Streams of William James

The Newsletter of William James Society
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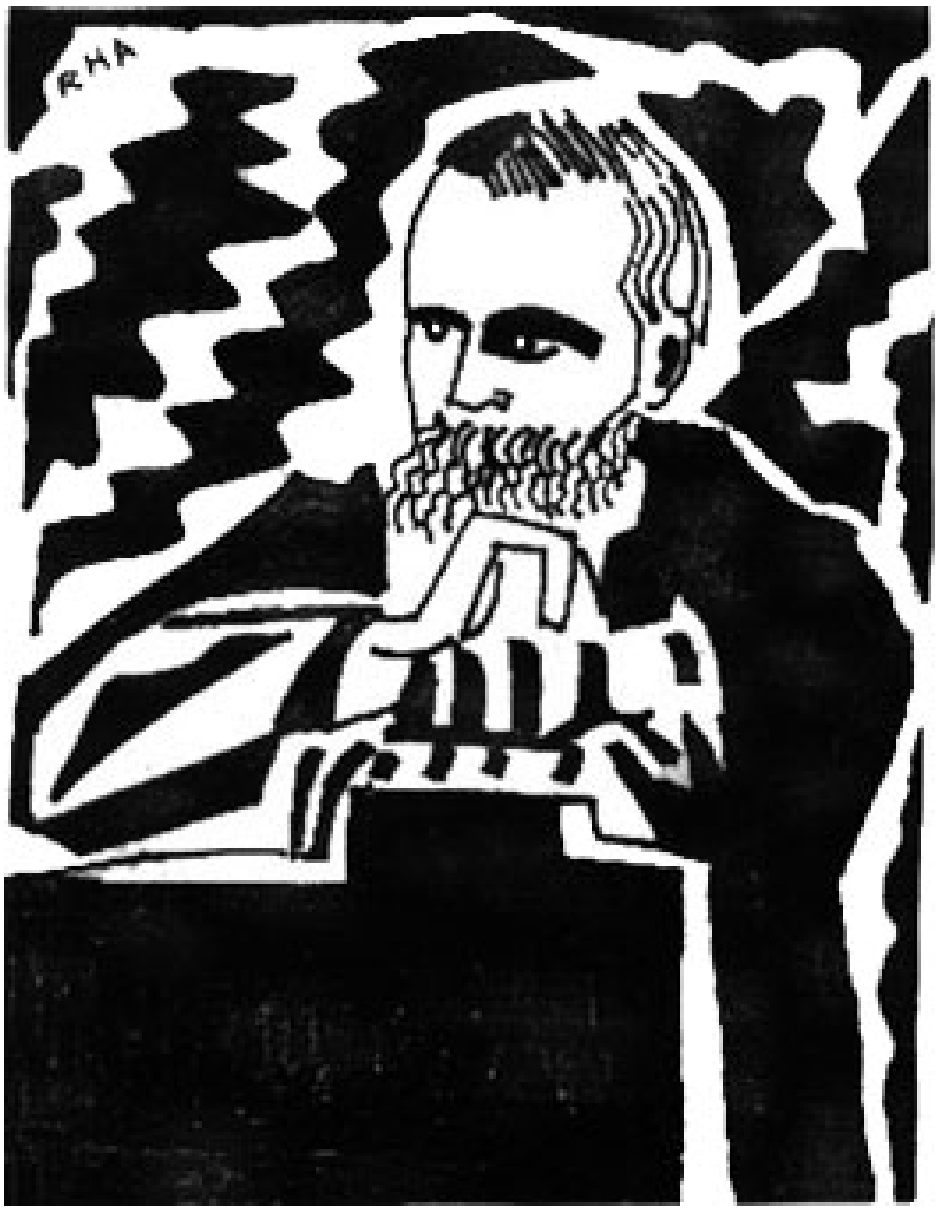

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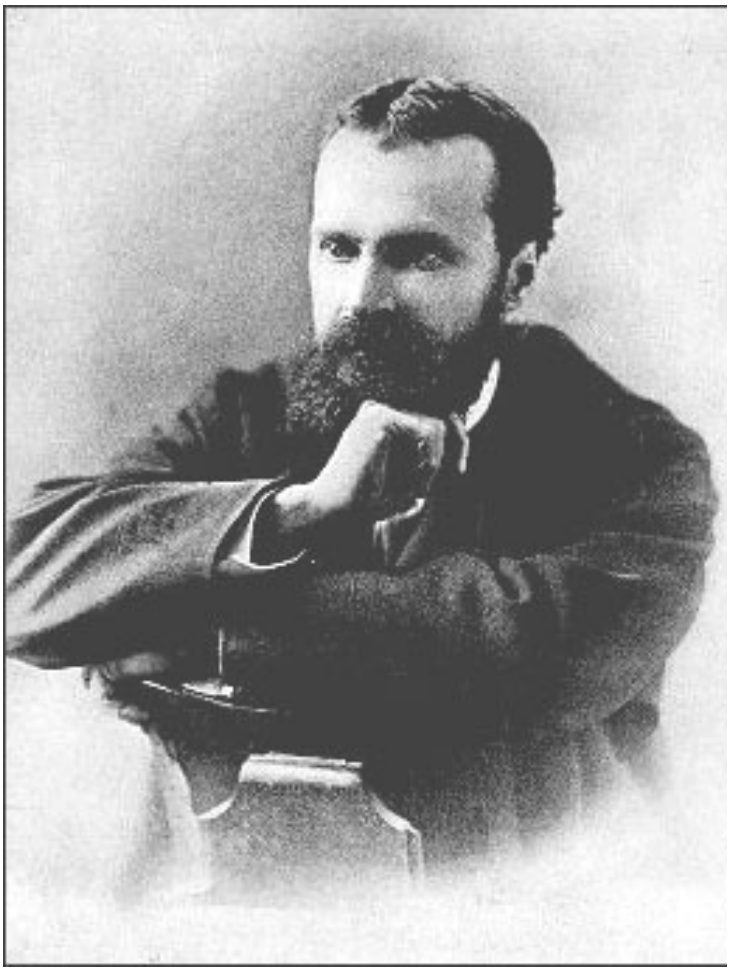

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Books About William James

compiled by Frank Pajares
can be located at
http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/jbiblio.html

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A Provisional Vision

by Randall Albright

Linda Simon was not the first to notice that the William James so often photographed formally is not the William James that many people knew, whose lives he touched, and whose lives he continues to touch. The inside cover of her *Genuine Reality, A Life Of William James* (1998) shows a man with a checkered shirt and striped tie, his thumb wrapped around his belt in a casual manner, with a piece of paper in hand.

Although this picture is perhaps taken from one of his Adirondack summer retreats with friends, James was also known for dressing in a more relaxed, eccentric manner as a professor at Harvard as well. He personally encouraged people in whom he thought novelty and humanity could provide progress both for one's self and society. As a teacher and popularizer of thought that has wide-ranging implications (he wrote, for example, that "pragmatism" was simply a new name for some old ways of thinking[1]), his influence touched people as diverse as George Santayana, his brother Henry, Robert Frost, Gertrude Stein, D. H. Lawrence, and Niels Bohr. Those who influenced him include Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Stuart Mill, and Charles Renouvier, as well as his father and Emanuel Swedenborg. He enjoyed the works of William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and H. G. Wells. At times he admired the work of Charles Peirce, John Dewey, and Henri Bergson. His drawings can bear a strong resemblance to those of Jean-François Millet.

As these names begin to indicate, the William James who was always searching for "genuine reality" was one who enjoyed a diversity of views and friendly discussions. He tolerated difference even if he personally constantly revised his own words and concepts to refute those of others which he believed were reductionist or, even worse, simply absurd.

James was a cross-disciplinary worker in the best sense of the word. It is hard to categorize him. Like Emerson's *Representative Men*, he moves between labels such as "philosopher," "mystic," "skeptic, "poet," "man of the world," and "writer." People have pondered his implications in English, psychology, philosophy, physics, ethics, religion, education, and American history departments of universities. He personally was wary of over-specialization, however, and many of his fears have come true. He is now compartmentalized by some, fracturing him into either a primeval starting point for psychology, a mere harbinger of more recent people in the field of philosophy, or passed over quickly as some footnote (as well as his own footnotes) in American history. Ideas such as "pan-psychism" are derided by some. A strain of secular humanism seems to be the only antidote, for others, to counter the latest threats against non-conformists in society who simply want to live their own lives.

But The Right To Believe[2] which James suggested on more than one occasion was merely personal, and he rejected dogmatism strongly. People have talked about the breath-taking intimacy of reading his works, of feeling like his presence is there in the room with them.

There are many issues to explore with such an extraordinary man as the center of our vision.

My vision for this *Streams of William James* newsletter is to provide a forum for a multi-tiered, pluralistic vision, both by William James himself, and others in their various phases of discovery of him and their own lives as we turn to the 21st century. I reject as firmly as he did the nihilistic vision of "I don't care."[3] I believe that I can at least *try* to leave the world a better place than how I found it. James talked in terms of meliorism. This newsletter is a forum to inspire people to do such acts of kindness as James did, himself. People may expect to find a piece of writing by a James scholar, juxtaposed against the visual art of someone who is a high school student. Definitions for words that are not common in abridged college-level dictionaries, as well as suggested translations for non-English words, will appear. I also plan to print or talk about works which may have influenced James to help re-build some of the historical context for him.

My vision for this *non-profit William James Society* that publishes the newsletter, as well as sponsors events in the future, is to try to re-establish what James called that "older philosophy" where scholars, fans, students, and lovers of James can all feel comfortable to contribute.

At this point in time, I am looking for more points of view, verbal and visual contributions, as well as "seed money" for this newsletter. (Note: For now, only black-and-white or gray-scale imagery can be considered, for cost reasons.) I envision more, however. Perhaps colloquia will come about, where members of the Society and their guests could gather, for example, and which can be announced in the newsletter.

The very word "provisional" evokes James. In "The Stream of Thought" chapter of *The Principles of Psychology,* he talks about how we perch on landings between transitions. Everything in life is, essentially, a work in progress. Although I hope that this becomes a great and successful venture, with millions of subscribers and members, world-wide, I do not dismiss this first step.

The question then arises, however: What is the next step? This is where I ask your help. Can you volunteer your services, your money, or any other mode of action to help me in this War Against War, this battle for both self and community improvement? People talk

about "growing" the economy. This is all well and good. But I talk about growing our minds, hearts, bodies, and souls, too.

And now, I would like to finish this provisional vision with some words by William James himself:

> What shall we do? Many would find relief at this point in celebrating the mystery of the Unknowable and the awe which we should feel at having such a principle to take final charge of our perplexities. Others would rejoice that the finite and separatist view of things with which we started had at last developed its contradictions, and was about to lead us dialectically upwards to some higher synthesis in which inconsistencies cease from troubling and logic is at rest. It may be a constitutional infirmity, but I can take no comfort in such devices for making a luxury of intellectual defeat. They are but spiritual chloroform. Better live on the ragged edge, better gnaw the file forever!
>
> from The Mind-Stuff Theory chapter, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) [Cambridge: Harvard UP edition (1981, 1983)], 179.

—Randall Albright is Editor of this newsletter. He is a multi-media artist (6 calendars sold at the Hirshhorn Museum, Smithsonian Institution, among other places) and also works as a software technical writer. His e-mail address is albright@world.std.com

Footnotes

1 William James, *Pragmatism* (1907) [Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991 edition], 25-26.

2 The title essay and "Is Life Worth Living" in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897) and "Appendix: Faith and The Right to Believe" of *Some Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911) by William James are examples of this.

3 "The mood of levity, of 'I don't care,' is for this world's ills a sovereign and practical anaesthetic." –William James, from "Is Life Worth Living" in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 43.

Reading William James

by William P. Coleman

Although my response to him uses my intellect, I don't know if I can state the gist of it intellectually. Somehow, I seem to hear him speak very directly. His writing isn't just words: there's a voice.

For example, Randall Albright had quoted him him recently on the James Family List Serve as saying:

> The commonest vice of the human mind is its disposition to see everything as yes or no, as black or white, its incapacity for discrimination of intermediate shades. So the critics agree to some hard and fast impossible definition of socialism, and extract absurdities from it as a conjurer get rabbits from a hat.
>
> William James, from the Monistic Idealism chapter, *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 78.

It's uncanny. It's as if I were looking at a daguerreotype and suddenly the image on the flat picture in my hand started to move and speak. The word "frisson" in overused now, but that's what William often makes me feel: a shiver of delight. Partly, it must be that I am particularly susceptible to him; more, he seems to have been alive and aware as few others have ever been.

He needs and wants to see things as they are. He refuses to settle. It makes no difference whether he agrees with others or not. If he does, it makes no difference whether he thought it first or not. He is totally absorbed in encountering the thing or person and in the meaning for people.

I think of what he looks like in photographs: penetrating, quick, nervous, quirky. I share his goals, but am overweight and phlegmatic. I would have been satisfied with a life as his Dr. Watson.

—William P. Coleman is a private consultant developing applications of mathematics to build a humane and sustainable future, especially in medicine. He takes photographs and writes stories, screenplays, and film criticism. His e-mail address is wpc@wpcmath.com

Why James?

by Jonathan Levin

I read as much Dewey, and there are some points on which I've satisfied myself (for now) that Dewey does indeed provide the "more rigorous" treatment (and the same goes for Peirce), but James is also, for me, the more robust, enchanting thinker. This has something to do with what James is always aiming for: a sense of the liveliness of things, the great buzzing, blooming confusion that we somehow recognize as the familiar texture of our life itself. Even in his most technical papers, James is something of a poet. When Dewey gets technical, he's just plain technical. When James gets technical, he still manages to wax rhapsodic. I don't mean to suggest that James's logic is less persuasive than a more rigorous logic would be but rather that it persuades in a different and, for me, altogether more satisfying register.

One example: writing in the late essay "The Continuity of Experience" about the impossibility of parsing what he calls his "present field of consciousness" into "inside" and "outside" parts, James comments that the "full self is the whole field, with all those indefinitely radiating subconscious possibilities of increase that we can only feel without conceiving, and can hardly begin to analyze." This is one of James's many attempts to capture what he saw as the dynamic structure of the thinking self. The suggestively elusive phrase "indefinite subconscious possibilities of increase" marks, for me, the permeable or porous boundaries of the Jamesian self. James is right to caution that our analysis of this process can only proceed so far: "possibilities of increase" are, by definition, out of focus, hazy, imprecise, and James's larger point is that such hazy unfocused imprecision is a structural feature of all dynamic consciousness. This, to my mind, is an infinitely more satisfying description of consciousness than those that pretend to more empirical or theoretical precision. What's more, James's defense of such vague dynamic processes is linked to his radical democratic pluralism, his instinct to champion those aspects of our world that remain "indefinite" because they are marginalized by our usual reductive understanding of the relationship between centers and their peripheries, in our conceptions of social and mental experience alike.

James is at once, in mysteriously integrated fashion, philosopher, psychologist, phenomenologist, scientist, moralist, religionist, and poet. His formulations aren't always entirely satisfying. Sometimes, he seems to spin new pseudo-problems to trouble future generations, as in his attempts to pin down pragmatism's conception of truth. Still, I guess that because I believe the poetry is as significant as the philosophy, I can't imagine getting "beyond" James, however much I might on occasion prefer something in Peirce or Dewey (or Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty, for that matter). They are also gifted poets in their own ways, though none, I think, quite so persuasive, endearing, or engaging as James.

—Jonathan Levin is Associate Professor of English at Columbia University. His book on The Poetics of Transition: Emerson, Pragmatism, & American Literary Modernism *(Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) includes a chapter on William James. His e-mail address is jal17@columbia.edu*

Infectious and Inspiring

by Ian Evans

William James' writing represents more than simply an important contribution to philosophy and psychology at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. His overall commitment to pluralism, his attempts to synthesize differing world views, and most importantly his ability to make ideas and debates real and not simply "intellectual gymnastics," as he put it, show that he lived his philosophy, more so than perhaps anybody save Ludwig Wittgenstein. I find his temperament to make philosophy relevant, and the energy and zeal he displays in his writings, infectious and inspiring.

—Ian Evans graduated from University of California, Santa Cruz, in 1997 with a degree in philosophy. He works for Inprise Corp. His e-mail address is ievans@inprise.com

James and The Web of Life

by Randall Albright

The first work by William James that I read was *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* After that, I became a software technical writer for a company in 1987, Meta Software Corporation, which is still in business. The core product upon which their higher tools were based was called *MetaDesign*, and a mathematician, Dr. C. A. Petri, was named on the original front page "Acknowledgments" as the person whose ideas provided the theoretical foundation for the software.

Petri created "Petri nets," which mathematically analyze complex systems. To put it simply, the core aspect of his design in these nets is that, to describe a system, one moves from a "place," represented by a box in Meta Software's visualization, to a "transition," represented by a circle, to another "place," and so on.

The company's current Web site is:

http://www.metasoftware.com/

Later, when reading *Psychology, The Briefer Course* by James, I realized this is something about which James spoke so clearly that people like Niels Bohr, when introduced to *The Principles of Psychology,* got quite exuberant and asked his team to at least read "The Stream of Thought" chapter.[1]

Some biographical notes on Bohr (1885-1962) are intruiging to explore in his connection with James. Although people remember him as part of the Los Alamos project, he also spoke at the United Nations in 1950, advocating an open world, and attempting to persuade statesmen to utilize rational, peaceful policies to prevent the usage of atomic weapons from ever having to plague the earth again. He was known for encouraging team spirit, a commitment to the humane usage of science, and took such an active part in the anti-Nazi resistance when the Germans occupied his home country of Denmark of 1940 that he had to escape to Sweden under imminent threat of arrest by the Nazis in 1943, before eventually coming to the United States.[2] His theory of "complementarity" suggests that when you go beyond both logic and common sense, you may not be in a realm of "nonsense" as much as in the presence of a new insight.[3] Deep Jamesian echos occur with this summary, as exemplified in a sample like this:

> There are so many geometries, so many logics, so many physical and chemical hypotheses, so many classifications, each one of them good for so much and yet not good for everything, that the notion that even the truest formula may be a human device and not a literal transcript has dawned upon us. We hear scientific laws now treated as 'conceptual shorthand,' true so far as they are useful but no farther. Our mind has become tolerant of symbol instead of reproduction, of approximation instead of exactness, of plasticity instead of rigor.[4]

"Kansei engineering," or continual improvement of system design, has sometimes been linked to people during the World War II effort at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but it continues to be used as a buzz word in companies to re-tool, streamline, think from new angles, and simplify, particularly from the customer's point of view.

