"The Religious": Dewey's Post-Feuerbachian "Sublation" of Religion (and Some Critical Roycean Considerations)[1]

"O Religioso": a "Suprassunção" Pós-Feuerbachiana de Dewey da Religião (e Algumas Considerações Críticas de Royce)

Ludwig Nagl
Department of Philosophy
University of Vienna – Austria}
ludwig.nagl@univie.ac.at

Abstract: Dewey's concept of "the religious" can contribute to the re-opening of a *philosophical* exploration of the public and private role of *religion after the criticism of religion.* His transformation of religion is open to criticism, however. Some questions concerning the post-Feuerbachian character of Dewey's category "the religious" are explored in this text with reference to Hilary Putnam's recent remarks on Dewey's concept of "projection". Other questions arise in view of Richard Rorty's Dewey inspired critique of "clericalism". The final part of this article reflects on the mature work of Josiah Royce, who – in spite of sharing with Dewey a *socio-communal* approach toward religion – tried to philosophically re-read religious motivations (within the framework of his late "peirceanized" pragmatism) in a manner *substantially different* from Dewey's.

Key words: Pragmatism/Neo-pragmatism. Philosophy of Religion. Dewey. Feuerbach. Royce. Putnam. Rorty. Habermas.

Resumo: *O conceito de Dewey de "o religioso" pode contribuir para a reabertura de uma exploração* filosófica *dos papéis público e privado da* religião após a crítica da religião. *A transformação deweyana da religião, contudo, está aberta à crítica. Algumas questões referentes à característica pós-feuerbachiana da categoria "o religioso" de Dewey são exploradas neste texto relativamente aos recentes apontamentos de Hilary Putnam sobre o conceito deweyano de "projeção". Outras questões surgem em vista da inspirada crítica do "clericalismo" de Dewey por Richard Rorty. A parte final deste artigo reflete sobre a obra madura de Josiah Royce que – apesar de compartilhar com Dewey uma abordagem* sócio-comunal *da religião – tentou reler filosoficamente as motivações religiosas (com a estrutura de seu último pragmatismo "peircianizado") de uma maneira* substancialmente diferente *de Dewey.*

---

1   This is the short English version of a considerably longer German article published in: NAGL, Ludwig. *Das verhüllte Absolute. Essays zur zeitgenössischen Religionsphilosophie.* Frankfurt am Main et al: Peter Lang, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2010, p. 125-166. A first draft of the English text presented here was read in June 2009 at the International Symposium *John Dewey at 150:* Art, Culture, and Society, organized by the University of Opole, Poland.

Palavras-chave: *Pragmatismo/Neopragmatismo. Filosofia da Religião. Dewey. Feuerbach. Royce. Putnam. Royce. Rorty. Habermas.*

Introductory remarks

Dewey's reluctance, in the middle period of his intellectual career, to deal with questions of religion *philosophically* is well documented[2]. In Darnell Rucker's book *The Chicago Pragmatists* we find an anecdote which throws some light on the stance Dewey took in the years before 1934 when *A Common Faith[3]* appeared. "Students at Columbia were constantly asking Dewey to say something about religion", the anecdote goes:

> Dewey was finally prevailed upon to read a paper on the subject to the graduate philosophy students, but word got out and people turned up in such numbers that the session was moved to the largest auditorium at Columbia. Dewey was irate. 'They just want to see a monkey hang by his tail', he commented; and he said very little about religion at that meeting.[…] [H]e saw little point in talking about religion [he said later to a colleague], not because he thought it unimportant, but because he considered religion a personal matter.[4]

In 1934, however, Dewey ended his reticence about religion[5]. Milton R. Konvitz, in his introduction to volume 9 of Dewey, *The Later Works*, characterizes the main thrust of *A Common Faith* - the *locus classicus* of Dewey's philosophy of religion - as follows:

> At the outset, [Dewey] said that his intention was to separate the religious phase of religion from the supernatural; to emancipate what is genuinely religious – to allow the religious aspect of experience to develop freely on its own account. This view, he said, will be unsatisfactory to two camps: to those who hold to traditional religions, and to those who hold that all religions are discredited and that everything of a religious nature should be dismissed.

This double move – to re-assess and to critically reconstruct the philosophical core of religions, i.e.: to neither affirm the historical stature of "positive" faiths, nor to reject a religious attitude toward life altogether – re-enacts (transformed, and in part) the complex, bi-coded thought figures that, in the relation of modern philosophy toward religion, were first developed by Kant and Hegel. For Kant, the rational core of religion ("Vernunftglaube") can be brought to the fore only if the many modes of

---

2 Many aspects of Dewey's stance towards religion are analyzed in Part III, Royce and Dewey, in: OPPENHEIM, Frank M. *Reverence for the Relations of Life*: Re-imagining pragmatism via Josiah Royce's interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.
3 DEWEY, John. A Common Faith. *The Later Works*, v. 9. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 1-58. [= CF]
4 RUCKER, Darnell. *The Chicago Pragmatists*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969, p. 107.
5 KONVITZ, Milton R. Introduction. In: DEWEY, John. *The Later Works*, v. 9. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. XIII.

superficial "observances" (the "pseudo-service of God in a statutory religion"[6]) are dissolved by a critical philosophy of religion. This first step is the pre-requisite not for a self-assured, post- religious Enlightenment, however (nor for an Enlightenment, that remains - as Habermas will later say – "un-enlightened about its own limits"), but for a "Vernunftglaube". This *philosophically reconstructed faith* centers around the *postulates, or practical background assumptions,* that warrant, and re-stabilize, our free-standing, autonomous, and community-oriented ethics in a *logic of hope.* The *postulates* of freedom, immortality, and God re-assure us, that our finite endeavors, although they tend to falter and fail, will *ultimately* not be in vain.

In Hegel, the attempt to *conceptually reconstruct* the *core* of religions is embedded in the complex claim that the aesthetic and religious forms of mankind's (still deficient) representations of in-finity can be "aufgehoben" in a comprehensive, historically informed *philosophy of religion.* Instead of altogether shunning away from the concrete historical manifestations of the religious in a pseudo-enlightened way, philosophy has to extensively explore *the historical configurations, and reflective re-specifications,* of our *varied* semantics of finiteness (semantics that, most of the time explicitly and always covertly, presuppose, as their limiting idea, a conception of the absolute[7]). "Aufhebung", in Hegel, thus never means mere *negatio: never "sublation", abstractly read.* In its threefold sense, "Aufhebung" is, first, *critique. But this certainly is not all. It is* at the same time *elevation* - a complex reconstruction -, and *conservation* - the saving of the very core of the (only formally) negated content. Hegel thus closes his 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* with a telling invective against the rise of a new thought mode – *radicalized* Enlightenment – that he sharply distances as a

> vanity of understanding which is displeased by the fact that philosophy still exhibits the truth in religion and demonstrates that reason resides within it. This Enlightenment wants to have nothing further to do with the content, and therefore is highly displeased that philosophy, as conscious, methodical thinking, curbs the fancies, the caprice, and the contingency of thinking.[8]

Dewey's *A Common Faith* – as, on the one hand, *critical* of core elements of the empirico-historical religions (its "traditional supernaturalism" in particular[9]), and as opposed to "*aggressive* atheism"[10], on the other, – participates in *both* classical forms (the Kantian and the Hegelian) of modern philosophies of religion. This participation is, at the same time, limited, since far-reaching differences do exist between Dewey's,

---

6   KANT, Immanuel. *Religion within the Limits of Reason alone.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960, book four, part two, p. 156.

7   Hegel inherits motives from Descartes' third meditation, but transforms them by dialectically deconstructing their "rationalistic" deduction mode. For Hegel, the in-finite is never the (thus *itself finite*) *complementum* of the finite. It is not its mere "transcendent other", but contains in itself, and grounds, the *free-standing* semantics of finiteness.

8   HEGEL, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, v. III, The Consummate Religion. Edited by Peter C. Hodgson. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998, p. 347.

