“Loyal to a Dream Country”: Republicanism and the Pragmatism of William James and Richard Rorty

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Our nation has been founded in what we may call our American religion, baptized and reared in the faith that a man requires no master to take care of him, and that common people can work out their salvation well enough together if left free to try.

William James, “Robert Gould Shaw Oration,” 1897

[The civic religion of which Whitman and Dewey were prophets] … centered around taking advantage of traditional pride in American citizenship by substituting social justice for individual freedom as our country’s principal goal … You have to be loyal to a dream country rather than to the one to which you wake up every morning.


James and Rorty refer here to what sociologists used to call the American civil religion. In 1967, Robert N. Bellah coined this phrase to suggest how Americans, shaped by the complex interplay of republican and Christian traditions, believe they have an obligation “to carry out God’s will on earth.” Since the 1970s, though, it has been historians like J. G. A. Pocock who have shown how republicans throughout the modern West have for the last five centuries blended the millennialist beliefs of Christianity with the ancient conviction that humans realize their political nature through the virtuous acts required to sustain republics in a cosmos ruled by fortune. As James once said of pragmatism, republicanism is a new name for an old way of thinking.1

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Today, American pragmatism is not associated with republicanism. On the contrary, along with postmodernism, pragmatism is associated with a new antifoundationalist culture, in which all truths – including cosmic and civic ones – are made, not found. In both its old period (roughly 1890 to 1930) and new one (roughly 1980 to the present), pragmatism is known for promoting this culture, a culture defined by a certain “nonchalance” about beliefs that other consider fundamental. It is all the more remarkable, then, that when pragmatists turn to politics they consistently turn to the beliefs of republicanism, particularly that we inhabit a cosmos ruled by fortune (what new pragmatists call contingency) and that communal or civic acts are our best response to this cosmos. No pragmatist has ever named this set of beliefs “republican.” Indeed, the epigrams above are rare in calling it anything at all. The question that this article addresses is: why, given all the possible vocabularies with which they can make new truths, do pragmatists – particularly its two greatest popularizers, William James of the old school and Richard Rorty of the new – consistently turn to republicanism?

This article will consider two possible answers in turn. The first answer, which new pragmatists have not stated but would most likely support, is that, because pragmatism is an antifoundationalist philosophy, its proponents are free to take up whatever vocabulary seems to work best in the current historical context. Since republicanism has proven useful during key junctures in American history – Thomas Jefferson used it in 1776, Abraham Lincoln in 1863, Martin Luther King in 1963 – pragmatists (most of whom are American) use it during such times, too.

The second answer, which James himself gave but which has since been forgotten, is that pragmatism is a religion, a religion in the sense that one of its claims is a matter of faith rather than reason. That claim is that the universe is indeed one of contingency rather than order (James called it a “multiverse” or a “pluralistic universe”). Only upon this foundational...
belief can pragmatists then become “antifoundationalist.” From this perspective, political pragmatists inevitably become republicans because both groups religiously believe in a cosmos governed by fortune and in the absolute efficacy of civic responses to the contingencies generated by that cosmos.

The first answer is useful—today’s pragmatists could sharpen their political vocabularies with more republican conceits—but only amounts to academic housekeeping. Following analysis of “antifoundationalist pragmatism,” I will therefore spend more time on the second, more controversial answer, “religious pragmatism,” which has been obscured or evaded by most pragmatists since James, and which—if true—has important consequences for pragmatism in America today.

ANTIFOUNDATIONALIST PRAGMATISM

Today, old and new pragmatists are understood to be antifoundationalist philosophers. Like postmodernists, antifoundationalist pragmatists recognize that history changes all: that everything is “socially constructed,” including what nonpragmatists might mistake for permanent foundations. In a now famous passage from Pragmatism (1906), James says that to search for foundations is “a very primitive kind of quest,” as if there were a single magic word that will “name the universe’s principle and … [thus] … possess it.”

As antifoundationalists, pragmatists see through the foolishness of this quest for what Rorty calls “final vocabularies.” Instead, pragmatists see words—James mentions God, Matter, Reason, and a few others—as having only “practical cash-value,” tools with which we can practically indicate “the ways in which existing realities may be changed” (509). Pragmatism thus allows us to hold our vocabularies lightly; indeed it requires us to do so. As Stanley Fish, one of the most stringent antifoundationalists, puts it, “once pragmatism becomes a program … it turns into the essentialism it challenges.” Instead, “like a corridor in a hotel,” James says, pragmatism is used by anyone—atheists, theists, chemists, idealists—on the way to whatever room they like (510). Therefore, the antifoundationalist pragmatist who does present a program—say, a political program—does so with the understanding that his program is exceedingly arbitrary: “to put forth a vision is always [a] ‘leap of faith,’” Rorty says; a “Pascalian wager,” adds Cornel West. Depending on what the pragmatist believes needs to be done, he can walk

down James’s corridor to a room full of Deweyan democrats, or to one full of Heideggerian Nazis.⁴

Like anyone else, of course, antifoundationalist pragmatists want their programs to work and therefore pay great attention to their historical context. As a few historians have recently shown, James was no exception.⁵ One of the most persuasive analyses of the direct influence of history of James’s vocabulary is Deborah Coon’s in the June 1996 issue of The Journal of American History. Coon identifies the specific moment when James first deliberately takes up a political vocabulary. Distressed in the late 1890s by increasingly aggressive acts of imperialism by the United States, James “became acutely sensitive to the notion that philosophies lent themselves to one side or another in the affairs of the world, and it became crucial to James to create a philosophy that would take a stand against imperializing tendencies wherever it found them” (71). So, James, “not much engaged by political events” before the 1890s, suddenly became a “type of late-nineteenth-century communitarian anarchist” (73). The famous books he published subsequently (like The Varieties of Religious Experience in 1902 and Pragmatism in 1907) were thus, Coon argues, “forged in the fire of his radicalization of the 1890s” (99).

For antifoundationalist pragmatists and their historians, history drives philosophy. Since Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, the 1979 book that inaugurated the new pragmatism, Richard Rorty has been candid about history’s role in his work. In 1982, introducing Consequence of Pragmatism: Essays 1972–1980, Rorty explains antifoundationalist pragmatism (he calls it “post-Philosophical culture” here) as “offer[ing] a view on pretty much anything, in the hope of making it hang together with everything else.”

