

# Discourses on Love and Mysticism in American Pragmatism

Ludwig Nagl\*

---

**ABSTRACT** • The paper has four parts. It starts with a brief glance at Charles Sanders Peirce’s concepts of “agapism” and “evolutionary love” (and on some “agapism”-related “theo-semiotic” traits in Peirce’s concept of “objective idealism”). Part two deals with William James’s Lecture on “Mysticism” in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and looks at Wittgenstein as a reader of James’s *Varieties*. Part three is dedicated to Josiah Royce’s reflections on charity and the “invisible church” (in: *Source of Religious Insight*, Part VII “The unity of the Spirit and the invisible church”). Part four—a *neopragmatic* annex to the previous glances at *Classical pragmatists and pragmaticists*—discusses Richard Rorty’s (and Gianni Vattimo’s) remarks on 1 Corinthians, 13 (in *The Future of Religion*).

**KEYWORDS** • Love, Mysticism, American Pragmatism, Charles S. Peirce, William James, Josiah Royce, Richard Rorty

---

It is widely known in contemporary European philosophy that in the formative phase of American pragmatism *epistemological* questions about meaning, the “fixation of belief”, and truth, were raised in a new, non-traditional manner. But there is another side to American pragmatism—a side, if not unnoticed, then at least not thoroughly investigated in European philosophical discourse: pragmatism’s extensive interest in *philosophical questions about religion, mysticism and love*. Two essays by Charles S. Peirce are of great importance in this context. The first, “Evolutionary Love”, contains Peirce’s critique of a narrow, Darwinian reading of evolution, which he contrasts with his semiotically dimensioned “agapism”. The second is Peirce’s text “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God”, where he develops the concept of “musement”, which plays an important role in his philosophical reconstruction of the *core* of science, “divination”/“abduction”, the analysis of which makes possible a re-conceptualization of religious motifs. The main corpus of Classical American pragmatism contains,

\* Retired Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna, Austria • ludwig.nagl@univie.ac.at

in the writings of William James, a prominent and elaborate discourse on *mysticism*, as well as a discourse on *charity* in the work of Harvard's "absolute pragmatist", Josiah Royce. Tolerance, charity and religion, are—in their contemporary neo-pragmatic transformation—also important themes in Hilary Putnam's reflections on William James, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Simone Weil, as well as in segments of Richard Rorty's debate with Gianni Vattimo on *The Future of Religion*.

The following essay has *four parts*. It starts, *first*, with a brief look at Charles Sanders Peirce's "agapism"—the core of his theo-semiotically charged "objective idealism". It shows that Peirce's conception of "evolutionary love"—in spite of his partial dissociation from Hegel's dialectical *Begriff*—has significant parallels to it. Segment *two* deals with William James's complex explorations of "Mysticism" in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and takes a brief look at their influence on Wittgenstein's references to "the mystic" in *Tractatus*, 6. 522.<sup>1</sup> Part *three* presents core, love-related concepts of the "absolute pragmatist" Josiah Royce, in particular his notion of the "Beloved community, Church", and of its regulative *complementum*, the "invisible Church". Finally part *four*—the neo-pragmatic annex to this text—will look at Hilary Putnam's reflections on religious tolerance and charity (*inter alia* in his essay "Plädoyer für eine Verabschiedung des Begriffs 'Idolatrie'", which I had the pleasure to publish, in 2003, in *Religion nach der Religionskritik*).

### **Part 1. Charles S. Peirce: "Evolutionary love" and "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God": two texts on "agapism", on (mysticism-related) "musement", and on religion.**

Charles Sanders Peirce, the founding father of American pragmatism, explicates his praxis-oriented view of reality semiotically, i. e., via a complex analysis of sign use and sign development. His semiotics is indeed comprehensive: it "is not only linguistic theory but also a key to interpret, for example, theology", as the pragmatism scholar Rossella Fabbrichesi recently

<sup>1</sup> See in this context Ludwig Nagl, "'James's book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* does me a lot of good'. Wittgensteins therapeutische Jameslektüren", *Wittgenstein Studien* (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 185–209.

rightly pointed out.<sup>2</sup> This will be documented briefly with reference to two Peircean texts.

We first look at Peirce's essay "Evolutionary Love". How are we to understand the growth of symbols—the differentiation of human signs via learning, as well as the objective growth-dynamics of the evolving cosmos? Is a Darwinian conception sufficient to explain these processes? No, Peirce argues in his text: we need a more complex philosophical theory, if we really want to understand "evolutionary growth"—a theory, that is, that does not reductively over-emphasize "fortuitous variation" (like Darwin), nor stays *mechanistically* fixed on "necessity", as Darwin's scientism-oriented critics assert.<sup>3</sup> Such a third, complex theory of evolution has to focus on—that is, to explicate semiotically—the inner dynamic of "semiosis", the process of sign-"growth", that is to say of the ability of signs to interpret creatively, and react to, "the other", to mediate the negative and to provide a creative re-reading of the presupposed. Sign growth is thus not tied to the abstract idea of domination but to the concept of love, to a synthesizing, dialectical process, which—in pre-semiotic terms—is validly expressed, for instance, in St. John's gospel. "Love, recognizing germs of loveliness in the hateful, gradually warms it into life, and makes it lovely", Peirce writes. "This is the sort of evolution [...] that synechism calls for."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Rossella Fabbrichesi, "Spinoza, Emerson, and Peirce: Re-thinking the Genealogy of Pragmatism", *Transactions of the Charles Sanders Peirce Society* 55 (2019), vol. 2, 105.

<sup>3</sup> In his essay on "Evolutionary Love" (1893), Peirce distinguishes between three modes of evolution: a) "tychastic evolution" (operating with the concept of chance), b) "anacasmic evolution" (focused on the notion of necessity) and c) "agapastic evolution" (based on love and "synechism") (*The Essential Peirce, Volume 1 1867–1893*), edited by the Peirce Edition Project [Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992], 353–371; here 362). Darwin, according to Peirce, advocates the first, *abstract* mode of evolution.

