

Rorty, Derrida, and the Role of Faith in Democracy to Come

JANE MUMMERY, *University of Ballarat*

Democracy may indeed be an imperfect form of government, but all the others are far worse and this, surely, is a moment for recognizing the benefits which democracy brings, not a moment for drawing attention to its shortcomings. It is a moment for confirming our faith, not a moment for doubting it (Mendus 1996, 409).

Published over ten years ago,¹ Susan Mendus' statement could stand as a mantra for our times with democracy diagnosed as being at risk almost as a matter of course in our public domains over the last years.² That is, despite its much touted benefits, the assumptions, concepts, and practices of democracy are currently depicted as being under threat from an array of terrorists, dictators, fundamentalists of various stripes, and even from the West's own instituted reactions to the events of the past few years. On this basis at least it would seem that democracy has not lived up to its promise of being the "solution that other people will necessarily adopt when they cease to be 'irrational'" (Mouffe 2000, 65). Given these points, perhaps it is advisable to follow Mendus' advice and stop any examination of democracy that would further expose its frailties and shortcomings and simply affirm our faith in it. Of course, this is not what Mendus herself does. The above words are, after all, to be found at the beginning of an essay that goes on to consider yet another critique of democracy, that comprising the feminist challenge to the historical exclusion of women from democracy.³

Faith, in other words, may not be the best response to the ideals and promises of the democratic project. After all, Mendus points out that the democratic project would seem to embody ideals and make promises that it simply cannot deliver.⁴ Or as John Dunn has put it, "today, in politics, democracy is the *name* for what we cannot have—yet cannot cease to want" (Dunn 1979, 26–7). Yet because faith is typically seen as the only possible response when all others have been shown to be mistaken in some way, perhaps faith in democracy—in its capacity to continue—is both all there can be and the best that there can be. This, interestingly enough, is not far removed from the view of John Dewey. As Dewey put it, writing in 1939 when democracy was also seen as being under threat, the "powerful present enemies of democracy can be successfully met only by the creation of personal attitudes in individual

human beings" (Dewey 1998, 341). Dewey continues here to speak of democracy and these "personal attitudes" explicitly in terms of faith: "Democracy is a way of personal life controlled not merely by faith in human nature in general but by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished" (Dewey 1998, 342). The other thing about faith in this context is that it seems to suppose that despite all of the challenges thrown at it, despite all its frailties and shortcomings, democracy as this way of life will prevail. It is thus a faith, to draw again on Mendus' work, that "democracy can be transformed" to meet its challenges (Mendus 1996, 416).

This role of faith within the democratic project marks the scene of this essay. In general terms, my aim is to explore two contemporary proposed transformations of democracy—the democracies to come, to utilize Derridean phrasing, that have been outlined by Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida respectively—and then examine their implications for the democratic project as a whole. This paper has three main sections. First, I will set the scene for Rorty's and Derrida's respective proposals, examining the problematic of democracy to which both Rorty and Derrida are concerned to respond. More specifically, I will set out their reasons for their proposed transformations of the democratic project, where these reasons also mark the site of problems which they believe the democratic project needs to overcome. Second, I will outline Rorty's and Derrida's proposed transformations of the democratic project, their democracies to come. Finally, I suggest that both of these democracies to come start from and demonstrate a desire to rethink the grounds of democracy, a desire to shift the grounds of the democratic project from those that have traditionally been tied up with knowledge, truth, and rationality to those tied up with a certain conception of faith.

Why Must We Revise Democracy?

