

Democracy, Passions, Faith

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The original purpose of this panel was to explore the preconditions of deliberative democracy from a pragmatist perspective. I thank Torjus, Carlos and Roberto for their meticulous reconstruction and analysis of diverse patterns of normative interaction that deliberation requires not only as a functional device.

My own task was to explore (1) the role of political passions in the public sphere (I mean *passions*, not feelings or sentiments) and (2) the tension between deliberative attitudes in the public sphere and religious ideas and values. Unfortunately I was not able to finish my paper in progress, and I would only to suggest some questions about the second point, that is, about deliberation and religion.¹

I have to confess that a stimulus for this paper was a recent symposium on political theology in Madrid in which some American voices proclaimed that *only* religious traditions could provide politics with new energies and compensate the motivational deficit that seems being destroying democracy. I have to confess that I don't agree with this position. Politics probably needs more fire, yes, and probably deliberative

¹ In the first part of the whole paper, I emphasize the relevance of Michael Walzer's view of political passions for a pragmatic view of deliberative politics. According to Walzer deliberation is not the check-point of politics, nor the core of democracy, although it is an ingredient of it. Reason cannot be slave of passions, but Reason without passions is just a consolatory illusion. Too much passion just gets intolerance, blindness, violence. However, an excessive idealization of Reason promotes a lack of reaction. Political passions are associated to many dimensions of a participative democracy and we should not fear if we describe them using an almost confrontational and combative jargon (militancy, affiliation, campaign, fervour). Democracy requires *civilized* passions, but it *belligerent* passions (Walzer does not talk in Jamesian terms, but one could say that he eventually describes the "the political equivalent" of some "warlike virtues").

models reflect a too pallid fire, but I think that to introduce more religion in politics is truly “playing with fire”. In addition, a former motive for this inquiry has been an increasing dissatisfaction with some too optimistic pragmatist views of *conflicts* between worldviews, and particularly between secular and religious worldviews. Since I was not able to develop a more detail paper, you have to forgive the relative straightness of some of my statements.

In reference to old pragmatists, I would say that, in spite of his own desire to offer “equivalents” of religion, William James was very realist about the everlasting character of beliefs in a supernatural and transcendent God. He also admitted, I think, the difficulties to avoid the permanent confrontation among different faiths, at the same time he insinuates that secularism could be defended with the same intolerance and cruelty than a religion. Dewey, however, was more optimistic and thought that diverse religious faiths could be translated into a “common faith”.

Contemporary thinkers as Bernstein and Rorty have offered new models of translations of religious ideas and values into shared secular languages that I consider less optimistic than Dewey’s view. However, there are differences between the secularism of Bernstein and Rorty: They both criticize the rationalism of Habermas’s “translation proviso”, but Rorty was much less realistic than Bernstein when he proposed a translation of religion into poetry. Bernstein, however, seem to have a position closer to Walzer realism, that is: he doesn’t think that the “translation proviso” can be as *cognitive* as Habermas describe it, but at the same time that he does not trust too much in the *persuasive* model of Rorty.

In order to understand these differences, I would need to explain, first, the position of Rawls and Habermas, but also of Michael Walzer, an author that, if I’m right, is closer to pragmatism, or at least, closer to what I would call a realistic pragmatism.

The premise of this discussion is that, unfortunately, when many people talk about “God” they are not meaning any of the substitutes than the pragmatic family sometimes has offered. As an ironic and radical atheist said (Russell), if you believe in God, then you believe in God, that is, you believe in the Almighty and not in somebody similar to a chosen President, or in a friendly power collaborative with the realization of our best ideals. (“Natural piety”, “faith in ideals”, “loyalty to Humanity”, some other atheists have said will never compete with religious attitudes as fervour, devotion, adoration, sacrifice, obedience...). However, I think that the important issue is not the content of the religious beliefs from a theoretical point of view, but their role in the context of moral confrontations. Religious voices are not offering an appropriately *political* account of a public conflict or a debate if they describe it, for example, as a contest of confrontation between “Christians” and “infidel” (“heretical”, “pagan”) values. People with religious values should try to politicize them, since if not, how they could admit the *legitimacy* of the victory of their adversaries? Walzer’s version of translation principle is interesting: people with religious values don’t need to leave them behind when they enter the practical arena, but they do need to surrender their absolutism. Politics is, or ought to be discursive, and it is, or ought to be, enemy of absolutism. Religion can be discursive and argumentative, but its language tends to be absolutist in character (in terms of faith, mystery, dogma and orthodoxy). The habit to surrender absolutism is the more problematic requirement since it *cannot be imposed*. Secularism requires an acceptance of the open, contingent, inconclusive, and tolerant character of all positions in the public sphere. But this requirement “*can never and (should never be made) a matter for legal enforcement. It has to do with political culture and public education*” (Walzer, 1999/2007, pp. 120).

Religious views, then, can enter in the political arena, but they have to be defended with something different than assertions of divine authority.

From the pragmatic secularist view, where the arguments come from doesn't matter. Religious believers can be convinced that their best arguments come from God, or their prophets, or their authorized texts, but *they still have to persuade their fellow citizens.*

Bernstein (2010; pp. 162 and ff.) makes a complementary argument: the sources which promote deliberative attitudes cannot depend on enforcement of law, but they cannot also be induced by Habermas's abstract invocation to "self-reflection". A dialogical *mentality* is much more than a functional precondition for a deliberative democracy. It is an essential condition for a way of life which tries to respect religious beliefs at the same time that it tries to be loyal to the demands of a free and open society.

I cannot explain many other details. I will only finish asking my colleagues and the audience this brief question. If religious believers agree that even if their best arguments *come* from God, or from his authorities, they *have to persuade* their fellow citizens... Wouldn't they think that they have eventually accepted the secularist view and so given up the battle? In this case....

1) How does the *pragmatic family* come to terms with the feeling of believers that they are acting in unfamiliar ways? Can be major religions be adapted to democratic *ethos* without inducing into the believers the feeling that their deepest religious longings are been repressed?

2) Can secularist traditions promote *dialogue* with major religions without inducing into the non-believers the feeling that religion is still an obstacle rather than a stimulus for full democracy?

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