9   CF, p. 36

10 Ibid.

Kant's and Hegel's projects. These differences are not restricted to methodology, however – not to the difference between Kant's "transcendental" argumentation, Hegel's claim that philosophy is a dialectical "Bewegung des Begriffs", and to Dewey's "instrumentalist" analyses of thought and experience. They concern the content or religion itself. Dewey's project to liberate "the religious" from the fetters of "supernaturalism" is (in spite of Dewey's explicit criticisms of both authors) inspired by (some) arguments of Kant and Hegel. But it is even more influenced by the *post-Hegelian* de-composition of Hegel's "absolute dialectic as the dialectic of the Absolute", i.e. by the nineteenth century *radicalization of the concept of religion* introduced, within left-Hegelian discourse, by Feuerbach's "projection theory". Like Feuerbach Dewey tries, on the one hand, to *de-absolutify,* and, on the other, to *"humanize" and re-appropriate,* what he sees as the core of *mankind's* religious energies. In *A Common Faith* he advocates a *de-essentialized and "naturalized"* re-reading of (the formerly dogmatic, and potentially dangerous) religions: *the "religious".*

Dewey's approach may seem promising, since it goes along with, and promotes, the popular, anti-Cartesian (i.e. anti-binary, but nevertheless non-dialectical) thesis of a self-differentiating "continuum" between man and nature. If, for a moment, we make use of Charles Taylor's tri-polar categorization of contemporary attitudes toward religion[11], Dewey is neither, a), a believer in a *transcendent, "supernatural"* God, nor, b), an anti-humanist of the Nietzschean type who harbors a deep distrust *vis-à-vis* the successor category of "the absolute", man. He is rather, c), a *"community-oriented" humanist* who hopes that mankind, in the long run (supported, *inter alias*, by a functional, "adjectival" ideal of "the religious"), will manage to deal with, and to overcome, (most of) its limits.

As a *publico-ethical maxim*, this political "humanism" has great merits[12]. The question remains open, however, how well argued *philosophically* Dewey's (version of) of the "projection theory" of religion really is.[13] My paper will deal with this question in three steps: *First*, I will explore aspects of Dewey's claim by discussing a recent article by the Frankfurt philosopher Thomas M. Schmidt, in which is argued that "Dewey's approach to religion contains an argumentative potential which is still

---

11 See TAYLOR, Charles. Die immanente Gegenaufklärung. In: NAGL, Ludwig Nagl (ed.). *Religion nach der Religionskritik*. Wien: Oldenbourg, and Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003, p. 60-85.

12 This motif finds fuller expression in Dewey's analyses of democracy and education. See NAGL, Ludwig. *Pragmatismus*, chapter 5, John Dewey: Demokratie und Erziehung. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 1998, p. 128-137.

13 See SCHMIDT, Thomas S. Empirischer Naturalismus, demokratisches Experiment und die Erfahrung des Religiösen - John Deweys Philosophie der Religion, *Jahrbuch für Religionsphilosophie*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, Band 7, 2008 [= EN]. Schmidt asks whether Dewey's concept of "the religious" – considered not as a thesis of a philosophy of politics, but as an philosophical argument about religion - does not leave many questions open: "In religionsphilosophischer Hinsicht stellt sich [...] vor allem die Frage, ob Deweys Religionsphilosophie über eine Funktionalisierung der Religion zum Zweck der Stabilisierung der Demokratie und der ethischen Unterfütterung humanistischer Ideale hinausgeht". These worries occur, i.a. "[weil] zwischen der säkular-humanistischen Interpretation des allumfassenden Ideals und seiner religiös motivierten Identifikation mit einer Gottesvorstellung ein asymmetrisches Verhältnis [besteht]." (EN 54-55).

underestimated" (EN 37; translation into English by L.N.): This potential, Schmidt writes, rests on Dewey's thesis "that a naturalistic concept of religious experience has not to stop short at a reductionist causal explanation of religious phenomena." Dewey's pluralized, and socialized, concept of "the religious" can - in the wasteland of contemporary dogmatic reductionisms - contribute to the re-opening of a new *philosophical exploration* of the public and private role of *religion after the criticism of religion.*

But Dewey's transformation of religion – as will be shown in *step two* of my argument – is open to criticism. Some questions concerning Dewey's successor concept of religion, "the religious", will be formulated in reference to Hilary Putnam's recent remarks on Dewey's concept of "projection", as well as to Richard Rorty's Dewey-inspired critique of "clericalism".

The final, *third part* of my presentation will be dedicated to Josiah Royce, who – in spite of sharing with Dewey a *socio-communal* approach toward religion – tried to philosophically re-read religious motivations (within the framework of his late "peirceanized" pragmatism) in a manner *substantially different* from Dewey's.
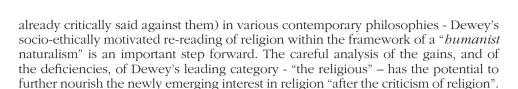
1. Schmidt's defense of Dewey's non-reductionist concept of "the religious"

There is a new interest, in German philosophical discourse, in the anti-reductionist stance that Dewey's analyses of "the religious" takes. The Frankfurt philosopher Thomas M. Schmidt has published in 2008 an article, "Empirischer Naturalismus, demokratisches Experiment und die Erfahrung des Religiösen. John Deweys Philosophie der Religion", in which he argues that Dewey "is still underestimated in contemporary philosophy of religion". The underexplored potential of his thought rests on Dewey's claim "that a naturalistic concept of religious experience has not to stop short at a reductionist causal explanation of religious phenomena" (EN 37; translation L.N.). Due to its humanistic outlook, Dewey's concept of religion does not, however, entail "a metaphysical concept of God in a classical sense." (EN 57). Schmidt remarks that "one might deplore this aspect of Dewey's theory, and see in Peirce's re-habilitation of metaphysical categories and in his attempts at a proof for the existence of God the more convincing variant of a pragmatic philosophy of religion." (Ibid.). But, whatever stance one may take in the end: Dewey's defense of "the religious" is important at the given moment: "In view of the strong naturalistic criticism of religion nowadays", writes Schmidt, "Dewey's position opens up the attractive possibility to reject this reductionism." (Ibid.) It is the strength of Dewey's position, writes Schmidt, that in his analysis of "the religious" Dewey shows that religious experiences "are neither mere psychic natural facts nor metaphysically warranted truths that can be justified independently from the natural and social continuum of experience in which religious persons stand. Thus, Dewey's humanist naturalisms can be strictly separated from any reductionist materialism." (Ibid.) A careful study of Dewey's *pluralized, deinstitutionalized, and socialized* concept of "the religious" can therefore contribute to the re-opening of a philosophical exploration (and not just a critical debunking) of mankind's religious energies.

Schmidt, it seems to me, is right. Compared with the older, materialist modes of "naturalism" - modes that tend to re-appear (forcefully, and not mindful of what was

already critically said against them) in various contemporary philosophies - Dewey's socio-ethically motivated re-reading of religion within the framework of a "*humanist naturalism*" is an important step forward. The careful analysis of the gains, and of the deficiencies, of Dewey's leading category - "the religious" – has the potential to further nourish the newly emerging interest in religion "after the criticism of religion".