In Fritjof Capra's beautifully written *The Web of Life*, he talks about how living systems are much more subject to change than mere cybernetic models can account for, and speculates that if scientists had followed the actual mutations in the HIV virus, for example, instead of sticking so closely to the mere modeling of its change, progress in stopping the spread of the virus, as well as the goal of its ultimate containment for both the infected and uninfected, could have been more rapid.[5] Capra concludes the book by talking about Humberto Maturana's work and Gregory Bateson's own struggles with cognition and consciousness, suggesting reasons why Bateson did not gain "further insights into the nature of the human mind"[6] in a way that again echoes James:

> The fundamental fact about our experience is that it is a process of change. For the 'trower' at any moment, truth, like the visible area round a man walking in a fog, or like what George Eliot calls "the wall of dark seen by small fishes' eyes that pierce a span in the wide Ocean," is an objective field which the next moment enlarges and of which it is the critic, and which then either suffers alteration or is continued unchanged. The critic sees both the first trower's truth and his own truth, compares them with each other, and verifies or confutes. *His* field of view is the reality independent of that earlier trower's thinking with which that thinking ought to correspond. But the critic is himself only a trower; and if the whole process of experience should terminate at that instant, there would be no otherwise known independent reality with which *his* thought might be compared.[7]

James suggests here and elsewhere that living systems are open, subject to change, that the "stream" of life itself only goes forward, and that we can only use the past as a sort of guide for possibilities in the future. This contrasts somewhat to George Santayana's famous warning that "Those who forget the lessons of history are doomed to re-live it," because James is well aware that while there may be *patterns* of recurrence, the future is largely undetermined, and the "lessons" which Santayana warns that we remember may appear in such new clothing that we do not recognize them, at

least at first, or perhaps recognize the *difference* in the new incarnation as well as the similarity.

Footnotes

1 as remembered by Leon Rosenfelt in *A Question of Physics, Conversations in Physics in Biology*, a set of interviews conducted by Paul Buckley and F. David Peat (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1979), 20.

2 Biographical information of Bohrs comes from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Volume 3 (Chicago: William Benton, 1967), 856-857

3 *A Question of Physics*, 152.

4 William James, from "Humanism and Truth" chapter, *The Meaning of Truth* (1909) [Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books Edition, 1997], 58.

5 Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life* (New York: Anchor, 1996) 279, 283-84.

6 Ibid, 308.

7 William James, from "Humanism and Truth" chapter, *The Meaning of Truth*, 89-90.

Some WJ Statistics

by Randall Albright

William James was born in New York City on Tuesday, January 11, 1842. His parents were Henry and Mary Walsh James, who were born respectively in 1811 and 1810 and both died in 1882.

William's brother, Henry Jr. (Harry), was born in 1843. Their brothers Garth Wilkinson and Robertson were born in 1845 and 1846. Their sister Alice was born in 1848.

William grew to be "just over five feet eight inches tall," according to Linda Simon. She writes that he "was trim, robust, with luminous and engaging blue eyes. To his classes at Harvard, he customarily wore a sporty tweed Norfolk jacket with checkered or striped trousers, tan shoes, and one of the colorful, flowing neckties he collected in England or Italy." She also notes that his "distinctive dress underscored his unconventional personality, his love of spontaneity, his intellectual irreverence."[1]

William married Alice Gibbens, born in Weymouth, Massachusetts on February 5, 1849, after a lengthy courtship on Wednesday, July 10, 1878.

His brother Garth Wilkinson ("Wilky") died in 1883. His sister Alice died in 1892. His brother Robertson ("Bob") died in early 1910.

On August 26, 1910, William died, head cradled in his wife's arms, in his country home of Chocorua, New Hampshire. He was survived by her, their four living children, his brother Henry, and many friends.

Simon notes that after William's death, his wife Alice "wore black for the rest of her life" and that she "never felt quite alone."[2]

Henry died in 1916. Alice died in 1922.

Footnotes

1 Linda Simon, *Genuine Reality, A Life of William James* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998), xiv.

2 Ibid, 388.

Busy

by Jason Gary Horn

I am back with my introductory American Literature course this semester: American Literature from the Civil War to the present. And once again I find myself fascinated with turn-of-the-century thinkers, especially those literary, religious, and philosophical minds that articulated so well the convolutions in thought that emerge in any transition between centuries. But times are constantly "a-changing," and for many, transitions allow for the most significant kind of changes. At least that is what I understand William James to be saying in much of his work.

Many American literary moderns, such as Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost, seem to have understood James in the same way. I must confess that I can never teach these poets, in particular, without frequent use of James's ideas. His thought permeates the American modernist imagination.

When the speaker in Stevens's "Anecdote of the Jar" places his jar on a hill in Tennessee, and the jar brings a sense of order and even meaning to the "blooming buzzing confusion" that surrounds it, I find myself directing my students toward James's ideas about provisional truths and the necessary refashioning of them. But jars and truths are fragile; they crack, break, and must be repaired.

Like Frost's wall in his well-known "Mending Wall." Here Frost's speaker wonders about the need to mend a wall at all, especially between neighbors. My students quickly begin to read the wall as beliefs and truths that we all receive and, for the most part, maintain--often without considering them. The spring frost shifts the ground, however, cracks the stone wall and opens gaps, and the speaker and his neighbor fill them with more substantial weight. Gaps in walls; gaps in beliefs, gaps in truth. It is a never-ending repair job. "Truth happens to an idea," I explain to my students, borrowing from James, like walls get built. Both the happening and the building are events, events that often occur between generations, as in Frost's poem and between centuries, as in James's time. James and the literary modernists were busy mending walls.

—Jason Gary Horn is Chair of the Humanities Division of Gordon College. His book, Mark Twain and William James, Crafting a Free Self *(Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), is an investigation of these two writers' thoughts. His e-mail address is j_horn@falcon.gdn.peachnet.edu*

Two Trees

by R.H. Albright (1991)

Significant Sorrows:

William James, Stephen Crane, and the Religious Psychology of American Literary Naturalism

by Jason Gary Horn

As a literary and philosophical movement, American Literary naturalism thrived in the late-nineteenth century despite, or perhaps because of, its bleak vision of cosmic determinism and its emphasis on life's harshest experiences. Naturalist writers certainly illuminate some of life's darkest corners, exposing the sorrows of existence rather than the joys. But to what purpose, to what effect, and to what ends. To begin answering such questions, I turn to one that more than most was capable of tapping into the literary and intellectual currents of his day.

William James was a cultural bellwether, his work a holistic reflection of his culture. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is no exception here. Published in 1902, James's *Varieties* articulates a cultural mood and a set of emotions broadly defined as religious; and as its subtitle suggests, the book can be read as a "study of human nature." Topping James's study list are notions of good and evil and their relation to human joy and happiness, sorrow and suffering. "A strange moral transformation has within the past century swept over the Western world," James explains in his *Varieties*, and few are willing to endure any amount of suffering or "listen to recital of cases of it."[1] Indeed, his *Varieties* underscores a fundamental shift in attitudes towards suffering and its place in religious experiences and in an American culture preoccupied with personal well-being.

The quest to escape suffering and find happiness has gone on in any century, of course, but what makes the closing of the nineteenth century particularly intriguing is naturalism's emergence in the midst of a culture's deliberate adoption of an "optimistic scheme of life." This last phrase is James's, and his *Varieties* probes those despairing views of human nature that color the naturalists' vision, an outlook that on the surface seems to offer little more than an ugly portrait of an indifferent world, a world of inevitable pain and irredeemable anguish. Yet as James suggests, the psychology of such a painful insight points to a will to perceive beyond surface facts, to the deepest springs of joy. Sorrow and suffering may, in effect, bring with them a peculiar kind of joy, a felt sense of relation within an authentic stream of experience.

"The method of averting one's attention from evil, and simply living in the light of good is spendid as long as it will work,"[2] James explains early in his *Varieties*. So why not just leave well enough alone, dismiss painful thoughts, and simply bask in the day's glad light? Such a question would have been absurd to American naturalists and to none more than Stephen Crane. And while Crane's work, in itself, does not define the limits of naturalism, its effectively epitomizes the naturalists' vision and its functional psychology. Publishing his work at the turn-of-the-century, Crane refused to let his late Victorian readers blithely live. Rather, he complicated their lives with books like *The Red Badge of Courage*, which exposes the darkest regions of existence, and disturbed their general sense of well-being with *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* and *The Open Boat*, which together painted cruel social and cosmic conditions. In a word, Crane deflated what James describes in his *Varieties* as his culture's obsession with "healthymindedness," the determined attempt to ignore life's miseries while systematically cultivating happy frames of mind.

As America drifted toward "weightlessness," T.J. Jackson Lears's term for a personal and cultural loss of moral and spiritual significance, its naturalist writers dropped heavy literary anchors.[3] None was heavier than Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. With this novel, Crane clearly illuminates the darker side of evolutionary theory. As with many a naturalistic work, animal imagery predominates as young Henry Fleming progresses from his initial cowardice to later blood thirsty attacks. Crane repeatedly describes his soldiers as mud-like and barbaric, murderous beasts, ravaging monsters, and wild, snarling dogs. Not a pretty picture. Charles Walcott sums up Crane's book succinctly: "One farm boy is made into a mad animal to kill another farm boy."[4] The animal imagery importantly defines the naturalist's sense of the human condition and points to the thin margin that divides the human from the brute.

But equally significant are the key psychological moments in the novel that suggest that something spiritual lies within an acceptance of primitive realities. These are the moments when the youth meets pain and death squarely in the face. Having left his comrades behind, Henry flees into the dark regions of a nearby forest and into the deep regions of mind. With the "rumble of death" following him, he struggles through a labyrinth of vines and branches, through a tangle of guilt and remorse, "seeking dark and intricate places."[5] He ultimately finds his way to what appears to be a chapel of sorts, where a "religious half light" filters in through the natural arch of leaves. But death has followed him from the fields and now confronts him inside the this natural chapel:

He was being looked at by a dead man who was

> seated with his back against a columnlike tree. The corpse was dressed in a uniform that once had been blue, but was now faded to a melancholy shade of green. The Eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yeallow. Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of a bundle along the upper lip.[6]

Leaving the forest behind, the youth cannot leave death and the pain and suffering that accompanies it. He rejoins his troops as they make their way out from battle, "a blood-stained crowd" of "cursing, groaning, and wailing" men, a "steady current of the mained."[7] Out of this mass of suffering humanity, one of the bloodiest soldiers tags after the youth, slowly dying as they trudge along the road together. "There was something ritual like" in the soldier's walk, Crane points out, and as he neared death his body began to struggle and violently kick about, resisting its own "gradual strangulation." Henry can only sink to the ground, "wailing" for his friend, whose face, in his death, "had been twisted into an expression of every agony" imaginable. Looking into his friend's "pastelike face," he notices the "mouth was open and the teeth showed in a laugh."[8]

"Let sanquine healthy-mindedness do its best with its strange powers of living in the moment and ignoring and forgetting, still the evil background is really there to be thought of, and the skull will grin in at the banquet."[9] Pain, suffering, and death, as both Crane and James knew, lay behind the shallow veneer of the most optimistic schemes of life. Yet one could certainly live without morbidly dwelling on such a bleak fact. One could, as James acknowledges in his *Varieties*, and many do; but doing so denies one of the profounder religious experiences that lead to a wider range of existence. Because the "evil facts" are a "genuine portion of reality," as James points out, "they may be the best key to life's significance and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth."[10]

Evil facts, of course, are found not only on the battle field but on the streets, as Crane and Theodore Dreiser both show in their novels about victimized women, in drawing rooms as Edith Wharton exposes so well in her novels of respectable society, and spread throughout the iron tentacles of soulless corporations as Frank Norris so effectively reveals. Such facts must have seemed painfully obvious for these writers, although many of their readers had blinded themselves to stark reality of the obvious.

James attributes much of this blindness to the "victory of healthy-mindedness within the church over the morbidness with which the old hell-fire theology was more harmoniously related."[11]

> We now have whole congregations whose preachers, far from magnifying our consciousness of sin, seem devoted rather to making lightof it. They ignore, or even deny, eternal punishment, and insist on the dignity rather than the depravity of man. They look at the continual preoccupation of the old-fashioned Christian with the salvation of his soul as something sickly and reprehensible rather than admirable.[12]

For much of American Christianity, the rhetoric of Jonathan Edwards had been eclipsed by a wave of general meliorism most explicitly set forth in books like Beecher's Evolution and Christianity (1884). As Lears so aptly words it, liberal ministers were busy exorcising the devil from their churches in their efforts to "create a clean, well-lighted place where religion and rationalist optimism could coexist in harmony."[13] But the effect, if not deadly, was at least deadening. In a rush to discard the notions of sin and suffering, to "maximize human happiness," many late Victorians "won freedom from fear but lost possibilities for ecstasy, or for religious experiences that might provide a deeper appreciation for life as a whole."[14]

But Crane would not let his readers off so easily, and extending the Calvinist reach of Jonathan into the late nineteenth century in his story of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Crane thrusts us into the very pits of hell. Having set his story in the slums of New York City, Crane plays upon one of Naturalism's major themes: environmental determinism. But the Bowery life is a living hell, and Crane's emphasis on this point recalls an ugly portrait painted by Calvinist theology as it paints a modern one of depraved humanity. The book opens with shrieks and screams of "howling urchins from Devil's Row," where bloody children run about like mad demons forcing their fists into faces and smashing stones against skulls, tangled in a frenzy seemingly intensified by the smell of blood, and "fighting in the modes of four thousand years ago."[15] Not that Crane's street children have a blank on beastly behavior, as Maggie's father bares his teeth on the domestic front. Home, as he complains, is a "reg'lar livin' hell," a sentiment he supports by his raging fits of violence that make most evenings at Maggie's house a chorus of "howls and curses, groans and shrieks."[16] Maggie finds no comfort on the streets, where she finds depravity of a different sort, not as easily recognizable behind facades of respectability. After being tossed aside by a lover who, having satisfied his sexual cravings recommends that Maggie "go the hell," Maggie quickly moves in that direction, toward a gruesome death. Crane's final pages show her passing a variety of people who in one way or another fail to recognize her

suffering. Seeking the "Grace of God," Maggie approaches a clergyman during the darkest night of her soul. A clergyman, whose "beaming, chubby face was a picture of benevolence andkindhearted ness, whose "eyes shone good will."[17] Yet she was out of his reach, so it seemed as he resisted a too close encounter. "He did not risk [himself] to save a soul. For how was he to know there was a soul beside him that needed saving."[18]

"How indeed," Crane might have us say. With hell, itself, pain had been ushered toward the back of the Christian mind, as William Gladstone pointed out in 1898, "there to sleep in deep shadow as a thing needless in our enlightened and progressive age."[19] Needless for many, but not for American literary naturalists like Stephen Crane, who perhaps while not consciously playing the part of modern Jeremiahs nonetheless, through an often sensational and melodramatic presentation of suffering humanity, recalled a religious way of accepting the universe, a religious sensibility buried beneath an empty morality. For religious sensibility, as James considers it, provides an "added dimension of emotion" that counters the deadening effect of morality, alone, "it redeems and vivifies an interior world which otherwise would be an empty waste" and ultimately offers a "new reach of freedom," from where we might grasp a more encompassing presence.

And this is finally where many of the naturalists leave us, with a presence or transnatural force that encompasses the whole of good and evil, both healthy-minded and morbidminded, pain and pleasure, sorrow and suffering. At least that is the direction Crane strains toward in The Open Boat, a short story that seems to bring his naturalistic philosophy to fruition.

Crane's tale of four forlorn men, stranded at sea in a lifeboat smaller than the general run of bathtubs, provides an effective venue for the author's meditations on essential problems of existence. Crane blends the hopes and fears of this lost quartet into a general complaint against "Fate" that echoes throughout the tale:

> If I am going to be drowned--if I am going to be drowned--if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life.[20]

No answer is forthcoming from the gods, nor from Stephen Crane. Life is a mix of sand and trees and tears and sorrow. But nature is "flatly indifferent," as Crane sees it, about the distribution of the mixture and though some of his lost crew make it to shore through the tragic "coldness of the water," one suffers the random call of death. The remaining few, left on the dark shore, can only listen and interpret the "great sea's voice."[21]

James offers no final word on such conditions either. Yet he believes that ignoring them is more detrimental to the human condition than accepting them. "For when all is said and done," as James puts it, "we are in the end absolutely dependent on the universe; and into sacrifices and surrenders of some sort, deliberately looked at and accepted, we are drawn and pressed as into our only permanent positions of repose."[22] Submitting oneself to the presence of life's painful conditions, even in the face of an indifferent cosmos that cancels the consequences of existence itself, may bring about a religious happiness, a total reaction to the nature of things.

—This work is from a chapter of a manuscript on which Jason Gary Horn is working about the continuing importance of The Varieties of Religious Experience. *Horn is Chair of the Humanities Division of Gordon College. His book,* Mark Twain and William James, Crafting a Free Self *(Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), is an investigation of these two writers' thoughts. His e-mail address is j_horn@falcon.gdn.peachnet.edu*

Footnotes

1 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 273.
2 Ibid, 152.
3 T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 45.
4 Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage. A Norton Critical Edition*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962), 221.
5 Ibid, 40.
6 Ibid, 41.
7 Ibid, 44.
8 Ibid, 50.
9 James, *Varieties*, 132.
10 James, *Varieties*,152.
11 James, *Varieties*, 88.
12 Ibid.
13 Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 23.
14 Ibid.
15 Crane, *Red Badge*, 3-5.
16 Crane, *Red Badge*, 11.
17 Crane, *Red Badge*, 51.
18 Ibid.
19 as quoted in Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 44.
20 Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat," in *The Red Badge of Courage and Selected Prose and Poetry,* ed. William M. Gibson (New York: Harcourt, 1950), 286.
21 Ibid, 293-94.
22 James, *Varieties*, 53.

An Influence: John Stuart Mill

by Randall Albright

William James appreciated the works of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) as early as the age of 22, when he mentioned him in letters to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (May 15, 1868) and Thomas Wren Ward (May 24, 1868).

