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## PLURATIONALISM AND THE UNMAKING OF VIOLENCE

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### ***Abstract***

Fundamentalist religious education (RE) inculcates generalizable emotionalism and willful irrationalism that may predispose trainees to impulsivity and unquestioning prejudice, evoking violence. A universal solution to unmaking violence hence may be to propagate in RE the social meme of public commitment to more consistently use everyday reasoning regardless of our worldviews -- also known as pluralistic rationalism (plurationalism). Historical, neuroscience and sociological, and community-practices research confirms this methodological practice reduces emotive attacks and prejudice underlying violence.

### INTRODUCTION

Fundamentalist religious education (RE) inculcates two psychologically compatible but socially incompatible ways of thinking -- willful irrationalism (expressed as denialism and dogmatism) and emotionalism. Using these subjective filters in conceptualizing one's perceptions and cognitions has been postulated to predispose one to impulsivity and unquestioning prejudice, which can trigger violence. RE scholars have consequently called for teaching *cross-cultural study*<sup>1</sup>, *critical reflection* (including skill in hermeneutic interpretation of one's doctrine and worldview)<sup>2</sup>, and *cross-religious dialogue*, including about the symbols and parables exemplifying our desired thoughts and behaviors.<sup>3</sup> Moderators of extant interfaith groups have

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<sup>1</sup> Moore DL. (2014). Overcoming religious illiteracy: Expanding the boundaries of religious education. *Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association*, 109:4, 379-389, DOI: 10.1080/00344087.2014.924765

<sup>2</sup> Vermeer P. (2010). Religious education and socialization. *Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association*, 105:1, 103-116, DOI: 10.1080/00344080903472774

<sup>3</sup> Manning PR. (2014). Engaging our symbols, sharing our world: Forming young people around symbols for participation in the public sphere. *Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association*, 109:4, 440-454, DOI: 10.1080/00344087.2014.924784

similarly touted "*facilitated civil conversation*" that moves away from debate and toward asking questions, to increase our intellectual and emotional understanding of others, if not to alter our disparate worldviews.<sup>4</sup>

But what do these different RE tactics all have in *common*, and how can their commonalities best be propagated *memetically* -- spontaneously from the ground up, rather than imposed from the top down? The common properties of these RE tactics are the same as their memetic ones -- their fundamental, practicable goal: That we *accept reality, question assumptions, and master emotions*; and that as a moral tenet we employ these three axiomatic practices consistently, in both our private thoughts and our social lives.<sup>5</sup> These RE tactics remind us to simply practice living on earth as a *sapient* human being, whether we are religious or not.

These axiomatic practices to more sapiently comport one's existence are the three methodological embodiments of Rationalism, the "use of Reason as our chief *source, test, and conduit* of knowledge."<sup>6</sup> But since the 19th-century, the term "rationalism" has become conflated with exclusionary worldviews such as atheism, secular humanism or objectivism, in an attempt to sever the lifeline between Reason and Faith. Yet rationalism is a practice, not a worldview -- both the religious and non-religious have an equal right to use Reason to more capably evaluate and live "in the world we've *all* inherited, whether from God *or* Darwin."<sup>7</sup>

Hence a universal solution to "unmaking violence" may be to propagate in RE the social meme of public commitment to more consistently use everyday reasoning regardless of our worldviews -- the social practice also known as "pluralistic rationalism" (or "plurationalism.")<sup>8</sup>

## HYPOTHESES & EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

I will examine *historical, neuroscience, sociological, and community-practices* research to vet the argument that antipodal roles are played by fundamentalism and plurationalism in RE -- a propensity of fundamentalist RE to create violence, and a unique efficacy of plurationalism in RE to unmake violence:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Fundamentalist RE, independent of context or situation, universally creates violence, by undercutting rational thoughts, actions and forms of communication.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *Plurationalism's practice and its memetic spread in both RE and the public square are capable of lessening practitioners' prior propensity toward denialism, dogmatism and emotionalism, as precursors of religious and generalized violence.*

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<sup>4</sup> Cowles R. (2014). Hearing another, not as "the other." Minneapolis *Star Tribune* (Commentary), August 12, [www.startribune.com/opinion/commentaries/270989361.html](http://www.startribune.com/opinion/commentaries/270989361.html)

<sup>5</sup> The Circle of Reason. (2014). Tenets. The Circle of Reason, [www.circleofreason.org](http://www.circleofreason.org)