2. The "religious" as a "human projection": Dewey's post-Feuerbachian move (plus Putnam's, and Rorty's, comments)

Dewey's pragmatic sublation, and transformation, of (traditional) religions has its merits, but is – at the same time - not unproblematic. This can be shown by starting from, and reflecting on, Hilary Putnam's recent remarks on Dewey (in *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life. Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein*, Afterword)[14]: Putnam describes in this book "his current religious standpoint as 'somewhere between John Dewey's *A Common Faith* and Martin Buber"[15]. He gives a short account of Dewey's position, at the end of which he explicitly puts Dewey's thought in the vicinity of a *projection theory* (that is - as I read this – in the neighborhood of a post-Hegelian theory of religion *of the Feuerbachian type*): Putnam writes:

> In *A Common Faith*, Dewey recognizes that our religious experiences and the conduct that they inspire often have great value. That they can also have negative aspects is something he is well aware of, from, for example, his struggle with the tortured feelings of guilt that he suffered in his youth (and that his biographers ascribe to the extreme version of Calvinism to which his mother subscribed), and from his disappointment at the fact that in his lifetime organized religions so often sided with the powers that be at times of social protest. Indeed, organized religion is not something Dewey ever came to favor. But in [*A Common Faith*] *Dewey views God as a human protection that embodies our highest ideals.*[16]

Dewey himself expresses this core idea – that religions are projections of our human capacities upon a non-human being - in his 1934 treatise as follows: "[T]he values prized in those religions that have ideal elements are idealizations of things characteristic of natural associations, which have then be projected into a supernatural realm for safe-keeping and sanction." (CF 48). Such an externalization of *our* capacities into a

---

14 See SCHMIDT, Thomas S. Empirischer Naturalismus, demokratisches Experiment und die Erfahrung des Religiösen - John Deweys Philosophie der Religion, *Jahrbuch für Religionsphilosophie*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, Band 7, 2008 [= EN]. Schmidt asks whether Dewey's concept of "the religious" – considered not as a thesis of a philosophy of politics, but as an philosophical argument about religion - does not leave many questions open: "In religionsphilosophischer Hinsicht stellt sich […] vor allem die Frage, ob Deweys Religionsphilosophie über eine Funktionalisierung der Religion zum Zweck der Stabilisierung der Demokratie und der ethischen Unterfütterung humanistischer Ideale hinausgeht". These worries occur, i.a. "[weil] zwischen der säkular-humanistischen Interpretation des allumfassenden Ideals und seiner religiös motivierten Identifikation mit einer Gottesvorstellung ein asymmetrisches Verhältnis [besteht]." (EN 54-55).

15 Ibid., p. 101.

16 Ibid. (our italics).

"transcendent" (quasi)essence is, as Dewey argues, an unnecessary reification that can be dissolved – via a critical pragmatic analysis – into an *adjectival*, i.e. generalized and de-institutionalized, *understanding* of the core of the historical religions. Religions can be transformed into *"the religious", into a human quality that is able to accompany all our dedicated actions, be they* in the sciences, in the arts, or in social life.[17] Dewey thus rejects the idea, that the language game of religion has *a specific status* - a status that cannot be substituted *in toto* by functional equivalents. He introduces as the successor category of the traditional religions a generalized notion of religiosity, a "sort of afterglow after other experiences, aesthetic, moral, scientific, or whatever they may be."[18], as Konvitz puts it in his introduction to *A Common Faith*. According to Dewey, if we transform religions more and more into this new adjectival form of "the religious", we will be able to set free, through an increasing deployment of our "social intelligence", those energies of mankind which until now were fettered by the illusionary ideal of a "supernatural". "The objection to the supernatural", Dewey writes, "is that it stands in the way of an effective realization of the sweep and depth of the implications of natural human relations. It stands in the way of using the means that are in our power to make radical changes in these relations." (CF 53).

The image that Dewey paints of "traditional religions" contains – this is my thesis – (at least some of the) core elements of Feuerbach's theory of religion. This, of course, does not mean that Dewey's analyses are directly influenced by an extended study of Feuerbach, or that Dewey's background Feuerbachianism fully defines the new outlook that Dewey's "adjectival" version of religion offers. The fact, that Dewey's - as Putnam says "humanistic" - *projection concept of religion* has a Feuerbachian ring, did not figure prominently in recent literature although it was not overlooked *in toto*. Dewey's background Feuerbachianism is, for instance, mentioned *en passant* in Frank M. Oppenheim's 2005 book *Reverence for the Relations of Life*: "Dewey concurred enough with Ludwig Feuerbach", Oppenheim writes there, "that he viewed the idea of God as [...] a projection arising from anxiety-filled impulses." (370). This assessment fits well into James A. Good's more general thesis, that we should view Dewey, the pragmatist, "as one of the greatest Left Hegelians because he furthers the development of Hegelian philosophy along humanistic and historicist lines."[19]

Feuerbach's post-Hegelian decomposition of Hegel's "*Begriff*" of religion – which, as I claim, is important for any fuller understanding of Dewey - can be characterized, in a nutshell, as follows. Hegel's dialectics between our experiences of

---

17 This upgrading of the "adjectival", and downgrading of the "institutional", is central also for Dewey's reflections on art in *Art and Experience*. See NAGL, Ludwig. Der "adjektivische" Charakter der Kunst: künstlerisches Handeln. In: NAGL, Ludwig. *Pragmatismus.* Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 1998, p. 141-142.

18 KONVITZ, Milton R. Introduction, in CF, p. XXVI. Konvitz suggests that it would make more sense to accept the *particularity* of religious motivations on its own value (as was done by Josiah Royce [see ibid., p. XXVII]): "Dewey, I think", Konvitz writes, "should have recognized the fact that it was possible to have the religious experience as a *primary* experience, with the aesthetic or other values attached to it as secondary qualities." (Ibid. p. XXVI.)

19 GOOD, James. Dewey's "permanent Hegelian deposit": a reply to Hickman and Alexander. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society*, v. 44, n. 4, p. 579, 2008.

finiteness and the idea of the absolute (a complex relationship that, on Hegel's own account, cannot be reduced to one of its "moments" as its reality base, be it to the moment of "the finite" or – equally abstract – to the moment of a merely "transcendent" infinite)[20], gets decomposed, and to de-dialecticized in Feuerbach's projection theory. Feuerbach raises the – by Hegel's own standards linear and abstract - claim, that *we finite subjects* (as the only *real* reality) imagine, and inadvertently produce "the absolute". Finite men create the illusion of a trans-human being which *supernaturally incorporates* the ideal of mankind's own perfection. (Descartes, in his "Third Mediation", has raised serious questions *avant la lettre* against the viability of this move by which Feuerbach tries to suspend – in view of the perfectibility of finite subjectivity – the, so Descartes, un-suspendable limiting notion of finiteness, infinity.[21]) In standard accounts of Feuerbach[22], his Hegel-critical projection theory is summed up as follows: Man, "in thinking the Creator, projects his essence."[23]

---

20 For a short analysis of the structure of Hegel's "Aufhebungs"-thesis see NAGL, Ludwig. Der Philosophie geht es nicht darum, die Religion umzustoßen. Ist Hegel – als Religionsphilosoph –"a thinker of the future"? (Derrida/Malabou und Royce). In: *Viele Religionen – eine Vernunft? Ein Disput zu Hegel.* NAGL-DOCEKAL, Herta; KALTENBACHER, Wolfgang; NAGL, Ludwig (eds.). Wien: Böhlau, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008, p. 88-105.

21 Descartes raises in his "Third Meditation" the (proto-Feuerbachian) question: „Perhaps all these perfections that I attribute to God are somewhat in me potentially, although they do not yet assert themselves and are not yet reduced to act. For I now observe that my knowledge is gradually being increased; I see nothing that stands in the way of my knowledge being increased more and more to infinity, I see no reason why, with my knowledge thus increased, I cannot acquire all the remaining perfections of God. And, finally, if the potential for producing these perfections is in me already, I see no reason why this potential does not suffice to produce the idea of these perfections." Descartes rejects this proto-Feuerbachian argument, however, when he writes: "*Yet none of these things can be the case.* [My emphasis, L.N.] First, while it is true that my knowledge is gradually increased and that in me there are many elements in potency which do not yet exist in act, nevertheless, none of these elements pertain to the idea of God, in which nothing whatever is potential; this gradual increase is itself a most certain argument for my imperfection." [Hegel, this may be added at this point, will call such a "gradual increase" later "schlechte Unendlichkeit".] Descartes continues his critique as follows: "Moreover, although my knowledge might always increase more and more, nevertheless I understand that this knowledge will never by this means be infinite in act, because it will never reach a point where is incapable of greater increase. On the contrary, I judge God to be infinite in act, with the result that nothing can be added to his perfection." (DESCARTES, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy.* Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1979, p. 31.) According to this, the conceptual pair *finiteness/infinity* cannot be dissolved in on direction: finiteness cannot be the "real" basis that "produces" the mere illusion of God.