He taught a course at Harvard on Mill's *Logic* in 1881-82, to which he referred in a letter to Tom Ward (November 21, 1881), and which he said he was "enjoying.... immensely" in a letter to Thomas Davidson (April 16, 1882). The text he was using was *System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive*, 8th edition (1872).[1] An excerpt from the final book of System of Logic, called *The Logic of Morals*, gives some indication of what Mill himself was saying:

> In all branches of practical business, there are cases in which individuals are bound to conform their practice to a pre-established rule, while there are others in which it is part of their task to find or construct the rule by which they are to govern their conduct....
>
> The relation in which rules of art stand to doctrines of science may be thus categorized. The art proposes to itself an end to be attained, defines the end, and hands it over to the science. The science receives it, considers it as a phenomenon or effect to be studied, and having investigated its causes and conditions, sends it back to art with a theorem of the combination of circumstances by which it could be produced. Art then examines these combinations of circumstances, and according as any of them are or are not in human power, pronounces the end attainable or not. The only one of the premises, therefore, which Art supplies, is the original premise, which asserts that the attainment of the given end is desirable. Science then lends to Art the proposition (obtained by a series of inductions or of deductions) that the performance of certain actions will attain the end. From these premises Art concludes that the performance of these actions is desirable, and finding it also practicable, converts the theorem into a rule or precept.
>
> —quoted from *John Stuart Mill, A Selection of His Works*, edited by John M. Robson (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1966), 345-346.

This same selection of Mill's works includes "On Liberty," which Mill dedicated to his wife in 1859. It also contains texts such as "On Poetry," "On Coleridge and Bentham," and his letter in reply to an invitation to run for Parliament as a Liberal in the House of Commons (1865). He won the seat, and unsuccessfully proposed that women be given the vote on the same basis as men in the Reform Bill of 1867. He was not re-elected, and some have observed that he was perhaps more relieved than dismayed by that outcome. He wrote "The Subjection of Women" in 1869, which William read that same year and called it "strangely startling and suggestive" in a letter to Henry Bowditch on August 12th.[2] Mill's *Chapters on Socialism* (1879) reveal some of the complexity of his views toward the term of "socialism." As Stefan Collini notes, Mill "believed that the actual practical and moral difficulties of socialism in the present stage of social development meant that a greatly improved capitalism held out the more realistic hopes for human betterment in the short term."[3]

Linda Simon writes that, by 1890, William felt that Mill's work "begged for reconsideration and revision."[4]

James dedicated *Pragmatism* in book form (1907) as follows:

> "TO THE MEMORY OF JOHN STUART MILL
> FROM WHOM I FIRST LEARNED THE
> PRAGMATIC OPENNESS OF MIND
> AND WHOM MY FANCY LIKES TO PICTURE AS
> OUR LEADER WERE HE ALIVE TO-DAY"

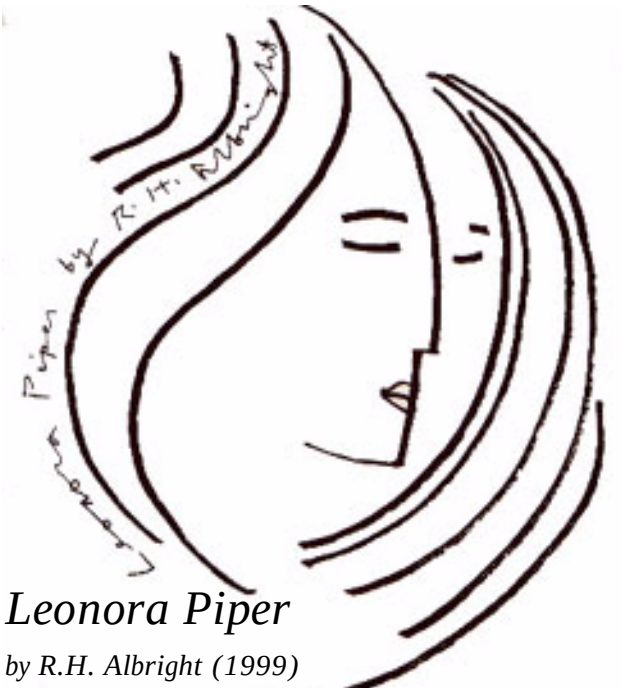
Footnotes

1 *The Correspondence of William James, Volume 5*, Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, editors (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1997), 187.

2 *The Correspondence of William James, Volume 4*, Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, editors (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1995), 384.

3 Stefan Collini, editor, John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty with The Subjection of Women and Chapters on Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xxii.

4 *The Correspondence of William James, Volume 6*, Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, editors (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1998), xl.



Leonora Piper

by R.H. Albright (1999)

An Argumentation for Contiguism

by Michel Weber

The present note intends to sketch the question of the real discontinuity (no pun intended, but appropriate) existing—or not—between two Jamesian concepts: the "stream of thought", on the one hand; and the "drops of experience", on the other. It is indisputable that the former belongs to a period when William James was primarily concerned with psychology; whereas the latter is explicitely dealing with ontological matters. But the two fields have always been closely intertwined in his prose, and, as Perry says: "if he was ever a philosopher, he was always a philosopher." Furthermore, in both cases the underlying question is the status of "what is immediately given"… and the *rational* answer does not spell itself simply in terms of the opposition of "continuous" and "discontinuous" approaches.

We will briefly examine the "stream of thought" and the "drops of experience" respectively, before showing the common features of these two specular concepts, and eventually concluding with a "contiguist" perspective.

I. The "stream of thought" metaphor obviously intends to put forward the continuous flow of consciousness as it is introspected. In Chapter IX of his *Principles of Psychology*, James defines "continuous" as "that which is without breach, crack, or division" (PP231). In spite of interruptions, time-gaps or quality breaks, consciousness remains an essentially continuous phenomenon : it "does not appear to itself chopped up in bits" (PP233)

Nevertheless, two subjective states can be distinguished within that flux: consciousness, "like a bird's life […] seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings" (PP236), of "places of flights"—or "transitive parts"—and "resting-places"—or "substantive parts". The former is a dynamic relational thinking, whereas the latter is a *comparatively restful and stable* contemplative state. Let us notice James' use of the expression "comparatively restful", which alleviates—if not destroys—Bergson's repeated critique of the Jamesian binomial.

In conclusion: James pictures here a real differentiated rhytmic structure of consciousness whose major tone is continuity in the flux. There are no breaches as such, only variations in intensity. By definition, all moments of the stream interpenetrate and melt together.

II. On the other hand, the "drops of experience" concept, constituting the focal point of the tenth chapter of the posthumous *Some Problems of Philosophy*, primarily puts forward discontinuity in our experience. Introspection is here somewhat less important than the requirements of reason: "the problem is as to which is the more rational supposition, that of continuous or that of discontinuous additions to whatever amount or kind of reality already exists." (SPP80) Although the bulk of the argument relies upon Zeno's antinomies, James claims for the obvious discontinuity of direct perceptual experience as well (as systematized by Fechner's threshold): "we either receive nothing, or something already there in sensible amount." (SPP80) In other words, our acquaintance with reality "grows literally by buds or drops of perception. Intellectually and on reflection you can divide these into components, but as immediately given, they come totally or not at all." (SPP80) Reality grows thus by "abrupt increments of novelty" (SPP95): these increments, drops, buds, or steps, are characterized by some (microscopic) duration and extension ; they are the "building blocks" of our (macroscopic) world.

Actually, two levels of the argument have to be distinguished: on the one hand, James addresses the epistemological question of sensory perception; on the other, he opens the door to the properly meta-physical question of the ontological structure of the Whole. Let us question further the latter, which grounds the former. To put it (even more) straightforwardly, the point is here that "nature doesn't make eggs by making first half an egg, then a quarter, then an eighth, etc., and adding them together. She either makes a whole egg at once or none at all, and so of all other units" (PU103). That abruptness is furthermore of primary importance to grant the possibility of genuine novelty, which itself conditions the meaningfulness of life. So far so good.

But the meaningfulness of life appears to the philosopher's eye as being directly correlated not only with genuine novelty, but with mundane stability (and continuity) as well. It is the *actual togetherness* of continuous and discontinuous ontological features that has—urgently—to be thought of. This is all the more so since challenging that "novelty seems to violate continuity [and] continuity seems to involve 'infinitely' shaded gradation." (SPP79) So how to solve the conundrum, if not by building the world of the subject (expression which is susceptible of a strict ontological understanding as well) with an uninterrupted series of buds of experience? In conclusion: there are breaches, but they are not gaps. Reality is a plenum, each and every one of its quanta impregnate and fertilize the others, thereby constructing the arrow of time. What adumbrates itself here—perhaps even more clearly than in the case of the "stream"—is the powerful con-

cept of *internal relations.*

III. Our dialectic moment is itself three-fold : once the concept of contiguum is introduced, we raise the question of the development of James' ideas, and conclude with some remarks on the weaknesses of language.

On the one hand, we have shown that the "stream" is susceptible to a dissection; but that partition does not disclose separate—external—elements : "I say of these time-parts that we cannot take any one of them so short that it will not after some fashion or other be a thought of the whole object 'the pack of cards is on the table'. They melt into each other like dissolving view […]." (PP269) In other words, there is an internal relationship between them that preserves the whole without killing the parts. On the other, we have seen that the "buds" have to be understood as building a continuum. As SPP claims, there is *nothing between the buds.* Each occurrence is at the same time something unprecedented and something acquainted with the universe in which it bursted. Sameness bring forth otherness. The image that is consequently projected in both cases—through the concept of internal relations—is that of a *contiguum* which preserves both continuity *and* discontinuity, internal *and* external relations. As James himself writes, what he claims of percepts and concepts can be said of continuity and discontinuity: "neither, taken alone, knows reality in its completeness. We need them both, as we need both our legs to walk with". (SPP34)

The remaining problem is that of the nature of the shift that James endures between the *Principles of Psychology* (1890) and the *Problems of Philosophy* (1911). Actually, the concept of buds or drops, already present in the *Pluralistic Universe* lectures (1908), was in gestation since James' reading of Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889—translated as *Time and Free Will. An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness)* and *Matière et mémoire* (1896—translated as *Matter and Memory),* sometime in 1902. Although there is no doubt that the importance of the discontinuist argument is linked with James' awareness of the Bergsonian Zeno, we can find in the *Principles* somewhat quantic expressions: "a kind of jointing and separateness", "sudden contrasts in the quality" (PP233). Hence the necessity of re-examining the whole idea of a real shift in his thought: why could it not be simply a difference of emphasis? The subsidiary question is here the timing of his progressive abandonment of dualism : for PP233 "things" are still "discrete and discontinuous"; but as early as 1902, James praises Bergson for his complete demolition of dualism and of the old subject-object distinction in perception[1]. There is unfortunately no room to address this question here.

Eventually, all this needs to be put in perspective with the help of the constant knowledge James shows of the weaknesses of our insights and of the deficiencies of our languages. Both stand inexorably on our way towards truth. Language, like sight, prefers clear-cut distinctions, independent entities, external relationships: "when we conceptualize, we cut out and fix, and exclude everything but what we have fixed. A concept means a *that-and-no-other."* (PU113) Reality, on the contrary, is *in the making.* Let us conclude with A. N. Whitehead's rather suggestive uttering: "The difficulty of communication in words is but little realized. If I had to write something about your personality, of course I could—but how much would remain that couldn't be put into words. So, when the rare balance of knowledge and perception appears, as in William James—one who could communicate so much more than most—it is perhaps an advantage that his system of philosophy remained incomplete. To fill it out would necessarily have made it smaller. In Plato's *Dialogues* there is a richness of thought, suggestion, and implication which reaches far. Later, when we came to be more explicit concerning some of those implications, we have a shrinkage."[2]

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Footnotes

1 "[…] démolition définitive du dualisme et de la vieille distinction du sujet et de l'objet dans la perception" (Letter to Bergson, 14 décembre 1902, in Henri Bergson, *Mélanges*, pp. 566-568)

2*Dialogues of A. N. Whitehead*, as recorded by Lucien Price. Introduction by Sir David Ross, Boston - London, Little, Brown & Company - Max Reinhardt Ltd., 1954, p. 271.

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Facts and Explanations

by Sheldon M. Novick

The house at 95 Irving Street, built by Alice and William James, is for sale. It was a light, comfortable house with large rooms and wide windows, modern and up-to-date when it was built in 1889. In the magnificent library room with its triple windows, William was able to write out his first great work, *The Principles of Psychology.*

Does it matter what happens to this house?

On a recent Saturday afternoon, I asked Dr. Michaeleen Maher of the American Society for Psychical Research why ghosts so oddly persist in particular places. What ties a ghost to a house, a particular chimney, or even a piece of furniture? She was surprised by the question, which seems not to have been studied. Perhaps it seems natural for ghosts to do this, ghost psychology being in this respect rather human.

Dr. Maher and I were having very public conversation on the stage of an Off-Broadway theater, in a sort of matinee symposium; that evening Jeffrey Hatcher's new dramatization of "The Turn of the Screw" would be performed, and we were discussing the plot and the story on which it was based. We sat in straight chairs on the stage, under spotlights, and talked about Henry and William James.[1]

The American Psychical Society has not changed greatly since its founding by William James; the evidence concerning ghosts, it seems, is still inconclusive. Listening to Dr. Maher speak about her scientific investigations I had the odd sensation of seeing William, for a moment, through Henry's eyes.

Do facts matter? Are ghosts to be proved or disproved, and if so how? Are they any more than a manifestation of our sense of place? A place's own historic sense of itself? Is the importance of William James' house a fact, or not?

The professors are not much interested in facts. For about eighty years, certainly since the Great War began, they have been nurtured among theories and explanations. When I gave a talk at Dartmouth a few years ago about the institutions that make up traditional communities, someone of my own age—I believe a professor—said dismissively, "The only reality is class." I had no ready answer at the time; but I can easily imagine Henry and William exchanging a glance. As they grew older they became friends, and shared their interest in facts, in the present moment. When they disagreed, as they extensively did, it was in the realm of explanations. Ghosts either were or were not facts; Henry for many years thought not, but after William died he listened very seriously to the widowed Alice's account of messages. How he explained such messages is another matter.

To William, facts succeeded each other rapidly; the unmediated experience of life was a stream, a buzzing confusion; one was obliged to step aside to describe and explain it, somehow, from the outside. The explanations were important.

Henry sought, on his side, to immerse himself in the moment or its memory; life itself or the donnée, the imagined or remembered moment that would unfold under his steady gaze. For art's sake one put the moment into a story, but the story had a different sort of reality and truth; it did not so much explain a moment as express its meaning.

What they shared was the sense that facts mattered, that one began with experience: that theories were suspect and subordinate to facts, and liable to produce absurd results when taken to logical extremes. Neither would have liked to see the house at 95 Irving Street swept away by "market forces," the meager manifestations of rootless greed; each would think in his own ways of the ghosts condemned to wander and be forgotten.

—Sheldon M. Novick is author of Henry James: The Young Master *(Random House, 1996), among other titles. His e-mail address is Sheldon_Novick@valley.net*

Footnote

1"Tempted Through the Garden," Saturday, March 20, 1999 at Primary Stages, 354 W. 44th Street, New York. Joining in the symposium were the playwright, Jeffrey Hatcher, and child psychologist Dr. Susan Davis.

"More Day To Dawn"

by Phil Oliver

It was an inspired and informed television script-writer who once had Captain Picard of the starship Enterprise give a book by William James (*A Pluralistic Universe*, perhaps?) to young Ensign Crusher.[1] James's pluralistic naturalism is just the sort of free-wheeling, ready-for-anything openness to novelty and variety that a deep-space explorer will want to travel with. "In utrumque paratus, then. Be ready for anything--that perhaps is wisdom," he quotes Renan[2].

And James is that kind of philosopher, because he wanted to be that kind of man: an explorer, an adventurer, a happy traveler. He would be right at home on the Enterprise, provided frequent shore-leave visits to Keene Valley in the Adirondacks, to Chocorua, N.H., and anywhere else in the traversible universe as fine. Again, temperament: here is as good a statement as I've found of the heroic temper which James so hungered to possess and to press upon the imaginations of his readers: "The great affair, the love affair with life, is to live as variously as possible, to groom one's curiosity like a high-spirited thoroughbred, climb aboard, and gallop over the thick, sun-struck hills every day. Where there is no risk, the emotional terrain is flat and unyielding..."[3]

In as many places as intrepidity can carry us, James urges cheerfully-firm resistance to the obstacles before our understanding and happiness. He opposes any diluted, accommodated, shadow-version of happiness as inadequate to the spirit of a dreaming and aspiring species.

Then, at the end of the day, we may still have recourse to whatever fatalistic or Stoic elements in our philosophic arsenal that may give some kind of succor for those best efforts which have landed short. But the end of the day is but a temporary terminus, a stage in an ongoing cycle. We may rise to resume the struggle, not in weariness but in renewed resolution and the happy temper of hope. The future always beckons with the hope--not a guarantee--of more fruitful engagement in life, of richer relatedness, refreshed perception, desired possibilities actualized, delightful new possibilities envisioned.

It is that Jamesian vision of "saving possibilities" in a future we can begin to enjoy in the present which integrates the themes I find most compelling in James: subjectivity, mystery, naturalism, evolution, religion, personal flourishing and social solidarity. All these are ingredient in my notion of personal transcendence based on present identification with future possibilities and interfused with the delightful potencies of the pre-verbal sensorium. I find these themes severally co-implicated in James, as points on that continuum of human experience which is at once stubbornly personal, constructively social, and globally natural. He was hugely impressed by the non-egoistic possibilities inherent in the fact of human subjectivity, wishing to highlight not deficiencies of human capacity due to our intrinsically localized points of view, but opportunities in the way of a kind of transcendence which celebrates our condition and spiritedly welcomes its challenges.