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⁴ The Fish, Rorty, and West quotations are from Pragmatism in Law and Society, Michael Brint and William Weaver, eds. (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1991), 63, 93, and 121. This particular linking of Dewey and Heidegger is made by Robert B. Westbrook in “A New Pragmatism,” American Quarterly, 45:3 (September 1993), 438–44, p. 439; but Rorty makes links like this in many places; see, for example, the essays “Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey” and “Pragmatism, Relativism, Irrationalism” in Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972–1980) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

⁵ There are two major histories of James’s thought as explicitly political: James Kloppenberg, Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920 (New York: Oxford, 1986), which argues James was a social democrat, and James Livingston, Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1830–1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), which argues he was a postmodern socialist. As discussed below, Deborah J. Coon’s “‘One Moment in the World’s Salvation’: Anarchism and the Radicalization of William James,” The Journal of American History, 83:1 (June 1996), 70–99, is an important addition to this scholarship. Future references to Coon’s article appear in the text.
When “everything else” was the Cold War, Rorty’s political programs were naturally restrained in scope. In 1983 he outlined a “Post-Modernist Bourgeois Liberalism.” In 1987, though he confessed his regret for having used the term postmodernism, his new program as a “social democrat” was still modest: to cherish liberal institutions in the face of Soviet imperialism, especially when “time seems to be on the Soviet side.” And, in 1989, the abrupt disappearance of communism in Eastern Europe found Rorty still tinkering with his Cold War liberalism in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, inventing the “liberal ironist” who spent his time privately redescribing himself since J. S. Mill had already said “pretty much the last word” about public life in a liberal democracy.6

Like William James a century before, however, Rorty was quick to gauge the meaning of global developments. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, liberalism was no longer a shield against the communist menace but something to work on again. Rorty stopped talking about the “liberal ironist” and instead (in an April 1992 essay, “The Intellectuals at the End of Socialism”) frankly stated “that we American leftist intellectuals do need to cast about for a new vocabulary.”

Thinking of newly free Eastern Europeans, Rorty wrote that “given the suffering they have endured under regimes that called themselves Marxist, [they] are likely to feel that Marxist rhetoric is no more respectable than Nazi rhetoric.” Rorty urged Western Marxists and socialists to drop this absolutist philosophy, and instead to “banalize” – that is, render contingent – their political ambitions as Rorty had already done. “I hope that we can stop using notions like ‘mystification’ and ‘ideology,’ notions that suggest that we are in a position to see through mere social constructions and discern something that is more than a social construction.” From the entirely contextual perspective of anti-foundational pragmatists, all we have are social constructions. “It would be better simply to say: perhaps we can construct a better society than we have now.”7

Since the Cold War’s end, to persuade others to take up his banal vocabulary of reform, Rorty has consistently presented the contemporary situation as “a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely

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promises great things.’’ That entrenched vocabulary, in Rorty’s view, is no longer orthodox Marxism but “cultural leftism.” In 1989 he wrote that “[t]he cultural left seems to me to share with the old-timey Marxists both an instinctive distrust of proposals for concrete piecemeal reform and the conviction that it is very important to find the ‘correct theoretical analysis’ of a social phenomenon.” Rorty brushed aside charges that he was joining in the “PC-bashing” then current. He only sought, as the Old Left once had, to make liberalism work for us, particularly to curb the “selfishness” of Americans since the 1980s. The cultural left, though, was still so focused on ideological purity that it was paralyzed, able only to report how “power” seemed to corrupt every political deed. While this was of some use in reducing American “sadism” toward women and minorities, Rorty noted, the main work of liberalism—reducing selfishness—was not getting done. For the sake of the republic, the left needed to become antifoundationalist, pragmatist.9

Indeed, the vocabulary that helped Rorty make his case was not so much that of the Old Left per se but a vocabulary Rorty associates with the Old Left and would eventually call “civic religion.” Using this vocabulary, Rorty was able to portray his Old Left position as dedicated to our republic, awash in contingencies. Unlike the cultural left, Rorty argued “[t]he Old Leftists … did not think that the culture they shared with the Fourth-of-July orator and with Martin Luther King, Jr., a culture that insists on patriotic celebration of America as a land of increasing freedom and equality, was simply an instrument by which ‘capitalism reproduces itself.’” American culture was for the pragmatist Old Left the only available “vehicle” through which “to circulate increasingly radical ideas among the electorate.” Writing in The New York Times in February 1994, Rorty argued that, “[l]ike every other country, ours has a lot to be proud of and a lot to be ashamed of. But a nation cannot reform itself unless it takes pride in itself – unless it has an identity, rejoices in it, reflects upon it and tries to live up to it.”10

8 Contingency, 9.
The Massey lectures he gave at Harvard University in 1997 and published as Achieving Our Country in 1998 represent Rorty's sharpest contrast of his "civic religion" and that "Gothic" worldview promoted by the cultural left, where (paraphrasing Mark Edmundson's 1997 study, Nightmare on Main Street) the world "is haunted by ubiquitous specters, the most frightening of which is called 'power,'" against which we are powerless (94). In contrast, Rorty uses his civic religion to present contemporary evils – such as the growing income gap and the demagogues who exploit it – as clear and addressable threats to our fragile republic. If nothing is done, Rorty argues, "something will crack." The strongman will appear, and then "nobody can predict what will happen." After all, "most of the predictions made about what would happen if Hindenburg named Hitler chancellor were wildly overoptimistic" (90). Compared to the despairing Gothic or sin-choked vocabularies to which Achieving particularly draws our attention, Rorty's calls for reform make no absolute claims about how the universe works; indeed, in a world no one fully understands, civic religion does seem humane, robust, and practical: the best vocabulary for a progressive republic after the Cold War.11

RELIGIOUS PRAGMATISM

There is another way to understand this pragmatist use of civic religion, however, one that requires focusing upon something about pragmatism that its new practitioners either obscure or disclaim: the peculiar foundation upon which antifoundationalism seems to rest. In another section of "What Pragmatism Means," less often cited than the corridor section, James actually explains this peculiar foundation. Passage through the corridor, it seems, is not exactly carefree. "The individual has a stock of old opinions already," James notes, "but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain." Experiencing an "inward trouble," the individual resolves upon "modifying his previous mess of opinions," making sure to "save as much of it as he can, for in this matter of belief we are all extreme conservatives." Faced with a new experience, we