<sup>6</sup> The Circle of Reason. (2014). What is Pluralistic Rationalism? (About Us & FAQ). The Circle of Reason, [www.circleofreason.org](http://www.circleofreason.org)

<sup>7</sup> The Circle of Reason. (2014). What are plurationalist practices? (About Us & FAQ). The Circle of Reason, [www.circleofreason.org](http://www.circleofreason.org)

<sup>8</sup> Harvard Pluralism Project. (2012). Promising Practice: Finding Common Ground Through Difference. Harvard Pluralism Project, [www.pluralism.org/interfaith/twin\\_cities/practices/secular\\_bible\\_study](http://www.pluralism.org/interfaith/twin_cities/practices/secular_bible_study)

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### Historical Evidence of the Need for Pluralism in Fundamentalist RE

The antipode of pluralism among theists is, in almost every respect, a religious cult -- the epitome of fundamentalist RE. Do cults' and fundamentalist religious ideologies' diminishment of their followers' independent reasoning permit and incite violence (and submission to violence)? And do those fundamentalists who successfully moderate their more extreme RE teachings do so through the pluralistic practice of reasoning cogitation?

Jim Jones' People's Temple and Do's & Ti's Heaven's Gate community both practiced mass suicide, on the shared but largely unquestioned assumption that after death their souls would either journey to paradise (People's Temple) or to a paradisaical extraterrestrial planet on a ship following the tail of comet Hale-Bopp (Heaven's Gate).<sup>9</sup> These assumptions were indeed questioned by some members of each community during their final days (including in the last audio-recordings to posterity by Heaven's Gate members), but were neither acted on nor debated.

The River Road Fellowship reached a different end, due to emergent independent thinking by its most-victimized members.<sup>10</sup> Dubbed in newscasts the "Maiden Cult," the Fellowship was an isolationist Christian fundamentalist community of tight biblical proscriptions upon work and lifestyle. Its charismatic pastor, Victor Barnard (now a fugitive wanted on 59 counts of alleged child sexual molestation, who fled for rural Washington with the bulk of his still-loyal fellowship), convinced its families to donate 10 of their female children to serve him as "virginal maidens" at his isolated "Shepherd's Camp," where for the next decade he sexually abused them (in some cases with the explicit blessing of their parents, who believed the pastor was an anointed prophet of God). A few "maidens" and Fellowship members publicly abandoned the cult after questioning their doctrine's and pastor's contradictions, as highlighted in a *Star Tribune* editorial (by this author):

*"As pluralistic rationalists, we feel both sympathy and admiration for the escape of Lindsay Tornambe and another woman from the religious cult that trapped their families...But also as pluralists -- both theists and atheists who commit to more consistently use everyday reasoning, regardless of our worldviews -- we know their escape wasn't simply from a religion, but from something so insidious it traps many of us. That evil was identified by Lindsay herself: 'We didn't really have a chance to think for ourselves.'"*<sup>11</sup>

Fundamentalist Christian U.S. politicians recently enjoined Ugandan Christian ministers and politicians to legislate religious dogma-based laws that criminalized, with life imprisonment, the

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<sup>9</sup> Wessinger C. (2000). *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate*, Seven Bridges Press, ISBN 978-1-889119-24-3.

<sup>10</sup> Louwage P, Ross J, Walsh P. (2014). "Maidens" called to God but then lived through hell. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Apr 16, [www.startribune.com/local/255322011.html?page=all&prepage=4&c=y#continue](http://www.startribune.com/local/255322011.html?page=all&prepage=4&c=y#continue)

<sup>11</sup> Burton F. (2014). The real power is in independent thinking. *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Commentary), Apr 17, [www.startribune.com/opinion/letters/255571071.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue](http://www.startribune.com/opinion/letters/255571071.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue)

practice or support of consensual adult homosexual behavior.<sup>12</sup> This religious fundamentalist movement triggered murders, tortures, and unjustified incarcerations of members of LGBT Ugandans and their human-rights supporters.<sup>13</sup> Uganda's opprobrium against its LGBT members was fueled by fundamentalist disinformation (e.g., homosexuals are pedophiles; homosexuality is the only way to spread AIDS; sexual preference is a choice and thus evil rebelliousness against God) and by the Ugandan President's, religious leaders' and public's unwillingness to question or vet those false assumptions.