I believe attention to Jamesian transcendence can shed needed light on ways in which cyber-culture threatens to compromise the texture of experience for the unwary, and to misdirect our understanding of what it means to be alive and conscious. One way to try and reclaim that understanding is through a return to the measured and deliberate elegance of poetic expression, possibly our oldest and most reliably product-tested virtual reality technology. James flags the incapacity of language to contain the robust subjectivity of ordinary experience; the best poets admit and accept that limitation and still create verbal illumination of interior worlds beyond their words. By that criterion, in fact, James was a marvelous poet of sorts. Richard Poirier has correctly observed that insofar as James's pragmatism works in and through language, not beyond it, it does so "by effecting a change of language, a change carried out entirely within language." But he also recognizes that James's largest sympathies, like those of the surpassingly prolix Emerson, remain poetically anchored in a region beyond words.[4]

Whatever worries we may be wise to ponder as our chronometers roll us into the twenty-first century, the lingering note for a Jamesian should be not worry but anticipation. "There is more day to dawn," concluded Thoreau in Walden. "The sun is but a morning star."[5] James's favorite rhetorical question sounds the perfect echo: "What has concluded, that we might conclude in regard to it?" This is a philosophy of exertion and hope, and of transcendent subjectivity.

—Phil Oliver has taught at Vanderbilt, Southeast Missouri State, and East Tennessee State Universities. This piece is from the introduction of Beyond Words: William James's Transcendent "Springs of Delight", *based on his Vanderbilt University dissertation. He is currently at work on a book about "mindful parenting" from the perspectives of American philosophy. His e-mail address is POliver826@aol.com*

Footnotes

1 In *Samaritan Snare* Wesley tells Picard that "William James won't be on my Starfleet exams." Picard answers "Nothing really important will be. Open yourself to the past-- history, art, philosophy--and all of this might mean something." Robert L. McCullough wrote this episode, originally aired 15 May 1989. Larry Nemecek,*The Star Trek Next Generation Companion* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995), 86.

2 *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lec. II. *Library of America: William James, Writings 1902-1910*, 41. But James repudiates Renan's own interpretation of these words-- "Give ourselves up, according

to the hour, to confidence, to skepticism, to optimism, to irony and we may be sure that at certain moments at least we shall be with the truth"--insofar as it counsels an ironic refusal to risk error or commitment. James would have little use for the "vain chatter and smart wit" which is the lingua franca of our day, finding in it an absence of due seriousness--not the same as grimness--about life.

3 Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 309. Ackerman did not have James in mind here, so far as I know, but her implicit total view is very Jamesian.

4 Poirier well understands chains of influence: "James is the point of transmission, linking Emerson to Frost, Stein, and Stevens... It is through James that one can most profitably trace an Emersonian linguistic skepticism... they share in a liberating and creative suspicion as to the dependability of words..." Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992), 5.

5 *Walden*, (1854) [Boston: Beacon Press 1997 edition], 312.

The Temper of a Pluralistic Naturalist

by Phil Oliver

Jacques Barzun took us along on *A Stroll With William James* more than a decade and a half ago, now.[1] More recently the nonagenarian Barzun summarized James's greatest early influence on his own imaginative development this way:

> The work that churned up and recast all my notions about life and the mind, thought and feeling, science and the art of writing was William James's *Principles of Psychology*... it read like a novel of adventure--which, in fact, it was: the adventure of discovering what was believed about human consciousness... I gathered from its sallies into all regions of culture, that the mind works natively not like a recording camera, not like a logical machine, but like an artist.[2]

Artistry of mind, Barzun learned from James, is our great, creative, natural endowment. And with this insight comes the problem of pinning down the nature, as it were, of Jamesian naturalism.

There is a crucial distinction, too often ignored by uncircumspect readers, between James's own philosophical/religious beliefs and his arms-length advocacy of others'; between, that is, his own enthusiasms and his excited sponsorship of the alien enthusiasms of other persons. James's naturalism, evolutionism, and faith in the future cannot be understood in isolation from his pluralistic esteem for diversity, his classic Millian liberalism from the conviction that every perspective offers a partial but indispensable window on reality. James's philosophy of transcendence cannot finally be understood apart from that remarkably candid personal effusiveness and natural exuberance of temper which extrudes from nearly his every philosophical statement.

What kind of a naturalist was James? This is not an easy question. James was a naturalist not simply in the manner of a Muir or a Peterson, or even of Thoreau, though he *was* a hiker and a believer in the restorative possibilities of the outdoors. But ordinarily James's naturalism should be understood in two senses: (1) *biological* naturalism, the view that all observable life phenomena admit of explanation at some level, and for whatever such explanation may be worth-- and it's not always worth so much for James, in those contexts of normal living in which verbal explanation is simply not appropriate or helpful-- in the terms of biological science; (2) *global* naturalism, the view that everything experienced and experienceable is real, and in precisely that sense is a part of nature. Being natural and real is not the same as being entirely objectifiable, predictable, or law-like. But it is honorific in the sense that it is something to be respected and taken seriously whether one experiences it oneself, directly, or it is reported in the experience of others. Where hallucination is suspected our respect may be less, but since we don't have fool-proof diagnostic or epistemic tools for distinguishing real experiences from false ones in every case, James solicits our tolerant forebearance.

James had strong personal tendencies towards both senses of naturalism, and strong sympathetic tendencies away from them. A radical empiricist's last word, forever really penultimate and not conclusive, must always be to wait and see. But some of James's earliest words on the subject remained instructive throughout his philosophic life: "I'm swamped in an empirical philosophy. I feel that we are Nature through and through... and yet, notwithstanding, we are *en rapport* with reason... all is nature and all is reason too."[3]

Because James's ubiquitous Nature shares equal billing with "reason"-- 'spirit' might for once be the more usefully descriptive term, here-- it isn't hard to find examples of his scornful rejection of unsophisticated naturalism. "The purely naturalistic look at life, however enthusiastically it may begin, is sure to end in sadness... "[4]

But James is not a *pure* (or "mere") naturalist, or a "popular science evolutionist" in contrast to someone like Henry Adams (whose dark musings on cosmic entropy he found comically shallow). "To ascribe religious value to *mere* happy-go-lucky contentment with one's brief chance at natural good is but the very consecration of forgetfulness and superficiality."

James's naturalism is saved from arid 'purity' by this attitude, which begins to tell us something important of his philosophy of transcendence:

> The lustre of the present hour is always borrowed from

> the background of possibilities it goes with... let faith and hope be the atmosphere which man breathes in;-- and his days pass by with zest.[5]

"*Zest*" is one of James's favorite words, charged with the vibrancy of experience not as a metaphysical category but the felt movement of life as literal *inspiration*, something to draw in and express through all the pores of one's being.

Is this 'spooky'? James's 1904 essay "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" concludes with the boldly "confident" assertion that "the stream of thinking (which I recognize emphatically as a phenomenon) is only a careless name for what, when scrutinized, reveals itself to consist chiefly of the stream of my breathing."[6] The bodily anchorage of thinking, for James, prevents him from wholly embracing a supernatural account of the phenomenon of transcendence as he encounters it in his own experience. But notice, he is careful to speak of "*my* breathing." Let others scrutinize the phenomena of their own inner lives and draw their own life-quickening conclusions. "Hands off," again.

"Not God, but more life" is the most natural human impulse, and the ultimate source of religious variety. And, as James informed a correspondent in 1901, his own sense of life was most quickened by what he couldn't help regarding as the progressive epic of evolution. "I believe myself to be (probably) permanently incapable of believing the Christian scheme of vicarious salvation, and wedded to a more continuously evolutionary mode of thought."[7]

James considered philosophies "religious" which reflect and support a personal style of confronting life and enable their possessors to act, hope, and dream instead of withdrawing in resignation and despair. These may be supernatural but they may just as well not be. So may the talk of subliminality and "a wider self through which saving experiences come," in the conclusion of *Varieties*, in *A Pluralistic Universe*, and elsewhere. The surface spookiness of such talk is much alighted when we recall that for James the "self" is substantially, naturally constituted by relations including not only those already established and recognized but significantly by others both anticipated and unforeseen. "Every bit of us at every moment is part and parcel of a wider self, it quivers along various radii like the wind-rose on a compass, and the actual in it is continuously one with possibles not yet in our present sight."[8]

But was James's own personal religious philosophy supernatural? We must resist any quick or easy answers here, lest we simplify and distort an issue which was complex for James, and ought to be for us, too. He sometimes does, indeed, write forcefully as an advocate and practitioner of supernatural speculation; but beneath all the varieties of our religious experiencing, he also suggests, we can still detect a common natural impulse in each of us to live meaningful, coherent lives *by our own lights.* This is the impulse that wants to honor our respective, personal, subjective commitments, but without in the process affronting the conditions of communal sympathy and civility. In view of this emphasis, the supernatural "over-beliefs" which James sometimes professes or flirts with may be seen as idiosyncratically personal curiosities, peripheral to his central insight into the natural ground of all kinds of religious speculation including the supernatural. Again, supernaturalism for James is not strictly opposed to what I've called his global naturalism. This is no concession, but a nod to the sophistication of James's peculiar form of naturalism. The simplistic dilemma between naturalism and supernaturalism is, for him, simply false. His affirmation of naturalism is subtle and diffuse because it aims, *prima facie,* to take everyone's experience seriously; and this means recognizing the potential integrity even of those experiences of others which for us ring fantastic and strain our own credulity.

What is this 'nature,' for James, which undergirds experience in its endless and unpredictable variety? Is it something essential and fixed? Can we even pose such a question without insinuating an unwarranted and un-Pragmatic essentialism? Is there a 'nature' at all, or do we experience 'natures' which we gather together under an abstract concept or metaphor which we then hypostatize and exalt as Nature?

These are the right kinds of nominalistic questions for a Jamesian to ask. We shouldn't essentialize nature in any sense which implies arrest or finality, these being intrinsically counter-evolutionary states. James, like all Pragmatists in the vanguard of philosophic Darwinism, was no turgid classicist on questions of Being and becoming. The evolutionary, anti-essentialist cast of his thought is unmistakable. His interest is not in specifying timeless conditions for the possibility of experience and understanding in general, but in discovering the actual content and meaning of our experience in and of (global) nature, and as conscious bits of nature ourselves, in particular. "Common men feel the question 'What is Nature like?' to be as meritorious as the Kantian question 'How is Nature possible?' So philosophy, in order not to lose human respect, must take some notice of the actual constitution of reality."[9] And this means taking notice of the experience of actual persons, as they report it, and 'taking notice' means taking seriously.

But does James's global naturalism so expand the meaning of 'nature' as to render it pragmatically inefficacious? No. The category of nature, in order to be truly helpful as well as accurate, must be able to accommodate the full range of human sensibility and

experience. For a Jamesian there is simply no other handle on "reality" than this. And whatever 'efficacy' means, exactly, Pragmatists don't value it above helpfulness and accuracy, and probably shouldn't distinguish them sharply in any case.

James's personal religion as well as his philosophy, it is then fair to surmise, included evolutionary thinking as an important element of belief in human solidarity. In the quotation just cited James rejects "vicarious salvation." But clearly he also regards evolution as a natural-historical process whereby "saving experiences" are generated for those with the breadth of sympathetic imagination to identify vicariously, as links in the chain of genetic and other influence which in its totality is human reality, with all those other links who are our brothers and sisters (and mothers, fathers, sons and daughters). A recent bestseller argues that, for genetic reasons mostly, the decisive influences in children's lives are provided not by parents but by peers.[10] James would not be impressed, preferring the healthy tension of the open Emersonian question "Who shall set a limit to the influence of a human being?" in combination with the sagacious injunction to let children "be themselves, and enjoy life in their own way."[11] A link is no mere placeholder, it is a support, a lead, a connection, and sometimes (for better or worse) an influence. And sometimes the best influence is benign neglect; but sometimes not.

And so another '*ism* crowds the stage of James's philosophy: *humanism*, most succinctly the view that human "experience as a whole is self-containing":

> I myself read humanism theistically and pluralistically. If there be a God, he is no absolute all-experiencer, but simply the experiencer of widest actual conscious span... [this is] essentially a social philosophy, a philosophy of 'co,' in which conjunctions do the work... refusing to entertain the hypothesis of trans-empirical reality at all.[12]

Facile scholars sometimes portray James as a hyper-individualist and an asocial, if not anti-social, philosopher. They do not understand the depth of his commitment to the communion of human ends: a commitment not unlike that of Emerson and Whitman, which dares speak the name of God in the most worldly of temples. For James, we may all aspire to be experiencers of wide conscious span. That does not mean that we can each be God ourselves, in the derisively anti-humanistic sense, but that we can throw off the narrow egoism of a constricted self-conception and choose a wider identity.

The role of temperament in philosophy is one of James's better-known preoccupations, with his distinction between tough- and tender-mindedness and his insistence on the rightness of seeking a well-tailored fit between individual traits of character and personal assent to propositions. Roughly this is the view that our prejudices precede all argument, and that we tend to find reasons for believing what we already, as if instinctively, accepted.

Two personal experiences of James's deserve special mention as illustrative of his temper and its formative influence on his philosophy. The first, discussed in Part One, is the "walpurgisnacht" he spent atop Mt. Marcy in the Adirondacks. He described its physiological and emotional manifestations in a letter to his wife which testifies eloquently to his preference for risk and challenge in life, and to his sense that such preferences are importantly related to our corporeal nature.

The second is James's personal account of the great San Francisco earthquake, which must be highly illuminating to anyone who's ever been graced with an earthquake experience of his own. My own small quake experience was in Palm Springs, California, on May 7, 1995, a relatively insignificant shimmy on the Richter scale (5.0) but enough to awaken me from a deep sleep at 4 a.m. with an immediate, inexplicable awareness of exactly what was happening. I confess that the dominant feeling for me, then, was fear.

James, by contast, gave this firsthand account of the events of April 18, 1906:

> When, lying awake at about half past five...I felt the bed begin to waggle... Sitting up involuntarily and taking a kneeling position, I was thrown down on my face. The room was shaken like a rat by a terrier... [My] emotion consisted wholly of glee... at the vividness which such an abstract idea or verbal term as "earthquake" could put on when translated into sensible reality and verified concretely... I felt no trace whatever of fear; it was pure delight...[13]

James described his total quake experience as "mind-enlarging," reporting in the quake's aftermath a sense of cheerful solidarity among the survivors, "a kind of uplift in the sense of a 'common lot' that took away the sense of loneliness that (I imagine) gives the sharpest edge to the more usual kind of misfortune..."[14]

It is no coincidence, I think, that one of the first things James wrote after the quake was an essay called The Energies of Men. Like Emerson and Thoreau before him, he was alert to the very human significance of natural events. An earthquake, even a puny one, is a release of vast amounts of energy. We are conservators and expenders of energy, too, but much of our effort is dissipated. "The human individual lives usually far within his limits... he energizes below his maximum, and he behaves below his optimum,"[15]

habitually.

But here is our greatest seed of hope: our bad habits were made to be broken. Like Emerson, James is a champion of self-reliance and the spirit of reform. Perhaps more than Emerson, he is also a champion of hope as the collective human urge which was so admirably displayed by those San Franciscans whose "hearty frame of mind" and eagerness to make a fresh beginning amidst natural devastation he found so uplifting.[16]

"All attempts to explain our phenomenally given thoughts as products of deeper-lying entities... are metaphysical."[17] James was never shy about doing metaphysics himself, even in the psychological writings when he announced a deliberate methodological intention to write from the standpoint of a new science in the early stages of collecting its data. Far from treating it as a bogey, he insists that "metaphysics means nothing but an unusually obstinate effort to think clearly."[18] But his most developed metaphysical stance—a blend of pluralism, radical empiricism, and naturalism—does not speculate coercively about deeper-lying entities. Instead he invites each of us to follow the arc of our own subjectivity in accounting for the particular constitution of our inner life.

Nonetheless, it is a mistake to think that James's naturalism and semi-conventional empiricism in Principles of Psychology was half-hearted or a sham, disingenuously masking a barely-concealed "spookiness." It would be more accurate to say that the younger James wrestled with his own conventionalism and the prejudices of his scientific training-- we shouldn't forget that he held an M.D. and that he worked in the field as a practicing scientist with Louis Agassiz' Brazil expedition-- and sought to balance it by cultivating an appreciation of "spookiness" in the experience of others which was not wholly native to his own spontaneous expression and temper. His peculiar brand of naturalism is more strongly akin to that of an Emerson than to the scientism and positivism of most self-avowed naturalists in our time. James was no Concord Transcendentalist, but he had that Emersonian purity of heart which instinctively exults in the experience of mystery and is prepared to admit that while we are intimately of nature, not foreign to it but related by "consanguinity," we are also "as much strangers in nature as we are aliens from God. We do not understand the notes of birds..."[19] But some know more of 'birdsong' than others, and know more of the occasional impulse to render life's music without words.

Yet a Jamesian naturalist revels also in the experience of discovery, not as mystery's rival but as its natural complement. The reconciliation of science and religion lies, if anywhere, in mutual respect for variable personal experience combined with fidelity to its shared natural conditions. A Jamesian is committed to both, and so can echo biologist Richard Dawkins' sentiment that "the feeling of awed wonder that science can give us is one of the highest experiences of which the human psyche is capable... a deep aesthetic passion to rank with the finest that music and poetry can deliver."20 But Jamesians may also have the advantage here, in their principled repudiation of reflexive hostility towards supernaturalism. It, too, they allow, may fire passions which are natural and real. Or, as Emerson wrote in Nature:

> The best-read naturalist... will see that there remains much to learn of his relation to the world, and that it is not to be learned by any addition or subtraction or other comparison of known quantities, but is arrived at by untaught sallies of the spirit...[21]

This Emersonian regard for nature as realized in spontaneous, personal, endlessly idiosyncratic human form distinguishes Jamesian naturalism from the misanthropic visions of many a naturalist. The poet Robinson Jeffers spoke of our "wild swan of a world," and evidently meant by it a world fundamentally indifferent to human needs and demands. But nature and culture are not antipodal for James. Some elemental part of us is indeed irretrievably wild ("game-flavored as a hawk's wing," James liked to say), but the domesticated and occasionally civil human animal is of nature, too. Poetry is of nature. Jeffers wrote: "I hate my verses, every line, every word."[22] James, too, lapsed into moments when just such sentiments escaped his breast. But notice, he always resumed philosophizing (as the poet always returned to verse).

Footnotes

1 Jacques Barzun, *A Stroll With William James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

2 Ronald B. Schwartz, *For the Love of Books: 115 Celebrated Writers on the Books They Love Most* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1999), 15.

3 Henry James, editor, *The Letters of William James*, in two volumes (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920) Volume I, 152-3.