11 Christopher Lehmann-Haupt views Rorty’s Hitler analogy as "intellectual bullying" (see "How the American Left Lost Hope," The New York Times, 23 April 1998), but it is also very republican to be vigilantly alert to corruptions that threaten one’s republic. Alan Ryan’s suggestion that Rorty’s “lay sermon for the untheological” is like Richard Price’s call for a rational English patriotism in 1789 is more accurate: see “The New Left,” The New York Times Book Review, 17 May 1998, 13.
cannot simply take up any vocabulary. “An outrée explanation, violating all our preconceptions, would never pass for a true account of a novelty. We should scratch round industriously till we find something less eccentric.” James emphasizes how we conserve old beliefs. Even during his “most violent revolutions,” “an individual’s beliefs leave most of his old order standing … Loyalty to them is the first principle – in most case it is the only principle” (513).

Pragmatists, then, are as wary of modifying vocabularies as non-pragmatists. The difference is that pragmatists will finally make the modifications. They recognize that sometimes old beliefs must be adjusted to work among new experiences. In a later lecture in Pragmatism, “Pragmatism and Humanism,” James contrasts the pragmatist’s ultimate willingness to modify old truths to the unwillingness of the foundationalist or “rationalist.” “The essential contrast,” James says with emphasis, “is that for rationalism reality is ready-made and complete for all eternity, while for pragmatism it is still in the making, and awaits part of its completion from the future. On the one side the universe is absolutely secure, on the other side it is still pursuing its adventures” (599). As James elaborates upon this distinction between pragmatists and rationalists, it becomes clear that this vision of an unfinished universe is sacred to pragmatists – the one foundational belief that they will not surrender. Where rationalists begin dogmatically with the claim that the universe is complete and in order, pragmatists begin dogmatically with the claim that the universe is incomplete and in flux. As James explains, “the alternative between pragmatism and rationalism in the shape in which we now have it before us, is no longer a question in the theory of knowledge, it concerns the structure of the universe itself.” For pragmatists, there is only one view allowed: “we have only one edition of the universe, unfinished” (600).

This argument from Pragmatism thus suggests that when we look at James’s antifoundationalism – his ease with new vocabularies – we are really only looking at his “theory of knowledge.” What, we should ask, is the supporting “structure of the universe”? What are the old beliefs, in other words, that James not only desperately conserves but that actually allow him to take on subsequently a select number of new vocabularies? Any history of James’s intellectual growth that describes a violent revolution in his thinking – such as Deborah Coon’s history of James’s sudden anarchism – overlooks James’s foundational beliefs, the beliefs that allowed him to take up “communitarian anarchism” and not something more outrée. Coon recognizes that some such beliefs exist, for she writes that “[p]rior to the 1890s, the U.S. had appeared to many of its
citizens to live according to the ideals of democracy ... but in the 1890s newer ideals seemed to be developing, “ideals that “seemed to James and many Americans to fly in the face of the older ideals” (74). Challenged by new experience, then, James would not have abandoned these older “ideals of democracy,” whose influence, as James wrote in *Pragmatism*, is “absolutely controlling” (513). Instead, he would have modified these old ideals to help explain how they might work better today than American imperialism does.

James’s old ideals of democracy were what we now call republican. Though historians of republicanism at first presented their findings as a rival discourse to liberalism (and dying out sometime in the nineteenth century), in the last decade and a half historians as well as political scientists now see how republican ideas – particularly the value of civic participation in the face of contingencies – continued to challenge and complement modern liberalism. Each tradition thus has enjoyed – as the political theorist Michael Sandel has described – a “shifting measure and importance” over the course of American history. Sandel has gone so far as to suggest that, “[r]oughly speaking, the republican self-understanding predominated through much of the 19th century while the voluntarist/procedural public philosophy [of liberalism] came to fuller expression after World War II.” Speaking less roughly, too, historians view late-nineteenth-century republicanism as the dominant mode of political thought for Americans after the Civil War. In his economic and cultural history of pragmatism, for example, James Livingston writes that while “republicanism was [not] the only cultural tradition available in late-nineteenth-century North America ... the mobilization of the majority during the Civil War gave it the vital character of common sense.” T. J. Jackson Lears, in his study of antimodernism in *fin de siècle* American culture, notes also that, faced with startling modern developments, the educated bourgeoisie in particular “clung to the shreds and patches of republican tradition.” A member of this caste, James was profoundly influenced both by modernity and by the war in which he did not serve; indeed, he felt for a long time his “own inadequacy when faced with the call for manly action in the righteous cause,” as George M. Frederickson puts it. The fundamental importance of civic life, particularly its more masculine martial virtues (“the strenuous life”), is the background to much of James’s philosophizing.12

Because it reads like “common sense,” James’s 1897 Robert Gould Shaw Oration (almost completely ignored by contemporary scholars) is probably the best place to learn exactly what James’s old republican ideals entailed. As a local public intellectual whose brother Wilkie was wounded in the same battle that decimated the Union Army’s first black regiment, William James was invited to speak at the 31 May 1897 unveiling of a statue on the Boston Common honoring the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and its white colonel Robert Gould Shaw. James took the occasion very seriously, committing his speech to memory and nearly losing his voice from practice. The ideas expressed in the address itself are not complicated, for, as James wrote to his brother Henry soon after receiving the invitation, “there [are] only three or four things which any possible orator would on that occasion have to say” (ERM 220). Still, James found writing the address “a fearful job,” as he wrote to his friend Benjamin Paul Blood in April, “and the result somewhat of a school-boy composition.”

According to James, America has a faith “that a man requires no master to take care of him, and that common people can work out their salvation well enough together if left free to try.” However, “the great intractable exception” to this faith was slavery. In seeking to end slavery during the War, what “Shaw and his comrades” did was not exceptional; rather, their deeds only confirmed the basic faith “that in such an emergency Americans of all complexions and conditions can go forth like brothers.” So, James added, “we all may hope to be faithful in our measure when the times demand” (66–67). Republicans truly believe in the virtuous citizen’s ability to take advantage of demanding times.


