
Pragmatism and Democracy: Assessing Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*

Jason Springs, Editor

Cornel West, Richard Rorty, Stanley Hauerwas, and Jeffrey Stout*

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Jason Springs

Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition* intervened in debates that had extended for more than two decades across the fields of religious ethics and the philosophy of religion. A central aim of the book was to mediate a long-standing impasse between theological traditionalists and liberal secularists. The former often described liberal democracy as inhospitable—if not positively antithetical—to the substance and particularity of theological claims. For the latter, democracy required the secularization of what they believed to be exclusionary and authoritarian dogmatism intrinsic to robust theological commitments. Was it

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possible for these opponents to find common cause in the face of social injustices, forms of imperial expansionism and a market-saturated society that they found equally intolerable? If so, how would they navigate the apparent irreconcilability of their commitments without compromising the substance of those commitments? What hope was there for the emergence of the kind of broad-based coalition building among fellow-citizens of drastically different commitments that had proven indispensable to social justice and reform movements of previous eras?

Amid the post-September 11th urgency of such questions, *Democracy and Tradition* prompted a range of symposia and panel discussions. Perhaps the most celebrated of these invited three key figures treated in the book—Stanley Hauerwas, Cornel West, and Richard Rorty—to engage its central arguments in conversation with one another, followed by a response from Stout. What follows is the edited transcript of their discussion.

Cornel West

I think that Jeff Stout is absolutely right. There is no doubt that dear brother Stanley Hauerwas is the most prolific and influential theologian in the United States today. He is the major voice who has said let the church be the church, and preserve its own institutional identity, theological integrity, and prophetic witness in its struggle against Constantinian captivity. We appreciate that. And Richard Rorty is a brook of fire through which we all must pass. This is the second time that he has attended our great body, and we are very honored to have him here. He single handedly reconstructed American Pragmatism. Whether it is a *mis*-reading is an open question, of course. The problem is, Rorty has a certain suspicion of religion and religious voices, and Stanley has a deep suspicion of the world. Happy to have had Wayne Proudfoot, who is the finest philosopher of religion of his generation, moderating the session, and of course myself, Counselor West.

I want to begin with the question “Who is Jeff Stout?” Jeff Stout is the most religiously musical, the most theologically learned, and the most philosophically subtle of secular thinkers writing in America. That is a very rare combination. But he also has a history. He comes from working class Trenton, not Princeton. That’s a leap. It’s a big leap. He spent years in the Civil Rights movement. Quite appropriate that we’re right here in Atlanta—Martin Luther King Jr. is not simply his hero. Martin’s life and struggle and witness were profoundly imbibed in Jeff Stout’s soul, and his mind and his heart. Led anti-war struggles at

Brown University, then on to Princeton. I think it's no accident that when you turn to that stellar Religion Department at Princeton—before I arrived and after—Jeff Stout has trained more black professors of philosophy of religion than any other figure in the Academy including myself—Eddie Glaude, Mike Dyson, William Hart, Will Walker, Victor Anderson. Of course there have been many white brothers and sisters too, we know, many Jewish brothers and sisters too, and so forth. And this is very important. “Who is Jeff Stout?”—we could talk about his Emersonian perfectionism. His kind of democratic *paideia*—this formation of attention to radical texts, to the great questions: What is the meaning of life? What are the sources of our hope? How are we to act? It has to do with the maturation of a soul and the cultivation of a self. But it's part and parcel of who Jeff Stout is in light of his own context and history. We can talk about a neo-left wing, Hegelian pragmatist—which is very distinct social theory and moral objectivity—his pragmatic conception of democratic sociality, his anti-foundationalism, contextualism, the dynamism of the very criticism that he puts forth. We can talk about him being a radical democrat. And it's true, he is deeply concerned about the legacy of Emerson, Whitman, Ellison, Baldwin, Muriel Rukeyser, and others. We can talk all about him being a naturalistic humanist. All four are true. But they still don't get to the core of the question “Who is Jeff Stout?”

And I want to suggest that if you understand this third text as part of a corpus—this is his magnum opus—part of a marvelous corpus that goes back to *Flight from Authority*—a text that I believe has yet to receive the full attention it deserves—it does what? It creates a democratic space between transcendentalism and foundationalism on the one hand, and relativism and nihilism on the other. He called it first “mitigated skepticism,” and that became “fallibilism”—more and more democratic. He began to think deeper about the relation between his sophisticated professional training in philosophy and religion and how it related to not just his soul, but the soul of America—the soul of America.

I read *Democracy and Tradition* as, in part, Jeff Stout like a jazz musician laying his soul on the table and saying that what's at stake is the soul of America. “What does it gain a nation to dominate the world and lose its soul?” And what is at stake in this text is not just simply various professionalist moves and intellectualist maneuvers. But it is the attempt of a fellow citizen—and one of the most deeply dignified human beings I know—to try to redeem the soul of America, a democratic experiment he sees sliding slowly down the slope of chaos and anarchy.

Meaning what? He wants to make the world safe for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy and his secular allies. And Jeff Stout is a secular ally of the prophetic movement that comes out of the best of America's religion. And he believes that secular liberals, as much as he respects them—the late, great John Rawls, we already miss him so, and our dearly beloved Richard Rorty—their versions of secular liberalism, intentionally or unintentionally, make it difficult for the Martin Luther King Jr.'s to emerge because of their deep suspicion of religious voices that they see have authoritarian implications and repercussions.

And I think Brother Stanley is, in part, right, that your critique of not just American democracy, but the American Empire—we always have to add an anti-imperialist note these days—resonates deeply with Jeff. But the difference is that he's more worried about Stanley than Stanley is worried about him. Why? Because the new traditionalists—not just you Stanley, but your brother John Milbank who's made such manifest contributions in his own way, and Alasdair MacIntyre, too—they don't recognize the degree to which democracies are so fragile. They don't recognize the degree to which languages and rhetoric that somehow downplay the moral substance, that downplay the ethical dimension, and downplay the efficacy of fellow-citizens, religious and nonreligious, can't be conveniently cast aside. And so, in effect, the language that one uses in castigating modernity, castigating democracy, castigating liberalism—that's dangerous language for those who want to make the world safe for Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy and his secular allies. Even if you have a similar analysis of the operations of power—the acceptance of the capitalist modes of production, the commodification of the various forms of reification of the market throughout everyday life.

Now, because most of you haven't read the text, I hope you keep your minds open to the complexity of the text. First of all, I hope that you would pay attention to the *form* of the text. It's written in a certain way. It's intentionally crafted. It's constantly borrowing from George Orwell and Wendell Berry and Montaigne, and William Hazlitt—Jeff Stout's heroes. Why? Because they believe. Montaigne himself, the inventor of the essay—measure for measure, conversational, improvisational, self-critical, democratic theory in the very form itself, undogmatic, fair, clear, lucid, and also witty and ironic. And, of course, here we must admit that Jeff learns much from Richard Rorty, whose prose is also very clear, lucid, conversational, improvisational, thoroughly witty.

Beyond form and content there is also the deeper issue of whether Jeff can conceive of democracy as an anti-traditional move against hierarchy in light of his traditionalist love of virtue. He marshals both forces at the same time. He's a virtue theorist. He loves the perennial

attempt to exercise, but no fixed point. He loves serious talk about standards. Of course, the stories at Princeton—Brother Jeff writing six single-spaced pages on undergraduate and graduate papers is just one small example of his deep concern for excellence standards for his students. But what kind of faith will it be? That's the question, you see. Well, let me try to turn critic.

First and foremost, I think that there is a difference between those of us who are still wrestling with the Augustinian pole of the perfectionist movement, or the Augustinian pole of the tradition of self-cultivation vis-a-vis Emersonian hope. And Jeff and I wrestle with this. And I am in transition, so that's another reason why I am glad to be here. In the text he characterizes me as being a bit too obsessed with the Augustinian pole owing to my influence, not just with Martin Luther King Jr., but with moments in Reinhold Niebuhr. I know brother Stanley has said some pretty rough things about Reinhold in the past. I'd love to have another panel with him to defend Professor Reinhold Niebuhr. But that's a dialogue. But I'm just acknowledging the influence here. And what I mean by that is this—that I do think that we're going to have to seriously come to terms with the roles of tragic and the tragic-comic in the Emersonian perfection so that it does not end up in this very simple optimal mode associated with textbook Emerson, and really get at the tragic dimensions, the comic dimensions of Emerson. If that is so, then the Emersonian pole does not look so far removed from the Augustinian pole.