4 William James, *William James: Writings 1902-1910* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 132.

5 Ibid., 133.

6 Ibid., 1157.

7 Letters II, 149.

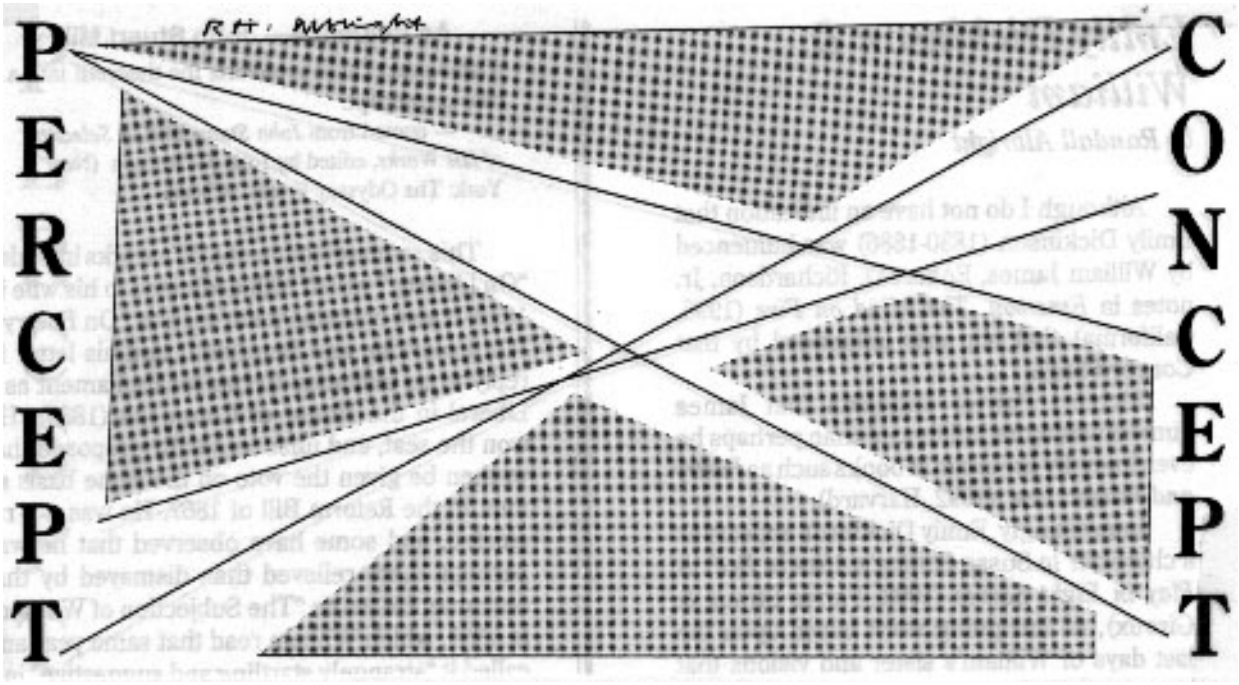
8 *William James, Writings 1902-1910,* 762.

9 Ibid, 990.

10 Judith Rich Harris, *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

11 Emerson: *Essays and Lectures* (Library of America, 1983), 971. Emerson's rhetorical question is from *Conduct of Life* ("Power"), 1860. The contervailing caution: "I suffer whenever I see that common sight of a parent or senior imposing his opinion and way of thinking and being on a young soul to which they are totally unfit. Cannot we let people be themselves, and enjoy life in their own way? You are trying to make... another you. One's enough." Ralph Waldo Emerson: Complete Writings (New York: Wm. H.

Wise & Co., 1929), 988.
12 *William James, Writings 1902-1910*, 891-2.
13 *Letters II*, 251.
14 Ibid.
15 *William James, Writings 1902-1910*, 1239.
16 John McDermott, addressing the first annual "Summer Institute for American Philosophy" in Burlington, Vermont in July 1998, criticized James's quake reactions as "obscene" and, with other observations in On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings, suggestive of "value-blindness." Notwithstanding my utmost respect for McDermott's wisdom, and unbounded gratitude for his Herculean contributions to the cause of American Philosophy, I must respectfully and emphatically disagree.
17 William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 6.
18 Ibid., 148.
19 Emerson: *Essays and Lectures*, 41-42.
20 Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite of Wonder* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), x.
21 Emerson: *Essays and Lectures*, 43. Andrew Fiala says if we recognize, with Emerson, that "nature is still elsewhere," beyond the poet's words and the philosopher's theories, we may regain some respect for nature as that which continually exceeds our attempts to grasp her."--"Nature is Still Elsewhere: Pragmatic Ecology and the Poetry of Nature," presented to the annual conference of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy in Eugene, Oregon, February 26, 1999.
22 Robinson Jeffers, "Love the Wild Swan," in *A Comprehensive Anthology of American Poetry* (New York: Modern Library, 1944), 357.



"Percepts and concepts interpenetrate and melt together, impregnate and fertilize each other. Neither, taken alone, knows reality in its completeness. We need them both, as we need both our legs to walk with."

—William James, from the "Percept and Concept" chapter in
Some Problems of Philosophy (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 52-53.

Philosophical Terms, William, & Charles Peirce

by Randall Albright

"Tychism" accounts for the element of chance in reason. "Synechism" emphasizes continuity in explanation.

Tychism and synechism are further defined in *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary* (1991). Charles Sanders Peirce's usages of these terms are noted in that dictionary.

In a letter that William sent to Peirce, dated December 22, 1897, he expresses his disappointment that Charles is "sticking so to formal logic" as Peirce is preparing a lecture series to be delivered at Harvard. William suggests that Charles is not thinking in terms of a lecture which more than a few people could understand, asks him to "think a more popular plan out," and warns that the current state of Peirce's ideas "ought to be printed for the scattered few." James also says in the letter that he personally would like to see the following issues addressed in the series:

> What I should like is anti-nominalism, categories, attraction of ideas, hypothesis, tychism and synechism.

Nominalism is defined in this same version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a belief in abstractions and universal concepts which have no relationship, in and of themselves, to reality.

Despite William's criticism of Charles in this letter, as well as unknowingly calling him "some old fogy" to his brother Henry in a letter (August 20, 1891) in response to Peirce's unsigned review of *The Principles of Psychology* in the July 2 and 9, 1891 issues of *The Nation*, William was a supporter of Charles and his work on a number of levels, including financial aid. He acknowledged in his Pragmatism (1906) lectures that the term was "first introduced into philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878" and went on to name Peirce's "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" article in the January issue of that same year in Popular Science Monthly as an inspiration for James' own title of the Pragmatism lecture series.[1]

However, Charles was not pleased with how William had broadenned the use of his term, and re-named his own pragmatism to "pragmaticism" as a way to keep it safe from future hijacking.

Charles's objections did not stop William from continuing to champion his friend, however. As late as A Pluralistic Universe, William suggested to people interested in Henri Bergson's work that they might find it was "altogether congruous" with earlier work done by Peirce, "tho reached so differently."[2]

Footnotes

1 William James, *Pragmatism* (1907); [Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1991 edition], 23.

2 William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 398-399.

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—Randall Albright

William James

by Alice Boughton (1902)

Meeting William James

by Greg Stone

I should have met William James when I was seventeen. At that time I had finished a brief fling trying to understand Plato and Descartes. My conclusion was that rationality was too limited a tool to uncover truth. It's great for theorems but lousy for postulates. Despite three or four college philosophy classes, philosophy seemed to me to be a mere intellectual pastime, a hobby or recreational activity.

Around the age of forty, I had an epiphany. I suddenly saw that I had completely misunderstood the value of philosophy. Asking whether Aristotle or Nietzsche is more true is like asking whether Bach or Mozart is more true. I stopped looking for answers and started looking for philosophers whose ideas resonated with me; I was now looking for an artist rather than an authority. I read some general surveys starting with Durant's *The Story of Philosophy* and started following the philosophers who "struck sparks." Heraclitus, Vico, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Powys seemed to speak to me directly at times. The few references to William James that I encountered left little impression.

Then two years ago, I read Kaye Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind*. In this compelling and frank memoir, she mentions *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as one of the foundational books in her life. I was so impressed with An Unquiet Mind that I immediately obtained a copy of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. More recently, this time based on Harold Bloom's recommendation, I read *Pragmatism*. In both cases, much of the reading was slow going but I found it riveting. I think I've found "my guy."

Why William James? When I was a kid, I read the following joke in Boys Life: Jim was walking down the street one night when he came across his friend Bill on his hands and knees beneath a street lamp. "What are you doing?" asked Jim. "I'm trying to find my quarter," Bill answered. "I was walking down the street flipping it and, as I passed the fire hydrant, I missed and I didn't see where it bounced." Jim looked at the fire hydrant and shook his head, "That's fifty feet away. It's pretty unlikely that it bounced this far. Why are you looking here instead of where you dropped it?" "Because," Bill replied, "the light's better here."

One of the legacies of Western culture is that we're so enamored with our shiny tools: logic, mathematics, the scientific method, we tend to deny the value of anything that these tools are unsuited for. By and large we bask in the light and pretend that the darkness is insignificant or nonexistent. A vocal minority, that knows the darkness well, ascribes meager value to the light because it illuminates so little of the experiential landscape of human existence.

The first group is led by the metaphysicians, the second group by the poets. It seems to me that William James holds these two groups (mind and heart?) in their proper place. He affirms the crucial value of our scientific and philosophical tradition while acknowledging that there is much outside its scope. Precisely because he understands the limits of rationalism, he extends its power in unique ways. And, because he writes with the honesty and discernment of a poet, he offers direct access to knowledge that runs deeper than intellectual understanding.

William James offers me access in a more fundamental way. He has the skill, and takes the trouble, to meet me where I am and patiently lead me, step by step, into his world. His bedrock decency and respect for others, makes me feel welcome. His invitation to partake of his hard won wisdom is, ultimately, an act of love which I gratefully accept.

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Howard Gardner & William

by Randall Albright

Howard Gardner has worked with a number of issues which have Jamesian echoes. Beyond his many books, such as *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (1993), as well as teaching at the Education School of Harvard University, Gardner has also been employed by innovative directors of art museums suffering from lagging attendance, low staff morale, and dwindling endowments. In trying to figure out how to "re-invent" these museums without literally re-inventing their collections, Gardner's suggestions seem to have helped turn around the low ebb of fortunes in at least some of these institutions.

A director such as Malcolm Rogers at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, might also think that what Gardner said simply makes common sense. Rogers, for example, has concentrated on the strength of what the Museum has, instead of trying to make it into something which it is not (at least not overnight). The museum is weak in modern and contemporary art, but strong in both American and Impressionist Art. Although the Museum is also one of the strongest in its Asian art collections, Rogers also knows what sells, at least in New England: the *Monet in the Twentieth Century* blockbuster exhibit brought in many new visitors, and because, under his stewardship, the price for admission and an additional fee to the exhibition could be considered high, the show also brought in a vastly increased membership base. Similarly, the Spring 1999 *Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman* show envisions Cassatt not as someone hopelessly Victorian and out of touch with the needs of today, but as someone whose art is in a way transcendent, and speaks to our current condition as well as draws us into what her own conditions were.

Gardner, Rogers, and others are working on a multi-fold task, and it is paying off, literally, for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which has seen its endowment grow significantly during Rogers's brief tenure there.

The task also has some Jamesian ramifications. For example, James is famous for talking about "habit," but is often forgotten for his call to try to break out of habit occasionally to see things from fresh perspective. This is necessary both from the presentation's point of view as well as the spectator. A merely perfunctory performance of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* is not going to excite people the way someone like Simon Rattle can, at times. Neither can a fresh presentation be effective if the viewer is not anticipating a new approach, on the other hand.

> "Genius, in truth, means little more than the faculty of perceiving in an unhabitual way... Only what we partly know already inspires us with a desire to know more."
>
> —William James, from the "Perception" chapter, *Psychology, The Briefer Course* (1892) [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press edition, 1985] 195, 196.

When I recently went to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, a group of docents brought us in front of what are, to me, some very familiar objects, such as Rembrandt's self-portrait. But instead of launching into an explanation of the self-portrait and other objects such as Titian's *The Rape of Europa*, they asked us: "What do you see in this picture?" before giving any information, themselves. One assurance, with the initial reactions, was to not be afraid if we viewers contradicted each other, and also to allow the insight of one viewer to build another insight, or to take a slightly different tack. Only when the docents built a certain amount of momentum did they allow themselves to help "fill in the blanks," such as Rembrandt's age when he painted his portrait, whether he would have been able to afford those clothes at that time (he was very young), or why he would have painted himself in such a way for his prospective patrons. In the meantime, we viewers were able to look at something in at least some unhabitual ways that stretched my imagination as well as appreciation of the painting.

Ironically, as William James's name continues to be neglected or under-appreciated in favor of other more recent thinkers in fields such as psychology and education, he also talks about similar issues. For example, in "Chapter VII, What The Native Reactions Are" in *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (1899), James talks about utilizing a student's instincts and natural impulses to develop an affection for learning. If somebody has a hobby with stamp, shell, map or drawing collections, that is a great first step in understanding what interests them.[1]

There are many good tips in both *Talks to Students* and *Talks to Teachers* that I think are still relevant to today's needs, be they in art museums or in schools, and show the limits of what some may know as a "New Historicist" approach to James as well as the power of transcendence in his ideas from 100 years ago.

Footnote

1 re-printed in *William James, Writings 1902-1910* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 746.

James and Emerson: A Humanistic Affinity

by William Hoyt

It is hardly stretching to call William James and Ralph Waldo Emerson the two greatest thinkers that our country has yet to produce—even the third greatest, John Dewey, thought so. And their profound impact abroad notwithstanding, they were and remain ours. Seeking to raise America to what they believed was her rightful place upon the world's cultural high ground, they relished the occasion when they could impose the vitality of the American spirit upon the encrusted traditions of her kinsmen on the Continent. And they encouraged their fellow countrymen to do the same. Just as Emerson asserted to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard in 1837 that "we have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe,"[1] James, as Gifford Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh several decades later, remarked similarly: "It seems the natural thing for us to listen whilst the Europeans talk."[2] (Though quite gracious, James never could resist irony.)

Both of these men shared a similar "demanding optimism:" a strong commitment to expressions of individualism, while stressing the great personal responsibility this entailed; the belief that thought is the handmaid of action; and the hope, if not the conviction, that the future of mankind holds promise. Yet, this being the case, one would expect to find in James's writings, the work of a man who was nearly forty years Emerson's junior, a greater expression of his affinity towards the revered Concord sage. However, although he was undoubtedly influenced by Emerson's thought, any definitive acknowledgement by him on this score is conspicuously absent. Rather, while he was respectful of the man in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James makes an earnest attempt to expose what he found to be fundamentally superficial aspects of Emerson's transcendentalist beliefs. It was his feeling that because Emerson's character was too "regal," Emerson failed to recognize the deeper significance of a man's moral conversion. As a result, James judged his work by default as failing to encompass a wider range of human experience.

Why was this the case? In order for us to grasp fully the import of James's pragmatic philosophy, we must first make our acquaintance with the man behind it. In what may be considered an invitation to take this step, James himself claims: "Of whatever temperament a professional philosopher is, he tries when philosophizing to sink the fact of his temperament."[3] It is my belief that in so doing, he was thoroughly successful. Accordingly, this paper will seek to accomplish the following: first, to examine the influences which James was subjected to in his private life; secondly, to note their significant impact upon what we are left to regard as his philosophical temperament; and, lastly, to show through textual evidence that despite his expressed antipathy towards transcendentalism, James was actually more closely aligned to the philosophy of Emerson than he was willing, or able, to allow.

As Cushing Strout argues in his excellent essay, "William James and the Twice-Born Sick Soul:"

> James's own struggle for forming a personal identity and finding his proper vocation was acute. His growth to greatness was precarious and painful, vulnerable to chronic debility, depression, and distress. James's theory of the great man has one conspicuous weakness: It does not cover himself.[4]

And, furthermore, he adds that "what James needed to round out his theory of the great man was an ordered way of talking about the inner history of the great man's relation to himself and to the significant others in his family."[5] While it must be granted that James himself belonged to the "highest order of minds," that type of person who exhibits the least amount of reflexive behavior in response to his environment, it must also be admitted that his unique approach to the world about him was hardly what we might call "spontaneous." On the contrary, his opportunity to introduce the world to his "seething cauldron of ideas" was a hard-fought battle, indeed. As Strout notes, it was the "achievement of a personality threatened by imminent disorganization."[6]

For its first fifty-seven years, William James's life was never, truly, his own. So pervasive was the influence of his father, Henry Sr., that, following the latter's death in 1882, seventeen years needed to pass before James could finally pursue what he felt to be his true calling without the overwhelming burden of a guilty conscience. It was at the age of 23, while on a scientific expedition in Brazil with Louis Agassiz, when he realized that he was "cut out for a speculative rather than an active life." Accordingly, he resolved that, upon his return, "[he] was going to study philosophy all of [his] days."[7] Regrettably, this was not to be the case.

As his father had willed it, much of his life was to be a scientific one. This is not to say, however, that he was ever able to embrace it. He once confided to a friend: "I am about as little fitted by nature to be a worker in science of any sort as anyone can be, and yet . . . my only ideal of life is a scientific life."[8] So great was his need to please his father that it seemed as if nothing was too miserable for him to endure if only he received the older man's praise. In addition, as painful as it must have been for him, James was also forced to accept the fact that his mother had taken a special lik-

ing to his younger brother, Henry. Unsurprisingly, as Strout remarks, "because Henry was obviously the mother's favorite, it was especially important for William to feel that he was in good standing with his father."[9]

It is interesting to note here that James initially desired to become a painter. He loved to draw as a child and the pleasure he derived from creative expression persisted as he matured. Even so, his father had other plans for him. Having broken away from the dogmatic Calvinist faith in which he was reared, Henry Sr. was a metaphysician and theologian who found great inspiration in the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, the early eighteenth-century mystic, and in turn devoted his life to such religious study. However, like most of us, he had misgivings over his choice of careers. As he once wrote to Emerson, expressing his consternation:

> What shall I do? Shall I get me a little nook in the country and communicate with my *living* kind, not my talking kind—by life only—a word, may be, of *that* communication, a fit word, once a year? Or shall I follow some commoner method, learn science and bring myself first into men's respect, that thus I may better speak to them? I confess this last theory seems rank with earthliness—to belong to days forever past.[10]

One may deduce from these comments that by directing his son, William, towards a career in the sciences, Henry's dilemma would through his son be resolved. Explaining thus to a friend: "I hoped that his career would be a scientific one . . . and to give up this hope without a struggle, and allow him to tumble down into a mere painter, was impossible."[11] As we shall see, this decision was to have a resounding impact upon the younger James for the rest of his life. Here, Strout illuminates this for his reader:

> The basic clue to understanding [William] James's search for a vocation is provided by Erikson's remark in *Young Man Luther* that it is usually a parent, who has 'selected this one child, because of an inner affinity paired with an insurmountable outer distance, as the particular child who must *justify the parent,'* that by an 'all-pervasive presence and brutal decisiveness of judgment' precipitates the child into a 'fatal struggle for his own identity.[12]

And so, in the thirty years which he spent dutifully leading a scientific life following his enrollment in the Lawrence Scientific School in Cambridge in 1861, it is evident that, for James, Luther's struggle became his own.