22 I follow in my short account Frederick Coplestone's characterization of the core motif of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity.* See COPLESTONE, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, v.VII. New York: Image Books, 1985, p. 296-97.

23 As Feuerbach says: "Gott ist das offenbare Innere, das ausgesprochene Selbst des Menschen; die Religion die feierliche Enthüllung der verborgenen Schätze des Menschen, das Eingeständnis seiner innersten Gedanken, das öffentliche Bekenntnis seiner Liebesgeheimnisse." (FEUERBACH, Ludwig. *Das Wesen des Christentums*, Kapitel II, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1956.)

> [T]his human self-projection expresses man's alienation from himself: religion is thus [in Feuerbach's own words], 'the separation of man from himself: he sets God over against himself as an opposed being. God is not what man is, and man is not what God is […]. Thus by projecting his essence into a transcendent sphere and objectifying it as God, man reduces himself to a pitiful, miserable, sinful creature.[24]

Religion is therefore something to be overcome. Christianity, according to Feuerbach, has – at least indirectly – prepared the way for this necessary overcoming, since "in the doctrine of the Incarnation, [it] has united the word *Man* with the word *God* in the one name *God-Man*, thus making humanity an attribute of the supreme Being. What remains is, according to Feuerbach, to reverse the relation by making Deity an attribute of man." Thus, his critique of religion has, 'in accordance with the truth, made *this [former*, L.N.] *attribute (humanity)* the substance, and has made the predicate the subject'."[25]

For Feuerbach, the ideal of perfection, which – in its alienated form – is tied to the concept of a transcendent God, is at the same time of the highest importance, since the predicates that are at work in this "projection" are all not only valid (that is: the ideals of justice, of love, of forgiveness attributed to God, are no mere "subjectivist" fantasies), but are, indeed, the best normative ideals mankind is able to develop. The profound error of religion is that these predicates of perfection are (illegitimately) attributed to the fantastic essence of an extra-human, "supernatural" entity. The result of Feuerbach's critique is thus (as his contemporaries - enemies and friends alike - were quick to point out) *a "pious" humanism[26]* which – *by means of a post-religious, atheist religiosity* - tries to re-appropriate and to deploy the alienated religious energies within "Menschengattung" (the human race).

Dewey seems to share, more or less explicitly, most of the core elements of this Feuerbachian argument. Not only is "projection" the lead category of his philosophical critique of (traditional forms of) religion. Dewey also inherits, and expands, – by means of his de-limited, and generalized, *adjectival* conception of the "religious" - Feuerbach's *humanist "piousness"*. "The religious attitude", Dewey argues in *A Common Faith*, can be found in all areas of dedicated human action, "in art, science, and good citizenship" (CF 17). But in addition to Feuerbach he concedes – and this is the core of his post-Feuerbachian amendment, and pragmatic alteration, of Feuerbach's *a-theistic* projection theory – that people, if they want to, are free to continue to use the term "God": not in order to characterize an existing, non-finite being, but in order to signify the "unification" of our "ideal possibilities" (the "active relation between ideal and actual"). After making this "benevolent" gesture [to use a term originally used by Bertrand Russell to characterize William James's philosophy of religion], Dewey is quick to add, however: "I would *not insist* that the name [God] must be given" [to this unification]) (CF 34). To read it in a secular "humanist" way

---

24 COPLESTONE, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, v.VII, p.296f.

25 Ibid.

26 Max Stirner, in particular, underscored (and attacked) this "pious" character of Feuerbach's "anthropological" move. See: Stirners systematische Destruktion des Göttlichen und des Menschlichen. In: LÖWITH, Karl. *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche, Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Hamburg: Meiner, 1995, p. 381.

– that seems to be the *subtext* of his aside – will be perfectly all right, and probably: even more consequent.

Let us revert – after this detour - to Putnam's reflections on Dewey. Putnam acknowledges, as we have heard, the quasi-Feuerbachian status of Dewey's claims: that religion is "a projection. At the beginning of his remarks on *A Common Faith* he does not put this assessment into question (by, for instance, comparing this analysis with the claims that, from a first person perspective, "traditional" religious believers in most historical religions[27] raise). Putnam first emphasizes something different. He writes: When Dewey "views God as a *human* projection that embodies our highest ideals", I [Hilary Putnam]

> understand Dewey to be saying that the kind of reality God has is *the reality of an ideal*. Some people, we know, feel that this kind of reality is merely subjective. But Dewey did not believe that ideas and values are 'subjective' in the sense of being outside the spheres of rational argument and *objective validity*. Our values and ideals are indeed subjective in the sense of being the values of *subjects*, of human individuals and communities. But which values and ideals enable us to grow and flourish is not a mere matter of "subjective opinion"; it is something one can be right or wrong about.[28]

Putnam thereby insists on a hard-won, post-analytical insight: on the insight, that is, that values, and, for that matter, *our perfection ideals*, are neither mere "subjectivist", emotive whims, nor are they located beyond (publically valid) justification demands and standards. Putnam thus defends – *with Dewey, and against the analytic proponents of a strict "fact-value-dichotomy"* - the rational status of the de-essentialized, ethical contents of religions. *Pragmatism and (valid) ideals go hand in hand.* A "practical faith in ideal ends", Putnam agrees with Dewey, is no illusion (CF 57). It is not, in Dewey's words, "shadowy and wavering". In this regard, Schmidt, Putnam, and I (L.N.)[29] fully agree with the non-reductionist stance – the stance "beyond the fact-value-dichotomy"- which Dewey's pragmatism promotes in the area of practical philosophy (and of its regulative ideals).

What is of importance, however, in regard to our question about the convincingness of the "projection" metaphor itself, is that Putnam gives Dewey's post-"Feuerbachian" reading of religion – at the next stage of his considerations – a new twist. This second look is, not primarily informed by Dewey, but rather by (elements of) the philosophy of religion of Martin Buber. Putnam thus starts to re-investigate, and to partially subvert, facets of Dewey's Feuerbachian "projection"-theory. He emphasizes, that the images, or ideals of perfection, that organize the content of traditional conceptions of God (and supposedly re-appear, de-essentialized, and de-

---

27 Putnam rejects the talk of "construction" as inadequate at a different stage of his book. In its Levinas chapter he argues that – with regard to the others/the Other – "a genuine ethical relation to another presupposes that you realize that the other person is an independent reality and not in any way your construction." (PUTNAM, Hilary. *Jewish Philosophy*, p. 78.)

28 Ibid., p. 101.

29 NAGL, Ludwig. *Pragmatismus*, chapter 5, John Dewey: Die Kontinuität zwischen Forschungslogik und ethischem Experiment. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 1998, p. 122-128.

alienated, in Dewey's adverbial "religious"), cannot be (or to put it more cautiously: cannot be *immediately*) identified with the discursively articulated predicates that inform, and practically inspire, our advanced ethical, political, and legal debates. "God", Putnam writes,

> is *not* an ideal of the same kind as Equality or Justice. The traditional believer – and this is something I [Putnam] share with the traditional believer, even if I don't share his or her belief in an afterlife, or in the supernatural – visualizes God as a supremely wise, kind, just person. Although many intellectuals are afraid of this sort of "anthropomorphism" because they are afraid (as Maimonides was already afraid) that it will be taken literally, I feel that it need not to be 'taken literally', but is still far more valuable than any metaphysical concept of an impersonal God, let alone a God who is "totally other". Thus I [Putnam] understand, in my own way to be sure, what Buber is talking about when he speaks of a "I-You" relation to God [30].