Now I am a Chekhovian. And that's a kind of mediation between the Augustinian and Emersonian poles. It's dark all the way down. But you still endure. You resist. You persevere. It's the blues sensibility of my own particular tradition—tragic-comic hope. You can get Chekhov's "Three Sisters." You can get Howling Wolf. You get John Coltrane. Then the question becomes, is that different from the Emersonian? Jeff's version of the Emersonian perfectionist project is radically Ellisonian. That second chapter I highly recommend—the fascinating chapter on Ellison and Baldwin. It echoes his classic essay on black nationalism that's edited in Eddie Glaude's wonderful text *Is It Nation Time?* Of course, Eddie came up with the idea for that—and we thank you deeply for that.

But if that is true, then the Ellisonian version of Emersonian perfectionism begins to look very Chekhovian to me. And if that's true, then we're not far from one another, with the exception of the fact that I'm a Christian. That's a big one. But I have to defend my own particular version of what it means to be a Chekhovian Christian, which I have yet to do. I just trotted out the category. Within the tradition of reconstructing democracy as a tradition or understanding pragmatism as

what he calls a “democratic traditionalism,” modifying the virtues democratically, redefining the virtues in democratic terms, there is a Wolinian moment—the great Sheldon Wolin my thesis advisor at Princeton, whose recent text—powerful text on de Tocqueville, last chapter entitled “The Post-democratic Age”—says we’re living in a post-democratic age. The democratic vision itself is being eclipsed. We are simply getting mileage on the unbelievable efforts of those who came before. But our commodified society is such that it’s post-democratic. Wolin has called it “inverted totalitarianism.”¹

That’s a point I take very seriously. And I think in part Brother Jeff does too, but he’s redoing it. He wants to take the democratic wager that the demos has what it takes to sustain the democratic experiment. And that wonderful line in the text where he says we always find grounds for hope and humor among the demos. Now that’s a Pascalian wager on the plebs. Dewey did make that wager. Jeff does too. And the question becomes—for Wolin—what if democracy itself is a tragic-comic phenomenon in the world? And, once in a while, the energies from below tend to create democratic spaces and then dilution, incorporation, repression sets in. It leads to elites. And, therefore, [Wolin is] much darker. He’s closer to a Chekhovian view—my view—and I’m wrestling; I’m in transition.

Last but not least, I think the book needs to highlight the degree to which America has always had expansionist impulses and has always had imperial ends and aims—so that our discussion of the present moment is not one in which this is somehow so new and novel. Echoes of William Appleton Williams—empire as a way of life for the American democratic experiment. It reminds us of Erasmus, of Pericles’ orations—democracy at home, rule an empire abroad. To what degree have we wrestled with that paradox? A paradox, of course, that an enslaved people, a Jim Crow people, a hated people, those who produced Martin Luther King Jr. and his legacy, and his secular allies of whatever color have always started with understanding this very precious democratic experiment whose soul is now in great peril.

Richard Rorty

Jeffrey Stout and I both call ourselves pragmatists. We both think that the best thing about pragmatism is that its accounts of truth, knowledge, and moral obligation are tailor-made to suit the needs of democratic societies. We both regard philosophy as in the service of cultural politics,

¹Wolin (2001, 2003).

rather than as a quasi-science that provides rational foundations for certain cultural practices while claiming that others lack such foundations.

Stout and I are equally enthusiastic about the latest version of pragmatism: Robert Brandom's inferentialist and anti-empiricist account of the relations between language and reality.² Brandom builds on the work of Wittgenstein and of Davidson, but, as in the case of Dewey, his principal inspiration is Hegel. Stout devotes the concluding chapter of his book to expounding Brandom's views. I have devoted many articles to the same purpose.³

The heart of Brandom's philosophy is the claim that all authority is derived from social norms. Sacred books and the results of scientific experiments, both derive their revocable authority from social agreement, just as our legislators derive their revocable authority from the electorate. On Brandom's minimalist account of truth, all we can say about truth is that the indefinable term "true" is used to endorse assertions. So, to say that truth is preserved in valid inference is simply to say that we call "valid" whatever patterns of inference prevailing social norms treat as endorsement-preserving. To be rational, on Brandom's account, is self-consciously to conform to such norms, even while attempting to change some of them.

There is, however, one important issue about which Stout and I disagree. This is the tightness of the linkage between pragmatism and secularism. Stout is right when he says that Rawls and I have both "wavered between a form of pluralism that in principle ought to welcome the expression of religious as well as secular outlooks in political contexts and a relatively aggressive form of secular liberalism that appears to exclude views unlike his own [mine] from public life" (Stout 2004: 295). Stout thinks that I should be less aggressive—that I should come down, as he does, in favor of the view that there is no inherent tension between democratic institutions and religious belief. Stout regards theists and non-theists as equally well suited for participation in the practices characteristic of democratic societies.

Although I have lately come to think that Nicholas Wolterstorff is largely right and Robert Audi largely wrong about whether it's okay for religious believers to offer religious reasons for their opinions in the public square, I persist in thinking that non-theists make better citizens of democratic societies than theists. If Brandomian pragmatism is indeed the philosophical view best suited to democracy, and if theism

²See Brandom (1994, 2000, 2002).

³See Rorty (1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2007) and Stout (2002, 2004).

cannot be brought within the ambit of that sort of pragmatism, then theism and democracy remain at odds. Most forms of theism entail acknowledgment of a non-human authority, and such acknowledgment is incompatible with Brandom's initial premise—that agreement among human beings is the source of all norms.

Stout admits that it might easily be thought that “pragmatism, pursued as a general anti-metaphysical strategy within philosophy, is inherently anti-theological” (2004: 256). I do in fact think this, at least if the theology in question is Christian. I agree with Dewey that “it is impossible to ignore the fact that historic Christianity has been committed to a separation of sheep and goats; the saved and the lost; the elect and the mass.” Dewey went on to say that he could not understand “how any realization of the democratic ideal as a vital moral and spiritual ideal in human affairs is possible without surrender of the conception of the basic division to which supernatural Christianity is committed” (Dewey 1986: 55–56).

I'm happy to grant Stout's point that Christians like Milbank and Hauerwas have no use for metaphysics, but I do not think that makes them exempt from Dewey's anathema. For metaphysics is just an etiolated form of the urge to subject oneself to, and ally oneself with, a non-human authority. Plato succumbed to that urge when he distinguished knowledge from opinion, appearance from the really real, and thus replaced Zeus and Athena with the Idea of the Good. This impulse should be repressed whether it presents itself in Christian form, in Platonist form, or in the form of Comtean positivistic science-worship.

Stout thinks that “theological commitments need not be seen as a subset of metaphysical commitments” (2004: 256). I am dubious about that claim. For commitment to the existence of a non-human person who knows truths that human beings do not seems to me to presuppose what Dewey called a spectatorial account of knowledge—one in which knowledge consists in accurate representation of what is the case independent of human needs and interests. The idea that there could be such knowledge is, it seems to me, a metaphysical one.

As long as we hold to that idea, we can use analogical language to describe God as looking down on the whole of space-time, and perhaps on other realms of being as well, and getting everything in them right. But when we start thinking of the acquisition of knowledge as Brandom does, as a matter of acquiring social status in our community by producing assertions that prove to be reliable guides for action, it is not clear that any analogies are available that can be used to explain what it would be like to be a non-human knower. This is because it is not clear how somebody we cannot talk things over with could acquire social

status. Such a person might of course have power, in the way that the parent has power over the as yet unconvertible child. But power and status are not the same. Status of the relevant sort has to be earned in the course of conversation.

The spectatorial account of knowledge took for granted that there was a way things are—that they had properties that might or might not match the various predicates we humans used to formulate assertions about them. That metaphysical view and theism were made for one another, because it was assumed that anybody who could see the whole of things—could see how everything relates to everything else—would never be misled into using non-referring predicates, and thus could not mistake appearance for reality. Reality could thus be defined as the object of perfect knowledge—to be real, so to speak, was to be in God's visual field.

For pragmatists, however, the idea of "perfect knowledge" is not available. For they have no use for the notion of predicates that do not pick out properties. Predicates can of course be replaced by other predicates, in the way that the "narwhal's horn" replaced the "unicorn's horn" and in which the predicate "terrorist" sometimes replaces the predicate "freedom fighter". We can tell retrospective stories about which of such replacements were fortunate and which unfortunate. But pragmatists have no use for the idea that we can replace predicates that do not represent reality with predicates that do.

Brandomians can have short-term goals such as getting the structure of the human genome, or the financial situation of a corporation, or the relative merits of Milton and Blake, right. For such goals are what Dewey called "ends-in-view." But Brandomians cannot pursue what Dewey called "final ends"—for example, getting the nature of reality right by using only predicates that correspond to real properties. For progress toward that sort of metaphysical pseudo-goal cannot be gauged by conversational means. To use Kantian language, empirical ends-in-view are conditioned and therefore intelligible, whereas metaphysical final ends are unconditioned and therefore unintelligible.