<sup>4</sup> Charles S. Peirce, "Evolutionary Love", 354. See in this context also: Ludwig Nagl, Peirces 'agapastische' Evolutionstheorie", in chapter 5, "Evolution", *Charles Sanders Peirce* (Frankfurt/M. – New York: Campus, 1992), 126–135. — Peirce characterizes "synechism"—the core idea of his "pragmaticism"—in his article "Immortality in the Light of Synechism" (1892), *The Essential Peirce, Volume 2*, 1–3—as "the tendency to regard everything as continuous" (*ibid.*, 1). This "continuity" he explains—in a mode reminiscent of Hegel's triadic *Bewegung des Begriffs* (see Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Preface)—by strictly separating it from the binary, Parmenidean chasm between being and non-being: "There is a famous saying of Parmenides [...], 'being is, and non-being is nothing'. This sounds plausible; yet synechism flatly denies it." ("Immortality in the Light of Synechism", 2). In his concept of "synechism", Peirce, like Hegel in his *Begriffsdialektik*, tries to

Darwin's abstract view of evolution—that “natural selection” leads to the “survival of the fittest”—has its precarious background in a “greed-philosophy” propped up with reference to economics, Peirce writes. Darwinism follows the motto “Every individual for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost”: “Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount”, Peirce points out, “expressed a different opinion.”<sup>5</sup>

Peirce thus attempts a semiotic deconstruction of Darwin's “greed”-focused concept of evolution. He writes: “The gospel of Christ says that progress comes from every individual merging his individuality in sympathy with his neighbours.” This is the opposite of “the Gospel of Greed”—of the abstract thesis “that progress takes place by virtue of every individual striving for himself with all his might and trampling his neighbour under foot whenever he gets a chance to do so.” Peirce's Darwinism-critical analyses of human learning and of cosmological evolution thus focus on a philosophical reconstruction of the idea of loving acknowledgment: on a concept of semiotic “synechism”, which, as he writes, is “able to produce the genuine agapasticism at which Hegel was aiming.”<sup>6</sup>

Peirce's fully-fledged philosophical exposition of the religious implications of this “agapastic” interpretation of reality cannot be found, however, in his text on “Evolutionary love”, but in his reflections on the “God hypothesis” in his text “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God”<sup>7</sup>. Peirce is fully aware of the fact that, after Kant's critique, most of the traditional theological attempts to deduce God's *existence* are problematic. He thus

re-situate, and thus to replace, the dichotomic abstractness of dyadic juxtapositions, without *in toto* invalidating their (important, but merely interim) role. Of course, the “separating” activities characteristic of “understanding”—*der trennende Verstand*, to speak with Hegel—cannot be overlooked: “Synechism”, Peirce writes, “can never abide dualism [...]. But synechism supersedes its dyadic logic “which performs its analyses with an axe, leaving, as the ultimate elements, unrelated elements of being.” (Ibid).

<sup>5</sup> Charles S. Peirce, “Evolutionary Love”, 356.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 357; 363.

<sup>7</sup> Charles S. Peirce, “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God”, *The Essential Peirce, Volume 2 (1893–1913)* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998) [= EP 2] 434–450. For a comprehensive analysis of this Peircean text see Ludwig Nagl, “Charles Sanders Peirce's ‘A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God’: Its Structure, its Limits, and its Merits”, in: Ludwig Nagl, *Toward a Global Discourse on Religion in a Secular Age. Essays on Philosophical Pragmatism* (Vienna and Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2021), 137–150.

tries to replace the (abstract) question “Does God *exist*?” (which, in the terminology of Peirce’s theory of the “categories”, belongs to “Secondness”, i. e., to mere object experience<sup>8</sup>) with the complex idea that “God is *real*”. The question is thus re-situated within Peirce’s category “Thirdness”: semiotic “continuity”, *Vermittlung*—the piecemeal discovery that matter has the structure of mind,<sup>9</sup> which terminates in the insight that the cosmos is a “vast representamen, a great symbol of God’s purpose.”<sup>10</sup> Peirce wrote his text “A Neglected Argument” at a time when the scientific distancing of religion had already become widespread.<sup>11</sup> He thus points out that atheism and agnosticism do not at all result from science itself, but from a defective analysis of the depth structure and background of scientific investigation. The average scientist, Peirce argues,

“has become an ignorant, who, once he leaves his special field of research, intellectually hardly stands higher than an average photographer. His very narrow, but thorough education has turned him into a strange mixture of Enlightenment and superstition.”<sup>12</sup>

Peirce’s considerations concerning “the Reality of God”—his “nest of three arguments”—are presented in three steps. The *first* step he calls the

<sup>8</sup> I. e. to what he calls the “outward clash”.

<sup>9</sup> See Charles Sanders Peirce, *Religionsphilosophische Schriften*, edited by Hermann Deuser (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1995), 288; and Hermann Deuser, *Gott: Geist und Natur—Theologische Konsequenzen aus Charles S. Peirce’s Religionsphilosophie*, Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1993), chapter 1; as well as Hermann Deuser, *Gottesinstinkt. Semiotische Religionstheorie und Pragmatismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See Charles Sanders Peirce, “The Seven Systems of Metaphysics”, *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, 193. In spite of Peirce’s explicit critique of Hegel this definitely has a Hegelian ring. See Ludwig Nagl, “Peirce on Hegel, Pragmatism, and ‘the triadic Class of Philosophical Doctrines’,” in: *Charles Sanders Peirce in His Own Words. 100 years of Semiotics, Communication and Cognition*, edited by Torkild Thellefsen and Bent Sørensen (Boston-Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014), 429–435.

<sup>11</sup> They are written in full view, as well as in full affirmation, of the progress made possible by the experimental approach of the modern natural sciences.

<sup>12</sup> In “Logische Critique des religiösen Glaubens” (see Charles Sanders Peirce, *Religionsphilosophische Schriften*, edited by Hermann Deuser, 409–420) Peirce writes: “[D]er durchschnittliche Wissenschaftler [...] hat sich zum Ignoranten gewandelt, der, wenn überhaupt, außerhalb seines Spezialgebietes intellektuell wenig höher steht als ein durchschnittlicher Photograph. Seine besonders enge, aber gründliche Ausbildung hat ihn zu einer seltsamen Mischung aus Aufklärung und einem Äquivalent von Aberglauben gemacht.” (Ibid., 418–419; German translation of Peirce’s manuscript by Hermann Deuser.)

“humble argument”. It focuses on “musement”, the “free play” of imagination, and has close ties to aesthetically charged modes of mysticism<sup>13</sup>. In step *two* he develops his critical argument against traditional theological metaphysics. And in the *third step* Peirce presents his “hypothesis” that “God is real”, which he supports by means of an in-depth analysis of “abduction”, the finding of innovative thoughts in science.