There can be no doubt that James's identity-crisis played a large part in creating the symptoms of illness which his mother dismissed as mere quirks of his "morbidly hopeless" temperament. For years, he complained of "digestive disorders, eye troubles, acute depression, and weakness of the back."[13] As Strout sees it, early on in his career, "William's back and eye trouble provided him with an excuse not to practice medicine."[14] However, as was mentioned previously, his intense need to meet his father's expectations for him enabled him to persevere, though he continued to be plagued with thoughts of suicide for some time. Again, this much is clear: his life was not his own. He did not want to be studying science. One can only imagine the inner turmoil he was experiencing as he continued down this path. He was so miserable that there really cannot be any wonder that his health was so greatly affected. Even after his acclaimed two-volume course, *Principles of Psychology*, was published in 1890, he failed to derive any real satisfaction from his work. As Strout notes: "He spent twelve years on the book, delivering it at last like a man relieved of a kidney stone."[15] Whether or not he fully meant it, James wrote to an admirer who wished to read it: "Seriously, your determination to read that fatal book is the one flaw in an otherwise noble nature. I wish that I had never written it."[16]

In the late 1890's, James was finally able to free himself from his scientific work and attend to the philosophy which he had continued to read voraciously since his twenties. However, the protracted struggle against his father's wishes had taken their toll. Generated after years of agonizing over his lack of autonomy, James's pragmatic philosophical writings bear the scars of an emotional battlefield. In his essay, "Pragmatism and Religion," he writes:

> May not religious optimism be too idyllic? . . . Is all 'yes, yes' in the universe? Doesn't the fact of 'no' stand at the very core of life? Doesn't the very 'seriousness' we attribute to life mean that ineluctable noes and losses form a part of it, that there are genuine sacrifices somewhere, and that something permanently drastic and bitter always remains at the bottom of its cup?[17]

It is obvious that such bitterness was something he felt acutely. His mind had been shaped by conflict and, consequently, the "noes and losses" of life had become for him irrevocably internalized. That is not to say, however, that he was without hope. After all, he had triumphed in a sense—he *was* a philosopher. Indeed, it may also be said with equal warrant that much of his philosophy resonates with a tone of personal success. The French philosopher, Renouvier, made a note of this in a letter to James: "Your thinking springs from a source that is original and profound, and bears the stamp of what you yourself feel—of something that comes, indeed, from your very self."[18]

Of course, for James, this was only natural. Even in his early life, he claimed that he was "tending strongly to an empiristic view of life."[19] And, moreover, he believed that one of the greatest philosophical tasks was "to get at something absolute without going out of your own skin!"[20]

Accordingly, the pragmatic system which he later developed retained these sentiments by providing a practical approach to problems encountered in actual human experience. Not being content with merely abstract solutions, his primary concern was what *difference* it would make if this or that theory were true—As he liked to ask, "What was its cash-value?" In his mind, as soon as a theory fell back upon abstractions it became a closed case. There can be no doubt that such dogmatizing left him feeling claustrophobic. (Before his father discovered Swedenborg, James himself received a heavy dose of Calvinist theology.) Rather, James required, and rejoiced in, the fresh air of possibility in his life. His freedom from the stranglehold of science had changed him. He found that he had "live" options—that he could choose the direction his life was to take. Understandably, although his morbid feelings did not simply vanish, even his health improved. As Strout writes:

> Two weeks after hearing of his father's death, he wrote his brother Henry that he felt a 'different man' and was resolved to return home to his wife and children, amazed that a 'change of weather could effect such a revolution.[21]

In brief, James was a man who, as Erikson claims, felt "'called upon' to 'try to solve for all what he could not solve for himself alone."[22]

Turning now to the major themes of James's pragmatic thought, we shall see that the issues to which he devoted the most energy are those, which, again, held the greatest personal significance for him. And insofar as one's religious attitude—in James's own sense of the term—may best serve as an indicator of how that individual looks upon life in general, *Varieties of Religious Experience* will serve as the basis for this discussion. Indeed, its central thesis, "that individual religious experiences, rather than the precepts of organized religions, are the backbone of the world's religious life," addresses all of the core elements of James's pragmatic philosophy in its development—namely, the practical significance of ideas, the nature of truth (religious or otherwise), the "will to believe," the universe as an open, "melioristic" system, and the significance of the "strenuous life."

For James, the task of writing *Varieties* was viewed as the "carrying-out of a pledge." As Marty informs us: "He once promised his father that someday he would deal in a sustained way with religion."[23] In 1883, James wrote to his wife:

> You must not leave me till I understand a little more of the value and meaning of religion in Father's sense, in the mental life and destiny of man. It is not the one thing needful, as he said. But it is needful with the rest. My friends leave it out altogether. I as his son (if for no other reason) must help it to its rights in their eyes.[24]

As James did not fulfill his perceived filial obligation until twenty years after his father passed away, it is clear that the older man's influence persisted even beyond the grave. However, it may also be noted that the earlier years of conflict had given way, in James's mind, to a feeling of virtual vindication before his father. As he had clearly held the subjects of philosophy and religion in higher esteem than medicine, it is likely that Henry Sr. would have been quite pleased with his son's efforts, especially since they retained much of his own spirit. He himself once said: "Well, I take it, God is in one person quite as much as another."[25] And so, from this, in his characteristically systematic way, his son took pains to show that this was indeed the case.

Again, as we shall see, the pragmatic philosophical legacy which James left for us addresses each and all of the major concerns that he acquired from his personal struggles within the sphere of his family relationships, especially those stemming from his dealings with his father. From the outset, he advocated the eradication of dogmatism from our intellectual, moral, and religious life. In turn, he replaced its constraining presence with a strong advocacy for autonomy. Further, in relation to this, he stressed the legitimacy of one's private beliefs while emphasizing the importance of acting upon them. And, finally, he noted the importance of our resolving or moving beyond conflict once it is recognized.

Returning to his work itself, we find in the postscript of *Varieties* James's encapsulation of his sentiments concerning the "cash-value" of the "God" experience. He argues thus:

> The appearance is that in this phenomenon something ideal, which in one sense is part of ourselves and in another sense is not ourselves, actually exerts an influence, raises our centre of personal energy, and produces regenerative effects unattainable in other ways.[26]

And how ever the determinate conceptions which arise from this phenomenon may vary, James brings them all together under this rubric of experience. Whether or not people realize it, he might say, God works for us. It is this truly clever inversion which Pro-

fessor Leuba expresses so well:

> The truth of the matter can be put in this way: *God is not known, he is not understood; he is used*—sometimes as meat-purveyor, sometimes as moral support, sometimes as friend, sometimes as the object of love. If he proves himself useful, the religious consciousness asks for no more than that. Does God really exist? How does he exist? What is he? are so many irrelevant questions. Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is, in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse.[27]

For James, any explanation beyond this account, any intellectualizing of its content, is purely secondary from an objective standpoint. Of course, he acknowledges our human predilection for doing just the thing, what he calls the promulgation of "over-beliefs," but he asserts further that such theorizing seeks only to validate the initial impulse. Ultimately, though, he finds that a belief in the existence of God, in whatever form it may take, allows for a bit of sweetness to mingle with the "bitter at the bottom of life's cup" and, thereby, to create hope.

As we may find in his other writings, James's notion of over-beliefs is closely linked with his theory of the nature of truth. In his essay, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," he makes this statement:

> *True ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those we cannot.* That is the practical difference it makes to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as.[28]

It must be noted, however, that the words 'validate' and 'verify' have a special connotation for James. As used within the scope of his pragmatism, they refer to nothing other than the "practical consequences" of ideas—i.e., whether or not they "agree" with an individual's subsequent experience. In brief, 'truth' is, for James,

> something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us towards other moments which it will be worthwhile to have been lead to. Primarily, and on the common-sense level, the truth of a state of mind means this function of a *leading that is worth while.*[29]

It is here that the value of over-beliefs in religion becomes evident. Developing as they do according to the peculiar disposition of each person, they provide the means by which an individual may fix his initial "impulse" to the various systems of truth preexisting in his mind. As James was fond of saying, a religious belief should be judged by its "fruits," not its "roots." Insofar as our over-beliefs allow us to 'grab hold' of the religious experience and lead better lives, they are valuable. He writes: "In other words, not its origin, but *the way it works on the whole,* is Dr. Maudsley's final test of a belief."[30] And so, in this respect, we see that "these ideas will thus be essential to that individual's religion;—which is as much to say that over-beliefs in various directions are absolutely indispensable, and that we should treat them with tenderness and tolerance so long as they are not intolerant themselves."[31]

While, at this point, James's subjectivizing of truth may be objectionable to some, he makes an eloquent defense of his theory in his essay, "The Will to Believe." Although his detractors have derived seemingly endless pleasure in making puns on its "unfortunate" title—"The Will to Make-Believe" and "The Will to Deceive" among others—in actuality it is a sober argument in support of an individual's right to believe in a notion if it cannot be *dis*-proved by the available objective evidence. He makes it one of his points to show that our "nonintellectual" nature plays a large role in deciding what our convictions will be. Clearly, as we have just seen, our over-beliefs in religion are founded upon insights from such a region. Hence, James argues:

> Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, 'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a passional decision—just like deciding yes or no—and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.[32]

In his mind, our frequent inability to find apodictic grounds for deciding questions of "momentous" import, such as in questions of religious truth, *justifies* our founding our belief upon the inclinations of "what Pascal calls the heart." And so, away with dogmatism, for the jury on these matters is not yet in. And though we shall resort to "trusting our own lights" at our own peril, James reassures us that, in these cases, there are "worse things than being duped."[33] For him, it is far more important that we possess the courage to act and, perhaps, make our lives take a turn for the better. From *Varieties:* "Knowledge about life is one thing; effective occupation of a place in life, with its dynamic currents passing through your being, is another."[34]

This belief, that our lives may actually be improved by our actions, lies at the heart of James's conception of an open, "melioristic" universe. A humanistic vision, it puts the future of the world into the hands of agents such as ourselves. And while its salvation in not guar-

anteed under this system, it is certainly possible. As James had said, taken within this scope, our lives are seen to contain the chance for real success, real failure, real risk, and real triumph. In "Pragmatism and Religion, " he writes:

> Our lives, our turning-places, where we seem to ourselves to make ourselves and grow, are the parts of the world to which we are closest, the parts of which our knowledge is most intimate and complete. Why should we not take them at their face-value? Why may they not be the actual turning-places and growing-places which they seem to be, of the world—why not the workshop of being, where we catch fact in the making, so that nowhere may the world grow in any other way than this.[35]

This attitude, which plays upon the "will-to-believe" in the deepest sense, serves as the determining factor in James's ultimate conception of God. Clearly, James had argued that such a belief is warranted provided that it satisfies the practical demands that were outlined earlier. As we shall see, the God which he finds in his melioristic universe is finite in stature.

As James viewed it, if the universe were truly static and complete, we would have no recourse to improve it. Moreover, we would be forced to accept whatever evil we saw to exist. And while he allowed that this evil may serve as a practical good at times, he argued that we could not hope to effect its elimination on even the smallest scale. Now, on the other hand, with the universe "open," as it were—with the possibility of its salvation hanging in the balances—our status as agents is greatly enhanced. Moreover, as the universe itself is unfinished, God comes to be viewed by James as a limited, temporal force who aids us in our quest for justice. In this scheme, he works with us, and through us, as his plan for his creation is gradually realized. From *A Pluralistic Universe:*

> 'God' in the religious lives of ordinary men, is the name, not for the whole of things, heaven forbid, but only the ideal tendency in things, believed in as a superhuman person who calls us to cooperate in his purposes, and who furthers ours if they are worthy. He works in an external environment, has limits, and enemies.[36]

Furthermore, as we perceive him to be the embodiment of our ideals, we find in him the security and the resource of hope which spurs us on to acting with conviction. In the conclusion of *Varieties,* we find just such an expression:

> Most religious men believe (or 'know' if they be mystical) that not only they themselves, but the whole universe of beings to whom God is present, are secure in his parental hands. . . . God's existence is the guarantee of an ideal order that shall permanently be preserved. The world may indeed, as science assures us, some day burn up or freeze; but if it is part of his order, the old ideals are sure to be brought elsewhere to fruition, so that where God is tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution are not the absolutely final things.[37]

An excellent example of an over-belief, James would argue that we must keep in mind that its significance for pragmatism derives from the fact that it allows us to move beyond an initial, subjective religious experience, for example, and "bring a *real hypothesis* into play."[38]

In *Pragmatism and Humanism,* Patrick Dooley's elaboration upon this point allows us to see better how it leads into what James called the "strenuous life:"

> Nevertheless, this assurance that a permanent moral order will be preserved does not remove us from the task of making that moral order concrete. In the end, belief in God practically changes the world through our actions. Though belief in God may indeed encourage us to adopt the strenuous mood, it is our efforts that will make the world's salvation an actuality.[39]

In its most remarkable form, the "strenuous mood" can be witnessed in the lives of the saints. As James explains, it is marked by a radical shift in one's "emotional center" from a primary concern for his- or herself to a "sovereign," "higher affection." In all cases, this conversion, whether it be gradual or sudden, is a direct consequence of the religious experience. In scholastic terminology, it is called a "state of grace." Given James's egalitarian approach to the subject, he was obviously less concerned with the particular over-beliefs attached to this mystical phenomenon than with its practical effects. And, for the saints, these effects are nothing less than heroic. As James notes, they bring "earnestness:"

> Earnestness means willingness to live with energy, though energy bring pain. The pain may be pain to other people or pain to one's self—it makes little difference; for when the strenuous mood is on one, the aim is to break something, no matter whose or what.[40]

Taking this statement in the context of his pragmatism as a whole, it is clear that he would never have acceded to the strenuous mood's being used as an excuse for wanton violence. Rather, as he likely viewed it from his own personal perspective, James is asserting only that this renewed sense of power allows an

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—William Hoyt is a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at the Catholic University of America. This piece represents the first 2 sections of a paper that he wrote on James and Emerson for a seminar at Boston College, from which he received a Masters in philosophy. The last section of this paper will be printed in the Summer issue of Streams of William James. His e-mail address is WLHoyt@aol.com

Footnotes

1 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York, Modern Library, 1968), p. 62.
2 William James,*Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, Penguin Books, 1985), p. 1.
3 James, *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 11.
4 Dankwart A. Rustow (ed.), *Philosophers and Kings* (New York, G. Braziller, 1970), p. 492.
5 Rustow, p. 492.
6 Ibid., p. 492.
7 Ralph Barton Perry (ed.), *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston, Little-Brown, 1936), Vol. I, p. 220.
8 Ibid., p. 142.
9 Rustow, p. 500.
10 Perry, Vol. I., p. 43.
11 Ibid., p. 192.
12 Rustow, p. 498.
13 Ibid., p. 495.
14 Ibid., p. 495.
15 Ibid., p. 497.
16 Henry James (ed.), *Letters of William James* (Boston, Little-Brown, 1926), Vol. I, p. 304.
17 James, *Pragmatism*, p. 141.
18 Perry, Vol. I, p. 678.
19 Ibid., p. 516.
20 Ibid., p. 287.
21 Ibid., p. 503.
22 Ibid., p. 506.
23 James, *Varieties*, p. xiii.
24 Ibid., p. xiii.
25 Ibid., p. xi.
26 Ibid., p. 523.
27 James, *Varieties*, pp. 506-507.
28 James, *Pragmatism*, p. 97.
29 Ibid., p. 98.
30 James, *Varieties*, p. 19.
31 Ibid., p. 515.
32 James, *The Will to Believe* (New York, Dover, 1956), p. 11.
33 Ibid., p. 19.
34 James, *Varieties*, p. 489.
35 James, *Pragmatism*, p. 138.
36 James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York, Longmans, 1909), p. 311.
37 James, *Varieties*, p. 517.
38 Ibid., p. 517.
39 Patrick Dooley, *Pragmatism and Humanism* (Chicago, Nelson-Hall, 1974), p. 159.
40 James, *Varieties*, p. 264.

By Chance

[Tychism - see page 20 for definition]

by Randall Albright

Knowledge asks of these things: Who were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alice Boughton, Charles Renouvier, Leonora Piper, Gustav Fechner, Mrs. Montgomery Sears, that Brazilian Native American, Pauline Goldmark, or Tom Ward? And who were Alice Gibben or William James?

The price of an ever expanding universe of tolerance and understanding is being forever vigilant.

But is there an inherent "thing" beyond friendship, sacrificing one's self to a degree and living within a society as well as testing its bounds for different points of view, a creative and critical engagement that allows learning to be more than mere rote and routine?