Religious violence by ISIS ("Islamic State of Iraq and Syria") isn't being sustained contextually or situationally, but universally, by fundamentalist RE suppressing reasoned thought and communication: Youths are being recruited to fight for "the real deal" -- a "Great Islamic Caliphate" -- by radicalized local fundamentalist recruiters<sup>14</sup> and professional, emotionally-compelling YouTube ads, which have attracted young ISIS and al-Shabab fighters from many nations and cultures, including converted Christians<sup>15</sup>; women<sup>16</sup>; parents and their adolescent children<sup>17</sup>; and in the U.S. Midwest not just Somali-Americans<sup>18</sup> but Caucasian-Americans and African-Americans<sup>19</sup>. ISIS has also transformed childhood education in its conquered cities. According to an ISIS defector, the *first* step of ISIS' fundamentalist schooling is *depriving children of the tool of independent reasoning*:

*"Philosophy is prohibited. They canceled it as a kind of blasphemy."*<sup>20</sup>

ISIS' religious violence and misogyny isn't imbedded in the Qur'an, which preaches non-aggression to peaceful unbelievers and supports using one's intellect and mind ('aql) and one's

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<sup>12</sup> Muhumuza R. (2014). Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, signs controversial anti-gay bill. *The Huffington Post* and *Associated Press*, Feb 24, [www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/24/ugandan-president-signs-anti-gay-bill\\_n\\_4845722.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/24/ugandan-president-signs-anti-gay-bill_n_4845722.html)

<sup>13</sup> Brydum S. (2014). LGBT Ugandans Attacked, Killed as Tabloid Lists "Top 200 Homos." *The Advocate*, Feb 25, [www.advocate.com/world/2014/02/25/lgbt-ugandans-attacked-tabloid-lists-top-200-homos](http://www.advocate.com/world/2014/02/25/lgbt-ugandans-attacked-tabloid-lists-top-200-homos)

<sup>14</sup> McEnroe P, Shah A. (2014). Federal grand jury targets local terrorist pipeline. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, September 6, [www.startribune.com/local/minneapolis/274233901.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue](http://www.startribune.com/local/minneapolis/274233901.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue)

<sup>15</sup> Schmidt MS, Schmitt E. (2014). Terrorists lure Americans to Syria. *New York Times*, Aug 28, [www.startribune.com/world/273129771.html](http://www.startribune.com/world/273129771.html)

<sup>16</sup> McEnroe P, Shah A. (2014). St. Paul woman recruited to aid terrorists in Syria, relative says. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Sept 4, [www.startribune.com/local/stpaul/273870181.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue](http://www.startribune.com/local/stpaul/273870181.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue)

<sup>17</sup> Withnall A. (2014). Iraq crisis: Australian national fighting for ISIS in Syria tweets photograph of son holding up severed head and writes, "That's my boy." *The Independent*, Aug 11, [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-crisis-australian-national-fighting-for-isis-in-syria-tweets-photograph-of-son-holding-up-severed-head-and-writes-thats-my-boy-9660624.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-crisis-australian-national-fighting-for-isis-in-syria-tweets-photograph-of-son-holding-up-severed-head-and-writes-thats-my-boy-9660624.html)

<sup>18</sup> McEnroe P, Shah A. (2014). Second Minnesota man may have been killed fighting with terror group in Syria. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Aug 29, [www.startribune.com/local/west/273128841.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue](http://www.startribune.com/local/west/273128841.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue)

<sup>19</sup> Forliti A. (2014). High School buddies followed similar path into militant Islam -- and met the same end. *Associated Press*, Aug 29, [www.startribune.com/local/273095721.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue](http://www.startribune.com/local/273095721.html?page=all&prepage=1&c=y#continue)

<sup>20</sup> Damon A, Yan H. (2014). Inside the mind of an ISIS fighter. *CNN*, Sept 4, [www.cnn.com/2014/09/04/world/meast/isis-inside-look/index.html?hpt=hp\\_c2](http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/04/world/meast/isis-inside-look/index.html?hpt=hp_c2)

critical reflection, or "inner struggle" (ijtihad) to counterbalance religious obedience (taqlid) and calls to defensive holy war (jihad).