Regarding the above question, there are of course all the contemporary reasons and problems already mentioned—democracy and the Western way of life are seen to be under attack—and indeed both Rorty and Derrida have responded directly to the events of and post 9/11.⁵ As Rorty puts it, for instance, these events have meant that we in the West need to ask the question, "How can democratic institutions be strengthened so as to survive in a time when governments can no longer guarantee what President Bush calls homeland security" (2002, 2). Or, in Derrida's words, they remind us that despite the Western tradition's assumption of the democratic having become "coextensive with the political" (2005, 28), there is a need to respond to those regimes and arguments that do not accept this assumption.⁶ These points, however,

are by no means the end of the story. There is the traditional problem for democracy recognized and much discussed by political philosophy, that of the tension between the competing ideals of liberty and equality. There are also, however, at least two additional reasons that Rorty and Derrida identify and which I will consider below: the problems inherent in the perceived need to delineate and ground democracy in terms of the Enlightenment demand for universalizable principles, and the associated problem of democracy being marked by irrecusable tensions that make it seemingly impossible either to determine fully or to justify it by either its conceptual or practical boundaries. These reasons can both be seen as manifestations of a broader issue, that of the presumed need to ground the democratic project via specific assumptions regarding knowledge, truth, and reason.

To begin with the first key reason outlined above, both Rorty and Derrida have challenged the need to ground such concepts and/or practices as democracy in the way thought necessary by Enlightenment thinkers such as Immanuel Kant. Specifically, Enlightenment thinkers generally agreed⁷ that the only acceptable practices or forms of society are those justified with reference to broad universalizable tenets that are themselves based in and justified by "knowledge, reason, and science" (Hollinger 1994, 2).⁸ Hence Kant, for instance, argued that for any claims and practices to be accepted as true or valid, they must meet one key criterion: they must be rationally universalizable. The only justifiable claims and practices are those that can be recognized as the sorts of claims and practices that every rational and autonomous person would accept. That is, they would need to fit under something like Kant's moral law, being based on principles that have been calculated to be acceptable not just to any individual will but to that of every other possible rational subject.⁹ In other words, Kant argued that practices that are acceptable for any of us must be consistently and unconditionally acceptable for all others, a point he elsewhere set out as the Universal Principle of Right.¹⁰

In contrast to this kind of justification through their universalizability, Rorty has challenged the idea that democracy or democratic practice requires "a theory of truth" or "notions like unconditionality and universal validity" (Mouffe 1996, 5). He argues for a position he designates as antiessentialist and post-Philosophical (Rorty 1996a, xl), and an associated democratic culture that no longer sees the need to ground, legitimate, or justify itself via any supposedly universal philosophical truth or ideal.¹¹ Given the aim of "taking democracy seriously," it is simply unnecessary to hold onto the view that "every assertion is [or should be] a claim to universal validity." As he also says here, he simply does not "see the reasoning" of any argument that we do need to keep this view,

instead arguing that "we ought to be able to be responsible to our interlocutors without being responsible to reason or the world or the demand of universality or anything else" (Rorty 2006, 48). The implication of this is that we need to de-transcendentalize democracy. We must realize that democratic practice and argument can continue even if its specific practices and assertions are not universalizable.

This leads into some of the problems for democracy of which Derrida reminds us. Among these is an issue that Derrida has raised consistently with regards to concepts, that of the presumed inviolability of their borders. This issue is key for Derridean deconstruction given its commitment to showing that there are in fact no "impassable borders" (1993, 9) and that the dream of any "full presence which is beyond play" is just that, a dream (1978, 279). What this entails is that deconstruction marks and shows that any and all attempts to keep a concept strictly pure and compartmentalized from its other(s) is fruitless. To put this another way, every such compartmentalization requires a boundary, but all such boundaries are actually in-betweennesses that function not only as a division but also as a connection. This means that Derridean deconstruction itself works to open limits and boundaries to contestation, disrupting both their operations and their anticipated effects.

When this insight is applied to the concept of democracy, we see that democracy itself is not able to be kept strictly compartmentalized from its other(s). As Derrida has put it, "Democracy is what it is only in the *différance* by which it defers itself and differs from itself. It is ... equal and proper to itself only insofar as it is inadequate and improper, at the same time behind and ahead of itself" (2005, 38). Democracy, in other words, is marked by *différance* and self-contradiction, an insight that Derrida has recently explored through the logic of what he has come to call "autoimmunity," a term first used by Derrida in his essay "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in analyzing "religion." For us here, however, its most important use has been in his post 9/11 dialogue with Giovanni Borradori, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides," and in his essay "The Reason of the Strongest (Are There Rogue States?)" in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, where he speaks of democracy as functioning under the logic of autoimmunity. Given that autoimmunity describes the process in which a being destroys itself from within,¹² Derrida's use of the term in reference to democracy would seem to suggest that democracy should perhaps be understood as necessarily carrying "within itself the seeds of its own destruction," where autoimmunity is its "always-possible failure ... to distinguish what it protects from what it protects against" (Thomson 2005, paragraphs 2, 3).¹³