The *humble argument*, Peirce writes, is “open to every honest man [and] I surmise [has] made more worshippers of God than any other” (EP 2, 446). It arises out of “pure play”—out of the lively exercise of one’s powers of imagination which Peirce calls “musement”.<sup>14</sup> This “play” is a meditation (which can evolve into prayer-as-meditation<sup>15</sup>) and can be carried out by everyone, whether learned or unlearned:

“This entirely honest, sincere, and unaffected, because unpremeditated, meditation upon the Idea of God [... will], by developing a deep sense of the adorability of that Idea [...], [bring forth] a Truly religious belief in His Reality and His nearness.” (EP 2, 446).<sup>16</sup>

Peirce is well aware, however, that significant problems are bound to arise in connection with his “humble argument”. The musement-induced “God hypothesis” significantly differs from the usual hypothesis in science, since it cannot be validated in a standard empirical manner. Is thus, maybe, the theological discourse able to provide the necessary argumentative support? In *step 2 of his argumentation*, Peirce destroys this hope.<sup>17</sup> Theolo-

<sup>13</sup> See in this context Roger Ward, *Peirce and Religion. Knowledge, Transformation, and the Reality of God* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018), 58–59.

<sup>14</sup> As Michael L. Raposa points out, Peirce’s concept of “musement” is “rooted in some of his earliest reflections (i. e., on his encounter, as a teenager, with Friedrich Schiller’s idea of a *Spieltrieb*) [...]. “Musement”, Raposa writes, “originates as a form of esthetic play but can evolve into prayer-as-meditation, while also being treated as the first (abductive) stage in an argument for the reality of God.” (Michael L. Raposa, “Peirce and Modern Religious Thought”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 27 [1991], 343.)

<sup>15</sup> See FN 17.

<sup>16</sup> See in this context Roger Ward, “Science and the Persistent Reality of God in the ‘Neglected Argument’”, *Peirce and Religion* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018), 129–151.

<sup>17</sup> As Roger Ward has pointed out, “Peirce does despise theoretical religion, but only for the way it limits inquiry by resolving into forms that demand authoritative privilege and claiming immunity from continuing discovery.” (Roger Ward, “Experience as Religious Discovery in Edwards and Peirce”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 36 [2002], 303.) In recent attempts to compare Peirce’s pragmatist view of religion with

gians, he writes, have the tendency to resort to indefensible premises in their attempt to demonstrate the existence of God<sup>18</sup>, to premises, for instance, that are tied to the “method of authority” rampant in ecclesiastical contexts.

In step three, Peirce thus looks for a new way to back the God hypothesis. There exists a significant area of contact between the *depth-structure* of “musement” and *the guessing process by which new scientific hypotheses are found*. The *creative core* of science is formed by something which also nourishes the “humble argument” for the Reality of God: the “abductive *divining*”, or “spontaneous conjecture of instinctive reason.” (EP 2, 443) According to Peirce, successful research does not find its hypotheses “fortuitously [...] as the Darwinians suppose”. The scientific “guessing instinct” is successful only since it is (vaguely) attuned to the objective ideality of the Real. Science, this implies, is thus not a mere “nominalistic” construction. An orthodox Darwinian reading of “abduction” misreads the “agapastico-synechistic” (i. e. at its core *non-accidental*) character of cosmic “growth”.<sup>19</sup>

the arguments of (late analytical) Christian philosophers like Alvin Plantinga and William Alston, aspects of this abstract “theoretization” of religion tend to recur. (See, in this context, the critical remarks of Sami Pihlström on Michael J. Slater’s re-reading, based on Plantinga and Alton, of Peirce’s “Neglected Argument” in his “Review of Slater (2014), ‘Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Religion’”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 50 [2014], 606.)

<sup>18</sup> In “What is Christian Faith” Peirce writes: “[Theologians] swamp religion in fallacious logical disputations. Thus, the natural tendency is to the continual drawing tighter and tighter of the narrowing bounds of doctrine, with less and less attention to the living essence of religion.” (Peirce, *Collected Papers*, edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1931–1935], vol. 6, CP 6. 438) A “religion of love” (ibid., CP 6. 443) seeks to overcome these dubious, parochial limits. “Let us endeavour with all our might”, Peirce continues, “to draw together the whole body of believers in the law of love into sympathetic unity of conscience. Discountenance as immoral all movements that exaggerate differences, or that go to make fellowship depend on formulas invented to exclude some Christians from communion with others.” (Ibid., CP 6. 445) For crucial documents on Peirce’s religious practice (documents that were not included in Peirce, *Collected Papers*!) see Henry C. Johnson, Jr., “Charles Sanders Peirce and the Common Book of Prayer: Elocution and the Feigning of Piety”, in: *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 42 (2006), 552–573.

<sup>19</sup> What according to the “humble argument” starts to appear in a vague, aesthetic mode in “musement”, can be spelled out and (partially) made more precise through a pragmaticist exploration of the depth-structure of “abduction”, that is to say of the “mediatedness” and (concrete) “continuity” of *all* signs in a “semiosis” which substantially transcends everything that can be produced solely by our finite sign-using actions. This “semiosis” is symbolized in Peirce’s “God hypothesis”—in the assertion “that nothing has any kind

Since for a full-fledged philosophy of religion neither the immediacy of the “humble argument” nor the tradition of theology will suffice, Peirce argues that only a (semiotics of) science which focuses on the depth structure of, and background to, “abduction” can argumentatively back up the “humble argument”. In doing so Peirce is not, however—as some of his critics (and false friends) assert, “scientizing religion”<sup>20</sup>: As the pragmatism scholar Douglas R. Anderson rightly pointed out, for Peirce

“science without religion in its emotive and experiential forms *is mere scientism*—an uninspired and ineffective *theoria*. And religion without science becomes tenacious individually and authoritative communally—it becomes blind and incapable of growth.”<sup>21</sup>

## Part 2. William James on “Mysticism” in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

The most extensive, in-depth elucidation of “mysticism” in American Pragmatism is provided by William James, in Lectures XVI and XVII of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.<sup>22</sup> Although James writes that he is

of value in itself [...], but only in its place in the whole production to which it appertains.” (EP 2, 445).