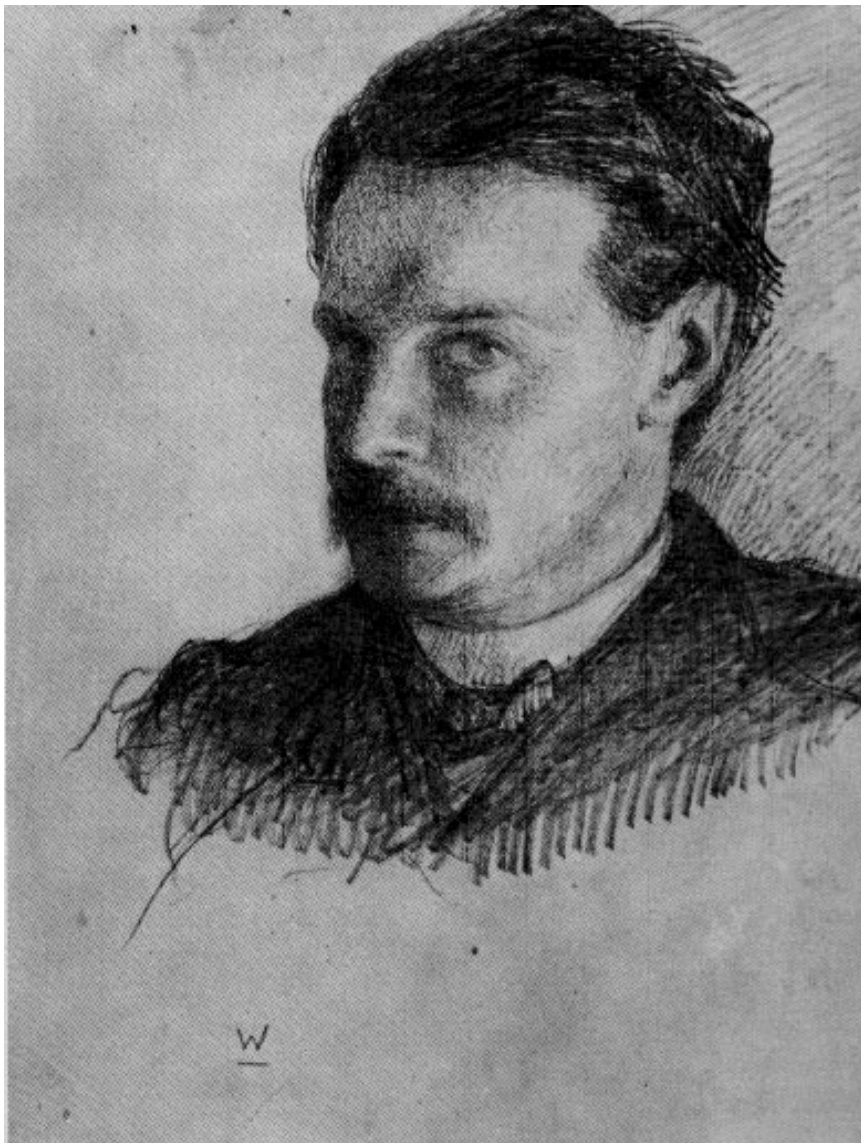
Knowledge asks so much of these things. But they do not become anything more than atomic particles and statistics. They do not become living, minute particulars of excitement and exuberance until one day, perhaps, when Ariel meets the Police. And Ariel finds that there are some good police and some bad police. And sometimes good police go bad, and vice versa. It's a question of habit and paying attention to what you believe is important.

But Ariel needs to police herself. And Ariel needs the good police. And the good police need Ariel, too.

"Where there is no vision the people perish. Few professorial philosophers have any vision. Fechner had vision, and that is why one can read him over and over again, and each time bring away a fresh sense of reality."

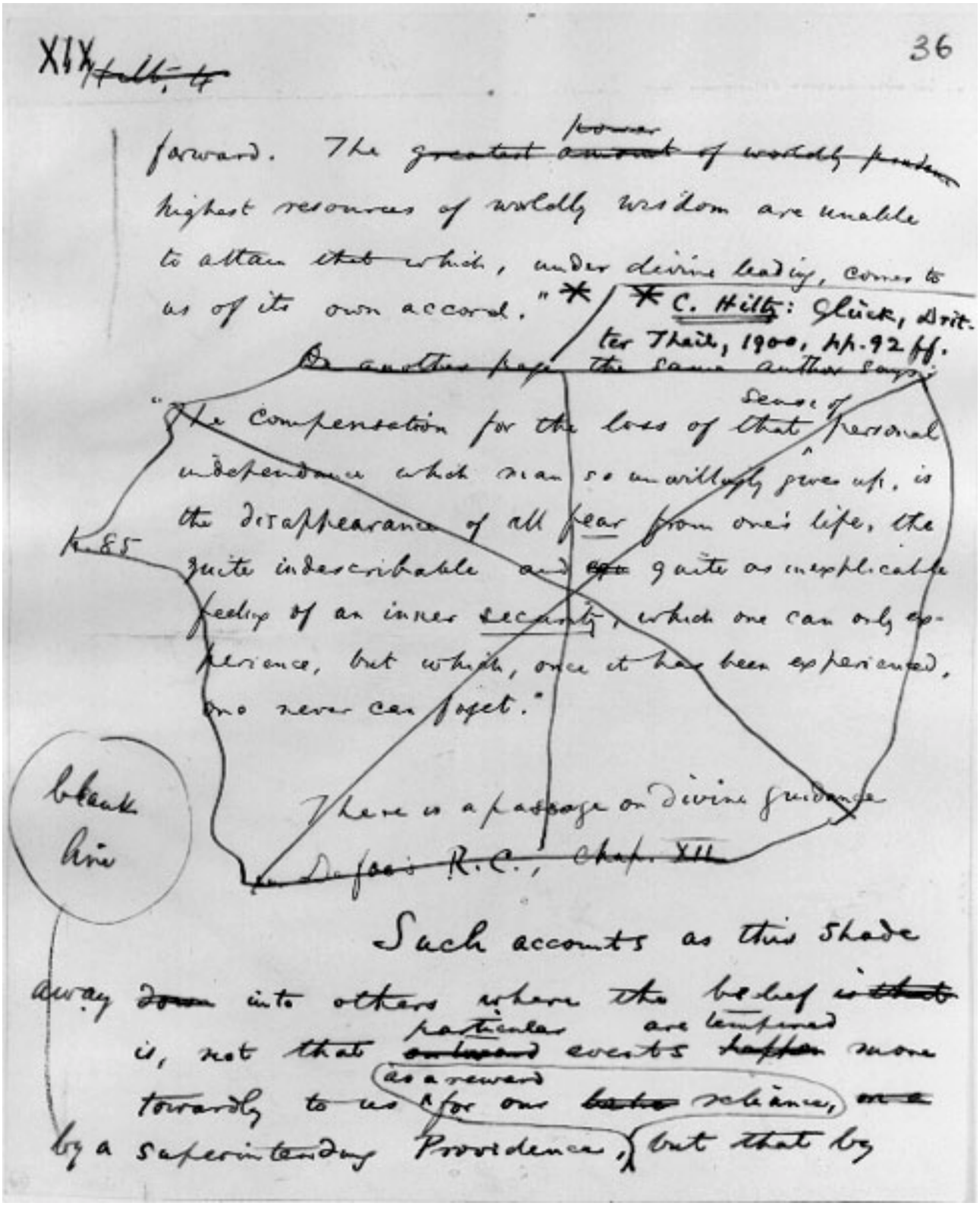
—William James, from the "Concerning Fechner" chapter,
A Pluralistic Universe
(New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 78.

And a possible footnote:
"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."
—*Proverbs 29:18, The Bible, King James Version*



Self-Portrait (1866)

by William James



Draft Manuscript Page from The Varieties of Religious Experience
by William James (later released in book form in 1902)

Emily Dickinson & William

by Randall Albright

Although I do not have an indication that Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was influenced by William James, Robert D. Richardson, Jr. notes in *Emerson, The Mind on Fire* (1995) that she was influenced by that Concord Sage.

Richard Poirier suggests that James himself was more influenced than perhaps he even knew by Emerson in books such as Poetry and Pragmatism (Harvard UP, 1992).

Interestingly, Emily Dickinson appears as a character in Susan Sontag's *Alice in Bed : A Play in Eight Scenes* (1993), an intriguing work based upon the last days of William's sister and visions that Sontag imagines Alice as having.

Terry Oggel suggested "This Was a Poet—It Is That" (448) by Dickinson in an e-mail response to the James Family List Serve in February 1999 to the question: "Why do people read William James's works?" In one of the earlier responses, Greg Stone noted how he personally came to know James through Kay Redfield Jamison's *The Unquiet Mind* (1995), and then movingly went on to tell how a poet heart-wrenchingly pulls issues forth. In reply to that, Oggel suggested this poem.

Perhaps it was the word "attar" in the poem that inspired Oggel to suggest it to the group.

A brief biographical note about Dickinson: only a few of her works were published in her lifetime. William James does not seem to have been familiar with her work.

Special thanks to Terry Oggel and Greg Stone for permission to cite their posts. The James Family List Serve is sponsored by Cheryl Torsney at West Virginia University. William, his brother Henry, his sister Alice, and his father, are among the family members that may be used as list topics.

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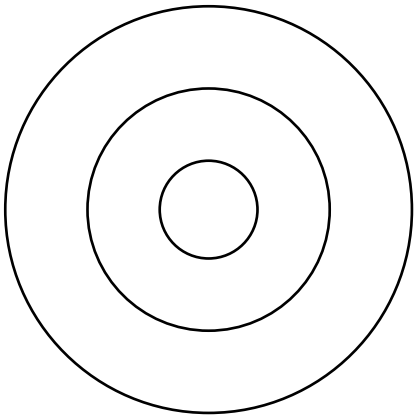

Special Thanks— and a Note

by Randall Albright

First, I want to thanks Cheryl Torsney for sponsoring the James Family List Serve. This Society and newsletter came about as a response from me, followed by others, in that forum.

Second, I want to thank all who contributed, in various ways, to this first issue of Streams of William James. I hope that this first issue, which is roughly twice the size of what I hope will be the quarterly's regular page length, will convey some sense of what a pluralistic William James newsletter can include, and spark contributions from all.

Many thanks again to those who made this dream a reality, and now—let's look ahead to Summer and to Fall!

Putting Aside Old Animosities:

An Account of an Evangelical Christian

by Ben Kilpela

For many of us who have been religious believers, the pragmatism of William James is a problem, not a solution—an irritant, not a salve. Surely, this should surprise no one, even those who have read James on religion for years. For what other first impression of the religious philosophy of James would be likely for a late-twentieth century American Evangelical Christian—a thoughtful, well-read person steeped in Evangelical apologetics (a booming field, still unknown to many) and seeking that oddly vague experience of a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ"? For most true believers, James wrote nonsense about religion. It's not that believers suppose that religion was unimportant to William James. No, clearly, he was held in thrall by the subject. But such of his sentiments as drew him to the topic give most religious believers cold comfort, for James failed, it seems, to adopt one of the lasting faiths, those religions of exclusivist creeds that have filled human history to the brim and, in our century, spread over the land like floods.

As you might have guessed, I was, at one time, one of those billions of true believers, and it is important to know that as we take a brief look at what James has meant to my life and thought. For any seeker comes to any thinker from some place, and knowing where the seeker began the journey can help you understand that seeker's response to James. My former religious faith is common in contemporary America (much more common than perhaps many people realize): Evangelical Christianity. Perhaps, you know the system: the one that produces the Born-Again believers. I held to strong views (and carefully defined views) on the Virgin Birth, on the bodily Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, on the final authority of Holy Scripture, on salvation from damnation to hell by grace through Jesus the Christ, God Incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. For the sake of brevity, I'll stop with that one sentence description of my starting point with James. Just describing such a belief system is daunting, let alone relating it to James's study of religion.

My encounter with William James began, as it does for many, with "The Will to Believe." That first grapple with James was vexing. Who was this simpleton, touted as the great American philosopher, who reduced faith to a series of strategic decisions? Does the Christian believe in the way this essay describes? God forbid, for the believer *knows* Christ and Him crucified. No need for appeals to "live" options or forced choices. I dismissed James with an easy wave and a condescending wink. This essay confirmed it, as it had for many believers: James is little more than a tiresome "new thinker," a liberal, relativist, or pluralist, not a thinker to be consulted on the big questions, or trusted for good answers. Did he have anything new to say about Jesus? Hardly. Did he believe in *The Bible*—alone? Clearly not. The ideas he offered in that famous essay seemed to be the seedbed of modernism, skepticism, pluralism, relativity, and liberality. Such doubts and waffling can't get to the need of man for salvation. "Christ lives!" the believers answer. I deemed ideas about live options and forced decisions as dangerous, for they leave people in their sin. James's ideas are not, for most Evangelicals, live options. The only live option is Jesus Christ as revealed in *The Bible*. It seemed a shallow, unattractive way of calling a person to faith by calling him to a leap toward that which can't be affirmed or denied with certainty. The believers believe that God has left no one in the dark. Christian faith is truth, not guess-work, not strategic gambling, weighing odds. For Evangelical Christians, the James of this essay could be seen as no more than a source of irritation, a silly nuisance in the philosophical world. What did he have to contribute to the great debates about the Resurrection, the authority of *The Bible*, or the existence of God? These were settled issues, well-defended questions, in the eyes of the Evangelicals. There was no need to turn to the weak, insipid defense of faith that James offered, since Jesus stood ready for us all.

Ah, but look who join the liturgists against James: the scientists, the materialists, the atheists, too. For who among them wants to admit that "live" options exist for religious faith and hope? That the freedom to believe exists? And who among them wants to admit that there is no certainty to their "systems" of thought? No, religion is gone. The method of Bacon has won the field. The King is dead, Long live the King!

But James drew me in. It was the contentious, raucous, unending debate about religion and meaning and morals and faith and ultimate truth itself—as it was, I believe, for James—that turned me back to him again, years after I read "The Will to Believe." The enduring intellectual conflicts of our world, the war between science and religion, between religion and religion, between innumerable systems of truth and ideas, came, for various reasons, to seem to me no closer to resolution than they had, say, when Luther said he could do no other or Darwin wrote about a new descent for man. For the Evangelical, the nagging question is often why those foolish "secular humanists" and scientists and modern philosophers just cannot see that Jesus is God and Christianity the one full and final truth, as it always has been. This question astounds the Christian, and it more than astounded me. The problem, what I call the problem of disagreement, infuriated me, as, I believe, it once nagged at James and many another American thinker trying to

"resolve" the conflict with new ways of thinking, from Jefferson to Christian liberalism.

In the course of events, I looked to James's *Pragmatism* for some hope to end this old, ugly, interminable battle for the one, final truth; and I, like so many Evangelicals and others like us of every stripe and persuasion—from the scientific to the New Age—came away even more irritated. Yet, though James's ideas about the "cash-value" of ideas, about believing in what "works," about psychics and religionists and mystics, appear foolish to Monists, they began to draw me in as I finally saw that our absolute and final systems simply cannot hide themselves from revision, emendation, or removal. The waves of disagreement keep tearing away at the land despite the sea-walls we build. It is on absolutes that most forms of Christianity and natural science and many other philosophical and religious systems maintain that they are founded upon, firmly, unwaveringly.

As he intended, James nags at those billions seeking the one, final truth. For the work of thought seems never to reach its end in perfect, inviolable truth, either in James's times or in ours. Who can miss this idea and the implications of it? At such a point, when the world to me seemed so filled with diversity as to be beyond comprehension, when people couldn't seem to pull together or think together or believe together in any space or on any level, then James sprang to mind and I began to credit his search for new ways of conducting philosophy and thinking about religion, of finding the "higher" truths. To me, all the competing systems begin to look a little frail, a little bent and splintered by the minds that produced them, as James points out in *Pragmatism*:

> The books of all the great philosophers are like so many men. Our sense of an essential personal flavor in each one of them, typical but indescribable, is the finest fruit of our accomplished philosophic education. What the system pretends to be is a picture of the great universe of God. What it is—and oh so flagrantly!—is the revelation of how intensely odd the personal flavor of some fellow creature is.
>
> —from "Lecture One: The Present Dilemma in Philosophy," *Pragmatism* (1907) [Amherst, NY: Prometheus edition] p. 19.

But the genius of James, I saw, was not to strive to destroy and replace all the frail systems, but to seek to put every one to work, for every one, in James's conception, might have cash-value, might prove useful, enjoyable, promising, or productive. There's the heart of the difference between the Monist and the Pluralist. The Monist continues to raise up new systems on the ruins of the old. The Pluralist looks to every system and every idea for new ways of understanding and living and continuing the pursuit to the next idea, and next flowering of system. As the exclusivist, Monist position of Christianity began to crumble for me, I still felt and saw the power of religion in human life and throughout our shared history, West and East. James honored this perception, for rather than turning on religious systems, James looked to them to learn something ever new about the world, to find new truths, and in that endeavor was the beauty and hope of his pragmatic enterprise.

Inspired by new ways of thinking about old matters and disillusioned by my once strong faith, I turned, naturally, to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, to see just what James had learned from religion, and, too, out of a certain desperation to find some way out of the mysteries and tangles of modern philosophical thought as they wound around the old systems, the religions and passions of the past. For I saw no way to reconcile all the systems competing for attention and adherents. And where was the cure for their animosity toward each other? In a new system? That hope was dead. Instead, James offered the prospect of stepping back and surveying the wide field of religious experience without regard to the usual boundaries and disciplines and definitions. He said he would look at human experience, and such a study must cross the lines of faith and thought, must bridge all the systems. And so it did. Yet more than this, it looked away from those old absolutes to the welter of experience. In that diversity, there can be hope for a new way of overcoming all the old difficulties that still trouble the modern mind.

I could go on at length about all this. But let me rather turn to the one passage from the *Varieties* that turned my life in a wholly new direction. It's from the "Conclusion", and it summarizes new ways of understanding religion that James hinted at throughout the *Varieties*:

> Ought it to be assumed that in all men the mixture of religion with other elements should be identical? Ought it, indeed, to be assumed that the lives of all men should show identical religious elements? In other words, is the existence of so many religious types and sects and creeds regrettable?
>
> To these questions I answer 'No' emphatically. And my reason is that I do not see how it is possible that creatures in such different positions and with such different powers as human individuals are, should have exactly the same functions and the same duties. No two of us have identical difficulties, nor should we be expected to work out identical solutions. Each, from his peculiar angle of observation, takes in a certain sphere of fact and trouble, which each must deal with in a unique manner.... Unquestionably, some men have the completer experience and the higher vocation, here just as in the social world; but for each man to stay in

his own experience, whate'er it be, and for others to tolerate him there, is surely best.

—first published in 1902 [New York: Penguin, 1982] p. 486-7.