As Robert Bellah pointed out in 1967, “what people say on solemn occasions … is often indicative of deep-seated values and commitments that are not made explicit in the course of everyday life” (21). Frederickson agrees with this as far as James is concerned (see p. 161) as does Linda Simon, whose recent biography is the one exception to the contemporary neglect of this address. See Genuine Reality: A Life of William James (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1998), xiv, where she describes the address as pivotal for it gave James his first “chance to demonstrate the ‘civic courage’ he urged upon all Americans.” The oration is found in William James, The Works of William James: Essay in Religion and Morality, F. H. Burkhardt et al., eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). Future references appear in the text.

Machiavelli wrote about this in poems about Fortuna – “a woman who can be temporarily mastered if you do not hesitate with her” – and Occasione, “a woman with a forelock by which she can be seized from before but tonsured so that she cannot be taken by the short hairs behind.” 15 Although the details are few, James’s cosmology in the “Shaw Oration” matches Machiavelli’s. To become a hero, James says, “depends mostly on the opportunities which the accidents of history throw into their path,” and Shaw, “the blue-eyed child of fortune” (61), “recognized the vital opportunity: he saw that the time had come when the colored people must put the country in their debt” (67). In the version of the address published in Memories and Studies (1911), an additional sentence read: “Fortune sends an opportunity, but the man’s sense for what is vital in things must be alert to take it up” (289).16

While the bulk of the address exemplifies James’s basic republicanism, its concluding paragraphs do support Deborah Coon’s contention that James began to worry about American imperialism in the late 1890s. Nevertheless, James does not drop his republicanism for anarchism in the final pages of the “Shaw Oration”; rather, as he would later explain the process in Pragmatism, he “marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity” (513). A boundary dispute with Venezuela had recently brought the US close to war, to which James was much opposed. Upset by the increase in “war cant” – as his friend John Chapman called it in a letter advising James to simply “Get up and say Shaw did well and sit down”17 – James attempted in closing to distinguish “the moral service of them from the fortitude which they display.” “War has been much praised and celebrated among us of late as a school of manly virtue,” James notes, “but it is easy to exaggerate upon this point.” James then distills what is essential about republicanism (the moral service) from what is only historical (the fortitude). “Ages ago,” James admits, “war was the gory cradle of mankind, the grim-featured nurse that alone could train our savage progenitors into some semblance of social virtue.” Machiavelli, the first modern republican and the one most faithful to the example of ancient republics, had taught the same: that participation in wars remains the

16 See James’s view of the address itself, reprinted in Works, in a letter to his brother Henry: “It’s a strange freak of the whirligig of fortune that finds me haranguing the multitude on Boston Common, and I hesitated a good deal what to do. But one ought not to be too ready to funk an honour” (220). See also in Letters those to Benjamin Paul Blood about meeting this “challenge” (59) and to Henry about the day as “the last wave of the war breaking over Boston” (60).
17 Simon, 277.
simplest way to insure civic virtue in a republic. Standing before an audience of Civil War veterans, James acknowledges that “[w]ar still excels in this prerogative.” However, there are other ways to cultivate “social virtue,” and we need new vocabularies to describe these ways. “Our pugnacity is the virtue least in need of … orator’s or poet’s help. What we really need the poet’s and orator’s help to keep alive in us is … that more lonely courage which [Shaw] showed when he dropped his warm commission in the glorious Second to head your dubious fortunes, negroes of the Fifty-fourth” (72).

“That lonely kind of courage (civic courage we call it in peace-times),” James concludes, “is the kind of valor to which the monuments of nations should most of all be reared” (72). Grasping the essence of republicanism – civic courage in the face of adversity – James describes it in new language that does not justify America’s burgeoning imperial ambitions. Books like J. G. A. Pocock’s *The Machiavellian Moment*, Albert O. Hirschman’s *The Passions and the Interests*, and Sean Wilentz’s *Chants Democratic* describe how republicans from James Harrington to Montesquieu to Andrew Jackson modified the vocabulary of republicanism for new historical contexts. In the “Shaw Oration,” James retains the republican faith – he warns that “[d]emocracy is still upon its trial” and that “[t]he civic genius of our people is its only bulwark” (74) – but he redescribes it for a new world. “The nation blest above all nations,” he argues, “is she in whom the civic genius of the people does the saving day by day, by acts without external picturesqueness; by speaking, writing, voting reasonably; by smiting corruption swiftly; by good temper between parties; by the people knowing true men when they see them, and preferring them as leaders to rabid partisans or empty quacks. Such nations have not need of wars to save them” (72).

Contrary to their reputation for nonchalance, then, pragmatists work hard to reconcile their old beliefs with new realities. As James admitted in a letter to his brother describing his “Shaw Oration,” “I brought in some mugwumpery at the end, but it was very difficult to manage it.” Over the coming years, James grew more adept at managing his republican beliefs in new contexts, not least because he was busy formulating that process as “pragmatism.” First announced the year after the “Shaw Oration” in “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” (1898), *Pragmatism* was a lecture series James first gave in 1906.
That same year he also gave a lecture about the psychology of war that would be published later as “The Moral Equivalent of War” (1910).¹⁹

Before turning to “Moral Equivalent” for final evidence of James’s pragmatist religion of republicanism, consider again the lecture from Pragmatism, “What Pragmatism Means.” As is well known, James begins this lecture with a silly anecdote about how “the pragmatist method” has the ability to “settle metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable” (506). Camping with philosophical friends, James returns from a “solitary ramble” to find his colleagues debating whether a man trying to catch sight of a squirrel scrambling around a tree actually goes “round” the squirrel, given the creature’s ability to stay exactly opposite him. James’s solution – it “depends what you practically mean by ‘going round’ the squirrel” (505) – is the nonchalant start to a lecture that will actually (as described above) show how most of the time (except for during petty linguistic debates) we are exceedingly “loyal” to our old beliefs, barely modifying them to serve new realities.