These complex Peircean reflections on love/agapism, semiosis, and God, were, however, regrettably neglected in one of the most influential contemporary Peirce receptions, in Jürgen Habermas’s chapters on Peirce in *Knowledge and Interest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 91–131, where Habermas provides no analysis of the religious depth-structure of Peirce’s concept of “abduction”: an omission which is repeated in Habermas’s recent book, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*, volume 2, *Vernünftige Freiheit. Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2019) where Habermas suggests, that Peirce’s “objective idealism” uncritically re-defends a thought position that was rightly criticized in post-Kantian discourse. As a result the semiotic reflections on agapism that the founder of pragmatism suggested, remain—quite amazingly—totally without analysis in Habermas’s reconstruction of the complex history of faith and knowledge.

<sup>20</sup> For a critique of this scientific (mis-)reading of Peirce’s “nest of three arguments” see Sandra B. Rosenthal, “Peirce’s Neglected Argument. Some Neglected Pragmatic Consequences”, *Pragmata. Festschrift für Klaus Oehler zum 80. Geburtstag*, edited by Kai-Michael Hingst and Maria Liatsi (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2008), 268.

<sup>21</sup> Douglas R. Anderson, “Three Appeals in Peirce’s Neglected Argument”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 26 (1990), 360.

<sup>22</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 379–429. For a short, general introduction to James’s pragmatistic view of religion see Ludwig Nagl, “Die pragmatistische Verteidigung des ‘Rechts zu glauben’”, in: Ludwig



unable to approach the “mystical states of consciousness” from the inside, he is convinced of “the paramount importance of their function” in religion.<sup>23</sup> James’s explorations of mystic experiences are complex, indeed. Hence they could be fruitfully compared with other investigations of mysticism, such as Henry Bergson’s reflections on “Mechanik und Mystik” in *Die beiden Quellen der Moral und der Religion*.<sup>24</sup>, or the comprehensive explorations of mysticism carried out by Mircea Eliade (which Wilhelm Dancă has carefully reconstructed<sup>25</sup>).

Mysticism, for James, is an important mode of religious experience.

“The words ‘mysticism’ and ‘mystical’—he writes—are often used as terms of mere reproach, to throw at any opinion which we regard as vague and vast and sentimental, and without a base in either facts or logic.”<sup>26</sup>

In opposition to this, James points out that the “mystic” has four characteristics: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity. “Ineffability” is the first, and “negative”, mark of mysticism: those who speak of mystical experience, James points out, say, at the same time, “that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others.”<sup>27</sup> (Wittgenstein will put this later, in *Tractatus*, 6.522, as follows: “Es gibt allerdings Unausprechliches. Dies zeigt sich, es ist das Mystische”; the mystical cannot be expressed by propositions, it can only be shown.) James elucidates the “ineffability” of mystical experience by comparing it to the experience of love. “One must have been in love one’s self to understand a lover’s state of mind”, he writes.

Nagl, *Pragmatismus* (Frankfurt-New York: Campus, 1998), chapter 3.4, “William James: Ethik und ‘religiöse Erfahrung’”, 69–83.

<sup>23</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 379.

<sup>24</sup> Henri Bergson, *Die beiden Quellen der Moral und der Religion* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2019), Chapter IV, “Mechanik und Mystik”, 279–334.

<sup>25</sup> See Wilhelm Dancă, “The Genesis of the Concept of Mysticism in the Thought of Mircea Eliade”, *The International Eliade*, edited by Bryan Rennie (Albany: New York Press, 2007), 209–225.

<sup>26</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 379–380.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

“Lacking the heart [...], we cannot interpret [...] the lover justly and are even likely to consider him weak-minded or absurd. The mystic finds that most of us accord to his experiences an equally incompetent treatment.”<sup>28</sup>

(Here, again, there is an amazing similarity to a reflection of Wittgenstein’s on love and religion in *Culture and Value*.<sup>29</sup>)

The second “mark” of mysticism, for James, is its “noetic quality”, its status as a mode of “deep truth”. “Although similar to states of feeling”, James writes,

“mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth, unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain.”<sup>30</sup>

This “insight into depths of truth”—the overstepping of the limits of a binary-coded “intellect”—characterizes not only Eckhart’s and Boehm’s mystico-philosophical thought, as James writes, but also Hegel’s dialectical concept of the “Absolute”. And it recurs, one might say, in Peirce’s idea of “musement” and his theo-semiotic explication of “evolutionary love”.<sup>31</sup>

The third mark of mysticism is its “transiency”: “Mystical states”, James writes, “cannot be sustained for long”<sup>32</sup>.

The fourth characteristic of the mystical state is its “passivity”: the mystical, to put it with Wittgenstein, “shows itself” (*es zeigt sich*).

“Although the oncoming of mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations—James writes—when the characteristic sort of consciousness once

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Wittgenstein writes there: “What inclines even me to believe in Christ’s Resurrection? [...] [F]aith is faith in what is needed by my *heart*, my *soul*, not my speculative intelligence. [...] Perhaps we can say: Only love can believe the Resurrection. Or: It is love that believes the Resurrection. [...] We might say: Redeeming love believes even in the Resurrection; holds fast even to the Resurrection. What combats doubt is, as it were, *redemption*.” (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, translated by Peter Winch [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980], 33e; see also Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. The Duty of a Genius* [New York: Viking Penguin, 1990], 383; and Ludwig Nagl, “Religion”, *Wittgenstein-Handbuch*, edited by Anja Weiberg und S. Majetschak [Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2022], 362–366.)

<sup>30</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 380–381.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 417; 388.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 381.

has set in, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power.”<sup>33</sup>

Of the many examples that James provides in his explorations of mystical experiences, some are non-religious, and art-related, and some religious. The sudden (poetic) experiences of a “deeper significance” is an art-related example: “Most of us can remember”, James writes,

“the strangely moving power of passages in certain poems read when we were young [...]. We are alive or dead to the eternal inner message of the arts according as we have kept or lost this mystical susceptibility.”<sup>34</sup>

James, *en passant*, also deals with the connection between mystical experiences and intoxication: a connection which James tested on himself in an experiment with “nitrous oxide” about which he also published an extensive report<sup>35</sup>. On the role which the most popular intoxicant, alcohol, plays, James writes:

“The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. [...] Drunkenness [...] is in fact the great exciter of the *Yes*-function in man.”