In our times, such ideas have become commonplace, but seldom since James, when they were radical, have they been expressed with such clarity and conviction. But, remember, in the hands of an Evangelical Christian, they can change a life. As I first read these words, I was still playing a role in the long modern revival of Christianity in America, living in the midst of Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, movements which would so influence many away from any rapproachment with modern ideas, with diversity or with modern "liberal" thinking. Just a short time ago, anger and distrust still held the day, and they do so this very day in the Christian circles I once lived within.

Yet James's ideas directly and boldly address the problem of people disagreeing about everything under the sun, and especially about religious matters, a problem which, as I have suggested, troubled James deeply. He, like so many, found in the diversity of human thought and philosophical systems a bewildering display of uncertainty and changeability, the instability of all our human conceptions of reality. But the ideas expressed in the passage quoted above let me finally put aside the old animosities, the need I have always felt to prove someone else wrong, be that person a Calvinist or a Lutheran or a scientist or an atheist.

So, as a result of reading James, I could finally say with him (and begin to believe) that if a Calvinist were forced to be a Pluralist or a staunch Catholic were forced to be a materialist scientist, "the total human consciousness of the divine would suffer." Could I believe that? Could or should we all believe that? Should I honor views that I disagree with entirely, when I find so little credibility in the ideas and arguments of those who espouse them? The "Conclusion" to the *Varieties* has enabled me to take the first steps toward letting those I disagree with be what they see they need to be, to deal with their "certain sphere of fact and trouble" in their "unique manner."

Almost certainly, I realize (since people disagree about just about everything), this is not exactly your position, you who are reading this brief essay. You might not feel anything but disgust for someone like, say, a Fundamentalist Christian riffling the pages of his *Bible* for the one verse that will destroy your argument against him, but your disgust, in my view and James's, is the solution *you* have found to the difficulty *you* have seen, for this time of your life in the particular circumstances of your life. Moreover, the disgust you feel, in James's view (I believe), is also, strangely and almost paradoxically, part of the "total human consciousness of the divine," just as the Fundamentalist's rigidity, however disgusting to you, is, too. Trust me, I'm not trying to convince you my readers to do or think anything, to accept Fundamentalists or accept me or accept Calvinists in the way I have. I'm just laying out for view the way James's ideas have changed my life and made me much happier—much more at peace—at last.

For the exclusivist Evangelical Christian position never gave me peace like that which I found in James, and that is how I know, now, that it is not the solution to the difficulties I have seen. Yet, strangely, that same exclusivist position gives great peace to many other people whom I know very well. Even Fundamentalism has made men happy. With James, I affirm that as I have found a "worthy mission," in part, rejecting Evangelical Christianity, others have found theirs in accepting it. The momentous point, the cash-value of James's ideas, is that, at last, rather than having to persuade them to my view (which ain't donna happen!), I can let them have the solution they think they need to the difficulties they see and try to learn something from it. Things might change for them, as they might change for me. And that is exciting, to keep searching and studying, let others do their own searching and studying, and try to learn from—to find the cash-value—of every system and idea.

James lived as our times dawned, and the times haven't changed much. In his day, every theory, every tradition, every "fact," seemed to be under siege. In science, Darwin had exploded doctrines that were centuries old. In religion, new forms of "criticism" were twisting spiritual understandings that were millennia in the making. In psychology, James himself was hiking up to new mountain-tops, yielding entirely new and daring vistas on the human mind and soul. Every old, esteemed theory suddenly looked jejune. James and many like him must have been asking: when will the next storm whirl in off the ocean and destroy, yet once more, another precinct in the City of Man's Knowledge?

Have the days changed much? It would seem not. One hundred years after James, each of us still lives in our little worlds while the great world of human experience boils and bubbles all around and far away from us. A million little worlds thrive; a million realities have put down roots; countless "systems" offer their wares. So many systems trying to get a grasp of it all, this unending and ever expanding array of ideas and explanations and guesses and hints and passions and "wills to believe" and systems. In other words, so many, many "live options."

It was James's idea to accept all explanations, in the face of the almost infinite variety of human experience, as unavoidably limited. Who could see through eyes inhabiting so many different worlds looking out at and making judgments about so many different reali-

ties? No one. Still, James felt the thirst of every philosopher to *know it all*, to boil everything down to one perfect and final system—one set of principles, one tried and true formula (just as thousands of years before, the Catholic Church, in Scholasticism, had tried to sum it all up once and for all time). But he turned away from trusting fully in *any* monistic explanation, even any of the explanations he himself offered. Rather, he looked to human experience in all its vast disarray to lead him away from any form of Monism. Imagine the world of thought as a million homes. James wanted to sup at more and more tables and let every idea and hint seep into every niche of his being, hoping to know and understand ever more, never resting, always wanting to take the next step, to know the next truth.

What an insight! It aids us yet today. It is James's gift to the world. No one can see through all eyes. No one can hear through every ear. Our individual explanations crumble under the vast weight of the experiences of millions of other human beings. Yet James didn't despair, for he came to look no longer for the one final Truth. Rather he looked to experience itself, in all its crazy diversity, urging all ideas and conceptions to come and show their wares, sensing that every explanation and every experience would become enriched by drawing on all others. The enrichment began in his life, and so it may continue in ours.

Most of us, I included, are still tempted by Monism. We are still trying to shut out every perspective that doesn't conform to the image of the world certain systems present, be they scientific or spiritual or otherwise. Need one search far for new evidence of Monism's hope? Look only at at the continuing "culture wars" to see how thinkers dismiss one another—drawing up their arguments as though they were lining up troops for battle—and seek to trample their foes and every inch of their systems into oblivion. The prevailing opinion in philosophy seems to be: the world would be better if every perspective or understanding other than my own did not exist. James, I feel, wept over such attitudes. He rather called on himself and us to trust to the welter of ideas and experiences to yield greater cash-value than the Monist systems we devise in isolation. I came to want to join him in this work.

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Vorgefundenes

by Randall Albright

When I first came across the word on the back page of this issue, I looked at my *Langenscheidt Standard German Dictionary* (1993); the closest I could find seemed to be the adjective vorgefertigt, which the dictionary translates figuratively as "prefabricated." I then e-mailed William Coleman and Charles Funkhouser to see if they could help give further insight to what James meant with this term, given the context.

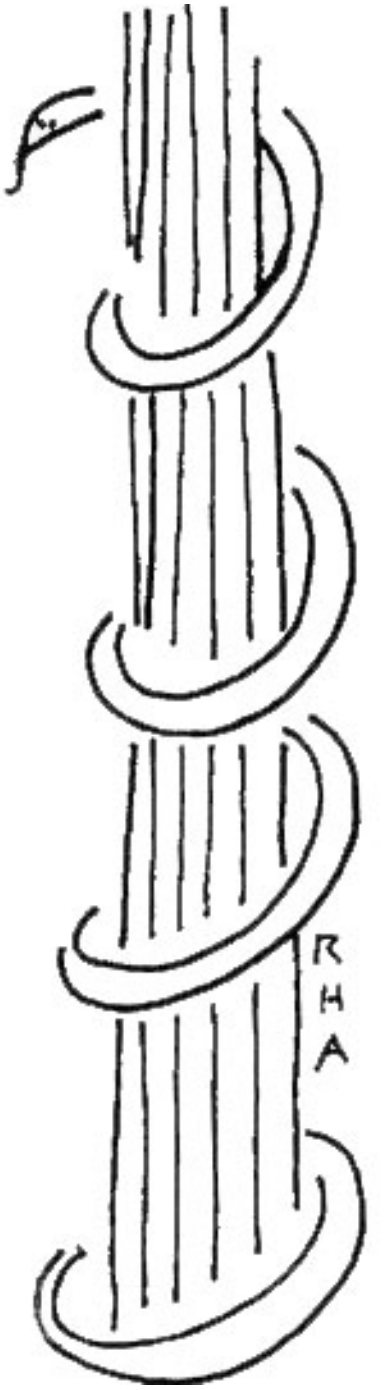
Funkhouser replied that my dictionary had not steered me too far away from what the word means in the context that I gave him. He replied that "'prefabrication' (sing.) would do, but also something like 'preconception' or 'preconceived notion.'"

Coleman replied that "'gefunden' is not in the dictionary because it is the past participle of the strong verb 'finden,' which is the ordinary verb for 'to find.' 'Gefundenes' would be something found.'"

This exploration for the definition of a word also represents a team effort, which William appreciated at times as much as individual effort, at other times.

Are you going around a squirrel or is the squirrel going around a tree?

—RHA



"The trail of the human serpent is thus over everything. Truth independent; truth that we find merely; truth no longer malleable to human need; truth incorrigible, in a word; such truth exists indeed superabundantly—or is supposed to exist by rationalistically minded thinkers; but then it means only the dead heart of the living tree, and its being there means only that truth has its paleontology, and its 'prescription,' and may grow stiff with years of veteran service and petrified in men's regard by sheer antiquity. But how plastic even the oldest truths nevertheless really are has been vividly shown in our day by the transformation of logical and mathematical ideas, a transformation which seems even to be invading physics. The ancient formulas are reinterpreted as special expressions of much wider principles, principles that our ancestors never got a glimpse of in their present shape and formulation."

—William James, from "Lecture Two: What Pragmatism Means" in *Pragmatism* (1907) [Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books Edition, 1991], 31.

"*Pluralism*... is neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but melioristic, rather. The world, it thinks, may be saved, on condition that its parts shall do their best. But shipwreck in detail, or even on the whole, is among the open possibilities."

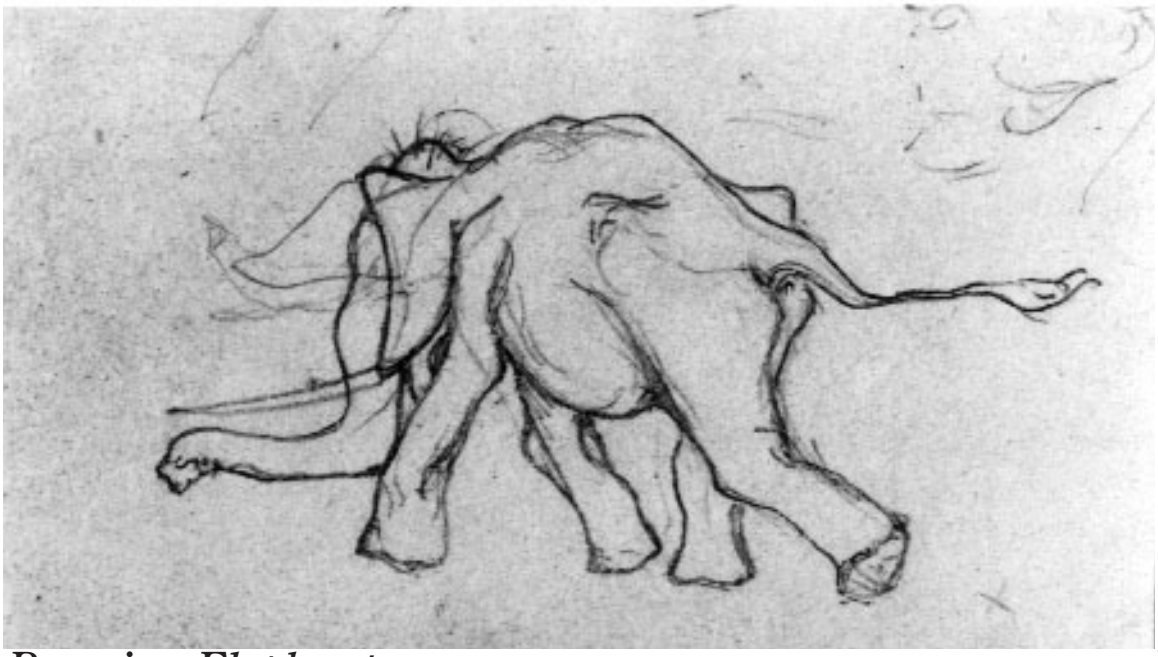
—William James, from "The One and The Many" chapter, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 142.

"*The war against war is going to be no holiday excursion or camping party.* The military feelings are too deeply grounded to abdicate their place among our ideals until better substitutes are offered than the glory and shame that come to nations as well as to individuals from the ups and downs of politics and vicissitudes of trade. There is something highly paradoxical in the modern man's relation to war. Ask all our millions, north and south, whether they would vote now (were such a thing possible) to have our war for the Union expunged from history, and the record of a peaceful transition to the present time substituted for that of its marches and battles, and probably hardly a handful of eccentrics would say yes. Those ancestors, those efforts, those memories and legends, are the most ideal part of what we now own together, a sacred spiritual possession worth more than all the blood poured out. Yet ask those same people whether they would be willing in cold blood to start another civil war now to gain another similar possession, and not one man or woman would vote for the proposition. In modern eyes, precious though wars may be, they must not be waged solely for the sake of the ideal harvest. Only when forced upon one, only when an enemy's injustice leaves us no alternative, is a war now thought permissible...."

—William James, beginning of "The Moral Equivalent of War",
Association for International Conciliation: Leaflet No. 27, February 1910
re-printed in William James, Writings 1902-1910 (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1281.

Question:

Why do you think Alice, William's sister, once called him "Mercury"?



Running Elephant

by William James (1865)

Standing Brazilian Native American

by William James (1865)

95 Irving Street, A Museum?

by Randall Albright

On March 19, 1999, Eugene Taylor reported to the James Family List Serve that 95 Irving Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, William and Alice James's home of many years, was for sale. The contact person that he named was Alan Savenor at DeWolfe Realty New England.

This home, listed on the Historic Register, is where William James wrote *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Various seances were held here, and guests such as his brother Henry, the novelist, stayed. The asking price, originally reported at $2.5 million, has been lowered to $1.9 million.

If you are interested in seeing this landmark preserved and open to the public as a museum house, I suggest you write to:

Neil Rudenstine, President
Harvard University
Massachusetts Hall
Cambridge, MA 02138

and express your concern about the impending sale and suggest this as an alternative to merely having it as a private residence.

Harvard's Houghton Library has an extensive collection of manuscripts and photographs which could be used to help build historical context for making the house an interesting museum. The Harvard Archives contains additional classic portraits of James, and other parts of the University contain valuable James memorabilia, such as a portrait of William's father, Henry, Senior, which hangs in William James Hall, home to the psychology department.

Other museum houses in metropolitan Boston include the following:

• the Brookline home of William's friend, Frederick Law Olmsted, which is owned and run by the National Park Service; and

• the Concord home of William's god-father, Ralph Waldo Emerson, which is still owned by the Emerson family, but open to the public from April through October. Emerson's desk and library have been preserved at the Concord Museum, open year-round.

"In *principle*, then the real units of our immediately-felt life are unlike the units that intellectualist logic holds to and makes its calculations with. They are not separate from their own others, and you have to take them at widely separated dates to find any two of them that seem unblent. Then indeed they do appear separate even as their concepts are separate; a chasm yawns between them; but the chasm itself is but an intellectualist fiction, got by abstracting from the continuous sheet of experiences with which the intermediary time was filled. It is like the log carried first by William and Henry, then by William, Henry, and John, then by Henry and John, then by John and Peter, and so on. All real units of experience overlap."

—William James, from the "Continuity of Experience" chapter, *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 287.

"*Romeo wants Juliet as the filings want the magnet;* and if no obstacles intervene he moves towards her by as straight a line as they. But Romeo and Juliet, if a wall be built between them, do not remain idiotically pressing their faces against its opposite sides like the magnet and the filings with the card. Romeo soon finds a circuitous way, by scaling the wall or otherwise, of touching Juliet's lips directly. With the filings the path is fixed; whether it reaches the end depends on accidents. With the lover it is the end which is fixed, the path may be modified indefinitely."

—William James, from "The Scope of Psychology"chapter, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) [Cambridge: Harvard University Press edition (1981, 1983)], 20.

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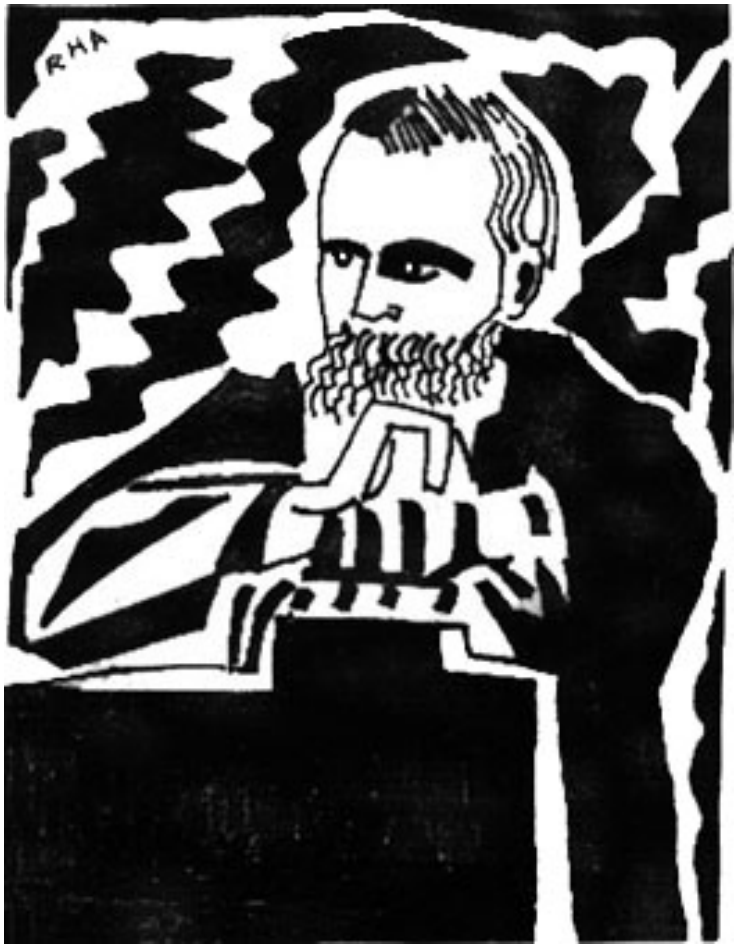

"The question of being is the darkest in all philosophy. All of us are beggars here, and no school can speak disdainfully of another or give itself superior airs. For all of us alike, Facts form a datum, gift, or Vorgefundenes, which we cannot burrow under, explain or get behind. It makes itself somehow, and our business is far more with its What than with its Whence and Why."

——*William James*, from "The Problem of Being" chapter,
Some Problems of Philosophy (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 46

See page 35 for a definition of "Vorgefundenes"