These reflections, I think, are important, if we want to dig deeper into Dewey's core claims in the field of religion. Putnam sides, on the one hand, with Dewey's rejection of "the supernatural" (i.e. with his criticism of a concept of God that is *defined by a mere negation of our finite [i.e. then: god-less] nature*). Elements of this critical move can be found in many modern discourses on religion. Already in Kant a negative, onto-theological concept of a "*meta*-physical" God is shown to be theoretically inde-monstrable. And Hegel never tires to point out that any abstractly "transcendent" (i.e. any merely "un-endlich") conception of God is but a "Verstandesprodukt": a product of the binary distinctions that "understanding" - *"Verstand", as the locus of strict abstract oppositions* - posits, and that dialectical reason – through its mediations of the finite and the absolute, suspends. A God, whose essence is *the mere inversion of the finite as "transcendent"* is thus criticized by Hegel as nothing but an - itself finite - illusion: as "schlechte Unendlichkeit als eine verständige Illusion". But Putnam goes beyond any mere affirmation of these criticisms of an *abstract* "supernatural". He articulates also, and at once, his concern regarding any narrow reading, and affirmation, of the Feuerbachian disillusionment theory of God. Putnam insists that in many of its traditional forms the semantic content, and pragmatic action scheme, of religious motivations – expressed in the first person perspective of a participant in the language game of religion - is closely connected to the idea of a person-to-person relationship between the finite and the divine. God, as a religious "ideal" – in monotheisms, and in many other forms of religion – can, it seems, be *only imperfectly reconceived as* the inter- and intra-social relation and "unification" of "humankind" in view of humanities *own* ideals of perfection. This ideal is rather seen (for instance in its philosophical reconstruction in the postulates of Kant's "Vernunftglauben") as a living relation with, and trust into, a "saving" personal force *greater than me (*and, for that matter, also greater than *us*). This relation is thus, *first*, a relation that excludes the option that one of the *relata* is "impersonal" (which would be the case in, for instance, the idea of a relation of *finite subjects* to the universe as sum total of a nature containing all *objects*). And, *secondly*, this religiously interpreted I-Thou relation excludes the notion that there exists an totally unbridgeable distance between the *relata*: a transrational,

---

30 PUTNAM, Hilary. *Jewish Philosophy,* p.102.

even a-rational abyss between "us" and a "*totally* other".[31] (These two readings, or rather: misreading, of the possibility of a relationship to the divine were, by the way, ruled out already – via a problematic scholastico-Aristotelian ontology, however – in the medieval notion of *analogia entis* which specified two conditions for a valid talk of God: that the concepts used in it are neither used in a mere homologous, nor in a mere heterologous, but in an analogous manner. In this way, the argument ran, we can, *on the one hand*, avoid the abstract identification of man and God - avoid, say, the idea that God is an imaginary product, a perfected self-image, of man -, and stay clear, on the other, from claiming the opposite, that this relation must be seen as a totally irreconcilable alterity between Him and us finite humans.)

But, certainly, Putnam's half-affirmative and half-critical, *risky*, first-person re-reading of Dewey's philosophy of religion is *only one* of the voices that are to be heard in the contemporary, post-analytical discourse on "the religious". There is also another, less hesitant, neo-pragmatist voice that, without much wavering, supports Dewey's post-Hegelian *"Aufhebung"* of religion. Richard Rorty, in one of his late texts, "Anticlericalism and Atheism", articulates his own - as he says *not atheistic, but "anticlerical"* - position in the area of religion in a short statement that ends with an (uncommented) quote from Dewey's 1934 treatise. "Of course, we anticlericalists who are leftists in politics", Rorty writes,

> have a […] reason for hoping that institutionalized religion will eventually disappear. We think otherworldliness dangerous because, as John Dewey put it, "Men have never full used the powers they possess to advance the good in life, because they have waited upon some power external to themselves and to nature to do the work they are responsible for doing."(*A Common Faith*, p.31).[32]

This claim, it seems to me, – at least in its general form – is not easy to defend. Even if it is true that religions were, and still are, misused to function – in Marx's words - as "opium of the people", it would be unfair to overlook that religious motivations which according to Dewey's categorization count as "traditional" were often not only not detrimental to, but supportive of, elaborate socio-communal activities, and encouraged (as the third-world projects of many religious denominations demonstrate) innovation and the establishment of progressive institutions.[33] More generally

---

31 This holds true, for instance, for the concept of God in Judaism as well as in Christianity, as Nicolas Wolterstorff has recently argued *vis-à- vis* some postmodern theories: "The Hebrew bible/Old Testament tells us that we are created as icons of the Holy One; God is not *ganz anders* [..]; and the New Testament, as interpreted in conciliar Christianity, tells us that in Jesus of Nazareth God had dwelt among us to the extent of joining our nature with his in that person that was and is Jesus Christ." (WOLTERSTORFF, Richard. The Religious Turn in Philosophy and Art. In: *Religion nach der Religionskritik* [NAGL, Ludwig, ed.]. Oldenbourg Verlag: Wien, Akademie Verlag: Berlin, 1999, p. 278.)

32 RORTY, Richard. Anticlericalism and Atheism. In: RORTY, Richard and VATTIMO, Gianni. *The Future of Religion* (ZABALA, Santiago, ed.). New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 33. (See also p.40, footnote 2).

33 Milton R. Konvitz, in his introduction to Dewey's *A Common Faith*, also criticizes Dewey along these lines: "The record would show", he writes, "that many persons, believing in a transcendent God, worked on the earth to do what God had left undone; that a belief in the supernatural inspired them with the courage and strength they needed to fulfill their

speaking, and in addition to these empirico-historical asides, it might be argued that it never was the point of *religions that try to live up to their own standards* to provide excuses for our inactivity in situations that we are actively able to change. Quite on the contrary: their practical potential consists in the capacity to restore strength in individuals, and in communities, in situations where they experience their real, and not just imagined limits.

3. Some Royce-inspired questions

In his transformation of religion into "the religious", Dewey closely ties all arguments (and all possible answers) to his core vision of – to use Charles Taylor's term – an "exclusive humanism" (that is: to the idea of a *naturalized, "pious"* humanism without recourse to a "supernatural", or transcendent, God). This strategy differs significantly from other explorations of religion within pragmatism, particularly from the – semiotically induced – "objective idealism" and "theism" of Charles Sanders Peirce, and from the – "triadic", i.e. interpretation-centered - philosophical reconstruction of, *inter alias*, "Church", as the "Beloved community", in the late, Peirceanized philosophy of Josiah Royce.[34] Frank M. Oppenheim recently pointed out that – compared with other strata of the emergent pragmatism discourse on religion - Dewey's *A Common Faith* "suffers from certain omissions". Interestingly enough, Dewey avoided entering, at least more extensively, the religion-focused discourse that was emerging, at his lifetime, at Harvard: "Not only "Peirce's 'A Neglected Argument' seems not to have registered with Dewey, despite of James's enthusiastic response and Royce's published references to it", writes Oppenheim. Dewey also "bypassed Royce's approach to the Interpreter-Spirit in the *Problem of Christianity*, and the purified notion of God, formed by a synthesis of Greek, Judaic, and Indic religious traditions, in Royce's article 'Monotheism'."[35]

What Dewey opts for instead is the idea that "nature" itself can be read as "closure". Dewey's adjectival "religious" – that our dedicated actions in science, in the arts, and in public life do have, as Konvitz puts it, "a kind of afterglow" which we are justified to call "religious" - is, considered *in abstracto*, a merely cumulative concept: a "collection", or aggregate, of finite experiences. It thus needs, as Dewey knows, in order to get some stability, a form of closure which – along the line of Dewey's basic

---

ideals, which they saw as goals set for them by God." (KONVITZ, Milton R. Introduction to Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. XXIX.)
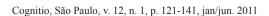
34 For a short survey of these pragmatist positions see NAGL, Ludwig. Pragmatistische Handlungshorizonte. Erwägungen zur Tiefenstruktur des Zukunftsbegriffs bei Rorty, James, Peirce und Royce. In: *Pragmatismus – Philosophie der Zukunft?* (HETZEL, Andreas; KERTSCHER, Jens; RÖLLI, Marc, eds.), p. 189-216. Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2008; and NAGL, Ludwig. Die unerkundete Option: pragmatistische Denkansätze in der Religionsphilosophie. Anmerkung zur Habermas'schen Skizze nachkantischer Religionsbegriffe. In: *Glauben und Wissen. Ein Symposium mit Jürgen Habermas* (LANGTHALER, Rudolf; NAGL-DOCEKAL, Herta, eds.), p. 186-215.Wien: Oldenbourg, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007. (See also, ibid.: HABERMAS, Jürgen. Replik auf Einwände, Reaktion auf Anregungen, p. 366-414).