The same can be said for “The Moral Equivalent of War.” Like “What Pragmatism Means,” “Moral Equivalent” begins with an example of a dispute (here, between militarism and pacifism) and James’s promise to sketch by the end of the lecture “the most promising line of conciliation” between the two sets of belief. And, like “What Pragmatism Means,” “Moral Equivalent” actually reveals that pragmatists do not compromise so much as conserve their beliefs and redescribe them to work better with new realities. Though it is an uncomfortable truth for many scholars today, James conserves the militarist’s and not the pacifist’s beliefs in “Moral Equivalent.”²⁰ James begins the address by drawing attention to what for rationalistic pacifists is an uncomfortable fact: the deep, irrational civil religion of post-bellum Americans. Only “a handful of eccentrics” would actually vote (if this were possible) to replace the Civil War with a peaceful transition. “Those ancestors, those efforts, those memories and legends,” James points out, “are the most ideal part of what we now own together, a sacred spiritual possession worth more than all the blood poured out” (162). And, yet, unlike the ancients (whose


²⁰ Cf. Coon, “One Moment,” 89, and Kloppenberg, Uncertain Victory, 183. For republican readings of “Moral Equivalent” like mine, see Frederickson, 220–18; Christopher Lasch, The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics (New York: W. W. Norton 1991), 296–304; Lears, 123; and Livingston, who argues that the address “resurrects what his audience as well as later historians would recognize as a form of republicanism” (212–13).
entire history was “a bath of blood” [163]), most Americans are also critical of war’s excesses. Today, then, “civilized opinion is a curious mental mixture” (164): “military ideals ... as strong as ever [yet] confronted by reflective criticisms” (164). It is time, then, for a marriage of old beliefs to new realities.

In the “compromise” James subsequently sketches, the pacifists keep little. They have “certain deficiencies in [their] program,” as James delicately puts it. Mainly, their view of the cosmos is wrong, and “Moral Equivalent” is really an attempt to convert them to the republican religion. Pacifists need to see that the cosmos is governed by fortune, not reason, and that civic virtues are therefore of dire importance to any true republic. Currently, James shows, we only know how to cultivate such virtues in a world governed by “pain and fear.” Because we are used to a cosmos that serves as “the supreme theatre of human strenuousness,” we therefore cannot simply make a “transition to a ‘pleasure-economy’” (as the pacifists hope) without finding new ways to tutor the old virtues.

“Pacifists ought to enter more deeply into the esthetical and ethical point of view of their opponents” (168), James concludes; they do not realize the “full inwardness of the situation” (169). If James states here that socialism is our future, he is also very careful to note that it is a socialism founded completely upon republican virtues:

In the more or less socialist future towards which mankind seems to be drifting we must still subject ourselves collectively to these severities that answer to our real position upon this only partly hospitable globe. We must make new energies and hardihoods continue the manliness to which the military mind so faithfully clings. Martial virtues must be the enduring cement; intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, obedience to command, must still remain the rock upon which states are built. (170)

We do not live on some “cattleyard of a planet” (166). The “mere fact” is “life is hard,” “men ... toil and suffer pain.” But, “[t]he planetary conditions once for all are such, and we can stand it” (171). Accept this structure of the universe, James asks, and a moral equivalent to war may just work.

Today, when critics as well as proponents of the new pragmatism bemoan new pragmatism’s lack of political gusto, they contrast it to fervent moments like these in “The Moral Equivalent of War.” However, despite the admiration for James’s and Dewey’s political programs, most new pragmatists still believe that these programs nevertheless are arbitrary. Take, for example, the self-described “paleo-pragmatist” Robert Westbrook, who however concedes in his definitive biography of
John Dewey that the antifoundationalist pragmatists are philosophically correct. Or consider Mark Bauerlein’s recent comparison of pragmatists and poststructuralists, which notes that both offer the same anti-representationalism, but where the poststructuralists use it for “a nihilistic assertion of the loss of transcendence,” the pragmatists treat it as “the happy foreground of a reconstruction of culture of criticism.” Whether this is a logical move by pragmatists is not examined; Bauerlein’s book looks instead at the psychological roots of such optimism. Perhaps the most famous example of the new pragmatists’ abiding commitment to antifoundationalism – even if it compromises their commitment to the old pragmatists’ politics – is Rorty’s use of Dewey. After decades of treating Dewey as his antifoundationalist colleague, Rorty finally admitted that, while he admired the old pragmatist’s political beliefs, there really was no way to square these with pragmatism.

Still, new pragmatists have tried to argue that, while democratic vocabularies are not foundational, they are more enduring, not entirely arbitrary. Their arguments basically replicate James’s when he wrote that we are conservative about our beliefs; none, though, follows James from his “theory of knowledge” to his claims about “the structure of the universe.” For example, Hilary Putnam was, in fact, drawn “back to pragmatism,” as he says in the opening pages of Pragmatism: An Open Question (1996), because he wonders “whether an enlightened society can avoid a corrosive moral scepticism without tumbling back into moral authoritarianism.” That is, because antifoundationalist pragmatism seems to make all vocabularies equally arbitrary, what will stop us from walking down the corridor past the Deweyans to the Nazis? To explain what stops us, Putnam seems to follow James’s argument from “What Pragmatism Means.” Pragmatists, Putnam says, “hold that doubt requires justification just as much as belief.” This antiscalptical quality of pragmatism means

21 Westbrook, “A New Pragmatism,” 417. After showing that Dewey really believed that “democrats had something of considerable significance at stake in metaphysics” and were convinced that democracy was (quoting Dewey) “to a reasonable extent sanctioned and sustained by the nature of things,” Westbrook notes that “Rorty’s contention that ‘no such discipline as philosophical anthropology is required as a preface to politics’ may be true, but it is not, as a matter of intellectual history, ‘the Deweyan view.’” See John Dewey and American Democracy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 366–67.


that we really cannot doubt everything. Instead, pragmatists are fallibilists, which means, while we hold “that there are no [final] metaphysical guarantees to be had” for any of our beliefs, we do not willy-nilly drop any of these working beliefs without just cause. “[F]allibilism does not require us to doubt everything, it only requires us to be prepared to doubt anything – if good reason to do so arises!” As James put it, we “save as much of [our old beliefs] as [we] can, for in this matter ... we are all extreme conservatives.” Unlike James, though, Putnam does not move from here to greater claims about the “structure of the universe.”