Thus, “not through mere perversity do men run [after alcohol]”, James concludes. Alcoholic intoxication is a substitute, in a curious manner, for art related modes of mystical experience: “To the poor and the unlettered”, James writes, “it stands in the place of symphony concerts and literature.”<sup>36</sup>

Speaking in a more general way—in a way which explicitly includes religious modes—all mystical experiences “converge towards a kind of insight [...], the keynote of which “is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity.” This, he concludes,

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. See in this context also Charles S. Peirce’s account of a mystical experience that he had in St. Thomas Episcopal Church, New York, 1892 (Peirce MS L488: See Roger Ward, *Peirce and Religion*, 58–59, as well as the review of Ward’s book by Lauri Snellman, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 56/3, 2020, 471–472.)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 383.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 387–388.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 387.

“is a dark saying [...] when thus expressed in terms of common logic [...]. It must mean something, “something like what the Hegelian philosophy means, if one could only lay hold of it more clearly.”<sup>37</sup>

“Mystical moments”, James sums up his investigations, “are states of consciousness of an entirely specific quality.” Many of these moments do come “*sporadically*”. “Hindus, Buddhists, Mohammedans, and Christians”, James writes, have, however, “all tried to cultivate the mystic *methodically*, as an element of religious life.” After looking at yoga-practices, Buddhist *dhyâna*, and Sufism, James deals with Christian “meditation, the methodical elevation of the soul towards God”: with Saint Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises; with the mystical teachings of St. John of the Cross (“who describes the condition called ‘the union of love’, which is reached by ‘dark contemplation’ ”); with the “orison of unions” of Saint Teresa; and the thoughts and practices of “the fountainhead of Christian mysticism”, Dionysius the Areopagite, who “describes the absolute truth by negatives exclusively.” Here James, again, points out a (partial) similarity with Hegel: “Like Hegel in his logic, mystics journey towards the positive pole of truth only by the *Methode der Absoluten Negativität*”<sup>38</sup>. This inclusion of negation in our attempts to approach the Absolute is the case also in the writings of Eckhart, of Jakob Boehme, as well as of Angelus Silesius, whom James quotes, in the German original, with the following poem:

“Gott ist ein lauter Nichts, ihn rührt kein Nun noch Hier;  
Je mehr du nach ihm greifst, je mehr entwind er dir.”<sup>39</sup>

The mystic deconstructs all linear speech. “In mystical literature”, James writes, “self-contradictory phrases such as ‘dazzling obscurity’, ‘whispering silence’, ‘teeming desert’, are continually met with.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. In a footnote, James further explains this as follows: “What reader of Hegel can doubt that that sense of a perfected Being with all its otherness soaked up into itself, which dominates his whole philosophy, must have come from the prominence in his consciousness of mystical moods like this, in most persons kept subliminal? The notion is thoroughly characteristic of the mystical level, and the *Aufgabe* of making it articulate was surely set to Hegel’s intellect by mystical feeling.” (Ibid., 399, footnote 1).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 398–400; 406–407; 417.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 417.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 421. “They prove that not conceptual speech, but music rather, is the element through which we are best spoken to by mystical truth.” (Ibid., 421). Wittgenstein would,

At the end of his two *Lectures on Mysticism*, James sums up his investigations as follows: While “no authority emanates from [mystical states] which should make it a duty for them who stand outside of them to accept them uncritically”, they “break down the authority of [...] rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone.” While they are not scientifically verifiable, they are hypotheses, which point

“in directions to which the religious sentiments even of non-mystical men incline. They tell of the supremacy of the ideal, of vastness, of union, of safety, and of rest. They offer us *hypotheses*, hypotheses which we may voluntarily ignore, but which as thinkers we cannot possibly upset. The supernaturalism and optimism to which they persuade us may, interpreted in one way or another, be after all the truest of insights into the meaning of this life.”<sup>41</sup>

That religious belief is, as the *enactment of a “genuine hypothesis”*, anchored not in the force of logical deductions, but in human praxis, was already argued by James in his 1896 Lecture *The Will to Believe*—his “defense of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced.” Hypotheses lead to “options” which, as James says, “may be of several kinds. They may be—1, living or dead; 2, forced or avoidable; 3, momentous or trivial.” Genuine options are “of the forced, living, and momentous kind”.<sup>42</sup> Trying to lead a religious life is such a genuine option.<sup>43</sup> However, historical religions are very varied. Asking himself, rhetorically, at the end of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, “is the existence of so many religious types and sects and creeds regrettable”, James answers this question with “‘No’ emphatically”. The divine, James argues, “can mean no single quality, it must mean a group of qualities”: thus

maybe, affirm this assessment. Peirce and Royce however, head—on the basis of their “pragmaticist” reflections on the Real—toward a *philosophically introduced* complex (*analogia entis*-like?) “theosemiotic” (see Michael L. Raposa, *Theosemiotic. Religion, Reading, and the Gift of Meaning*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 422–423; 428.

<sup>42</sup> William James, *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1956), 1–3.

<sup>43</sup> See in this context Ludwig Nagl, “Religion in einem ‘säkularen Zeitalter’: Glaube als ‘Option’ (Hans Joas) und ‘Shapes of Faith Today’ (Charles Taylor)”, *Säkularismus, Postsäkularismus und die Zukunft der Religionen. Festschrift für Yvanka B. Raynova*, edited by Hans-Walter Ruckebauer und Susanne Moser (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, forthcoming 2023).

“different men may all find different worthy missions. Each attitude being a syllable in human nature’s total message, it takes the whole of us to spell the meaning out completely.”<sup>44</sup>

While religious creeds are very different, there is, however, a “common nucleus”, which, as James argues, consists of two parts: 1) an “uneasiness”: “a sense that there *is something wrong about us* as we naturally stand”, and 2), “salvation”, which tends to “take a mystical tinge”—the belief “that we are saved from the wrongness by making proper connections with the higher powers.” This part 2 presupposes “a divided self”, and its internal struggle: “the change of personal centre and the surrender of the lower self.”<sup>45</sup> James describes the “nucleus” that can be found in all religions, as follows: the individual

“becomes conscious that this higher part [of himself] is continuous with a MORE of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself, when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck.”<sup>46</sup>