What this makes clear is the need to rethink how we understand and ground democracy and democratic practice. Given the points touched on above, neither the concept nor the practice of democracy seems as self-evident or justifiable as we might think. Not only are its grounds unstable and its boundaries porous and problematic, but also its practices would seem to be potentially, and problematically, both democratic and non-democratic. The questions here, then, are as follows. What does this problematic of democracy mean for the democratic project? Must the various tenets of the democratic project be certain or true in order to be accepted or affirmed? Must democratic practices be founded in anything that is context-transcendent? These various problems and questions provide the context for the following discussion of Rorty's and Derrida's attempts to revise our understanding of democracy.

Rortian Democracy to Come as Hope and Sentimental Education

Rorty's proposed transformation of our understanding of democratic practice and conversation rests upon his claim that such, or indeed any, practices and conversations do not need to claim universal validity or to assert or assume any universal truths. Certainly he suggests that democracy provides the most useful basis for society,¹⁴ but he does not go so far as to say that this usefulness must be justified on a context-transcendent level. Rather he argues that we make a mistake when we focus too much on grounding the concept of democracy instead of on simply furthering democratic practices and conversations. Rorty, in other words, offers us a conception of democracy that is a pragmatic doing of democracy.

This is no surprise. Rorty explicitly describes himself as following in the tradition of the pragmatism of William James and John Dewey,¹⁵ a tradition that he thinks has effectively been able to turn attention from the old ubiquitous metaphysical problems associated with "impossible attempts to transcend experience" (Dewey 1958, 25) to the much more useful and productive "criticism of morals and institutions" (Rorty 1996a, 43). Pragmatism, in other words, wants to give philosophy a practical role, to turn it into a form of social or cultural criticism.¹⁶ Under this umbrella, the doing of pragmatism is the weighing up of what is on offer while accepting that nothing of what is on offer has been or can be completely grounded or legitimated. It is a participating in and evaluating of what is going on that accepts that the best outcomes can only be "short-term reforms and compromises" (1996c, 17).

Rorty is reminding us that the world of the pragmatist is necessarily one of competing interests and disparate conversations and contexts. Not only is it not unified, but it is better this way. He tells us we are

better off letting "a hundred flowers bloom" and simply leaving any "botanizing" to others (1996a, 219). At the same time, however, Rorty is not advocating the acceptance of just everything. He is quite assured of the point that even in our lack of interest in botanizing—in making universalizable judgments—we are still required and able to be social and cultural critics. How are we do achieve this?

[The pragmatist thinks] ... that in the process of playing vocabularies and cultures off against each other, we produce new and better ways of talking and acting—not better by reference to a previously known standard, but just better in the sense that they come to *seem* clearly better than their predecessors (Rorty 1996a, xxxvii).

This means that the doing of pragmatism is the promoting of conversations where participants actually want to make things better and will be prepared to listen to each other's points of view. Further, it marks the acceptance that the only possible supports for or constraints on our conversations are the checks and balances we meet in our everyday lives and which we can continue to invest in comfortably. As Rorty describes it, the doing of pragmatism occurs under the aegis of "social hope,"¹⁷ where this means something like the hope we have "that some day we shall be willing and able to treat the needs of all human beings with the respect and consideration with which we treat the needs of those closest to us, those whom we love" (1999b, 202–3; see 1998, 11).

