Cultural Politics and the Question of the Existence of God

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The term "cultural politics" is a useful description of arguments about what words to use. When we say that Frenchmen should stop referring to Germans as "Boches", or that white people should stop referring to black people as "niggers", we are practicing cultural politics. We are saying that our socio-political goals—increasing the degree of tolerance that certain groups of people have for one another, in the hope of decreasing the amount of violence and cruelty in the world—will be promoted by abandoning certain linguistic practices. Our opponents, whose socio-political goals may include the permanent subjugation of blacks by whites, or the permanent suspicion of Germany by France, practice cultural politics by insisting on using the very words we think ought to be dropped from the language.
Philosophy as cultural politics. This volume presents a selection of the philosophical papers which Richard Rorty has written over the past decade, and complements three previous volumes of his papers: Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth, Essays on Heidegger and Others, and Truth and Progress. Said should have been titled “The Right to Believe.” There he argued that one had a right to believe in the existence of God if that belief contributed to one’s happiness, for no reason other than that very contribution. I think that the best way for those of us who find James’ pragmatism sympathetic to restate his position is to say that questions about what is too permissive and what is too restrictive are themselves questions of cultural politics.