A full *argumentative* explanation of this “transcending” faces, however—as James states, severe difficulties. James gives only a psychological description: whatever “the ‘more’ with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected” is on “its *farther* side”, James writes, it is “on its *hither* side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life.” When we ask “how far our transmarginal consciousness carries us if we follow it on its remoter side”, no scientific answers are possible. “Here”, James writes, the “over-beliefs”, i. e., the historical concretization of the religious “nucleus”, begin. These various “over-beliefs”—which include theistic, as well as non-theistic ideas of the divine, are, as James vigorously insists, “absolutely indispensable”, and “we should treat them with tenderness and tolerance so long as they are not intolerant themselves.” “Over-beliefs” include “monistic interpretations of religion” that comprise various modes of “mysticism”, contemporary forms of “idealism” which culminate in philosophical approximations to “the Absolute”, as well as a “pragmatic” view of religion, that is to say the religious position that James affirms as his own. This view

<sup>44</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 487.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 508–509.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 508.

assumes, in various historically charged ways, that “the world interpreted religiously is not the materialistic world over again”<sup>47</sup>, but the *locus* of a “piecemeal supernaturalism”. In his “Postscript” to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* James writes:

“Notwithstanding my inability to accept either popular Christianity or scholastic theism, I suppose that my belief, that *in communion with the Ideal* new force comes into the world [...], subjects me to being classed among the super-naturalists of the piecemeal [...] type.”<sup>48</sup>

James is quite aware that his attempts at a philosophical exploration of “mysticism” and “religion” are open to many justified criticisms. At the end of *Varieties* he thus expresses the hope that “in a later work I may be enabled to state my position more amply and consequently more clearly”. In one regard he is convinced, however that his elucidations are correct: “I think”, he writes on the last page of his book, “that a final philosophy of religion will have to consider the *pluralistic hypothesis* more seriously than it has hitherto been willing to consider it.”<sup>49</sup>

### Part 3. Josiah Royce: On the “Beloved Community”, “Charity”, and the “Invisible Church”

James’s colleague and friend at Harvard, Josiah Royce—who, like James, defended religion against a science-induced “immanentism”—criticized the “individualism” which permeates James’s view of mysticism and religion. Royce articulated his critique with positive reference to the “interpretation”-focused, intersubjectively dimensioned “sign” concept of his other important discussion partner, Peirce, arguing that James’s analyses are in need of a “community”-related *supplementum*.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 512–513; 515; 518.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 521.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 502; 526.

<sup>50</sup> See Ludwig Nagl, “Avoiding the dichotomy of ‘either the individual or the collectivity’: Josiah Royce on Community, and on James’s Concept of Religion”, *The Varieties of Transcendence. Pragmatism and the Theory of Religion*, edited by Hermann Deuser, Hans Joas, Matthias Jung, and Magnus Schlette (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 236–252; and Ludwig Nagl, “Religion in early pragmatism: William James (and his friend and critic, Josiah Royce)”, in: Ludwig Nagl, *Toward a Global Discourse on Religion in a Secular Age*.

For James, religion is exclusively tied to “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude”; thus “ecclesiastical organizations” are mere derivatives that grow “only secondarily”.<sup>51</sup> This individualistic approach, Royce argues, overlooks the *socio-communal components* which, inexplicitly as well as explicitly, are contained in any individual self-relation. He argues, like Peirce, that we never have an “immediate” grasp on ourselves. The reflecting self interprets itself to itself: this process repeats—at the very centre of subjectivity—the complex structure of “community”. In Royce’s mature work, this *inter-subjective* aspect of all human experience is analysed, in his “architecture of communities”, in *four* ways, two of which are explicitly related to faith, mysticism, and “charity”/“love”<sup>52</sup>.

In *The Problem of Christianity*<sup>53</sup>, Royce shows, *first* (in full accordance with Peirce) that even the validation *process* of natural sciences has no “monological” quality, but has to rely on the “community of scientific investigation” (PC 324). He, *secondly*, points out that processes of *communal* interpretation do also play a prime role in all branches of the humanities. In Royce’s analyses of a *third* and a *fourth* form of community we enter the field of “charity” and religion. The philosopher and Jesuit Frank M. Oppenheim, in his seminal study on *Royce’s Interaction with Peirce, James and Dewey*<sup>54</sup>, convincingly argued that Royce—“in his late period”—was preoccupied with motifs that are present in mysticism: with the need “to ‘fall in love with the universe’”, as well as “to discern the workings of the Logos-Spirit” in the “invisible church.”<sup>55</sup> In the *third* dimension of his “architecture of communities”, Royce deals with (what he calls) “the Beloved community, Church”: the *locus* of mankind’s attempts to address the Absolute. In doing so he reformulates, on the one hand, the core of the Christian creed, “charity”, while at the

*Essays on Philosophical Pragmatism* (Vienna and Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2021), 151–163.

<sup>51</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, XXI.

<sup>52</sup> For a more extensive analysis of Royce’s rich concept of religion see the essays on Royce in Ludwig Nagl, *Toward a Global Discourse on Religion in a Secular Age. Essays on Philosophical Pragmatism* (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2021), 165–248.

<sup>53</sup> Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001) (= PC).

<sup>54</sup> Frank M. Oppenheim, S. J., *Reverence for the Relations of Life. Re-imagining Pragmatism via Josiah Royce’s Interactions with Peirce, James, and Dewey* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.



same time arguing, that this “leading idea”—love—is not at all exclusively tied to Christian faith, but is of trans-Christian significance.

In anticipation of the contemporary faith crisis, Royce writes In *The Problem of Christianity*:

“Whatever may [...] be the fortunes of Christian institutions, or of Christian traditions, the doctrine of the salvation of the otherwise hopelessly lost individual through devotion to the life of the genuinely real and Universal Community must survive, and must direct the future both of religion and of mankind.” (PC 42).