My disagreement with Stout about the compatibility of pragmatism and theism is connected with our longstanding disagreement about how much of the rhetoric of "objectivity" pragmatists can afford to retain. The culture that was pragmatist enough to view a claim to knowledge as a claim to social status rather than to a privileged spectatorial relation to reality, would, I think, find some of Stout's assertions unintelligible. For instance, where he says "Truth, or accuracy, is an objective status as well as a normative one." Inhabitants of such a culture would not be able to make sense of Stout's claims that "whether

our beliefs actually enjoy the status of being true is not up to us” (2004: 255). For in that culture, there would be no such thing as “the status of being true.” That phrase would be interpretable, at best, as a metaphorical reminder of the possibility that what is currently endorsed might someday no longer be endorsed.

One way to dramatize the issue between Stout and myself about whether to retain the rhetoric of “objectivity” is to consider his claim that Brandomian minimalism is “perfectly compatible with a whole-hearted rejection of a narcissistic attitude toward truth” (2004: 257). I think that the point of Brandomian minimalism about truth, and indeed of pragmatism in general, is precisely to encourage narcissism. The term “narcissism” is one that Stout borrows from his friend and colleague Mark Johnston, who has used it to criticize Hilary Putnam’s identification of truth with idealized rational acceptability. Stout paraphrases Johnston as saying “the truth about some subject-matter pertains to that subject-matter; yet on Putnam’s view even the truths natural science teaches us about the properties of atoms are actually about what we would be justified in believing under ideal conditions.” How, Johnston asks, “did we get into the picture?”

My response is: we were in the picture all the time, since we were the people who invented talk about atoms and their properties, as well as about God and his goodness. In both cases, we are free to decide to cease from such talk if we find better things to talk about. God and the atoms are subject-matters of inquiry because we made them subject-matters. In that sense, though obviously not in a causal sense, they are our creatures. This claim of the priority of discourse over existence was what was true in idealism. It is one thing to say that we are not in control of things—that they can hurt or annihilate us. But it is another thing to say that things dictate to us how they are to be described; they cannot do that.

Brandomians, it seems to me, should agree with Habermas when he says “language and reality inextricably permeate each other,” and when he goes on to argue that there is no way to separate what pertains to the one from what pertains to the other (2003: 143). This is to grant William James’s point that “the trail of the human serpent is over all.” To say that the truth about something pertains to it rather than us is, on this view, no more than a metaphorical way of saying that we should abide by our own social norms when deciding which encounters with which things should make us revise our descriptions of what’s going on.

What Stout calls narcissism, I call “self-reliance.” As I see it, the whole point of pragmatism is to insist that we human beings are

answerable only to one other. We are answerable only to those who answer to us—our conversational partners. We are not responsible either to the atoms or to God, at least not until they start conversing with us. So whereas Stout sees pragmatism as allowing room for a non-metaphysical version of theism, I see theism as a resilient enemy of human self-reliance, and metaphysics as merely a surrogate for the traditional theistic insistence that we humans need to abase ourselves before something non-human.

As I see it, the pragmatist philosopher's job is to get people into a state of mind where they no longer ask questions like "Is there a higher law?" "Is ethics objective?" "Do ethical assertions claim to be true?" Those questions got their start in life when theism was in vogue—when it was widely believed that if God (or, at a minimum, the Idea of the Good) didn't exist, everything would be permitted. They would cease to be asked if nobody could remember what it was like to acknowledge a non-human authority—if human beings became as self-reliant as Dewey hoped they might. In a Deweyan culture, nobody would understand what Stout had in mind when he wrote, in an astonishingly un-Brandorian sentence, "there could be a form of excellence that transcended even an idealized human capacity to recognize it" (2004: 263).

Despite everything I have said so far, there is a way to reconcile theism and Brandorian pragmatism. This is to substitute a god of love for a god of power. By "a god of power" I mean someone who has enough features in common with human beings to be thought of as a person, but who has authority over us even though remaining unavailable for conversation. By a "god of love" I mean the sort of god in whom the Catholic philosopher Gianni Vattimo says he believes—one who, in an act of kenosis, turned over all his power and all his authority to human beings. He left us on our own, as loving parents eventually leave their children on their own.

Tillich spoke of the continual self-overcoming of the Jesus who was Jesus by the Jesus who was the Christ, and said that this self-overcoming should be the model for the further development of Christian theology. If one interprets this self-overcoming as Vattimo's all-encompassing act of kenosis, then one will view the triumph of secularism as the consummation of the Christian religion. One will say, as Vattimo does, that "secularization is the constitutive trait of authentic religious experience." Christians, Vattimo hopes, will cease to think of Christ as Lord, and instead think of him as Whitehead's "fellow-sufferer who understands." So thought of, Christ fits well enough into the tradition of Emerson, Whitman, and Dewey, much better than he does into that of Augustine and Aquinas.

All that would be needed for Christians to make the switch Vattimo recommends would be to adopt, self-consciously and consistently, a practice recommended by Robert Merrihew Adams. Stout describes this practice as follows:

In deciding what to view as a moral obligation, according to Adams, we need consider not only what God has commanded us to do, but also whether the content of the putative command survives rational criticism. Such criticism must take into account our best understanding of God's goodness. A command that we initially take to be from a divine source, but which cannot plausibly be viewed as the sort of edict that a wise and loving God could have issued, should not be viewed as a divine command. (2004: 260)

The practice Stout describes Adams as commending is the one presently engaged in by what Stout calls "the religious Left" in the United States. These are the people who think it is obvious that a wise and loving God would regard sodomy as innocuous rather than as abominable. I suspect that a lot of the theologians whom Stout criticizes are, in fact, members of this Left. They are tacitly Adams-like in their interpretation of divine commands. It has never occurred to them to think of their gay friends and relations as practicing abominations.

If there is still a disagreement between the Adamsites on the religious left and Brandomian pragmatists like Stout and myself, it is about whether getting God into the act is important for keeping one's sense of the objectivity of ethics. As Stout describes his views, Adams thinks that the nature of human excellence "must be described in such a way that its independence from human valuing is guaranteed metaphysically" so that it does not "collapse into what human beings love and admire" (2004: 262). Stout in his book proposes to substitute rational agreement among human beings for this divine guarantee. But as long as the result of Adamsite practice is God's endorsement of enlightened changes in public opinion, it will be unnecessary to resolve the disagreement between Adams and Stout about whether God should be "called on to buttress our sense of the objectivity of our moral practices" (261).

Further, there will be no need to resolve the disagreement between Stout and myself about whether we need to hang on to notions such as "truths that pertain to the subject-matter rather than to us." The merely theoretical tension between theism and Brandomian pragmatism that I have been describing in my remarks today can remain unresolved, because it will be a difference that makes no difference to practice. As long as citizens can reach a peaceable consensus on social policy, it will

not matter whether they use the vocabulary of Plato, or of St. Paul, or of Emerson, or of Nietzsche when they describe themselves to themselves. For their private self-images will have little to do with the content of their contributions to political discussion, even though those images may provide their motives for taking part in such discussion.

This is not to say that such self-images are of no importance. Their importance is illustrated by Vattimo's and Gary Wills's passionate insistence on describing themselves as Catholics, and by the passionate insistence of many other Catholics that Vattimo and Wills have forfeited the right to do so. But democratic societies have learned how to divorce the discussion of social policy from what individual citizens do with their solitude, just as they have learned to separate what Dewey called "the religious" from the worship of a god of power.

Stanley Hauerwas

Jeff was kind enough to send me the manuscript of *Democracy and Tradition* oh, I guess eight or nine months ago. And then when I got the galleys, I could not resist going ahead and writing a response to it. And that response, in which I try to defend myself a bit from the criticisms Jeff makes of my work, will soon be in a book coming out from Brazos press called *Performing the Faith*.⁴ It's just more shit hitting the fan, but I suspect you might want to read it. There I try to respond to the criticisms Jeff makes of my work. But I am not going to use this time to replay that defense. And so I may be putting Jeff in an unfair position, since some of the things I am going to raise are not necessarily in that text. That I am not going to replay that should confirm, when everything is said and done, given Jeff's criticisms of MacIntyre—how can MacIntyre really be against Modernity since everybody buys his books?—in like manner, you might assume that my not using the criticisms I have already written in *Performing the Faith* is a marketing decision. Namely, if you want to know what I *really* think, you'll have to buy my book.

I confess that I am somewhat taken aback by Jeff's estimation of my influence, that is, that I have convinced Christians in America to give up on democracy. I had no idea I was so influential. I had no idea *any* theologian could be that influential today. But I am willing to believe him. I do think that Jeff's criticisms pay more attention to the titles of some of my books than what I say. I am, of course, against general

⁴Hauerwas (2004).

appeals to justice abstracted from practices that provide for articulations of goods upon which any account of justice depends. And, of course, that also has to do with the question of the general relation of the virtues, since I think any account of justice requires an account of charity which means that the virtues cannot be divorced from their theological home.