35 OPPENHEIM, Frank M. *Reverence for the Relations of Life*: Re-imagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce's interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey, p. 380.

decision *pro immanence* – has to have a *non-transcendent* quality. This closure is not provided by a "supernatural" God; it is "nature" itself that, according to Dewey, supports our limited, and faltering "religious" actions. This emphatic concept, "nature", is the – as critics might say vague and romantically "speculative" - thought figure by which Dewey tries to *re*-introduce, in a scientifically purified manner that stays clear of all meta-physical excess, the abandoned metaphor of a helping God into *A Common Faith*. He transforms and de-personalizes this hope (which is constitutive of most traditional religions) into the (*post I-Thou) anonymity* of an (internally self-differentiating, "evolving") *natural "force",* of which – according to him - (since we ourselves are part of it) we can hope that it will infuse into our finite, and faltering, life a trans-individual "meaning".[36] This "naturalistic" hope perspective never reaches in Dewey, as far as I see, the status of an "objective idealism" of the Peircean or Roycean type: i.e. the status of an experimental philosophical conceptualization of a universe that makes room for the belief that this universe is the expression of, and includes, a theistic God - or, as Royce says in his late philosophy, an "Interpreter Spirit" - as its ultimate semiotico-pragmatic horizon. In Dewey *nature itself*, in the end, is the reference point[37], or ideal unity, of the varied forms of our (potentially

---

36 "The community of causes and consequences in which we, together with those not born, are enmeshed", Dewey writes in CF, p. 56, "is the deepest symbol of the mysterious totality the imagination calls the universe": It „is the matrix within which our ideal aspirations are born and bred. It is the source of the values that the moral imagination projects as directive criteria and as shaping purposes. […] The continuing life of this comprehensive community of beings […] holds within its content all the material that give verifiable intellectual support to our ideal faith. A 'creed' founded on this material will change and grow, but it cannot be shaken."

37 This naturalism – seen as a perspective of "closure" – leaves open, on the general level of epistemology (and not only in the particular area of a philosophy of religion), a host of questions, as Robert B. Brandom has recently shown. Brandom argues, in *Articulating Reasons*, that - since there exists no unproblematic continuity between the life forms of "discursive" and "nondiscursive creatures" -, any philosophy has to set priorities, if it wants to clarify the question, how similar and/or different "the judgments and actions of concept users" are compared with "the uptake of environmental information and instrumental interventions of non-concept-using organisms and artifacts." In contrast to many authors in contemporary semantic theory, as well as to [Dewey's] classical American pragmatism, Brandom argues that an extended analysis not of the continuities, but of the "*dis*continuities between the conceptual and non- or preconceptual", is the promising route to take. He therefore keeps distance from Dewey's naturalistic pragmatism, and argues – forcefully, it seems to me – for what he terms "Hegel's rationalist pragmatism": a pragmatism that "by slighting the similarities to animals" and by "highlighting the possibilities opened up by engaging in social practices of giving and asking for reasons" will "get closer to an account of being human that does justice to the kinds of consciousness and self-consciousness distinctive of us as *cultural*, and not merely *natural*, creatures." (BRANDOM, Robert B. *Articulating Reasons. An Introduction to Inferentialism.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 3-35). Not only Brandom, but also Habermas insists (in spite of being, generally speaking, like most left Hegelians in favor of a [sophisticated] *continuous* "Naturgeschichte") that such a "naturalism" is nowhere a finished theory. It is, at best, an open project "which until now we are not able to conceptually demonstrate": "Die Einheit eines Universums, dem die Menschen als Naturwesen

failing and finite) "religious" modes of activities in the sciences, the arts, and in public life. Critics of such a "turn" were quick to point out that Dewey's *de-absolutification and, at the same time, naturalization project of hope* organizes something like a watered-down *post-Hegelianism* ("watered down", since in Hegel himself, nature is a transitory and not the ultimate category). "It is arguable", Frederick Copleston writes, "that [Dewey's] world view shows traces of its author's Hegelian past in the sense that Nature is substituted for Hegel's Spirit."[38] Dewey does not invest much work into an elaborate support for this post-Hegelian substitution, however: "When Dewey is treating past systems", Copleston argues,

> he bothers very little, if at all, about the arguments advanced on their behalf by their authors and dwells instead on the inability of these systems to deal with the problematic situations arising out of contemporary culture. [T]he result is, that the attentive and critical reader […] receives the impression that the naturalistic view of the world is assumed, not proved.[39]

Dewey's *scientism/naturalism*, it might thus be argued – although it is able to describe some recent developments, and diversifications, of *religiosity in a secular age -* is not able do *full* justice to the internal configurations of the core of mankind's religious energies. This assessment may get further support (at least in *some* regards), if we raise three questions that are inspired by Josiah Royce's late, "peirceanized" (absolute) pragmatism.[40] These questions are: 1) Is Dewey's "instrumentalism" a valid, free-standing, pragmatic theory of truth and interpretation (and thus an apt tool for the interpretation *of religion*), or does his "instrumentalism" at many points "need a supplement", as Royce argued?[41] 2) Is Dewey's universe – unlike most religious world-views - over-optimistic, i.e.: does it avoid, as Royce once said quoting Hegel, the "Geduld und Schmerz des Negativen" (the patience and pain of the negative)? Or, to put this question differently: does Dewey, as Stanley Cavell remarked, shun away from the abyss of skepticism? And, 3), does Dewey's (post-Feuerbachian) "religious" decompose the complex argumentative structure of (what Royce called) "the religious paradox"? We will now, in the final part of this text, have a very short look only at the first and the third of these questions.

---

angehören, würde ich in der Kontinuität einer 'übergreifenden' Naturgeschichte suchen, von der wir uns wenigstens in Analogie zum Darwinschen Erklärungsansatz eine Vorstellung, *wenn auch noch keinen befriedigenden Begriff machen können.*" (HABERMAS, Jürgen. Das Sprachspiel verantwortlicher Urheberschaft und das Problem der Willensfreiheit. Wie lässt ich der epistemische Dualismus mit einem ontologischen Monismus versöhnen? In: HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Philosophische Texte*, v.5. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009, p. 339.)

38 COPLESTONE, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*. New York: Image Books, 1985, v. VIII, p. 376.

39 Ibid.

40 See NAGL, Ludwig. Beyond Absolute Pragmatism: The Concept of Community in Josiah Royce's Mature Philosophy. *Cognitio. Revista de filosofia*, São Paulo, vol. 5, n. 1, p. 44-74, jan./jun. 2004.

41 See NAGL, Ludwig. Hegel, ein 'Proto-Pragmatist'? Rortys halbierter Hegel und die Aktualität von Royces absolute pragmatism. In: *Von der Logik zur Sprache. Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 2005*. BUBNER, Rüdiger, and HINDRICHS, Gunnar (eds.). Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007, p. 390-411.