The same can be said for James T. Kloppenberg, one of political pragmatism’s foremost historians. In a 1996 article in The Journal of American History, Kloppenberg encouraged contemporary historians to turn from “the newer varieties of linguistic pragmatism that see all truth claims as contingent” to the older pragmatism “descended more directly from James and Dewey.” But, while Kloppenberg sounds like he will then reject antifoundationalism as the core of “linguistic pragmatism,” he does not. Instead, he points out that the old pragmatists “begin with a nuanced conception of experience as the arena for truth testing and culminate in ethical and democratic activity.” Consequently, “James’s and Dewey’s pragmatism did not lack substantive values: the ideals of democracy.” However, Kloppenberg continues, these ideals are not part of a pragmatist religion but rather “grounded in [the old pragmatists’] experience as social beings and their commitment to communities of inquiry rigorously testing all truth claims.” Like Putnam’s, Kloppenberg’s defense of pragmatism recalls James’s point about our conservation of old beliefs, grounded as we are in thick experience. Like Putnam and unlike James, though, Kloppenberg says nothing about this version of experience actually requiring faith in a certain kind of universe.25

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Even Richard J. Bernstein, the contemporary pragmatist who perhaps has the greatest sense of our “precariousness” within the pragmatist cosmos, goes no further than Kloppenberg or Putnam in the defense of enduring vocabularies. Bernstein, like the others, still believes pragmatism to be at root antifoundationalist. In 1992, he wrote that pragmatists are actually better postmodernists than the postmodernists themselves, because they know how “to live with an irreducible contingency and ambiguity – not to ignore it and not to wallow in it.” However, Bernstein draws our attention to the fact that one of the main ways that both old and new pragmatists have learned to live with this antifoundationalism is through the practical use of vocabularies that are drawn from American moral and political tradition. Dewey, for example, consistently addressed “fellow humans as citizens of a democratic experiment.” Democracy may have no essential connection to life within irreducible contingency; however, as a traditional American rhetoric, it is often more persuasive than other vocabularies.

TWO CONCLUSIONS

Given that even those commentators most partial to old pragmatism’s political vision are unwilling to abandon antifoundationalism, it may seem as though the first answer to why pragmatists use republicanism is the accurate one. That answer goes something like this: because pragmatism is an antifoundationalist philosophy concerned with accomplishing things in (American) historical contexts, the republican vocabulary – while logically as arbitrary a choice as Nazism – usually works the best. This would then explain why James and Dewey turned to it throughout their careers, why West used it in his 1989 The American Evasion of Philosophy, why Bernstein used it in his important pragmatist writings in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and, finally, why Rorty uses it now. In moments of change or crisis, republicanism is simply the vocabulary that works best for political pragmatists.

See the paragraph beginning “The classical pragmatists shared a cosmological vision of an open universe in which there is irreducible novelty, chance, and contingency” (814) in “The Resurgence of Pragmatism,” Social Research, 59:4 (Winter 1992), 813–40.

Bernstein, “The Resurgence of Pragmatism,” 838 and 834.

For Dewey’s use of the republican vocabulary, see Bernstein, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward: Richard Rorty on Liberal Democracy and Philosophy,” Political Theory, 15:4 (Nov. 1987), 538–64. “[T]he one theme that runs throughout … virtually all [Dewey’s] writing,” Bernstein writes there, “is the need to reconstruct democratic communal life – a form of life that requires and cultivates civic virtue” (540). See also
If the first answer is indeed correct, political pragmatists should look more closely at this republican tradition upon which they rely. Currently, this awareness seems slight, and pragmatist uses of republicanism are consequently not as persuasive as they could be. Consider, for example, Rorty’s presentation of “civic religion” in Achieving Our Country. Rorty says Whitman and Dewey were its prophets, because “[t]he most striking feature of their redescription of our country is its thoroughgoing secularism:”

American exceptionalism has usually been a belief in special divine favor … [or] divine wrath … Dewey and Whitman wanted Americans to continue to think of themselves as exceptional, but both wanted to drop any references to divine favor or wrath. They hoped to separate the fraternity and loving kindness urged by the Christian scriptures from the ideas of supernatural parentage, immortality, providence, and – most important – sin. (15–16

One reason republicanism so decisively shaped revolutions in England, France, and America, as well as great American reform movements like Abolitionism and the Civil Rights Movement, is that its cosmic vision appealed to both the Christian and the secular mind. As many historians have shown, the cosmic rhetoric of republicanism – blending as it does the whim of fortune with the terror of the apocalypse – motivates uncommon acts of “fraternity” or civic virtue. Rorty’s argument that such cosmic visions are necessarily visions of “divine favor” or “divine wrath” is not really to the point. More to the point is Harold Meyerson in his review of Achieving Our Country: “surely part of the greatness of Martin Luther King Jr. was his ability to inspire a generation of civil rights activists with the certitude that they were involved in a project of cosmic consequence …. There has always been more in the heaven and earth of building a campaign, in short, than Rorty’s philosophy admits.”

In addition to depth, republicanism offers pragmatism greater historical length. In Achieving, for example, Rorty ignores the great civic commitments of republicans in centuries before this one. This does allow him to claim that only in the early twentieth century did Progressives develop a “new, quasi-communitarian rhetoric” to replace the “in-
dividualist rhetoric of America’s first century” (8). As the discussion above of James’s republicanism should suggest, though, this is simply inaccurate historically. Worse – from an antifoundationalist’s viewpoint at least – it leads to unpersuasive arguments. Without reference to the long republican tradition, Rorty has to argue that the communitarian idea of Dewey and Croly was a new one, and therefore that the Old Left really invented this “civic religion.” Resting all his hopes upon the Old Left like this guarantees that Rorty will be misunderstood by the American political right and center (not to mention his cultural left foes). As Carlin Romano reports, right-wing reviewers of Achieving accuse Rorty not only of postmodernist relativism (which antifoundationalist pragmatists just have to live with) but (as a Washington Times reviewer puts it) of seeking “to resuscitate a moribund Marxified radicalism.” This is an incorrect conclusion, but not a surprising one, given that Rorty’s exclusive allegiance to liberals “between 1900 and 1964” is a red flag to right-wingers. As it is to many contemporary liberals: Peter Berkowitz in his review of Achieving welcomes Rorty’s “condemnation of the Left’s abiding weakness for Marx” but dismisses not just Rorty’s postmodernism (naturally) but also Rorty’s continuing allegiance to “the agenda pursued over the course of six decades by the ‘reformist’ Left … from expanding welfare and affirmative action to promoting unionism and higher taxes” – a course that has been, as Berkowitz brutally sums it up, “a practical failure.” In short, Rorty’s exclusive interest in the Old Left makes his civic religion seem to bloom only in the shadow of “big government,” when what Rorty really is trying to show is how civic religion has been the foundation of all good reform liberalism, from the bottom-up Civil Rights Movement to the top-down New Deal. A more explicit use of the entire republican tradition, which even overlaps with “the Enlightenment tradition” that Rorty and other pragmatists already like to use, would help progressive antifoundationalist pragmatists in their current arguments for more civic participation.