The horrors being committed by the nominal Muslims of ISIS differ in context from those committed by the nominal Christians of the Ugandan anti-gay mobs, River Road Fellowship, and People's Temple, or earlier nominal Christians of the Ku Klux Klan, the Nazi German Christian party, or U.S. abortion-clinic and gay nightclub bombers; as well as from the horrors committed by the nominal New Age Spiritualists of Heaven's Gate, or the nominal Atheists of the communist parties of Russia, China, Cambodia and North Korea. But all these horrors are in their essential aspect *one* horror: The horror of *universally* teaching our fellow sapient to blind themselves to the light of reality, to bow beneath the weight of falsehoods, and to bare their stampeding emotions. This one horror is the absolute evil of *willful irrationalism* -- "anti-sapience."

### **Neuroscience Evidence of the Utility of Pluralist Practices in Unmaking Violence**

Neurobiology studies show that correlates of pluralism (reasoning with emotional integration) counter correlates of predisposition to violence: Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) during tasks to control impulsivity shows less facile volitional prefrontal cortex activity (executive reasoning) and less cortical-limbic communication (integration of reasoning with emotional perceptions) in subjects diagnosed with antisocial or borderline personality disorders, and criminal psychopaths.<sup>21, 22</sup> Among normal subjects, one's judgment of what is *moral* becomes impaired while transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) suppresses one's temporoparietal cortex, the cortical region that provides one's understanding of other peoples' mental and emotional states.<sup>23</sup> Modern dialogue formats, as detailed later, now encourage discussants to practice integrating their volitional reasoning with their emotions and empathetic "mirror-neuron" brain circuits, by listening and questioning instead of emotively arguing.<sup>24, 25, 26</sup>

### **Sociological Evidence of the Utility of Pluralist Practices in Unmaking Violence**

Some pluralist methods are *institutionally* endorsed by a few modern religions or secular communities. The Baha'i Faith emphasizes acceptance but rational vetting of all prior religions'

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<sup>21</sup> Völlm B, Richardson P, Stirling J, Elliott R, Dolan M, Chaudhry I, Del Ben C, McKie S, Anderson I, Deakin B. (2004). Neurobiological substrates of antisocial and borderline personality disorder: preliminary results of a functional fMRI study. *Crim Behav Ment Health*. 14(1):39-54.

<sup>22</sup> Contreras-Rodríguez O, Pujol J, Batalla I, Harrison BJ, Soriano-Mas C, Deus J, López-Solà M, Macià D, Pera V, Hernández-Ribas R, Pifarré J, Menchón JM, Cardoner N. (2014). Functional Connectivity Bias in the Prefrontal Cortex of Psychopaths. *Biol Psychiatry*. Mar 14. pii: S0006-3223(14)00160-7. doi: 10.1016/j.biopsych.2014.03.007.

<sup>23</sup> Young L, Camprodon JA, Hauser M, Pascual-Leone A, Saxe R. (2010). Disruption of the right temporoparietal junction with transcranial magnetic stimulation reduces the role of beliefs in moral judgments. *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA* 107 (15), Apr 13, 6753–6758.

<sup>24</sup> Public Conversations Project. (2011). The Enemy Within. *Dialogue: A Virtual Workshop, Section 1, Neuroscience and Conflict*, © 2011, Public Conversations Project, Publishers, Watertown, Massachusetts, [www.publicconversations.org/video-series/virtualworkshop/sec1](http://www.publicconversations.org/video-series/virtualworkshop/sec1)

<sup>25</sup> Strickler J. (2009). Secular Bible Study casts wide net. Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, Feb 20, [www.startribune.com/lifestyle/39916382.html?refer=y](http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/39916382.html?refer=y)

<sup>26</sup> Harvard Pluralism Project (2012), op. cit.

holy books and prophets ("sequential revelation"). Its followers consequently reject jihad and other forms of religious violence. Among secular groups, declared Atheists tout neuroscience-and/or reason- based ethics as their guide to personal moral behavior (although some atheists still engage in non-plurationalistic, emotive *ad hominem* communication tactics against theists).