One of Jeff's most interesting criticisms of me is that I cannot have Yoder and MacIntyre too.⁵ The tensions between my use of Yoder and MacIntyre have been wrongly identified. He thinks MacIntyre's description of liberal society tempts me to adopt a rigidly dualistic account of the world that my criticisms of the "early" Yoder should have prevented me from doing. But I do not think that Yoder has a rigidly dualistic view of the relationship between Church and World. Jeff reads me as thinking that I must have a rigidly dualist view, given my use of MacIntyre. I think the problem with my use of Alasdair's declension narrative—and there is a question about exactly what kind of declension narrative Alasdair gives—is that it can imply a form of Constantinianism that I probably cannot have just to the extent that I am developing Yoder's arguments against Constantinianism. For Christians, if I am right, as an apocalyptic people, one time is never worse than another. Every time is a problem. But I really do not want to look back, but as I said, forward.

Jeff's criticisms of Rawls and Rorty seem to me to open up possibilities of constructive conversation we desperately need. Particularly important is that Jeff rightly sees that Rawls's exclusion of strong convictions from politics, even as late as *The Law of Peoples*, and Rorty's finding that religious convictions are a "conversation stopper," discard the grammar of religious convictions. That is, it makes it impossible to display how religious convictions shape lives, so there is continuity between what is done and how it is done, making possible virtuous habits. And that is a very crucial point at the heart of Jeff's argument—that we cannot expect religious people to privatize their religious convictions in a way that they describe their actions as somehow different from the internal life of religious convictions. This is important to Jeff because he also has now given a perfectionist view of democratic authority that needs to develop the virtues—piety, practical wisdom, justice, and charity.

⁵Stout executes this line of criticism in (2004: 162–178). Representative selections from John Howard Yoder's work include Yoder (1972, 1997); for the work by Alasdair MacIntyre most influential on Hauerwas, see MacIntyre (1981).

Now I want to demure just a bit about Jeff's claim on page 228 that all moralities are about the same topic—maybe, but descriptions are everything. If descriptions are everything, then the virtues give an ongoing narrative which should help provide the grounds for Jews and Christians to discover what they have in common and how they differ. The best book I know that deals with the complex relation of the virtues, description, and narrative is Charlie Pinches's new book *Theology and Action: After Theory in Christian Ethics*. It is not at all clear how Jeff understands the possibility that a virtue may hold similar and yet diverse gifts given the body. If the virtues are really going to shape description then you can have the same topic from different sets of differently traditioned virtues.

Finally, the reason I want to further explore with Jeff his constructive proposal, which I do in *Performing the Faith*, is that Jeff has already given us a gift because he thinks theology matters. I mean, what an admirable gift Jeff has given those of us in the theological community—that theology matters. And just as importantly, Jeff cares deeply about that which he writes. That is, he has something to say. And therefore this is not just another instance of academic game playing. In all that, I think we all owe Jeff Stout an immense debt of gratitude.

What I want to explore further, however, is Jeff's understanding of democracy. What I find so attractive is his attempt at a democratic theory that is not State theory. I take it that Stout is in the vicinity, therefore, of figures such as Sheldon Wolin, Peter Euben, Romand Coles (one of my colleagues at Duke), and William Connelly, who are trying to develop some account of radical democracy. Now, this I believe is surely on the right track. But I do have an observation at the beginning about the status of what Jeff is trying to do. That is, I think Jeff has a rhetorical problem. He wants to convince Christians that my criticism of liberal democracy is a mistake. But to do that he must argue I have been wrong about the theological claims that I've made to substantiate the kind of judgments I've made about liberal democracy—that is, in particular, what I've had to say about how Christians in America have confused the Church with America.

I've never written to ask liberals not to be liberals. That, after all, is their fate. Rather, I've always written to convince Christians that the Church is not the left wing of the Democratic party, that is, if there was a left wing of the Democratic party. Even though Jeff identifies himself in the book with certain Christian charities, I do not think he really wants to make a theological argument. But that raises the question of who "we" [is] in sentences such as "What we need today in the struggle against terrorism . . ." (that's a sentence in the book), "We have a just

cause to bear arms against terrorists” (that’s also a sentence), “Our armed forces should not be firing at civilians” (again, that’s a sentence). Those are all, by the way, phrases that I snipped out of a letter Jeff published as a critique against me in *Commonweal* (Stout 2003). And I have to say that I never thought Catholics would write in my defense, but they did. A couple of those places were from a letter by Grant Kaplan in response to Jeff. Indeed, I thought most of the letters that were signed were written by Catholics.

Now, obviously, I always have a “we” problem—about which “we” I am talking about. But in that respect, I think so does Jeff, just to the extent that he wants to repeat what I am saying without taking on the theological issues which he, himself, would not want to own as part of his own convictions. Every time we use ‘we’ it is a performative utterance. And that’s perfectly appropriate. But how you’re going to use the “we” in terms of creating a kind of rapport with your audience that you are presupposing against the background of their convictions, I think, is a question against which Jeff will be struggling.

That said, I want to try to raise some questions to try to understand better what Jeff means by “democracy.” Jeff argues that democracy is a tradition and as such it is not to be confused with liberal theory, often used to defend democracy. And this he thinks is one of the main criticisms that he can make of me since, as a matter of fact, I have done exactly that, i.e., I have confused liberal theory with liberal democracy rather than look at the actual practice of democracy. Therefore, Jeff suggests we should just quit talking about Liberalism, or the Liberal project a’ la MacIntyre. I have to say, he may be right about that, and I’m willing to think about it, but I think he would have to acknowledge there are many defenders of liberal democracy who assume liberal theory is necessary to defend democracy.

In contrast, of course, to the Liberal tradition, Jeff wants to say that democracy works within the pragmatic tradition, and therefore, is not liberal. It is, though, because the culture of democracy, a phrase that Jeff uses, is to be found in those practices that are about the giving and asking for ethical reasons. I worry a little about “ethical reasons” because I don’t want to distinguish any strong range of ethics from other aspects of our lives. Though democracies do not exclude strong religious convictions, it did come into the world, according to Jeff, as a critique of feudal and theocratic pasts. I think there are historical issues there that could well be debated. And, therefore, one of the most important aspects of modern democracy in a practice tradition is its critique of hierarchy. Such a democracy needs orthodox Christians, according to Jeff. The freedom of religion consists first of all in the right to make up

one's own mind in answering religious questions (p. 63). It is not clear to me, however, how Jeff's claim that we need orthodox Christians in the democratic discussion can be squared with the notion of making up our own minds. Jeff is very astute on debating these matters where he says, of course, authority and democracy are not incompatible. And strong forms of authority are needed, and [he] even praises Church councils as the exemplification of democracy—which I thought paid an extraordinary compliment to Nicea. Think of that time around Nicea. It was hardly democratic. But I appreciate that he's trying to think through that.

But I think a crucial issue here, and I'll come back to it, is the question about whether it is internal to religious convictions that we can think of making up our own minds as orthodox Christians. Jeff praises Cobbett's essays for addressing readers of all classes as capable of thinking for themselves.⁶ Yet, Jeff knows that thinking for one's self is a formation itself that Christians have been suspicious of, since thinking for us is always thinking *with*, rather than thinking *for* ourselves, which may yield a very different account of pragmatism. Just a note, Jeff at one point in the book quotes Annette Baier to say what it means to be committed to a democratic project is to never beg. And that is what I think it means to be a Christian—*always* to be a beggar. And how that difference plays itself out, I think, should be quite fascinating.

John Adams rightly said that "Democracy is not the rule of people," which means some form of representative government is required. Yet he does have a confidence in people, that is, as individuals. I thought it would be quite fascinating for someone to compare what Jeff has to say about the confidence in the individual with MacIntyre's "plain person"—that elusive character that appeared about twenty years ago in a couple of his works (which I've never been quite sure who it is). Jeff says, for example, that the question "is whether the people can summon the wherewithal, the moral fiber to act on behalf of democracy before democracy gives way" (2004: 23). And he says his hope is in the people, against a T. S. Eliot attitude of the Wasteland blues. And of course, he directs us for that to read Emerson and Whitman. But I worry about . . . the capitalist formations that shape us very well to be self-interested units of desire. In other words, I think the whole question of how economics is shaping the citizen that Jeff wants has got to be one of the central questions he must deal with.

⁶William Cobbett (1763–1835) was an English political essayist and journalist. He is a representative figure that MacIntyre employs in the central argument of *After Virtue* (1981: 243). Stout utilizes him as a counter-example to MacIntyre's claims (Stout 2004: 133–134).