Love—the idea of “unity of the Spirit”—“belongs to no unique and visible church”. This claim is the core of his *fourth, regulative* conception of “community”, of the idea of an “invisible church”: “the brotherhood consisting of all who, in any clime or land, live in the Spirit.” “Pauline charity”—while beautifully expressing this idea—remains, Royce writes, at the same time tied to parochialism, thus contributing to “a world where faith does not understand faith”, “where the fighting blood even of saintly souls is [...] heated by a hatred of seemingly false creeds.” In Royce’s “architecture of communities”, the “universal community” purifies—with reference to the idea of a pluralist, “invisible” church—those contents of level three which are susceptible to dogmatism. “What Paul said about charity”, Royce writes, “must be universalized, if it is true”. “Tolerance is [thus] what charity becomes when we have to deal with those whose special cause we just now cannot understand”.<sup>56</sup> Parochialism has to be restrained:

“Only by universalizing the doctrine which Paul preached to the Corinthians can we be prepared to use to the full this crowning source of insight,—Royce writes—the [...] inspiration which is embodied in *the countless forms and expressions of the invisible church*.”<sup>57</sup>

Thus for Royce furtherance of the idea of a universal community does *not* depend on the success or failure of this or that expansionist, but parochial, “visible” Church. Our future task, he writes, is not to re-affirm separation but “the task of inventing and applying the arts which shall win men over to unity, and which shall overcome their original hatefulness.” (PC 404)

<sup>56</sup> Josiah Royce, *Sources of Religious Insight* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 279–280; 295–297.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* (Emphasis L. N.)

#### Part 4. Neo-pragmatic Annex: Hilary Putnam on Simone Weil and religious tolerance, and Richard Rorty on 1 Corinthians, 13<sup>58</sup>

The elaborate reflections on religious pluralism, charity, and tolerance that form, in Classical American pragmatism, the core of James's as well as Royce's view of religion, were revitalized, in recent neo-pragmatist discourse, significantly by Hilary Putnam.

In his mature work, the Harvard philosopher deals carefully with Wittgenstein's thoughts on "religious belief"<sup>59</sup> as well as with William James's essay "The Will to Believe"<sup>60</sup>, and he focuses, in addition, in *Jewish philosophy as a Guide to Life*<sup>61</sup> (2008), on "the difficult—*spiritually* difficult—ideas"<sup>62</sup> expressed by Rosenzweig, Buber and Levinas. Along the lines of Wittgenstein, Putnam defends all religious readings of the world that are able to organize the life-forms of their adherents (as long these religious readings are not intolerant). Authentic faith is focused on charity and love, not on the parochial exclusion of "the other". This is the main idea in Putnam's essay "Plädoyer für eine Verabschiedung des Begriffs 'Idolatrie'" ("Let's Stop Using the Notion 'Idolatry'"), in which he carefully investigates Simone Weil's—interested and tolerant—appreciation of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> For the following, cf. our previous article, "Three Discourses on Religion in Neo-Pragmatism", *Filosofskij žurnal / The Philosophy Journal* 12 (2019, 3), 5–17, here 6–7.

<sup>59</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1992), chapter 7, "Wittgenstein on Religious Belief", 134–157.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 9, "Dewey and James", 191–197.

<sup>61</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life. Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Hilary Putnam, "Plädoyer für eine Verabschiedung des Begriffs 'Idolatrie'", *Religion nach der Religionskritik*, edited by Ludwig Nagl (Vienna-Berlin: Oldenbourg-Akademie Verlag, 2003), 52–55. Simone Weil can be rightly called a mystic, whose thoughts on love and God are situated between Judaism and Christianity. See in this context Peter Winch, *Simone Weil, "The Just Balance"* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Reiner Wimmer, *Simone Weil. Person und Werk* (Freiburg/Breisgau: Herder, 2009); and in Gerhard Wehr, *Christliche Mystiker. Von Paulus und Johannes bis Simone Weil und Dag Hammarskjöld* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2008), see the chapter "Simone Weil: Jüdin—Philosophin—christliche Mystikerin", 229–235.

Putnam, however, does not at all opt for an abstract relativism which claims “that all religions are equally good”. He rather argues, similarly to James, that every complex religion, *in its best parts*, does contain forms of religious sensibility that are less developed in other religions. His example of this is the sensibility for compassion which was developed in Buddhism.

“Die Vorstellung (dass die Buddhisten in den 2000 Jahren, in denen sie über Mitempfindung meditieren) nichts hätten erkennen können, was es bedeutet, ein mitfühlendes Leben zu führen, was nicht auch Juden und Christen gesehen hätten, ist Arroganz, ja sie kommt einer Form von Blindheit gleich”—Putnam writes.<sup>64</sup>

To appreciate, and to learn, from *the best* that other religious world interpretations have to offer—this core idea of a (not merely formal) religious pluralism—does not, however, imply, as Putnam expressly states, that believers have to abandon their own tradition. On the very contrary—this appreciation is able to enrich, and deepen, one’s own religious belief.

The second neo-pragmatic philosopher who began to re-analyze religion “after the scientific criticism of religion” and in doing so pointed out that its core is “love”, is Richard Rorty.<sup>65</sup> He characterized today’s intellectual situation—in the book which he co-published with the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*—as follows:

“The anti-positivist tenor of post-Kuhnian philosophy of science has combined with the work of post-Heideggerian theologians to make intellectuals more sympathetic to William James’s claim that natural science and religion need not compete with one another.”<sup>66</sup>

Rorty points out that contemporary approaches to religion are strongly influenced by Kant: “That we view God *as a postulate of practical reason*

<sup>64</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Plädoyer für eine Verabschiedung des Begriffs ‘Idolatrie’*, 58. (“The idea that Buddhists, in the 2000 years in which they have meditated about compassion, would not have been able to learn anything about how to lead a compassionate life that Jews and Christians have not also learned, is arrogant, and comes close to a form of blindness.” [German translation L. N.]

<sup>65</sup> See in this context also Ludwig Nagl, “(Neo-)Pragmatic Explorations of Religion: Richard Rorty, Cornel West, Hilary Putnam”, *La Religione dopo la critica alla religione. Un dibattito filosofico*. Edited by Herta Nagl-Docekal, Wolfgang Kaltenbacher and Claudia Melica (Napoli: La scuola di Pitagora editrice, 2017), 115–146.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*. Edited by Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 30.