Hence one way to determine whether plurationalist practices have historically unmade violence would be to compare the percentage of Baha'i and declared Atheists among convicted violent criminals, relative to their percentage within the general U.S. population. The U.S. Bureau of Federal Prisons, which houses mostly violent criminals (murderers, rapists and thieves), performed such a study for all religious adherents as well as declared atheists:

Declared Atheists represent 0.7% to 1.6% of the U.S. general population but only 0.07% of the U.S. federal *prison* population -- hence Atheists are 10- to 20-fold *under*-represented among violent criminals.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, 0.05% of the U.S. population but only 0.0005% of the U.S. federal prison population (only one inmate) is Baha'i -- a *100-fold* under-representation among violent criminals. In contrast, Catholics, Protestants, Christians, Jews, and Buddhists are roughly *proportionately* represented between U.S. and criminal populations, while Muslims are 7- to 10-fold *over-represented* in the violent criminal population compared to their U.S. population.<sup>28</sup> These data imply that the Baha'i Faith's and Atheism's *uniquely institutionalized* plurationalist practices inhibit generalized criminal violence, *apart* from their ethical injunctions shared with other religions; and that other religions' practicing, to variable extremes, of fundamentalist irrationalism creates generalized criminal violence, in *spite* of their ethical injunctions.

### **Community-Practices Evidence of the Utility of Plurationalism in Unmaking Violence**

The 1989-founded Public Conversations Project (PCP) is a family therapy-inspired "deliberate dialogue" program that substitutes emotive debate with first-person testimony and empathetic listening.<sup>29, 30</sup> The Circle of Reason (COR), founded in 2000, is the first international society for plurationalism, whose diverse theists, atheists, conservatives and liberals believe in public commitment to more consistently use everyday reasoning regardless of their different worldviews.<sup>31</sup> These organizations respectively sponsor "facilitated civil conversations" and "transbelief reasoning dialogues" that share some plurationalist practices, but not all.<sup>32, 33</sup> Their

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<sup>27</sup> Mehta H. (2013). What Percentage of Prisoners are Atheists? It's a Lot Smaller Than We Ever Imagined. *The Friendly Atheist (Patheos)*, July 16, [www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2013/07/16/what-percentage-of-prisoners-are-atheists-its-a-lot-smaller-than-we-ever-imagined/?webSyncID=aec7a405-09b4-9c19-a2d0-bc7597a113b9&sessionGUID=ec6680cb-74a2-2e3b-7200-60692a7388e1#disqus\\_thread](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2013/07/16/what-percentage-of-prisoners-are-atheists-its-a-lot-smaller-than-we-ever-imagined/?webSyncID=aec7a405-09b4-9c19-a2d0-bc7597a113b9&sessionGUID=ec6680cb-74a2-2e3b-7200-60692a7388e1#disqus_thread)

<sup>28</sup> Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. (2013). Statistics on religion in America, Report 1: Religious affiliation. *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project, [www.religions.pewforum.org/reports](http://www.religions.pewforum.org/reports)

<sup>29</sup> Chasin R, Herzig M, Roth S, Chasin L, Stains Jr R. (1996). From diatribe to dialogue on divisive public issues: Approaches from family therapy. *Mediation Quarterly* 13(4), 323-344.

<sup>30</sup> Herzig M, Chasin L. (2006). *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*. © 2011, Public Conversations Project, Publishers, Watertown, Massachusetts

<sup>31</sup> The Circle of Reason. (2014). About The Circle of Reason: The First Society for Pluralistic (Methodological) Rationalism. (About Us & FAQ). The Circle of Reason, [www.circleofreason.org](http://www.circleofreason.org)

<sup>32</sup> Herzig M, Chasin L. (2006), op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Harvard Pluralism Project (2012), op. cit.

similarities? Civility (no *ad hominem* fallacies); non-leading questions (to encourage understanding the facts, assumptions and emotions undergirding others' views); no "You people" statements (*strawman* fallacies); and relationship building from increased understanding of the other's worldview. Their differences? Plurationalism's encouraging debate (as long as it's reasoning, i.e., employs facts, questions and vets assumptions, and refrains from insults); and plurationalism's *memetic* potential to propagate as an individual and social practice beyond its use solely for invited dialogues.<sup>34, 35</sup> For example, the influence of PCP-like dialogues is often limited to the dialogue events themselves, a potential shortcoming in scope noted by Chakraverti:

*"Conflict resolution practitioners repeatedly find that when people return from an encounter in which they have shifted their way of relating to their adversaries and to the issues that lie between them and their adversaries, they are faced with the choice to be 'different,' with all the challenges that brings, or to revert to the dominant and stuck conflict understanding of their group. This indicates one of the limitations of dialogue, even when dialogue groups are large. Rarely can dialogue reach large proportions of a population."*<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, plurationalism is not itself a top-down dialogue practice like PCP, but a bottom-up public meme -- with the consequent potential for broader scope and influence (although perhaps only over multiple generations), through individuals spontaneously adopting plurationalism's practices to improve their personal lives and local society.