He also, I think, must deal—given his respect for democracy—with the problems of what he calls pluralism. He affirms pluralism. And it's not clear to me he really knows what he's talking about when he says the word "pluralism." I take it that despite where you're standing, to be able to know that we live in a pluralist world is already part of the problem of naming pluralism. That's why I think MacIntyre has always stressed fragmentation. Jeff wants to belong to a society that can deal with conflict. That he suggests, quite rightly, we should have it even if it means we can only begin with summary. He wants to make inexcusable, for example, intentional bombing of civilian populations, and thinks that that should be part of the democratic discussion. How will we get there, however? That is the question I want to know. Democratic politics is so adept at keeping out of public discussion matters that matter exactly because they matter, and represses such conflict. So, I worry about the kind of calls to be able to deal with [these concerns] as calls for more conflict, given where we are at this time.

In this respect, I think in Jeff's worries about our current politics I can't tell much difference between my worries about current politics. He says, for example, we cannot honestly call our mode of government democratic, if corporate influence on it is so strong that even calls by the public to get decisions have little bearing on legislative outcomes. He even provides a list early on in the book—on page 24—on the failures of modern democracy—that is, that we ignore the plight of the poor, that we allow our government to prop up tyrants, that we have engaged in violence that produces civilian casualties, that we don't hold professional elites responsible, that there is a deference to bosses, and that many people in our democratic society withdraw from political engagement because of the apathy bred. Jeff even means to suggest that democracy can level the excellences we need, because democracies also need a role for the elite. Whitman and Emerson are obviously a kind of elite. He also acknowledges that modern democracy fragments, which in many ways sounds very MacIntyorean, and therefore, it creates a drastic problem of the psychology necessary for sustaining a virtuous people. Now all of that is the price of real problems that Jeff notes face us currently in the kind of society we find ourselves.

Now, I realize Jeff wants to say that these are accidental aspects of democracy. But, how do we ever know when they *aren't* democracy? How do we ever know when, as a matter of fact, these are not accidental, but *intrinsic* to the kind of world in which we thought we were forming, called "democratic." What kind of reform does Jeff offer, other than reading Whitman and Emerson? He may trust the individual, but I must say I do not. He says, "On the issue of democratic individuality,

I stand with Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau, and against communitarians who have cast aspersions on this ideal." I certainly do not want to be a communitarian, since that's just another word for nationalism. But I do have deep worries about whether this in any way is a sufficient response to get us from where we are to where Jeff wants to be. Yet I can't tell that there's that much difference between Jeff and myself in terms of our own cultural analysis of where we are, even though mine is theologically motivated.

I think feeling some of these concerns about modern democratic polity—or what is allegedly modern democratic polity—is why Jeff ends his book with a lovely evocation account of his neighborhood, Community Park. The neighborhood is fighting to prevent a medical center from getting inspections and zoning regulations so that a block of rental housing can be converted to bureaucratic offices. Jeff notes his neighborhood, or association of neighborhoods, hold in common sports that can cut across racial and class lines. I must say, that is the kind of politics I want—the kind I try to get the Church itself to be, and for which we need so desperately examples. Jeff also suggests for us to think a national community like his neighborhood would be a good idea. Yet it seems to me that he is not suspicious enough about how the very moral appeals constitutive of national politics that were exemplified in his earlier "we's," that those very appeals threaten to undermine his neighborhood and my Church. However, he can be sure I hope to join him in the hope that the politics of his neighborhood and my Church can be sustained in a world I think increasingly is designed to undercut such endeavors. Accordingly, I can only say, Jeff, welcome to the struggle.

Response by Jeffrey Stout

EDDIE GLAUDE, David Lamberth, and Frederick Ruf have my warm thanks for organizing this symposium. I am grateful to Wayne Proudfoot and my three critics for participating. I'm overwhelmed by the generosity of the remarks and of the occasion itself, and I'm humbled by the task of responding. Standing at this podium is a little like posing for a photo-op in front of Mount Rushmore.

Cornel West appears in *Democracy and Tradition* mainly in Part 1, which is a discussion of what Walt Whitman called the "important question of character" facing American democracy. If you look outside academic philosophy, I argue, and you look at a tradition that leads from Emerson and Whitman down to Meridel Le Sueur, James Baldwin, Wendell Berry, and people like that, you can find a serious,

self-consciously *democratic* sort of reflection on the question of character—in an age that some allege to be “after virtue.”

Cornel West draws heavily on this democratic tradition, and he also draws on a variety of other sources. His project is no less eclectic than that of the great jazz musicians, to whom he referred a few moments ago. He blends prophetic social criticism, Augustinian realism about human fallenness, Emersonian ideals of democratic individuality, and a bluesy, tragicomic response to what he calls the funk of life. In creative acts of improvisational synthesis, he aims to meld the best features of these traditions.

West rejects the traditionalist pictures of democracy as a merely destructive leveling of virtue. But he also refuses the liberal secularist’s recommendation that citizens keep their religious commitments to themselves. Religion, for him, is the opposite of what Rorty used to call a conversation-stopper. His work is a conversation among the religious voices of America, enacted in the thought of one individual, and expressed openly in the public arena. Now, it’s fair to ask whether West succeeds in combining these voices harmoniously. Fair enough. But in my view the effort is an exemplary one, and it has earned my admiration.

Toward the end of Part 1, I try to show why someone like Ralph Ellison, for reasons rooted in his blues sensibility, might want to resist some of what Cornel West says in essays like “Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization.” In that context, I urge West to appreciate Ellison more and to rely on T. S. Eliot less. But other recent writings and conversations that Cornel and I have been having persuade me that our conceptions of hope may now be more similar than I had once supposed. And I think that Cornel’s remarks a few minutes ago reflect a similar sense. I’m not sure how to describe this exactly, but it seems that his love of Chekov, and my darkening mood, appears to be bringing us closer together.

West is right about the importance of learning from Wolin as well as from Dewey. But I want to emphasize that the kind of hope I have in mind when I talk about hope is not a mood but a virtue—the mean between the vices of smug presumption and politically paralyzed despair. So let your mood be as dark as you wish. Let it be as dark as mine. The question of hope is not the question of mood, it is the question of whether we can find it within ourselves—and Stanley, as far as what “ourselves” or what “we” I’m talking about, let’s start with the people in this room—whether we can find it in ourselves to muster the moral fiber to act for justice and to make a difference. If we can’t, then our dark mood issues in the vice of despair. You need hope at those moments when you are tempted by that mood— by the realization of how dark things are getting—to stop acting, or to withdraw, to become

apathetic, to withdraw into some sort of self-consolation. If I did not think Wolin was largely right about the fate of democracy—I say *largely* right, I think there are differences of emphasis—but if I did not think that he was largely right, then I would not be so anxious to construct what Ellison called a “raft of hope.”

I also agree with West on the need to think hard about what democratic ideals imply in a global context. What the American government usually has in mind when it calls for “democracy” in other countries, or at home, is not what I mean by it. In many countries today, an ethnic minority controls the economy while an ethnic majority seethes in resentment. Redressing the economic injustice of such arrangements reminds our leaders of socialism, so they promote a version of free market economics that makes matters worse. They then impose free elections, and express surprise and dismay at the resulting demagoguery, as the majority settles scores rhetorically, and then violently, with a market-dominant minority that typically lacks effective constitutional protections. And before you know it, ethnic warfare begins and people start calling for military intervention.

Meanwhile, multinational corporations have become the latter-day equivalents of the East India Company. We now have government for the corporations, by the corporations, but almost no government *of* the corporations. That’s what “deregulation” means. “Corporate despotism” may be the best name for the mode of government we now have, but the term “democracy” remains a good name for the people’s disposition to hold one another, their leaders, and the corporations responsible for their acts. It may be a latent disposition, but it’s still worth singling out and cultivating to the degree we can. One of my purposes is to cultivate that disposition and to encourage other intellectuals—especially young ones wondering how they’re going to spend their lives—to cultivate that disposition too.

I now want to talk a little bit about Part 2 of my book. There I ask whether the prominent philosophers and theologians of our time have done enough along these lines. Or, I ask in effect whether what they’ve been doing helps in the right way. Richard Rorty and Stanley Hauerwas appear in Part 2 of the book as representatives of two positions, liberal secularism and what I call the new traditionalism, respectively. I argue that both positions are much better at explaining the other’s weaknesses than the other’s strengths. And I worry about the rhetorical postures of both sides. I worry about whether those rhetorical postures unwittingly reflect and reinforce unfortunate tendencies in contemporary politics. My aim is to transcend the increasingly counterproductive dispute in which these two positions are currently locked.

In Part 3, I try to say what a better account of democratic culture would look like. I argue that this culture is best understood as a *tradition*. But my account of it can also be viewed as a form of *pragmatism*. So I mean it when I say that I am indebted to both Hauerwas on the indispensability of tradition and Rorty on the priority of democracy to philosophy. But you can also see why the two of them are resisting at least part of what I am saying. They recognize that I am trying to *aufheben* their conflicting positions. Who sits idly by when somebody does that?

