Editorial preface

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If there is any philosophical perspective that is distinctively American, a likely candidate is of course pragmatism. This issue brings together essays that explore how religion fares within the assumptions of pragmatism. A major interest of pragmatists has been in exploring concrete steps we can make that work to improve human life. It is hard to say which came first, the American impatience with philosophical speculation or our obsession with establishing social and political arrangements that we can live with and within. Pragmatists are much more driven by these practical concerns than they are with theoretical questions that are of interest to traditional philosophers, questions of metaphysics and epistemology, for example. This holds true for pragmatic approaches to the philosophy of religion.

Consider the pragmatist understanding of religious liberty. Here we find no concern to say or to define what religious liberty is (in some metaphysical sense); rather the pragmatist interest is in finding ways to honor and preserve it in our practices. One practical way of protecting religious liberty is by separating it from the affairs of state. This principle, embodied in the first amendment, suggests that religion has no business in the public square and that politics has no business meddling in the private affairs of the heart. But we have not always managed to maintain such a strict separation. Indeed many have raised the question as to whether such a separation is practical or desirable. If religion and politics are inextricably mixed as they seem always to have been in American life, the question is raised as to what sense we can make of the Jeffersonian insistence on the separation. Perhaps he was simply more worried about the deleterious effects of the state meddling in matters of religion, seeing this as an invasion of privacy, than he was worried about the effects of religion on politics, were it to enter the public realm. Certainly, up to this day the issues these questions raise have

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not only not only not been settled, they have generated discussions of unprecedented intensity.

And I am happy to say, philosophers have played an important part in these discussions of the role of religion in political life. A leading American pragmatist voice in these discussions has been that of the late Richard Rorty. As a pragmatist, Rorty had little interest in traditional religious questions (Is there a God? What is God's nature?). In this respect he was convinced that religion in this old sense is obsolete and politically irrelevant. He was no believer himself. As a separatist, he was quite happy to keep such religious issues out of the public square.

In our first article, Serge Grigoriev argues that Rorty's arguments for separation are thin and that he would have done well to see that there is much in common between his humanism and the interests of (a reformed) religion. As a pragmatist and humanist, Rorty was intensely focused on finding concrete steps that would work to forward human causes. As such we can only wonder why he was so steadfast in his separatism. Perhaps he should have been more open, and in the end perhaps he was, to the positive role that religion can play in politics. However in order for him to have seen this in any fully developed sense he would have had to have seen religion in a different (reformed) light. So, it is argued, he might well have spent his philosophical efforts more wisely had he focused on reforming religion so as to see its commonality with the humanist's interests than in mounting arguments for excluding religion from public life. The second article by Hartmut Von Sass zeroes in on this commonality between religion and humanism in his argument that what Rorty values most, namely, tolerant and ironic liberalism, is also at the center religious belief and practice, rightly understood.

The second two articles in this issue offer arguments for how pragmatic interests can be brought to bear on religious questions. The question that Aaron Rizzieri raises is whether or not practical considerations (for example its effect on my health and the way I live) might raise the bar on what it would take to count as knowing that not-*p* when one is committed to the truth of *p*. He makes the case that it would raise the bar. If a person believes that God exists and if denying this would result in devastating effects for this person, the bar is raised for this person to know that God does not exist, and this is so precisely because so much is at stake for this person's positive belief. Christopher Callaway continues this focus on consequences in his exploration of whether or not religion produces more harm than good. While agreeing that often in particular cases it is clear that religion produces more harm than good, it is still an open question as to its ultimate consequential value.