ourselves, to become identical with what father *would* have been like if he had ever managed to behave decently. The Idea of the Good is the idea of Father, stripped of his more terrifying parts and passions.

In the broad sense of the word “metaphysics” which Heidegger employs when he says that metaphysics is Platonism and Platonism metaphysics, metaphysics looks to pragmatists like an attempt to snuggle up to something so pure and good as to be not really human, while still being enough like a loving parent so that it can be loved with all one’s heart and soul and strength. Plato’s infatuation with mathematics — the paradigm of something neither willful nor arbitrary nor violent, something which embodies *anagke* with no trace of *bia* — gave him the model for this being: the bare outline of the father-figure, so to speak, without any distracting detail.

Freud’s interest in Plato was in fact restricted almost entirely to the discussions of Eros and of androgyny in the *Symposium*. But imagine him turning his skeptical intelligence toward Plato’s Theory of Ideas.

Had he done so, I think that he would have seen worship of the bare Idea of Father as the origin of the conviction that it is *knowledge*, rather than love, which is the most distinctively human achievement. For Plato arranged things so that we could please Father best by doing mathematics, or, at a second best, mathematical physics.

This conviction of the importance of knowledge runs through the history of what Derrida calls “the metaphysics of presence” — the history of the Western search for a still point in the turning world, something one can always rely on, always come home to, something, as Derrida says, “beyond the reach of play”. The quest for such a reassuring presence is, for all those who resonate to Aristotle’s claim that “all men by nature desire to know”, the proper way of life for the good child. To devote oneself to getting knowledge as opposed to opinion — to grasping unchanging structure as opposed to awareness of mutable and colorful content — one has to believe that one will be cleansed, purified of guilt and shame, by getting closer to something like Truth or Reality. When opponents of pragmatism say that pragmatists do not believe in truth, they are saying that pragmatists do not grasp the need for such closeness, and therefore do not see the need for purification. They are, their metaphysically-inclined opponents suggest, *shameless* in their willingness to revel in the mutable and impermanent. Like women and children, they seem to have no super-ego, no conscience, no spirit of seriousness ⁽³⁾.

As Blumenberg sees it, the repersonalization of God which occurred when Christianity took over eventually turned itself inside out. It did so when Occam drew the voluntaristic consequences of Divine Otherness, and thereby helped reduce monotheism, if not to absurdity, at least to unusability by the intellectuals. Occamism made the will of our Father in Heaven so inscrutable that all connection snapped between his will and our desires, between us and Him. He became less like somebody to get close to than somebody who could tolerate no relation save sheer obedience. He ceased to be a possible object of contemplation and rapport, and became something as inscrutable and unpredictable as he was fierce and unforgiving. So the

(3) See Kant’s hilarious section on the differences between the sexes in his *Observations on the feeling of the sublime and the beautiful*. Women, according to Kant, cannot act from principle, cannot act morally, because they don’t have any sense for the sublime — they cannot feel the awe which is appropriate before patriarchal authority.

rediscovery of Plato by the Renaissance humanists repeated the move toward depersonalization, and the turn from theology to metaphysics, which had been made when the Idea of the Good offered a purified form of worship to pagan intellectuals.

Dewey never read any Freud to speak of, but if he had I think that he would have accepted Freud's account of the maturation of humanity, and he could have used it to strengthen and supplement his own story of how the West overcame Greek dualisms in the course of inventing modern technology and modern liberal societies — two inventions which he took to be part of the same anti-authoritarian movement. He would have seen the successive de-centering performed by Copernicus, Darwin and Freud himself as helpful in forcing us to stop looking outside the human community for salvation, and making us instead explore the possibilities offered by social cooperation. In particular, I think that he might have seen modern democratic societies as founded on, as it were, fraternity alone — that is to say, fraternity freed from memory of paternal authority. Only pragmatism, he might have remarked, reaps the full advantage of that primal parricide.

Only in a democratic society which describes itself in pragmatist terms, one can imagine Dewey saying, is the refusal to countenance any authority save that of consensus reached by free inquiry complete. Only then can the fraternity which was first glimpsed when the primal father was killed by the band of brothers be achieved. This achievement had been deferred by the many attempts, made over many millenia, to come to terms with the spectre of the murdered father: the attempts which make up the history of monotheism and of metaphysics. It will no longer be deferred, Dewey thought, once we come to treat our collective superego, our collective sense of what counts as a moral abomination, as having no authority separate from that of tradition, and when we treat tradition itself as endlessly malleable and revisable by its inheritors.

4. CONCLUSION

I have discussed elsewhere James' and Dewey's solutions to the problem of reconciling science with theology, and have argued that Dewey was more successful than James in purifying religion of the

appeal to authority ⁽⁴⁾. This was, I think, because James got a kick out of sublimity — out of the sense of limitlessness — whereas Dewey did not. James, in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, is a connoisseur of unusual experiences. His reaction to reports of the rapture of the soul is like his reaction to the experience of the San Francisco earthquake of 1907: he wanted the earthquake to become more intense, to show what it could *really* do.

Dewey seems to have been incapable of such connoisseurship, and of any Bataille-like fascination with the extreme. His taste is for the beautiful. His only acknowledgement of the sublime consists in his hope that the contingently produced series of better and better societies will continue indefinitely into an unimaginably better future. This was the hope that that democracy would produce ever more beautiful forms of human cooperation and mutual enjoyment, ever more complex ways of satisfying novel human needs. Dewey relished the imagined spectacle of every richer, ever more diverse, forms of human fraternity. But he was devoid both of the need to abase himself before authority, and of sympathy with those who find such abasement thrilling. As he saw it, his anti-authoritarianism was a stage in the gradual replacement of a morality of obligation by a morality of love. This is the replacement which, in the West, is thought to have been initiated by certain passages in the New Testament ⁽⁵⁾.

University of Virginia.

(4) See my “Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance” in Ruth-Anna Putnam, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 84-102, and also my “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism” in Morris Dickstein, ed., *The New Pragmatism* (forthcoming in 1998 from Duke University Press).

(5) On Dewey’s relationship to Christianity, see the magisterial study of his religious thought by Steven Rockeller: *John Dewey: Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).