[...] cleared the way for thinkers like Schleiermacher [...], Kierkegaard, Barth and Lévinas”. This is also of central importance for Vattimo’s “weak” re-reading of the Christian faith which (albeit not explicitly) has strong connections to what Kant called *Zweifelglaube* (“doubting faith”) and *Hoffnungsglaube* (faith, based on hope).<sup>67</sup>

Hence faith, as Rorty stresses, does not culminate in “knowledge”, but in an action horizon that secularists like Rorty himself can, in significant parts, share with religious believers: in an emphasis on those ideas of love which are expressed (according to Rorty and in full agreement with Vattimo<sup>68</sup>) in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 13.<sup>69</sup>

Unlike Vattimo, however, Rorty opts not for a religious life perspective but for an exclusively “humanistically” and “naturalistically” configured “secularism”—for “a “fuzzy overlap of faith, hope, and love that may crystallize around a labour union as easily as around a congregation, around a novel as easily as around a sacrament, around a God as easily as around a child”<sup>70</sup>; or, as he also writes: for the (“unjustifiable”) hope that “some day,

<sup>67</sup> For a close reading of these Kantian reflections see Rudolf Langthaler, *Geschichte, Ethik und Religion im Anschluß an Kant. Philosophische Perspektiven “zwischen skeptischer Hoffnungslosigkeit und dogmatischem Trotz”* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2014), volume 2, 555–570.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Rorty, “Anti-clericalism and Atheism”, in: Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, 35 and 40.

<sup>69</sup> “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know it in part: but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” (The Bible, the Authorized Version)

<sup>70</sup> Richard Rorty, “Faith, responsibility, and romance”, in: *The Cambridge Companion to William James*. Edited by Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 96.

any millennium now, my remote descendants will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law.”<sup>71</sup>

From this *secularistically re-dimensioned* love and hope perspective, Rorty is in full sympathy with Vattimo’s *post-metaphysical re-reading* of a core category of Christianity, “kenosis”<sup>72</sup>. They both interpret it as “the gradual weakening of the worship of God as power, and its gradual replacement with the worship of God as love.”<sup>73</sup> In such a re-reading, Rorty argues, the genuine sense of God’s incarnation is better understood than in the older “triumphalistic” images of God, because it comes close to the “humanistic” detachment of our hope horizon from all modes of transcendence.<sup>74</sup>

In contrast to Rorty’s attempt at a fully “humanistic” narrowing down of “kenosis”, Vattimo points out, however, that all religious views of the world express *a sense of finitude* that we cannot overcome with recourse to an absolute form of “humanism”. The various historical interpretations of our “feeling of dependence” (a feeling which was analyzed by James as the core of any religion) are interwoven with constellations of the “objective spirit” (as Vattimo, in an almost Roycean manner, writes<sup>75</sup>), that is to say with socially mediated and historically structured attempts at an explication of faith.<sup>76</sup> All this, in its rich detail, tends to disappear in Rorty’s “humanistically naturalized” hope perspective.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, 40.

<sup>72</sup> The concept of “kenosis” (which, as Vattimo explains, means the incarnation of God, his “Entäußerung”, i. e., “his lowering to the human level”), originates in the epistle of Paul to the Philippians, 2:7. See in this context Gianni Vattimo, *Glauben—Philosophieren* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997), 34.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, 56.

<sup>74</sup> Vattimo does not follow Rorty at that point in his argument. For a short presentation of Vattimo’s philosophy of religion see Gianni Vattimo, “Die christliche Botschaft und die Auflösung der Metaphysik”, in: *Religion, Moderne, Postmoderne. Philosophisch-theologische Erkundungen*. Edited by Klaus Dethloff, Ludwig Nagl, and Friedrich Wolfram (Berlin: Parerga, 2002), 219–228.

<sup>75</sup> Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, 77; 70.

<sup>76</sup> Most of these traditions of interpretation tend to be deeply interwoven, as a careful investigation shows, with theological as well as philosophical reflection and critique.

<sup>77</sup> “When I speak of the God of the Bible”, Vattimo writes, “I speak of the God which I know only through the Bible. [...] My dependence on God is my dependence only on the biblical tradition.” (Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, 77.) Religion, of necessity, takes on a concrete social shape, manifesting itself in communities, churches, etc: “When we talk about the future of religion, I also think about another

Vattimo, it seems, is right in insisting on the difference between a religious and an exclusively “humanistic” re-reading of “kenosis”. Rorty’s non-religious interpretation of (what he calls) the “fuzzy overlap of faith, love, and hope”: the idea, that is, that we can overcome finiteness *collectively*, with recourse to a *social apotheosis* that steers clear of all “supernatural transcendence”, may, “in a secular age”, sound plausible to many. Classical pragmatists like Peirce, James and Royce, as well as neopragmatists like Hilary Putnam, did, however, philosophically explore love, finiteness, mysticism, and religion in a different manner. Their complex analyses have been taken up appreciatively in contemporary philosophical discourse by (among others<sup>78</sup>) Charles Taylor in *Varieties of Religion today. William James Revisited*<sup>79</sup>, as well as by Hans Joas in his book *Faith as an Option*.<sup>80</sup>

question”, Vattimo writes: “What about the future of the Church, the visible, disciplinary, and dogmatic structure of the Church?” (Ibid., 69) A careful analysis of the *social stature* of “the religious” is, for Vattimo, central for any in-depth analysis of religion. Within modern societies (that increasingly focus on individual self-aggrandizement) serious problems tend to occur. “Here I always come back to the example of Comte, who founded a sort of positivistic church”, Vattimo writes, “because he wanted people to go somewhere on Sunday, at least to do something that had an attitude comparable to religious preaching.” (Ibid.) That there exists a structurally deep connection between a living mode of religion and religious “communities” (which, in Rorty’s concept of a privatized “religious”, remains out of sight) was—within Classical pragmatism—carefully analyzed by Josiah Royce. (See in this context Ludwig Nagl, “‘Community’: Erwägungen zum ‘absolute pragmatism’ in der Spätphilosophie von Josiah Royce”, in: Ludwig Nagl, *Das verhüllte Absolute. Essays zur zeitgenössischen Religionsphilosophie* [Frankfurt a. M. -Berlin-Bern-Bruxelles-New York-Oxford-Wien: Peter Lang, 2010], 221–258.)

<sup>78</sup> For a re-reading of Peirce, Royce, and Putnam which is not restricted to science-related and secularist themes, see Ludwig Nagl, *Das verhüllte Absolute*, Part III, “Pragmatismus/Neopragmatismus”, 73–329.

<sup>79</sup> Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today. William James Revisited* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002). See also Charles Taylor, “Shapes of Faith Today”, in: *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age. Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*. Edited by Charles Taylor, José Casanova, George F. McLean and João J. Vila-Chã (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016), 269–281.

<sup>80</sup> Hans Joas, *Faith as an Option. Possible Futures for Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014). See also: Hans Joas, “The Church in a World of Options”, in: *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age. Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*. Edited by Charles Taylor, José Casanova, George F. McLean and João J. Vila-Chã (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016), 85–96.