Regardless of their sponsors' long-term potential for broader social influence, both the diverse attendees of COR's transbelief reasoning dialogues and the invitees of PCP dialogues -- including two descendant programs, the Minnesota Council of Churches' adult "Respectful Conversations Project" (RCP) and the Minneapolis YMCA's teen "Racial Justice Facilitation" (RJF) program -- show reduced verbal aggression, predisposing to unmaking violence:

In Boston, Massachusetts, PCP detected within its participants less irrationalism in the form of less emotive verbal antagonism, a feeder of social violence. As recounted by its attendees and by PCP Facilitator Trainer and Harvard and St. Paul, Minnesota, Luther Seminary Professor Mary Hess, long-term participants in a pro-life vs. pro-choice PCP dialogue became both "strengthened in their own worldview and *more respectful* of others' worldviews [*italics mine*]."<sup>37</sup>

Rich Cowles, a Minneapolis, Minnesota, facilitator of the recent PCP-inspired adult RCP and teen RJF dialogue groups, noted that by supplanting debate with "focusing on *how* people came to their views, and *how* they became part of participants' value systems," and by striving "not to

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<sup>34</sup> The Circle of Reason. (2014). How did Plurationalism get started? (About Us & FAQ). The Circle of Reason, [www.circleofreason.org](http://www.circleofreason.org)

<sup>35</sup> Cirkel van Rede. (2014). Eindig Maar Onbegrensd ["Finite But Unlimited"]. [www.sites.google.com/a/vandendriest.com/maarten/cirkel-van-rede](http://www.sites.google.com/a/vandendriest.com/maarten/cirkel-van-rede)

<sup>36</sup> Chakraverti M. (2008). Deliberate Dialogue. Handbook on Building Cultures of Peace, Joseph de Revera, editor, Springer Science + Business Media, LLC, pp. 259-272 [quote p. 268].

<sup>37</sup> Fowler A, Gamble NN, Hogan FX, Kogut M, McComish, M, Thorp B. (2001). Boston Globe Report on Public Conversations Project: Talking with the enemy. *Boston Globe*, Jan 28, <http://pubpages.unh.edu/~jds/BostonGlobe.htm>

change minds but to develop mutual understanding on issues through *human* connection and *civil* conversation," many participants expressed "chagrin that they've laughed at 'jokes' [about others] they *no longer* find funny [*italics mine*]." <sup>38</sup>

Two COR-sponsored transbelief reasoning dialogues recommended by the Harvard Pluralism Project as a "Promising Practice" are the Twin Cities' 2009-founded "theist + atheist" Secular Bible Study (SBS) and the 2010-founded plurationalist "nature walk & transbelief reasoning dialogue" group First Minneapolis Circle of Reason (FMCOR). <sup>39</sup> After their theist and atheist members participated long-term with the St. Paul, Minnesota, Council of Churches' interfaith dialogue group, the Council of Churches became the first in the country to change its dialogue group's name from "interfaith" to "interbelief," to become more inclusive to secular humanists and atheists with no religious faith but philosophical or ethical beliefs. <sup>40, 41</sup>

These Twin Cities community-practice outcomes reveal that "family therapy" rules-based or more overtly plurationalist practices-based public reasoning dialogues reduce participants' propensity toward prejudice, anger, aggressive and emotive verbal antagonism, and exclusionary tribalism -- precursors of religious and generalized violence.

How do the public reasoning dialogues of PCP, RCP, RJF, and COR-sponsored SBS and FMCOR succeed in unmaking these precursors of violence? Because, COR contends, they are public exemplars of the one *moral* tenet of plurationalism -- that as sapient beings we should all consistently strive to be objective, open-minded and equable, rather than subjective, close-minded and emotional, regardless of our disparate worldviews:

*"Reason is not a tribe; it is the only way to enlighten all tribes.  
Reason is not a speech; it must be the air that carries all speech.  
Reason is not for an elite; it must be for all."* <sup>42</sup>

Perhaps of broader importance to our species' and Earth's ultimate survival, plurationalism as a social initiative not only encourages us to practice reasoning in our *external* dialogues, but to practice reasoning in our *internal* dialogues. To commit ourselves to accept, in *every* aspect of our thoughts and lives, that:

*"What is, is; what is not, is not; and what is or is not, is paramount."* <sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cowles R. (2014), op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> Harvard Pluralism Project (2012), op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> Mehta, H. (2014). Minnesota Interfaith Group Changes Its Name to Become More Inclusive of Atheists. *The Friendly Atheist (Patheos)*, July 9, [www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2014/07/09/minnesota-interfaith-group-changes-its-name-to-become-more-inclusive-of-atheists/](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2014/07/09/minnesota-interfaith-group-changes-its-name-to-become-more-inclusive-of-atheists/)

<sup>41</sup> Shaw, B (2014). St. Paul's atheists are coming out of the closet. St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, Aug 4, [www.twincities.com/localnews/ci\\_26275289/minnesotas-atheists-are-coming-out-closet](http://www.twincities.com/localnews/ci_26275289/minnesotas-atheists-are-coming-out-closet)

<sup>42</sup> The Circle of Reason. (2014). Where does Plurationalism fit in the pantheon of philosophies? (About Us & FAQ). The Circle of Reason, [www.circleofreason.org](http://www.circleofreason.org)

<sup>43</sup> The Circle of Reason. (2014). What are plurationalist practices? (About Us & FAQ), op. cit.

Plurationalism's *universality*, as an organic blossoming of reason, can wend beyond the well-tended gardens of invited dialogue. Plurationalism can seed itself.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

*Qualitative historical data confirm fundamentalist (religious or secular) education, in proportion to its level of irrationalism, creates religious and generalized violence.*

Whither then RE? To the extent that fundamentalist RE discourages using facts, questioning assumptions, and mastering emotionalism, it licenses ideological, verbal and physical usurpation of others' free reasoning will -- all forms of aggressive violence. Major tactics of fundamentalist RE (as well as of secular "anti-theism") include emotive domination, including *ad hominem* invective, which inculcates prejudice and impulsiveness justifying violence. (The cherished Golden Rule conveniently no longer applies to those we call subhuman.) Plurationalists consider an insult to be fundamentally immoral, because it undercuts listeners' rationality; and suggest we start questioning our moral comfort with our verbal jabs. Also, plurationalists question the presumption that religious violence is sustained contextually and situationally. Rather, they maintain it is sustained *universally*, by too-ideological RE -- that RE must face the conundrum that it seeks to extinguish flames it itself kindles by encouraging its trainees to accept ideological worldviews without encouraging (or often even tolerating) their trainees' rational human impulse to question and vet them. Nor is this conundrum limited to RE, but applies more broadly -- to intolerance of religion by secular anti-theism, and to economic or political extremism. The war between rationality and irrationality belongs not to religion, or to any ideology. It belongs to each human being.

*Quantitative neurological and sociological research and community-practice sources confirm that plurationalist practices unmake precursors of violence.*

Whither then plurationalism? Distinct from secular humanism, Rand's objectivism, or atheism, which conflate "rationalism" with naturalist or anti-theist worldviews, plurationalism (also called "methodological rationalism")<sup>44</sup> considers rationalism a practice, not a worldview -- thus practicable both for the non-religious *and* the religious. This social movement, as a meme, simply encourages "reality's acceptance, assumption's denial, and emotion's mastery" (i.e., the practice of reasoning thinking, behavior and communication in all people, irrespective of their worldviews); and simply *discourages* denials of reality, unquestioned assumptions (potentially false realities), and emotive arguments or actions (dissociation from reality), including discouraging *ad hominem* insults as immoral.<sup>45</sup> Hence plurationalism predicts that religious (and secular) parents and educators, by espousing the simple practice of reasoning regardless of what worldviews they also teach, will reduce and someday eliminate the societal consequences of welcoming denialism, dogmatism, and emotionalism to the parlor rooms of civil society. By removing our religious sanction for irrationalism, we will help eliminate its inevitable sequelae

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<sup>44</sup> The Circle of Reason. (2014). About The Circle of Reason: The First Society for Pluralistic (Methodological) Rationalism. (About Us & FAQ), op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> The Circle of Reason. (2014). Where does Plurationalism fit in the pantheon of philosophies? (About Us & FAQ), op. cit.

of war, corruption, discrimination, despoilment and poverty, attaining humanity's next major step in moral evolution: To *deserve* the name *Homo sapiens*, "Wise Humans."

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