3.1 The first question "Is Dewey's instrumentalism a valid, and free-standing theory of truth and interpretation, or does it need a supplement'?" leads to rather general, methodological considerations. Josiah Royce raised it in his 1908 address at the Heidelberg International Congress of Philosophy. What he brought up there was – as far as I see – never sufficiently answered. Royce's core thesis at Heidelberg was, that "pragmatisms in vogue" like Dewey's "instrumentalism" - in spite of giving an accurate account of "man as truth seeker" - are true only "as a report of […] facts which transcend every individual man's experience, verifications, and successes. […]. *Instrumentalism, consequently",* this was Royce's general objection to Dewey's methodology*, is not "by itself adequate to constitute any theory of truth*".[42] It is "useful only if we can bring it into synthesis with other motives. In fact, it is useless"– Royce continued at Heidelberg – "to talk of the success of 'human spirit' in its efforts to win control over experience, *unless there is indeed a human spirit which is more than any man's transient consciousness of his own effort,* and unless there is a unity of experience, and unity objective, real and supratemporal in its significance." (Ibid.) Thus, according to Royce, an analysis of mankind's finiteness is necessary that digs deeper than the one offered by a mere "instrumentalistic" approach. If pragmatism wants to leave its stage of infancy it has to deal with – at least – two problems: with the attempt to semiotically re-conceptualize "the human spirit" (and its post-naturalistic abyss); and with an extended re-assessment of the relation of "empirical truths" to their non-empirical, presupposed "*Grenzbegriffe*". This second problem arises, because – as Royce remarks - "although every empirical truth is relative" (PT 707) *there are other (implied, and presupposed) concepts*, which are "truths such that to deny them is simply to reassert them." (PT 705) The complex semantics of this interplay of *the "finite" and its limit* can, thus, according to Royce, not at all be validly brought to an end in an over-confident empiricism – by the resolute move, for instance, away "from absolutism to experimentalism" - not by a steadfast insistence on *"the finite"(and its perfectibility*) only. In order to make "pragmatism more than the mere passing froth of waves that break upon the beach of triviality" (PT 709), the question has to be reopened *in which way any experiencing of the finite philosophically implies the limiting notion of a non-finite.* The answer to this question cannot, however, be found in the rationalistic "deduction" of an "Absolute (with a capital A)", but in a semiotically informed, empirism-friendly, and non-dogmatic "absolute pragmatism." This new project focuses, according to Royce, on truths that are both, "a construction, or creation – for activity determines its nature –", and, at the same time, not a mere product but at limiting experience to our productivity, something we "find". (PT 707)

If we follow Royce, this double structure has bearings not only for a theory of truth, but *mutatis mutandis* also for the philosophy of religion. Feuerbach, it might be said, in his criticism of religion, tried to reduce the interrelatedness of *"finding"* (in theological terms: that God *"reveals himself"*) and of *"construction"* (that any God-speech must be able to talk of God *in our terms*) to the *uni*linear thesis that the idea of an infinite that limits our construction is *nothing but* our construction. Royce,

---

42 ROYCE, Josiah. The Problem of Truth. In: *The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce*, vol.2. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969 [=PT], p. 696.

not unlike Hegel (and in implicit opposition to Feuerbach's later de-dialectization of this complex double-bind) insists that the absolute - in spite of the fact that we can only understand it in modes that we "construct" - is at the same time not at all "our mere product". This is the Feuerbach-distant core of Royce's analysis of (what he calls) "the religious paradox".

3.2 We omit question two[43] and jump to our third and final Roycean consideration: "Does Dewey's (postFeuerbachian) adjectival 'religious' abstractly decompose (what Royce called) 'the religious paradox'?" Royce introduces this "paradox" in *Sources of Religious Insight* as follows: "Religious faith does [...] involve a seemingly paradoxical attempt to transcend the admitted ignorance of the needy human being."[44] Traditional religions offer images of the sacred, plus imperatives and hopes embedded in narratives of revelation. These narratives cannot be, a), understood as modes of a merely causal "intrusion" of the divine into our finite life, nor can they be read - as long as the semantics of the idea of "revelation" is not suspended -, b), as mere human creations (or Feuerbachian "projections"). To accept, in religious belief, the sacred *as sacred* presupposes that we can *understand* it *as sacred*. This means that the sacred *on the one hand* overreaches our capacities and manifests itself as "given to us". It is – if we follow Levinas' re-reading of Heidegger – an event beyond our control, and thus cannot be thought of as set into work by our capacities alone. Bu*t on the other hand* it depends on finite and rational preconditions. ("Gott hängt ab von einem gottsetzenden Bewußtsein", as Schelling said: the sacred, *as a sacred that we can grasp*, depends on a consciousness that *posits* God - on our ability to *interpret* it *as sacred*.) Royce describes this paradox (which – fully read – does neither allow for *a one-sided* [subject- and freedom-quenching] *metaphysical*, nor for *a one-sided* [God-debunking] Feuerbachian "solution") as follows: "Every acceptance of a revelation, I say, depends upon something that, in the individual's mind, must be prior to this acceptance [...]. [It] proves its genuineness by appealing to *what your own interior light, your personal acquaintance with the nature of a divine being, enables you to know* as the basis of all your further insight into the divine."[45]

In light of such a *belief* in the *manifestations of a divine that are affirmed as divine through "our own interior light"*, we are able, in our varied religious faiths, to stabilize our ethical efforts when they reach their real (that is: not just imagined) limits. (Justifiable) religious beliefs - for Royce as for Kant - are not background assumptions of hope that organize excuses for our inactivity at points, where our actions could change social and individual matters. Their *strength lies* rather in enabling us to re-interpret those individual and collective experiences where - *after we have done all we could* - the result turns out to be insufficient.

Royce argues, like Kant, that we cannot (neither individually nor collectively) make sure that our (autonomously chosen) causes are, in the end, effective. We can,

---

43 For an exposition of this second question see NAGL, Ludwig. "The religious". Deweys nachfeuerbachsche "Aufhebung" der Religion, part 3.2.2, Ist das Deweysche Diskursuniversum überoptimistisch? In: NAGL, Ludwig. *Das verhüllte Absolute*, p. 156-161.

44 ROYCE, Josiah. *Sources of Religious Insight*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940 [= SRI], p. 104.

45 Ibid. p.23 (our italics).

and are supposed to, try our best. But the situation where our free action starts, and the *locus* where it terminates, are greater than us. Our motivations are *embedded*. Therefore we can only *hope* that they will, in the end, contribute to a goal that, in spite of never becoming real without us, is – due to its complexity - beyond our individual (and collective, *social)* reach.[46] Royce reads this *conditio humana* – unlike Dewey who tries to re-locate it in a speculative "naturalistic" perspective – similar to Kant, by taking recourse to postulates that make room for a *philosophically re-formulated concept of grace*. Not only are we graced when we find the individual cause that deserves our loyalty, so Royce. We certainly have to autonomously choose, and willingly affirm, our genuine cause *as ours*. This autonomously chosen cause is at the same time, however, *as complexly embedded* not merely the product of our ingenuity and will. Loyalty, so Royce in his "religious" re-reading (and affirmation) of our *autonomous* moral condition, "will always be […] a finding of an object that comes to you *from without and above,* as *divine grace* has always said to come […]." (SRI 206) This non-naturalistic, Kantian image of closure allows Royce to *avoid two rival possibilities* that he considers to be traps: a) the insistence on the desperate or, at best, "courageous" *strenuousness of a moral (and for that matter: socio-moral) activism* that tries to introduce "meaning" into a world which is seen as merely contingent; and b) the *dogmatic quietism* of an (action suspending) "*Faulbett der Vernunft*" – an attitude that decries human freedom (often with reference to a depraved theology) as ultimately unimportant, and thus usurps, and indirectly destroys, the concept of grace. Royce emphasizes, that "the spirit of loyalty" (conceived in