Hauerwas and Rorty are provocative writers. They specialize in provocations. There is much truth in their provocations, so I borrow from them liberally. But after the initial thrill wears off, what are we to make of their respective visions of the future? Hauerwas's is a version of biblical apocalypse, Rorty's a secularist utopia. What do these visions imagine? They imagine the conversion, destruction, or the withering away of their opponents—of each other.

I encourage both of these men to express their visions openly. Indeed, I encourage all of my fellow citizens to love justice, think hard about civility, and then say what they wish to the rest of us, whether that happens to be religious in content or not. But I have to admit that I don't find these two visions of the future very helpful. Interpreted as expressions of their wishes, they tell us what we already knew—namely, that these men want everybody to agree with them so fully that the lion lies down with the lamb and we enjoy discursive harmony forever. But who doesn't want that? Interpreted as claims about what is going to happen, I find them hard to believe.

Hauerwas has a lot to say about a God whose non-violent way of dealing with evil is revealed on the cross. But I have trouble fitting this image of God together with what happens in Revelation 20, when the same God deals with the damned. And if Rorty's story is not an endorsement of a long-discredited theory of secularization, then what is it *besides* a wish?

I admit to being less apocalyptic than Hauerwas and in some sense less utopian than Rorty. Without trying to shut them up, I am trying to imagine a more proximate future, realizable by our efforts, in which citizens who disagree on religious and ethical questions create a political discussion that is more genuinely democratic in form and content than the one we're having now.

This hopeful but non-utopian project is hard to get off the ground when the smartest, most compassionate young people—the ones who would have joined the civil rights movement if they had come of age politically when I did in the Sixties—are signing up to be either traditionalists or secularists. For this pits them against each other, instead of allowing

them to join forces in a way that provides politically effective opposition to the people who now control all three branches of government.

I worry about the resentment of public life that I sense in Hauerwas's younger followers. I see Hauerwas's relentless attack on Niebuhr and Rauschenbusch as partly responsible for the almost total disintegration of the religious left. The black church is just about all that's left of the religious left. Why is that? Because few people who actually live in black neighborhoods are tempted to *behave politically* as if justice were a bad idea.

I also worry about the Nietzschean narcissism that I sense in many of Rorty's younger readers, most of whom find his love of Whitman and Dewey quaint, or naïve, or despicable. I see his claim that secularists are inherently better citizens than theists as partly responsible for alienating the Hauerwasians. Dick Rorty issued this claim at the beginning of his remarks, and then said, in effect, "Let's talk about objectivity." I'll come back to that in a minute, but I want to stay with the claim that he moves so quickly beyond for a minute.

Why does Rorty think that atheists are better suited to play the role of democratic citizens than theists? He thinks that a belief in a supernatural being is what you need if you want to construct a spectatorial theory of knowledge, set up a caste of priests who claim to possess indefeasible authority over the rest of us, and do various other things that are antithetical to pragmatically defended democracy. But in making his case for this conclusion, Rorty behaves as if the inferential significance of this belief could be determined without considering the other commitments of the person who accepts it. And that view of inferential significance is at odds with Rorty's own holistic pragmatism.

According to this kind of pragmatism, the significance of beliefs has to be determined by tracing their inferential connections with lots of other commitments and with perception and action. It follows that belief in God implies nothing at all when deprived of such connections. When that belief is connected with the notions that God is love, that God commands effective care for the poor, that even Christians are sinners, and that we have the treasure of divine grace in the *earthen* vessels of our social practices, then the anti-democratic implications that Rorty associates with theism are not entailed.

And in the second half of his remarks, it seems to come to him that Adams, Vattimo, and Wills *aren't* everything that theists are cracked down to be in his secularist vision. The moral to draw from this realization should have been that theism, defined in terms of a belief abstracted completely from context, has no inherent relationship, positive or negative, with democracy. So if you want to fight homophobia

or some other evil, attack it directly, and cut out the essentializing generalizations about the inherent tendencies of theism. And while you're at it, keep in mind that thousands of religiously committed readers are thinking: If democratic culture is basically an expression of secularism, I'll have to be against it.

I am saying that the exclusion of religious voices is *not* what democratic culture is all about. Who more fully personifies the culture created by the First Amendment than Cornel West? Yet, as a defender of James and Niebuhr, he *is* what Hauerwas seems to imply a Christian should *not* be. And, as a citizen who brings his religious commitments with him into the public square, he *is* what Rorty seems to imply a pragmatic democrat should *not* be. I'm tempted to put this by saying that, in their visions, he is the invisible man, the excluded anomaly.

If liberal secularism is wrong about what modern democratic culture *is*, then Hauerwas's critique of atomistic liberalism ought to give way to a more concrete, fully explicit form of political engagement with that culture. I think my advice to Stan can be summed up by saying—give MacIntyre's metanarrative a rest. And give us a book on Dorothy Day, and show us what the implications of her witness look like, concretely, in the actions of the Ekklesia Project.⁷

As the connections between the vision and its practical embodiment become clearer, my worries about the resentment and alienation that I see in some of the younger followers will subside. But, Stan, don't console yourself by pretending that you don't have an influence on your readers, and that you don't bear responsibility for the sermons that will be preached across America for the next ten years. You need to decide whether you want those sermons to say that the main problem with America is its liberalism.

Hauerwas and Rorty, I think, are both too naughty by half. But they have taken quite different tacks today. Hauerwas has, in effect, said: "Who, me? A debunker of liberal modernity? I'm just a humble critic of a church that has lost its way." My response is to propose a truce on the following terms. Stan, your critics will stop calling you a sectarian if you will stop calling them liberals. Let's see how far we can get simply by refraining from using these two terms for the next decade. Maybe this will compel us to describe the society around us in a fresh way, and allow us to join forces, peaceably, against the greed, hatred, and fear

⁷The Ekklesia Project is an intra-Christian network of pastors, scholars, and lay people who works for church-centered restoration within the Christian family, and aims to preserve the distinctive and counter-cultural character of Christian identity in its interaction with secular institutions. See <http://www.ekklesiaproject.org>.

rampant in contemporary political life. Now I'm not saying, Stan, that we should avoid talking about the subject-matter that the term liberalism has been used in the past sometimes to talk about. I'm saying let's not use the crutch of this word to give us a shortcut through the analysis. Let's just see what happens if we can't use the word, and tie that hand behind our back, and force ourselves to say it in a different way. Let's try it—ten years.

At one point in the forty-four pages of the response that Stanley has written in response to my book he says, "I do not think justice is a 'bad idea.'" You'll remember that's the claim that was in the subtitle of one of his books, and this is partly what got me going. And I have to confess that getting him to say this—that "I do not think justice is a bad idea"—was one of my main objectives in writing about him. I had hoped he might say it without immediately adding qualifications. I had hoped he might say, "Let justice roll down like waters in a mighty stream." But I'll settle for what I can get.

Rorty, for his part, has said: "Damn straight, I'm naughty. I'm a Nietzschean narcissist and proud of it!" In his Nietzschean mood—which is only one of his moods, but my book seems to have brought it out in him—Rorty appears sometimes to have adopted an anti-realist position on truth: truth is what your peers will let you get away with saying, he once put it; it is reducible to cultural politics or solidarity or power. We should therefore drop the rhetoric of objectivity completely. The Nietzschean Rorty presents himself as a radical reformer of common sense—of ordinary speech—the prophet of a future in which people will no longer worry about truth and objectivity, thus freeing them up to embrace narcissism shamelessly.

Well there are, however, other Rortian voices. One is a Wittgensteinian voice, which sets out not to reform ordinary uses of the term "true," but rather to provide a kind of therapy for philosophical temptations that arise in the vicinity of those uses. What the Wittgensteinian therapist wants to reform is not ordinary language or common sense, but the compulsion to take sides in a fruitless metaphysical debate between realists and anti-realists.

This Rorty avoids anti-realist rhetoric, and instead tends to reinforce the idea that ordinary uses of "true" are perfectly in order. We hear traces of this, I think, in his remarks today. But this means, among other things, not being squeamish about using the terms "true" and "false" in moral and aesthetic contexts. Being squeamish at those moments is a sign that Wittgensteinian therapy is called for. And I thought that's what I was trying to supply in Chapter 11, the ones he refers to as still too worried about objectivity.

Wittgenstein was suspicious of the quest for a full-blown philosophy of language as a successor to representationalism. He thought of that as having too many spiritual traps in it—the attempt to provide overarching replacement theory. But since the mid-1980s, Rorty has repeatedly hinted that either Donald Davidson or Robert Brandom has done the trick, and supplied the relevant replacement theory. So there are also Davidsonian and Brandomian Rorties. But Davidson and Brandom, no less than Wittgenstein, would resist the reductive moves that I’m associating with Nietzsche, or with Nietzsche’s provocative aphorisms about truth. And if you want to reject all talk of objectivity, I don’t think you’re going to get much help from Davidson and Brandom.