If, then, pragmatists are using republicanism as just another vocabulary, they ought to use more of its rhetorical depth and historical length. But, is republicanism really just another vocabulary for pragmatists? To

conclude, I will explore the possibility that it is not, and that the second answer – pragmatism is a civic religion – explains why pragmatists turn to republicanism. I will focus on a few recent writings of the leader of the new pragmatists himself, Richard Rorty.

As my analysis of James suggested, to start talking about pragmatism as a religion would significantly clarify in what exactly pragmatists want people to believe: i.e., not in our current vocabulary (whatever that happens to be – militarist, cosmopolitan pacific, etc.) but in a cosmos ruled by contingencies that can be mastered through civic deeds. As Rorty’s recent writings already suggest, a defense of this civic religion, especially when contrasted with the wrathful God of sinners or with insidious and enervating Gothic powers, can be compelling. Is Rorty then arguing that pragmatism is, in fact, such a religion? The real question here, as Putnam asks in his review of Achieving, is what is the “epistemological status” of Rorty’s civic religion? Most of the time, of course, Rorty has argued that such vocabularies are arbitrary, and that he could as easily turn to Nietzsche as he could to Whitman. Sometimes, though, Rorty seems to make the argument of other antifoundationalist pragmatists presented above: that in practice these vocabularies – perhaps, as Bernstein says, because they draw on American tradition – are more enduring than others. For example, responding in the Spring 1995 issue of Dissent to Steven Lukes’s argument that the left since 1789 has always had a “vision” and needs one now, Rorty argues no vision is necessary; instead we need to identify reform projects and then “group a lot of them under a blanket phrase.” A lengthier defense of the necessity of such blanket phrases can be found in Rorty’s 1993 essay, “Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality,” which makes both the anti-foundationalist argument (since the French Revolution we have learned we are malleable and that foundational arguments are no longer necessary) and the argument for more enduring vocabularies: here, for “making our own culture – the human rights culture – more self-conscious and more powerful.”

And then, there are the very few – though in recent years frequent – times that Rorty really seems to be saying what James said: that we do in fact need a common vision of how the universe works – a vision that is a matter of faith – if we are to have a world where people can hold

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all of their other, temporary vocabularies lightly. This can occur subtly, as for example when Rorty rejects Christopher Lasch’s foundational vision and seems to offer his own foundational vision in its place: “You may see contemporary human beings not as enfolded in a fated spiritual darkness [as Lasch believes] but as still trying to master fate, still bravely stumbling through the seemingly endless minefields that separate them from those glimpsed uplands.” Is Rorty suggesting – like the republicans and James – that the struggle with fate is in fact where we must begin? His religious pragmatism can occur not so subtly, too. Consider, finally, the three following essays: “The Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature” (1995); “Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance” (1997); and “Fraternity Reigns: The Case for a Society Based not on Rights but on Unselfishness” (1996).

Rorty begins his December 1995 address at the Modern Language Association Convention, “The Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature” (reprinted in Achieving), with an Horatian epigram that describes what Rorty calls a “self-protective project”: “To stand in awe of nothing, Numicius, is practically the only way to feel really good about yourself.” Literary scholars (those people Rorty elsewhere calls the Gothic cultural left) live according to this motto, Rorty says, and it has produced in them “knowingness,” “a state of soul which prevents shudders of awe” (125–26). One immediately wonders what place awe has in the worldview of the antifoundationalist pragmatist, or what Rorty used to call the ironist, which he defined in Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity as “the sort of person … sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that [his or her] central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance.” But, in fact, Rorty goes on to argue essentially that we do need awe and that literature is “inspirational” precisely when it “make[s] people think there is more to this life than they ever imagined” (133), makes them think there is something “beyond” our world today. Rorty is careful to note that by values beyond today he does not mean values that are “eternal” (135), but he still wishes to establish a “religion of literature, in which works of the secular imagination replace Scripture as the principal source of inspiration and hope for each new generation” (136). Rorty goes on to argue that his

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34 While this case for Rorty’s pragmatist religion is based on recent writings, there are a few older ones to consider: see the passage ending with “the pragmatists tell us, what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark,” in “Pragmatism, Relativism, Irrationalism,” Consequences, 165–66.
35 Contingency, xv.
position represents that of “pragmatist functionalism” as opposed to “Platonist essentialism,” but, like James, this claim of functionality seems to rest upon the first claim that we live in an awful universe. For only if one presupposes that the universe is awful, that it is unfinished and thus awe-inspiring, can the “social hope” conveyed by great literature be real, functional. Indeed, Rorty’s cosmos here is even more like James’s vision, for Rorty ends with the familiar republican claim that “only those who still read for inspiration” – i.e., only those who believe like James that “we have only one edition of the universe, unfinished” – “are likely to be of much use in building a cooperative commonwealth” (140).

In “Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance,” Rorty’s contribution to The Cambridge Companion to William James (1997) and one of his few writings specifically about James, Rorty argues even more frankly about the need for a foundational faith. At first, Rorty makes the familiar antifoundationalist argument that religion be kept private, as just another lightly held vocabulary that if taken too seriously (as religious fundamentalists and scientific realists take it) tends to muck up conversations in the public sphere (90–91, 93). However, as his argument evolves, it becomes clear that what Rorty really does not like about these religions is that they tend to “produce ... specific habits of action” (93–94). William James’s “symbolic” or “demythologized” version of religion, Rorty argues, may seem “dishonest” or even “wimpy” to true believers because it does not lead to specific actions (92, 93), but it actually does justify actions, just less specific kinds. What Rorty seems to like about James’s version of religion is that it is “fuzzy” enough not to lead to dogmatic kinds of behavior (“too vague to be caught in a creed” [95]) and yet foundational enough to inspire the hopes upon which we can act. Pragmatists, Rorty writes, “think the point of religion is not to produce any specific habit of action but rather to make the sort of difference to a human life which is made by the presence or absence of love” (93–94):