Social hope is presented by Rorty as the hope for "new and better ways of talking and acting" (1996a, xxxvii), ways that minimize suffering, cruelty, and injustice while maximizing tolerance and productive practices and conversational exchanges. In other words, Rorty's pragmatism is essentially utopian—a point he readily admits.¹⁸ There is, however, a pressing question here: how is this utopia to be accepted, defended, or promoted given Rorty's argument that there are no universally accepted grounds or justifications? There are two points I wish to mention regarding this. First, Rorty would argue that it does not need to be defended; it will be recognized anyway as one of these "better ways of talking and acting" insofar as it just is better. On the flip side, however, Rorty does leave space for the work of non-coercive persuasion and what he calls "sentimental education" (1996c, 17; 1998, 176). Such an education is not a matter of the attainment of knowledge, however, but of sympathy, empathy, and solidarity. We must be educated to have and express sympathy and solidarity for each other. We need to be educated to understand that the differences between us are not impediments to

empathy, and that such an education will itself further and support both social hope and pragmatic talking and acting.

The other key point to note about Rorty's pragmatism, along with that of both James and Dewey, is that it is inextricably entwined with democratic practices and conversations. That is, democracy is not just one among many conversations, for Rorty; it is the exemplary conversation insofar as it enables the kinds of conversational exchanges that Rorty and pragmatism prioritize. After all, in Dewey's words, a genuinely democratic conversation assumes "the possibility of conducting disputes, controversies and conflicts as cooperative undertakings in which both parties learn by giving the other a chance to express itself, instead of having one party conquer by forceful suppression of the other" (Dewey 1998, 342). Further, as Rorty has stated: "I think that pragmatism is just a continuation of the idealistic, onward-and-upward Emerson-Whitman tradition of viewing American democracy as the greatest thing ever invented, and the source of all good things" (Rorty 2006, 53–4). In other words, the doing of pragmatism is the doing of democracy. Our conversations about how we should live can only operate at the level of context-specific compromises that take into account competing interests. Luckily, this process is what democracy also calls for.

At this point, it is clear that Rorty is proposing a rethinking of democracy where we focus primarily on the doing of democracy as opposed to its grounds, and where such a doing correlates closely with the doing of pragmatism itself. Such a doing, with its emphasis on context-specific democratic practices, is also described as building social hope and as resulting in communities and practices that are clearly better than any alternatives, meaning that Rorty finally delivers an essentially utopian picture of democracy. So far so good. Rorty has certainly set out a vision of democracy that would seem to escape much of the problematic outlined previously. He has achieved this, however, by simply shifting the starting point. We cannot ground the democratic project with any context-transcendent knowledge or truth. Let us say that we do not have to, that we are mistaken if we want to do so, and carry on with our practices regardless. In other words, Rorty's suggested solution to the problematic of democracy is simply to say that the problematic itself is a mistake; we do not have to take it seriously, a point Rorty stresses with his advice to "josh [our fellow-citizens] out of the habit of taking those topics so seriously" (1988, 39). As he puts it, "such philosophical superficiality and light-mindedness helps along the disenchantment of the world. It helps make the world's inhabitants more pragmatic, more tolerant, more liberal, more receptive to the appeal of instrumental rationality" (1988, 39). The question, however, is whether such advice not to be so serious when faced with difficulties of justifying the

democratic project is good enough. It is with this question in mind that we now turn to explore Derrida's proposed transformation of the democratic project, his aporetic democracy to come.

Derridean Democracy to Come as Aporetic Critique and Promise

Despite agreeing with Rorty—albeit for different reasons—with regards to the inability of concepts and practices like democracy to be grounded in a context-transcendent theory of knowledge and truth,¹⁹ Derrida proposes a very different transformation of the democratic project. Derrida reminds us that no concept or practice can be completely compartmentalized from its other(s). Indeed, the very practice of Derridean deconstruction has been to show us the irrecusable indeterminacy of all concepts and contexts, and to show us the inevitable disruption of all logics and economies. As he reminds us, “we can pronounce not a single ... proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest” (1978, 280–1). Given this, Derridean deconstruction can best be explained as the quiet creeping over everything of a “film of undecidability ... so that we cannot quite make out the figures all around us” (Caputo 1993, 4).