---

46 Jürgen Habermas recently summed up this Kantian argument – which is rearticulated by Royce in his philosophy of religion – as follows: "Als vernünftige Wesen zeigen wir [Kant zufolge] Interesse an der Beförderung eines Endzwecks, obwohl wir uns die 'Zusammenstimmung von Moral und Glückseligkeit' nur als Ergebnis der Intervention einer höheren Macht vorstellen können; denn kein menschlicher Verstand kann je die kumulative Vernetzung der kontingenten Nebenfolgen individuell gebotener Handlungen im ganzen voraussehen." After this clear exposé of those limits of autonomy that lead Kant to his "postulates" and to his claim that "the idea of a people of God can be realized (through human organization) only in the form of a church" (KANT, Immanuel. *Religion within the Limits of Reason alone*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960. Book Three, IV, p.91), Habermas avoids, however, to further follow Kant. He (somewhat abruptly) expresses his hope that (what Kant never would have conceded) *we, cooperatively,* will be able to deal with most, if not all of the open problems that result from our finite *conditio humana*: "Kant meinte eine solche [höhere] Macht postulieren zu dürfen, weil wir doch zur Beförderung des höchsten Gutes moralisch verpflichtet seien (aber niemand zu etwas Unmöglichen moralisch verpflichtet warden darf). Tatsächlich" - Habermas now argues, against Kant, "besteht das Problem jedoch darin, dass Kant eine Beförderung des höchsten Guts, die nur als kooperatives Handeln möglich wäre, zur moralischen Pflicht erklärt.[…] Eine Moral, die die einzelne Person verpflichtet, verschließt sich der öffentlichen Dimension gemeinschaftlichen Handelns; aus guten Gründen kann sie Erwartungen, die allein auf dem Wege des solidarischen Handelns eines Kollektivs erfüllt werden können, nicht zum Inhalt moralischer Forderungen machen." Royce (unlike Dewey) would, as far as I see, not accept this Habermasian dissolution of Kant's postulate of God by means of a *radical* (but, it might seem, *uncritical*) empowerment of the *collective* potential of "Menschengattung". (HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Philosophische Texte*, v.5. Einleitung. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009, p. 28-29.)

the complex manner sketched before) "completely reconciles those bitter and tragic wrangles between the mere moralists and the partisans of divine grace". (SRI 207) Along its line, we are able to read our *autonomous loyal* acts – guided by a "logic of hope" - as operating in an environment that, to say it with Peirce, has the quality of a growing, "enormous sign". This "semiotic environment" is unable to re-semiotize and differentiate *without* our dedicated work, but is, at the same time, neither our mere product, nor Nature with a capital N. It can be read (in a plurality of religious modes) as a divine gift. The belief that loyalty is in such ways "embedded", does - according to Royce - neither encourage abstract activism nor moral irresponsibility, but "gives you rest in toil, peace in the midst of care." (Ibid.) In this way Royce tries to avoid not only a reductive reading of James's "moral holiday" (and manages to reject Santayana's verdict that a Roycean world is a world of "clenched teeth" and never ending "strenuousness"), but starts to re-formulate the traditional concept of grace by *pragmatically* integrating its core into his semiotic notion of an *enlightened, autonomous loyalty.*

Royce's (today often overlooked) mature work has the potential – due to its extensive, critical and affirmative, interactions with the writings of Peirce, James, and Dewey – to prove helpful in our contemporary attempts to refine, and internally differentiate, pragmatist (as well as neo-pragmatist) philosophies.

References

BRANDOM, Robert B. *Articulating Reasons. An Introduction to Inferentialism.* Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2000.

COPLESTONE, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, v. VII and VIII. New York: Image Books, 1985.

DESCARTES, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy.* Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis, In.: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1979.

DEWEY, John. A Common Faith. *The Later Works*, v. 9, p. 1-58. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989. [= CF]

FEUERBACH, Ludwig. *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1956.

GOOD, James. Dewey's "permanent Hegelian deposit": a reply to Hickman and Alexander. *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society*, v. 44, n. 4, p. 577-602, 2008.

HABERMAS, Jürgen. Das Sprachspiel verantwortlicher Urheberschaft und das Problem der Willensfreiheit. Wie lässt ich der epistemische Dualismus mit einem ontologischen Monismus versöhnen? In: HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Philosophische Texte*, v.5, p.271-341, Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 2009.

HEGEL, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion.* Edited by Peter C. Hodgson. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

KANT, Immanuel. *Religion within the Limits of Reason alone*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960.

KONVITZ, Milton R. Introduction. In: DEWEY, John. *The Later Works*, v. 9, p. XI-XXXII, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989.

LÖWITH, Karl. *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche. Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Hamburg: Meiner, 1995.

NAGL, Ludwig. *Pragmatismus*. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 1998.

NAGL, Ludwig. Beyond Absolute Pragmatism: the Concept of Community in Josiah Royce's Mature Philosophy. *Cognitio: Revista de filosofia*, São Paulo, v.5, n.1, p.44-74, jan./jun. 2004.

_____. Hegel, ein Proto-Pragmatist? Rortys halbierter Hegel und die Aktualität von Royces Absolute Pragmatism. In: *Von der Logik zur Sprache. Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 2005*. BUBNER, Rüdiger; HINDRICHS, Gunnar (eds.). Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007, p. 390-411.

_____. Die unerkundete Option: pragmatistische Denkansätze in der Religionsphilosophie. Anmerkung zur Habermas'schen Skizze nachkantischer Religionsbegriffe. In: *Glauben und Wissen. Ein Symposium mit Jürgen Habermas*. LANGTHALER, Rudolf; NAGL-DOCEKAL, Herta (eds.). Wien: Oldenbourg, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007, p. 186-215.

_____. Pragmatistische Handlungshorizonte. Erwägungen zur Tiefenstruktur des Zukunftsbegriffs bei Rorty, James, Peirce und Royce. In: *Pragmatismus – Philosophie der Zukunft?* HETZEL, Andreas; KERTSCHER, Jens; RÖLLI, Marc (eds.). Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2008, p. 189-216.

_____. Der Philosophie geht es nicht darum, die Religion umzustoßen. Ist Hegel – als Religionsphilosoph – a thinker of the future? (Derrida/Malabou und Royce). In: *Viele Religionen – eine Vernunft? Ein Disput zu Hegel*. NAGL-DOCEKAL, Herta; KALTENBACHER, Wolfgang; NAGL, Ludwig (eds.). Wien: Böhlau, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008, p. 88-105.

_____. *Das verhüllte Absolute. Essays zur zeitgenössischen Religionsphilosophie*. Frankfurt am Main et al: Peter Lang, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2010.

OPPENHEIM, Frank M. *Reverence for the Relations of Life: Re-imagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce's interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

PUTNAM, Hilary. *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life. Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008.

RORTY, Richard. Anticlericalism and Atheism. In: RORTY, Richard and VATTIMO, Gianni. *The Future of Religion* (ZABALA, Santiago, ed.), p. 29-41. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

ROYCE, Josiah. *Sources of Religious Insight.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940. [= SRI]

_____. The Problem of Truth in the Light of Recent Discussion. In: *The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce*, vol.2, p.681-709. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969. [= PT]

RUCKER, Darnell. *The Chicago Pragmatists*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969.

SCHMIDT, Thomas S. Empirischer Naturalismus, demokratisches Experiment und die Erfahrung des Religiösen - John Deweys Philosophie der Religion. In: *Jahrbuch für Religionsphilosophie*, Band 7, p. 37-59. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2008. [= EN]

TAYLOR, Charles. Die immanente Gegenaufklärung. In: NAGL, Ludwig (ed.). *Religion nach der Religionskritik*, p. 60-85. Wien: Oldenbourg, and Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003.

WOLTERSTORFF, Richard. The Religious Turn in Philosophy and Art. In: *Religion nach der Religionskritik*. NAGL, Ludwig (ed.). Oldenbourg Verlag: Wien, Akademie Verlag: Berlin, 1999, p. 273-284.

Endereço / *Address*
Ludwig Nagl
Department of Philosophy
University of Vienna
Universitätsstrasse 7
A-1010 Vienna, Austria
Homepage: http://homepage.univie.ac.at/ludwig.nagl/