The kind of religious faith which seems to me to be behind the attractions of both utilitarianism and pragmatism is ... a faith in the future possibility of mortal humans, a faith which is hard to distinguish from love for, and hope for, the human community. I shall call this fuzzy overlap of faith, hope, and love “romance.” Romance, in this sense, may crystallize around a labor 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. (96)

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This definition of religion as “romance” seems very close to James’s pragmatist religion of republicanism, in that Rorty’s romance is the foundation for consequent light uses (or “easy crystallizations”) of other vocabularies to talk about God or children or labor unions. Rorty insists that it does not matter what we are specifically romantic about; “what matters is the insistence itself” (97). But, what is the origin of that insistence? Is it not the result of Rorty’s faith in an awful universe that still needs our work, still needs us to formulate and execute a wide diversity of civic actions?37

Rorty describes these actions here as part of a “Whitmanesque dream of plural, democratic vistas.” In recent years, Whitman’s writings, particularly his Democratic Vistas (1870), seem to describe for Rorty the kind of fuzzy religion that supports the “antifoundationalism” that allows one to take up different vocabularies depending on the circumstances.38 And, yet, Rorty even admits at one point in the Cambridge Companion essay that sometimes he – like all of us – wants something more than fuzziness. “All of us fluctuate … between God as a perhaps obsolete name for a possible human future and God as an external guarantor of some such future” (98). Rorty’s dissatisfaction with Whitman’s fuzzy faith and his desire for a cosmic vision that demands more specific kinds of actions seem to bring him even closer to William James’s faith in one edition of the cosmos, the one that sponsors a rugged civic life. Rorty has expressed that dissatisfaction with Whitman in another essay, the utopian narrative that he wrote for The New York Times Magazine in 1996: “Fraternity Reigns: The Case for a Society Based not on Rights but on Unselfishness.”39 In this piece, Rorty pretends to write in the year 2095. In Rorty’s narrative, the history of the United States between 1995 and 2095 basically parallels the same period a century earlier, except where the Old Left sponsored sixty years of liberal reforms the New Left botched the job. In Rorty’s futuristic history, the New Left, instead of heeding calls for a civic religion in the 1990s, continued to talk about individual rights – continued to worry about sadism rather than selfishness. So, where the Old Left dealt with class injustice from 1900 to 1914, the New Left kept blabbing about rights from 2000 to 2014, until finally the

37 For a similar defense of fuzzy faith, see Rorty, “Religion as Conversation-Stopper.”
38 Besides in Achieving Our Country, Rorty also describes his “Whitmanesque” vocation to write for “fellow citizens” in his contribution to a recent forum in American Literary History on “Thinking in Public,” 10:1 (Spring 1998), 65.
growing gap between rich and poor led to a class war in the year 2014 (this scenario is described in Michael Lind’s book, *The Next American Nation*, which Rorty reviewed favorably in 1996). From 2014 to 2044 America was not engaged in world wars but rather under the rule of a military dictatorship. Only in 2045 did the Old Left’s ideal of fraternity triumph in the election of the new “Democratic Vistas Party”; fifty happy years later, in 2095, the future Rorty writes this “history.”

Now, what is most interesting about Rorty’s narrative is that the fuzzy foundationalism of Whitman proves inadequate, and Rorty resorts instead to a favorite genre of republicans, the jeremiad. What this republican jeremiad is arguing is close to what James argued in “Moral Equivalent:” that we need to wake up to “our real position upon this only partly hospitable globe.” There is no reason to believe Whitmanesque visions will be enough to save us. In fact, it is likely the US will burn to the ground before its citizens stop talking about rights and start talking about fraternity. As Rorty himself states, from his vantage point of 2095, “we are now, once again, a constitutional democracy, but we have proved as vulnerable as Germany, Russia and India to dictatorial takeovers. We have a sense of fragility, of susceptibility to the vicissitudes of time and chance, which Walt Whitman and John Dewey may never have known.” This new understanding of our place in the cosmos is very important to Rorty, as the last sentence of this jeremiad suggests: “Our chastened mood, our lately learned humility, may have made us better able to realize that everything depends on keeping our fragile sense of American fraternity intact” (158).

Humility is different than fallibilism, and that is the difference, I think, between religious pragmatism and antifoundationalist pragmatism. Antifoundationalists are engaged in a complicated program of persuasion: i.e., all beliefs are fallible though beliefs about democracy are practically less so. Religious pragmatists are engaged in a straightforward program of conversion: i.e., a religion of humility before Contingency is better than one of humility before Reason or Power or Sin because the former will save the republic and the latter will not. On first hearing, pragmatism as a project of conversion sounds like a step backward. But the history of republicanism – which, with pragmatism, is just another, less confident version of the Enlightenment narrative – is the history of such

40 Rorty, “Sins of the Overclass,” *Dissent* (Spring 1996), 109–112: “It will take a lot of class consciousness to defeat the oligarchy, and Lind makes a good case for saying that we will not get sufficient class consciousness if we continue to insist on racial consciousness” (110).
proselytizing: James Harrington throughout the Interregnum; the Founders throughout the Revolutionary and Federalist periods; the Abolitionists for the two decades before the Civil War. Then, in the decade preceding the bloodiest war known to humanity at the time, William James saw the republican faith being twisted to support a cult of war. In 1910, he decided the only thing to do was to reclaim that faith and cloak it in a new language, one that sounded like the moral equivalent of war and therefore stood a better chance than the cattleyard utopia of the socialists of convincing Americans to forsake their militarism. His program failed in the short term, though in the long term it bore good “Old Left” fruit: e.g., the New Deal, the Peace Corps, even AmeriCorps today. Richard Rorty, in the decade following the end of the Cold War, saw that same republican faith being mistaken for “simpleminded militaristic chauvinism” (Achieving, 4). In the late 1990s, he decided, too, that the only thing to do was to reclaim that faith and cloak it in a new language, one that sounded like the moral equivalent of patriotism and therefore stood a better chance of convincing Americans to forsake their selfishness than the Gothic paranoia of the cultural left. We have still to see what fruit this old loyalty to a dream country will bear.