When these insights are utilized with reference to the democratic project, it becomes clear that this project is both inherently full of self-contradictions and at risk from the other(s) it cannot exclude. There are, however, two ways of responding to this realization. The first is to try to find a way to resurrect the democratic project in such a way that it is no longer problematized by its contradictions, an approach that is taken by Rorty, among others. The second approach is that taken by Derrida, and marks an attempt to rethink the democratic project through the very terms and possibilities of its contradictions and risks—in terms of autoimmunity and as the aporetic critique and promise of democracy to come.

To begin with Derrida's analysis of autoimmunity, the key premise is that democracy, on account of its own conceptual possibilities, is always already at risk from its own practices. That is, it is very much part of its own practices that democracy may become democratically non-democratic, a point that Derrida exemplifies with both philosophical and political instances: Plato's concern that the very propriety of freedom as one of the necessary components of democracy seems to blur into the impropriety of license; the Algerian election of 1992; 9/11 and the subsequent responses of democratic governments.²⁰ Given such points, and insofar as the democratic project cannot be disentangled from its risks, Derrida goes on to say that democracy can only realize itself according to the risks and indeterminacy bound up in the process of autoimmunity.

That is, risks and indeterminacies are an integral part of the democratic project. Indeed, it is this acceptance of the intrinsic risk and indeterminacy exemplified by democracy when conceived in terms of autoimmunity that also frames what he calls democracy to come. In his words:

the expression 'democracy to come' takes into account the absolute and intrinsic historicity of the only system that welcomes in itself, in its very concept, that expression of autoimmunity called the right to self-critique and perfectibility. Democracy is the only system, the only constitutional paradigm, in which, in principle, one has or assumes the right to criticize everything publicly, including the idea of democracy, its concept, its history, and its name. Including the idea of the constitutional paradigm and the absolute authority of law (2005, 86–7).

In other words, the intrinsic logic of the autoimmunity of democracy shows it to be a system open to self-critique and perfectibility,²¹ which in turn works to support Derrida's delineation of democracy to come as aporetic critique and promise. Again, in Derrida's words:

The expression 'democracy to come' does indeed translate or call for a militant and interminable political critique. A weapon aimed at the enemies of democracy, it protests against all naïveté and every political abuse, every rhetoric that would present as a present or existing democracy, as a *de facto* democracy, what remains inadequate to the democratic demand (2005, 86).

Given this outline, there are a few related points on which I wish to elaborate. First, it is clear that if Derridean democracy to come is this interminable political critique and protest then it cannot be aligned with any "present or existing democracy," or even any future democracy. Rather it is a reminder that any demos that is not being actively and deconstructively questioned tends to end up meeting only the interests of one group, one "ideal of liberal democracy" (1994, 85). Democracy to come, in other words, is the repetition and sustaining of the democratic project as a question—as a sustained deconstructive "engagement with regards to democracy" (1996, 83)—and is thereby unable to formalize or produce itself as any determinate democratic future present. Hence, it is a promise of perfectibility that is constitutively disjoined even from any expectation of the possibility of achieving perfection. Despite this, however, democracy to come is a "promise to be kept." It marks and is inspired by a promise that its process and engagement must "not remain 'spiritual' or 'abstract,' but [needs] to produce events, new effective

forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth" (1994, 89). Such practices, as Derrida delineates in his later work, might include the ongoing deconstructive questioning of existing democratic institutions and practices and the rethinking of how national and international borders, sovereignty, and space should function.²² Furthermore, as Derrida stresses elsewhere, the "to-come of democracy is also, although without presence, the *hic et nunc* of urgency, of the injunction as absolute urgency" (2005, 29). Democracy to come is urgent decision-making and accepted responsibility; it is the promise of doing better, a promise, even, of doing deconstruction (1997a, 105). But it also exemplifies the fact that our decision making must operate more or less in the dark, before we have had the chance to work everything out in advance,²³ and in the face of our recognition that

If I conduct myself particularly well with regard to someone, I know that it is to the detriment of an other; of one nation to the detriment of another nation, of one family to the detriment of another family, of my friends to the detriment of other friends or non-friends, etc. (1996, 86).