Unless, of course, you ignore extremely important things they say. I understand very well that Brandom might not want to endorse everything I do with his tools. But you wouldn’t guess from Rorty’s talk that chapter 8 of Brandom’s magnum opus, *Making It Explicit*, develops a pragmatic account of *objectivity*. As Brandom puts it there, “One of the central challenges of an account of conceptual norms as implicit in social practice is . . . to make sense of the emergence of . . . an *objective* notion of correctness or appropriateness” (Brandom 1994: 594). Chapter 12 of *Democracy and Tradition* tries to do for ethical norms what Brandom does for conceptual norms.

Brandom’s kind of pragmatism asserts the priority of the practical over the objective and the subjective in an acceptable account of norms. He finds this reordering already in Kant, and credits Hegel with the insight that the practical sphere needs to be understood in social terms. But it is crucial, according to Brandom, that this affirmation of the social-practical *not* be viewed as a plea for the elimination of talk about subjectivity and objectivity.

The social-practical sphere is that in which human subjects are shaped into beings—into subjects—constrained by norms and thus into beings who are free in the sense of being fit to be held responsible for their judgments and actions. It is also the sphere in which some normative practices place constraints of objectivity on the subjects involved in them. In the practice of natural science, the norms require certain forms of close observation of objects and use of a vocabulary that lends itself to “objectifying” descriptions. In the practice of moral education, the norms require resistance to the selfishness and self-delusion of the ego, and attention to the actual needs and suffering of others. In the practice of democratic social criticism, the norms require attention to the condition of the least well off and suspicion of the self-justifying stories that societies—in the form of group idolatry—tell about themselves.

The norms in each case are embedded in social practices. But the ones I have just mentioned orient one's attention to objects (that is, persons and things) that are distinct from the inquiring subject. Following these norms involves checking "subjective" tendencies like wishful thinking and rationalization. Implicit in those norms is a distinction between living up to one's responsibilities as an inquirer and getting the answers right—between being justified in believing something and having a true belief.

When Brandom tells his Hegel–Heidegger–Sellars story about the precipitation of objective norms out of social practices, he is marking the point at which his kind of pragmatism—which is my kind of pragmatism—diverges from the Nietzschean Rorty and from any postmodernism that proclaims the disappearance of the "subject" and announces the tyranny of the "objective." What needs to be avoided is not our ordinary talk of truth and objectivity in the contexts of science, ethics, and politics, but rather objectivist philosophical accounts of that talk, on the one hand, and postmodernist rejections of that talk, on the other.

Is pragmatism *essentially* secularist? Are *all* pragmatists naturalists? I would have thought that the reason we call Dewey a "pragmatic naturalist," and do so without redundancy, is that pragmatism and naturalism are not identical. Both Peirce and James resisted Dewey's naturalism. I see no reason to conclude that they were not pragmatists or that their pragmatism was *essentially* at odds with their theism. Rorty's way of posing this issue is once again at odds—at least it seems to be—with his own holistic conception of meaning as use.

In an American context, pragmatism concerns itself with a number of distinct doctrines: the priority of the social-practical, Dewey's fairly aggressive form of Darwinian naturalism, James's permissive conception of rationality, a holistic conception of meaning as use, several incompatible accounts of truth, and so on. There is no point in declaring any of these of the essence of pragmatism. It should be obvious to anyone familiar with the tradition that there is a tension between the permissive conception of rationality epitomized in James's "The Will to Believe" and the naturalist agenda of Dewey's "A Common Faith."

Dewey isn't just affirming naturalism; he's saying that his religious opponents are not rationally entitled to their commitments. And that history is bending in that direction. This conclusion is hard to defend if you accept what James says about rationality. I don't think it settles much when Rorty, if I understood his remarks correctly, stipulates a definition of pragmatism that resolves this tension in Dewey's favor. The relation of pragmatism to theism is almost as complicated as the

relation between democracy and theism. And Rorty seems today to be treating both of these topics in an uncharacteristically rigid way.

Among the most prominent thinkers who now call themselves pragmatists are Hilary Putnam, Cornel West, and Bas van Fraassen. The first is a Jew, the second, a Protestant, and the third, a Catholic. These are anti-metaphysical theists, who side with James against Dewey on religion. And it seems to me they are evidence that contemporary pragmatism is no more essentially non-theistic, or atheistic or secularist than classical pragmatism was.

The post-Heideggerian theology now coming out of Europe is similarly anti-metaphysical in the sense that it refuses to buttress the objectivity of our social practices by claiming that God has underwritten them. Theologians who affirm the priority of the social-practical over the objective and the subjective are intentionally depriving themselves of metaphysical consolation. They are pragmatists in what Brandom calls the “broader,” more “interesting” sense—the sense in which Hegel and Heidegger qualify as pragmatists no less than Dewey does.

It is true that many thinkers who affirm the priority of the social-practical (including Brandom) have only human beings in mind as the persons participating in the social practices that generate meaning and authority. But the priority of the social-practical can be distinguished from the questions of what sorts of persons there are and how divinity is to be conceived. For this reason, I think it is possible for thinkers to give the priority of the social-practical a theological twist. And I think a number of theologians have been doing this in any number of different ways, and that might be one thing worth talking about in the discussion period today.

But, I am no more a believer in theism than Rorty is. What do I do with my solitude? Well, as Cornel has pointed out, I pursue an Emersonian ideal of spiritual ascent, while rejecting even Emerson’s “over-soul” as a form of self-consolation. That makes me about as secular as an Emersonian can get. But it doesn’t make me a *secularist* in matters of public philosophy, because reading James persuades me that people who disagree with me on religious questions might be rationally entitled to their beliefs. Indeed, I think it’s often a good thing for citizens to express such beliefs, so that the rest of us can have an opportunity to criticize them, but also perhaps to learn from them.

It would please me if Christians, Jews, and Muslims all came over to my austere conception of sacred value. But I don’t expect this to happen, even over the long haul. If religious differences are likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future, how are we to reason with

one another respectfully, productively, on issues of public importance? And how might we build coalitions among citizens of various persuasions to fight effectively for a just social order? These are two of the questions that I am trying to raise today.

I now want to say a couple of things directed to Stanley in conclusion. In Stanley's remarks, he took me to be criticizing him for being a sectarian. I hope you read the book carefully. I hope you *re*-read those sections, Stanley. That's not what I'm saying. What I was trying to do was to note a difference between your rhetoric and what I take to be your own considered opinions on the relevant subjects. And I was trying to show how the rhetoric that you've adopted keeps the debate over whether you're a sectarian or not going. That's the issue. So, when you say that I am accusing you of creating a rigid and static line between Christian virtue and liberal vice, I would urge you to go to page 154 and see exactly how the sentences there go.

So here is what I actually say: "What Barth saw as an ever-shifting boundary between church and world *appears* to have hardened in Hauerwas's *rhetoric* into a rigid and static line between Christian virtue and liberal vice. It is clear that he does not intend to allow the boundary to harden in this way at the level of doctrine. But his anti-liberal *rhetoric* can easily give the impression that the boundary has hardened in practice" (2003: 154).⁸

It should be clear that the point of this passage is to draw a contrast between the considered doctrinal commitments and the rhetoric, and to use this contrast to explain why the charge of sectarianism hasn't gone away. I am *not* endorsing the charge of sectarianism against Hauerwas. I'm offering a diagnosis of the somewhat awkward rhetorical posture he has found himself in, and I'm suggesting how he could gracefully get out of that posture—namely, by replacing the repetitive anti-liberal diatribes with *detailed, theologically sensitive* social criticism. And I'm *not* asking him to be less theological or less critical.

On begging: Hauerwas and I have profound religious differences over the practice of petitionary prayer. But the question raised in my discussion of rights has to do with whether the poor should have to beg *from the rich and the powerful* for a living wage, for health care, for education. The idea is that a democratic culture cultivates the expectation that no human being should have to beg *other human beings* for what is owed them under justice. It says to the Latino immigrant, and the imprisoned black male, and the battered wife: There is no need

⁸Italics added to reflect emphasis as spoken.

to grovel. Stand up and make your claim in your own voice. We have your back.

One last point: Yesterday, in the Bonhoeffer session, Hauerwas told the story in which Tonto and the Lone Ranger are surrounded by thousands of Sioux. The Lone Ranger says, "Tonto, we are in trouble." And Tonto responds, "What do you mean *we*, white man?" Now, I take it that Stanley was illustrating what the Christian should say to his or her fellow American citizens in the time after September 11. That was the context of the remark, I thought.