From these points it is clear that Derrida's democracy to come is inscribed through and through with undecidability and urgency. It is not, in other words, simply a utopian or regulative ideal. It is rather the urgency of sustaining our engagement with and investment in democracy, but with a full acceptance of its risks and its undecidability. It is our acceptance that the configuration of democracy to come as never-ending critique and promise is also not a guarantee of producing anything better, along with our commitment not to be put off despite this. Finally, it marks our acceptance that

in the discursive context that dominates politics today, the choice of the term [democracy] is a good choice—it's the least lousy possible. As a term, however, it's not sacred. I can, some day or another, say, 'No, it's not the right term. The situation allows or demands that we use another term in other sentences' (Derrida 2002c, 181).

This, of course, is a very different view of democracy to come than that set out by Rorty. Although both argue for the perfectibility of the democratic project and for the point that the problematic that inscribes and destabilizes that project does not mark the end of democracy, they do so quite differently. Rorty argues that the democratic problematic simply does not matter; all we need to do is see democracy as the only

possible outcome of pragmatic practice driven by social hope and a sentimental education. Conversely, Derrida argues that it does matter, and that democracy to come requires us to accept that the democratic project is inscribed by contradictions, indeterminacies, and risks. Nevertheless, despite these and other differences,²⁴ the democracies to come proposed by Rorty and Derrida share a key premise aside from the need to transform our understanding of the democratic project, a need they both respond to with quite concrete suggestions: that of faith as being intrinsic to democracy to come. More specifically, I would suggest that they both demonstrate not so much a rejection of the need to ground the democratic project but a desire to reground it in such a way as to make room for faith.

Regrounding Democracy: Democracy to Come and Faith

When grounds and grounding are typically spoken of, the focus is on those underpinning principles or justifications that enable something to be known to be just so. Hence, the tradition of grounding that we have inherited from Enlightenment thinkers has argued that the only true grounds are those established by the context-transcendent nexus of rationality, knowledge, and truth, and where the latter two only fulfill the conditions of being knowledge and truth if they are achieved through the method of rationality. Thus, what we see in this tradition is "an act of exclusion or bracketing." That is, "the modern epoch turns on an *epoche*, a methodological imperative, in which modernity made up its mind to abide by human reason alone" (Caputo and Scanlon 1999, 2). However, with respect to the concept and practice of democracy this imperative has proved extremely problematic. Democracy does not seem to be reasonable all the way down. Certainly it has proved difficult to justify all the way down using reason alone given that its parameters and practices are mired in self-contradiction and indeterminacy. This, I suggest, sets the scene for Rorty's and Derrida's proposed re-admittance of faith into the democratic project. This is a possibility roundly rejected by Enlightenment thinkers who had cast faith, along with ignorance and superstition, in opposition to reason. Kant, after all, tells us in his first Critique to beware of transcendental illusion, the belief that we can meaningfully know of that which exceeds the limits of our understanding and reason. This, of course, includes faith. However, it is the flip side of this assumption—that everything we accept must be known and justified fully—that has been challenged by both Rorty and Derrida. The second point concerns just what is meant by faith. Traditionally faith, as described in the Hebrew Bible for instance, means a form of belief and trust. Hence Abraham's willingness to trust in God in all instances—even when

his trust runs counter to both natural law (how can he and Sarah have a child when they are both old and Sarah is sterile?) and societal norms (as shown by his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac)—is a prime example of the biblical concept of faith (Metzger and Coogan 1993, 222). Faith has come to mean something like trust or belief, where both the content and practice of this trust are not amenable to being either fully known or justified through reason (Taylor 2000, 203).

Faith, then, stands for a confidence—indeed a promise and its associated commitment—which cannot be fully grounded, guided, or controlled by reasoned knowledge. Further, it is not necessarily tied to religion or to any assumption of a super-sensible reality,²⁵ a point instrumental for both Rorty and Derrida. This faith, given our previous delineation of Rorty's and Derrida's proposed transformations of the democratic project, is an excellent description of how we are brought by them both to approach and understand the project of democracy to come. Rorty, for example, can only propose that we have faith that our pragmatic ungrounded conversations will allow us to negotiate our way to the best democratic outcomes. That is, he has faith that our conversations and negotiations will gradually make things better insofar as he has faith that we will come to recognize the superiority of democracy itself. He has faith as well that we can all benefit from a sentimental education. Finally, he accepts that none of this may come about, and that we simply cannot know one way or the other. Through his transformation of the democratic project, Derrida delineates the need to affirm democracy to come as no more than critique, promise, and risk. Our affirmation of what Derrida describes as the incalculable and undeconstructible nature of the promise of democracy to come, despite the risk, is very clearly an instance of faith. Faith, in other words, is our "thinking of the ... emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design" (Derrida 1994, 75); it is for Derrida both deconstruction and democracy to come.

There is an interesting point here that is worth noting. One of the key distinctions that Derrida makes with regards to faith is that between what John Caputo has called the "deeply lodged structural faith"—that which inspires Derrida's depictions of deconstruction, democracy to come, thinking of the promise as promise, and so forth—and "the determinate faiths of the concrete messianisms" (2001, 296). Given this distinction, it is fair to say that Rorty's faith is of the latter sort. He has faith in something—democracy—meaning that his faith exists within a determinable horizon although the exact shape of that horizon is not yet known. Conversely, Derrida's faith is not a faith in anything more than the very structure of faith and promise as pointing us towards something

that is always unforeseeable and unknowable, a structure that he also thinks underpins democracy.

Overall, what both Rorty and Derrida show us through their respective transformations of the democratic project is that we do not and cannot approach it from the reasoned certainty of knowledge and truth. Democracy to come, regardless of any other outcomes it produces or inspires, is a reminder that we cannot turn back to any certainty of democratic grounds. Rather we can only focus on its possibilities and risks and have faith. Finally, despite all the differences between their projects and the various important critiques of their projects, what both Rorty and Derrida have done is ask us to continue questioning the democratic problematic. More specifically, they permit us "to think the political and think the democratic by granting us the space necessary in order not to be enclosed in the latter" (Derrida 1996, 85).

j.mummery@ballarat.edu.au

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Notes

1. Susan Mendus' "Losing the Faith: Democracy and Feminism" was first published in 1992 in *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey 508 BC–AD 1993*. I would like to thank the editors for the opportunity to contribute a paper to this special edition of *Symposium* and for their excellent suggestions with regards to the paper. I anticipate following some of these up in more detail in further work.

2. Many of the Western responses to the events of and subsequent to 9/11 used a discourse of democracy being at risk and under attack. For example, in the aftermath of the Bali Bombings, Australian Prime Minister John Howard stated in an open letter to the Australian people in 2002 that the Bali Bombings were committed by "a murderous group of Islamic fanatics who despise the liberal democratic, open life of Western nations, such as Australia" (*The Australian*, November 2002).
3. As Mendus writes, "For feminists, the facts of history—the denial of the vote to women, their historical confinement to a domestic realm, their incorporation within the interests of their husbands—prove beyond doubt that for women democracy has never existed" (1996, 410).
4. In the most general terms, the core ideals of the democratic project are liberty and equality. These two ideals are, however, in constant tension insofar as any attempt to deliver on one of them means a constraint on the other.
5. For a selection of Rorty's responses to 9/11, see for example "Die Militarisierung Amerikas" (2001), "Fighting Terrorism With Democracy" (2002), and his interview with Eduardo Mendieta entitled "On September 11, 2001" (2006). Derrida's responses include his interview with Giovanna Borradori entitled "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides" (2002a), and the essays published in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (2005).
6. On this point Derrida writes that "the only regimes that *do not fashion themselves* to be democratic, the only ones that *do not present themselves* as democratic, unless I am mistaken, are statutorily linked to the Muslim faith or creed" (2005, 28).
7. It is important to note that although there was considerable disparity between individual thinkers in the period of the Enlightenment, they can be seen as agreeing on a loosely unified set of doctrines. Specifically, they would all tend to agree that "the source of all human misery is ignorance, especially superstition," and that only "knowledge, reason and science can destroy ignorance and superstition and help improve the human condition" (Hollinger 1994, 2). This sort of loose agreement thus enables Peter Gay to describe the Enlightenment project as comprising a "single army with a single banner, with a large central corps, a right and a left wing, daring scouts, and lame stragglers" (Gay 1995, 7–8).
8. For a comprehensive analysis of Enlightenment themes and criteria, see Peter Gay's two-volume work, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern*

Paganism (1995) and *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (1996).