Now suppose I say: "Stan, we are in trouble." Is Stan's response really, "What do you mean 'we,' American?" Does Stanley really think he is not part of the society that's under attack, the society that bears responsibility for a long history of injustices to other peoples? Well, no, and he will be quick to point out that there are many passages in his writings that deny this implication. But that's what his Tonto story implies—that he isn't an American. It's another of those misleading rhetorical gestures. It always gets a laugh. It appears to stake out a shocking claim about his identity (Christian, not American). But, when pressed, he'll explain that what he really means is that his identity as an American isn't *equivalent* to his identity as a Christian. More generally, that his being Christian places demands of discipleship that must not be confused with the attempt to make American politics more loving and procedurally just, that those demands *include* suffering with one's fellow Americans when the hardest time comes. That last bit effectively takes back the Tonto story's implication of "Nice knowing ya; see ya later."

So the rhetoric is deceptive. That's my point. It's bait and switch—followed by "Golly, why do people get so mad at me? Why do they think I'm a sectarian? I keep telling them that I'm not." But that's only part of the problem. The other part is that we never get a really clear view of how the demands of citizenship look *after* the crucial confusions are avoided. And it has the unintended effect of reinforcing the audience's desire to forget about those demands. It tempts American Christians to think that they don't have to worry about those demands in relation to tax law, for example.

These are major issues. I am very, very grateful for all of my respondents for their generosity and their grace, and to the sponsors for putting this together. Thank you very much.

Response by Richard Rorty

I doubt you want to hear the details of Jeff's and my disagreement on how to interpret chapter 8 of Brandom's *Making It Explicit*. But, let me assure you that what Brandom means by "objectivity" in chapter 8 is not what [Stout] thought he meant by it. Jeff and I also disagree about Dewey's *Common Faith*. I think it is entirely compatible with James's "Will to Believe." I don't think Dewey thought that religious belief was in any way irrational, and if you empirically accepted Milbank's description of the controversy as an attempt of each side to out-narrate the other with neither narration appealing to a Superior Being, his would neither be commended for superior rationality or irrationality.

I take Dewey's objections to Christianity to have been entirely practical and political. He thought that for every Martin Luther King, you got ten Joseph Ratzingers and ten Pat Robertsons. And he thought Christian churches were a social liability because of that—of the sheer political effect of the persistence of Christian beliefs. I think the elephant in the room here is Christian fundamentalism as a backup for the right wing of American politics. And that was the danger that Dewey was interested in. It wasn't anything to do with irrationality.

My second point is just, I don't think that the difference between Hauerwas and myself needs to be *aufgehoben*. I think that his—and again referring to Milbank's term—narration of the place of the church in the world, and my narration of a world without a church are, of course poles apart, but they are parts of an entirely peaceful disagreement which is fully compatible with agreement on what matters in practical politics. So I don't see that an *aufhebung* is really needed.

Response by Stanley Hauerwas

Very quickly, I really like Jeff's reading of James in connection with Wittgenstein's refusal to give you a philosophy of language *qua* philosophy. And I just want to say, that's what I was trying to do in *With the Grain of the Universe* in which, I try to show Reinhold Niebuhr actually had a reductive account that James didn't. So I actually prefer James to Niebuhr, by a long shot. And then I try to show if you read Barth with Wittgensteinian eyes, you can see him performing a Jamesian act. All of which, I know, may seem quite extraordinary. But that means, of course, I want to think there are viable claims associated with religious speech that are absolutely crucial to that speech. And so, in a certain sense, I'm not trying to retreat in any way at all.

I take Jeff's point about the rhetoric. But, I do think that he does seem to say that my use of MacIntyre hardens the dualism between church and world. Behind that is Yoder's insistence that church/world is not an ontological distinction. It is a distinction between agents, namely, that church/world runs down the center of every Christian. And that that's what we constantly need to be reminded of by one another exactly to the extent that we haven't acknowledged the violence that lies within ourselves, often times violence that takes the name of faith. That is an ongoing interrogation that we're never free of. So church/world remains, to put it in philosophical terms, always a discursive project. It always requires narration. And so it cannot be hardened.

I may well have over-emphasized polemically the Christian difference when it comes to being an American. I am well aware that I am—despite being a pacifist—an American. But, I think here you've got to feel the hesitancy that someone like John Howard Yoder instills in you—in which Christians are not allowed to tell non-Christians how to organize their lives. But, rather, we must first wait and see what is offered. So, it's not like I can come up with a theory of citizenship for Christians. Indeed, I'm not even sure I believe in the description "citizen," and for reasons that I hope would be helpful for those who would want to think of themselves as citizens. But what, therefore, the project always requires is a kind of distancing. I should think that Jeff would be happy that I am a Christian not trying to run his life anymore. But I want to be a witness to that—to what I think is good that makes my life happy and possible to sustain hope in despair.

But I suspect that the deepest difference that he quite rightly notes is the difference between the grounding of our hopes. And that I hope we can both contribute to one another as we begin what I think Jeff has made, namely, a really fresh opening for these questions among us today in a way that we have finally gotten past where we've been for the last twenty years. In that I think Jeff has made an extraordinary contribution.

Response by Cornel West

Brother Stanley, I think that Jeff's text is the most important text in ethics since *After Virtue*. It actually could be entitled *For Virtue and Democracy*, in contrast to *After Virtue*—a conversation quitter. Two very quick points: one is that, I do think, though, that the tension that Jeff is talking about between so-called secular liberals and new traditionalists is much deeper than some of us think. Because, if it is

true that it's difficult for a religious left to be forged in a nation that is 95 percent theist, then it means that certain deep resources in the democratic experiment are being marginalized—untapped—and makes what is at stake even more threatening, you see, and I think that is Jeff's point. It is a drama, it's very tenuous. I think the overcoming is quite real. And Rorty speaks as a democrat as well as a Nietzschean—we know the tensions there. Nietzsche isn't democratic. If the democratic project means that we have to have a space for a religious left that is not so suspicious of the world of which Stanley is talking about to allow for the Dorothy Days, the Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschels, and so on—we just honored brother Martin Marty today and Friday night. He's a living example of the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. We have Professor Preston Williams, Robin Lovin, and others who have dedicated their lives to trying to keep this legacy alive. Now, if it has difficulty because of this polarization, then much is at stake. It's not just a matter of us being able to attend some conferences and have discussion, and so forth.

The second point is that [...] I read Dewey's '34 lectures as militant naturalism in a pragmatic mode. I was just talking about this the other day. If you think it's just practical that for every Martin King you end up with ten deeply dogmatic brothers or sisters in church, and if it's the case that for every Counselor Thurgood Marshall you get ten Anthony Scalias, Rorty is not going to call for the abolition of the legal profession.

Final Response by Jeffrey Stout

I just want to take a minute to come back to a couple of points raised. I won't talk about the issue of transcending the two positions that I take to be locked in an unproductive battle, except to say that since I began circulating the manuscript of this book to friends of mine like these, I sensed that the movement I was trying to create has actually begun to happen. In an article published recently in the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Richard Rorty backed off of the "Religion as a Conversation Stopper" claims, and his description there of the so-called Jeffersonian compromise.⁹ Now, that way of talking about public discourse was one of the things that I thought should be transcended. And it seems to me that Richard Rorty is in the process of transcending it. And it's also pretty clear that I was trying to bring about the somewhat

⁹See Rorty (1999, 2003).

different rhetorical stance that Stanley has begun to adopt. And if this allows the people to join forces, then this is what I am trying to achieve. So, I am skeptical about what Dick just said. But, only because I think what I am calling for is already in the process of happening before us.

One other point: I want to come back to the Wolin issue. I think keeping Wolin in mind is one of the ways to help build the connections that we're talking about. Stanley has said that reading Wolin's *Politics and Vision* early on was one of the key moments for him, and for me. At Princeton, one of the moments that I was proudest of—am proudest of at Princeton—was co-authoring the divestment resolution for the Princeton Faculty with Sheldon Wolin, Albert Raboteau, and Malcolm Diamond. There is something toward the end of Wolin's book—his new book, the book on Tocqueville—that I think is worth drawing attention to. And it's where he talks about the importance within a nineteenth-century context of a kind of archaism within Tocqueville's references to aristocracy.

What he is saying is that, in that context, the talk about the aristocracy is crucial, because modernizing societies are fetishizing the new, the future. And what that blinded them to, for all the benefits it brought, was what was being crushed in the present. It's important to keep your eye on what is being crushed in the present. My attempt to talk about witness in our context is a self-conscious archaism of a comparable sort. So here is another way of putting my worry about the rhetorical stance of the new traditionalism: Does it draw our attention to the things that are *currently* being crushed? Or is it actually better a rhetorical posture for criticizing the liberalism of the nineteenth century than now? That's one way of putting the issue. There are things that we need now to conceptualize. One is the tradition that was getting started at the point of the American Civil War, when Lincoln, Whitman, Thoreau, and others were doing something, and starting to think of themselves as belonging to a tradition, and trying to create some sort of democratic possibility for the future. That's something that's about to be crushed, I fear, unless we do something about it—"we"—again, starting with those who can hear my voice today.

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