9. Kant, of course, elaborates on these requirements in his discussion of the categorical imperative, to "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant 1987a, 39).

10. In his *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant states that "the universal law of right is as follows: let your external actions be such that the free application of your will can co-exist with the freedom of everyone in accordance with a universal law" (1987b, 133; see 1994, A316/B372).

11. As Rorty states, this sort of culture—which he also calls "poeticised or post-metaphysical"—is "one in which the imperative that is common to religion and metaphysics—to find an ahistorical, transcultural matrix for one's thinking, something into which everything can fit, independent of one's time and place—has dried up and blown away" (Rorty 2006, 46).

12. As Derrida writes in "Faith and Knowledge," "the process of auto-immunization ... consists for a living organism, as is well known and in short, of protecting itself against its self-protection by destroying its own immune system" (2002b, 80).

13. There have been a number of recent papers concerned with clarifying the Derridean logic of autoimmunity. See, for instance, Haddad's "Derrida and Democracy at Risk" (2004), Thomson's "What's to Become of 'Democracy to Come'?" (2005), and Williams' "Theory and Democracy to Come" (2005).

14. In his examination of the usefulness of democratic society, Rorty also goes so far as to say that its usefulness is clearly exemplified by the "institutions and practices of the rich North Atlantic democracies" (Rorty 1983, 585).

15. As Rorty writes in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, although there are three thinkers associated with classical pragmatism—Peirce, James, and Dewey—"only James and Dewey deliberately and self-consciously related their philosophical doctrines to the country of which they were prominent citizens" (1999b, 25).

16. In *Consequences of Pragmatism* Rorty describes pragmatists as "culture critics" who have "abandoned pretensions to Philosophy" (1996a, xl).

17. See "On Moral Obligation, Truth, and Common Sense" (1996b), his "Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes" (1999a), and *Philosophy and Social Hope* (1999b).

18. Rorty, for instance, agrees that "there is not much use for my brand of futuristic romanticism until you have established the standard institutions of constitutional democracy" (cited in Niznik and Sanders 1996, 124).

19. As Derrida writes in *Aporias* of contexts—and, I would suggest, of grounds—"no context is absolutely saturable or saturating. No context can determine meaning to the point of exhaustiveness. Therefore the context neither produces nor guarantees impassable borders, thresholds that no step could pass" (1993, 9; see 1995, 152–3).

20. Derrida discusses these examples in *Rogues* (2005, 21, 33, 40).

21. In Haddad's words, "Democracy's lack of definition means that it has the chance of evolving into a better regime. This is an auto-immune process insofar as it involves democracy's putting an end to certain parts of itself so as to replace them with aspects more democratic" (2004, 34).

22. These suggestions are set out by Derrida in detail in *Rogues* (2005, 86–92).

23. As Derrida describes it, our ethico-political decision making cannot be fully dictated to us by the prescriptions and calculations of law. That is, we need to recognize that there is "a point or limit beyond which calculation must fail" (1997b, 19; see 1992, 24–5), but that this is not the same point where our responsibilities end. We have rather a duty to keep on responding. I consider these issues further in "Deconstructing the Rational Respondent: Derrida, Kant, and the Duty of Response" (2006).

24. I consider a more detailed range of differences between the democracies to come envisaged by Rorty and Derrida (and Mouffe) in "Rethinking the Democratic Project: Rorty, Mouffe, Derrida and Democracy to Come" (2005).

25. Rorty, for instance, writes of pragmatic theists that they cannot use belief in "personal immortality, providential intervention, the efficacy of sacraments, the Virgin Birth, the Risen Christ," or any other beliefs in a super-sensible reality as the "premises for practical reasoning" (1996b, 136).