

*Streams
of
William James*

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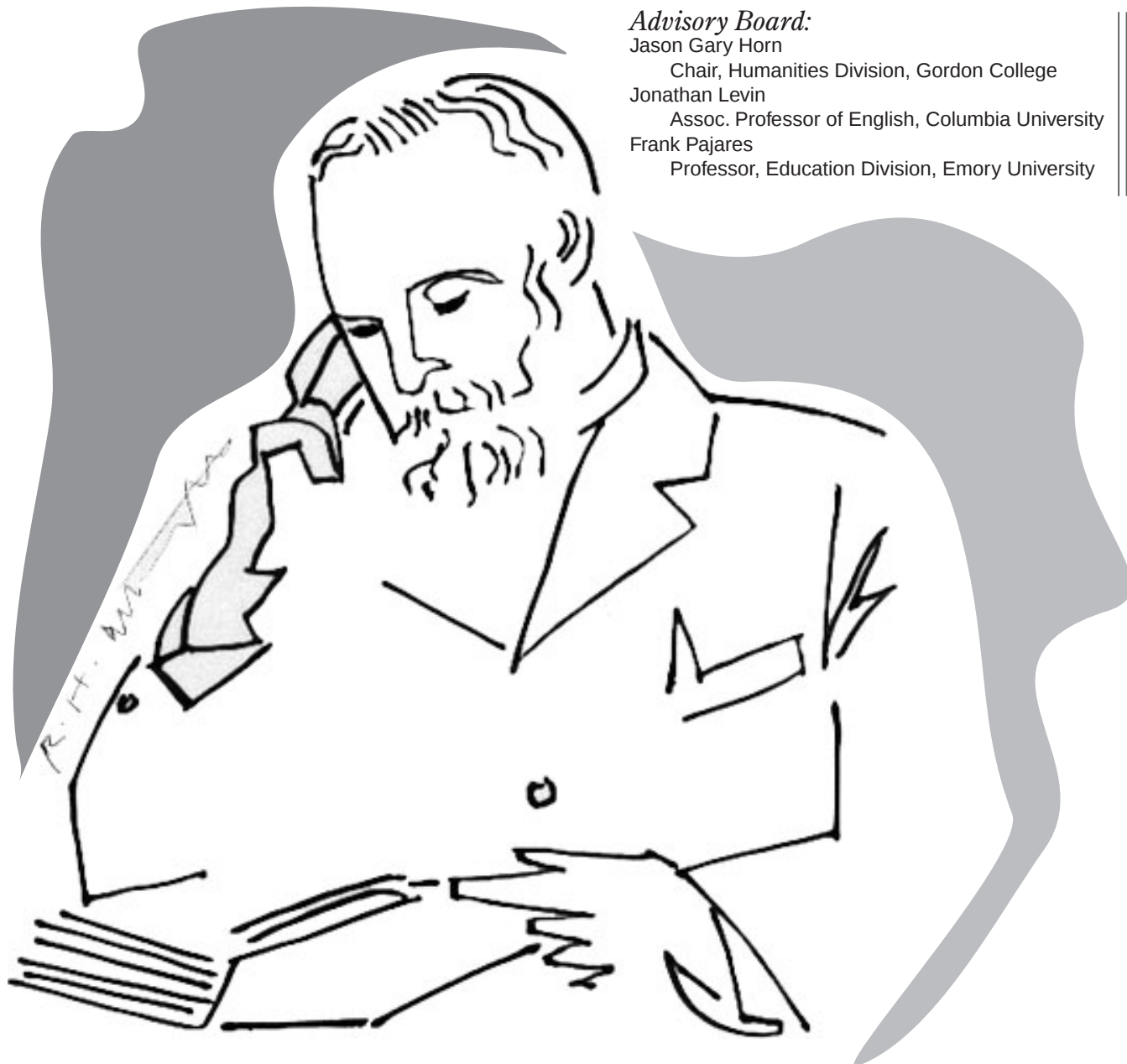


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Of Jamesian Interest

by Randall Albright

Giles Gunn edited and introduced a new selection of works by William, called *Pragmatism and Other Writings* (Penguin, 2000).

Richard Rorty continues to talk about the meaning of James in his own work with *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Penguin, 1999), including a previously unpublished "Afterword: Pragmatism, Pluralism and Postmodernism."

Eugene Taylor has an article called "William James and Sigmund Freud: 'The Future of Psychology Belongs to Your Work'" in *Psychological Science*, A Journal of the American Psychological Society, Vol. 10, Issue 6, November 1999.

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WJ and Post-Modernism

by Bill DeLoach

What role (if any) does William James have in pursuing what might be called a “post-modern” agenda? Let me go to the six points with which Charles Jencks tries to sum up post-modernism as a world movement, and suggest some of the parallels to be found in James.

1) The attempt to go beyond the materialist paradigm which characterizes modernism.

The materialist paradigm was already under challenge when James was writing his late, unfinished textbook *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy*. In a footnote he pointed out: “Many physicists now think that the concepts of ‘matter,’ ‘mass,’ ‘atom,’ ‘ether,’ ‘inertia,’ ‘force,’ etc. are not so much duplicates of hidden realities in nature as mental instruments to handle nature by after-substitution of their scheme. They are considered, like the kilogram or the imperial yard, ‘artifacts,’ not revelations. The literature here is copious: ...” [James cites especially J.B. Stallo, and adds eight further authors, including Mach and H. Poincaré] (James *Some Problems* 51n). As *The Timeline Book of Science* points out, in 1903: “French mathematician Jules-Henri Poincaré argues that small discrepancies in initial conditions can result in large differences within a short period. This observation will become important to chaos theory in the 1970s and later” (Ochoa and Corey 228). Chaos and complexity theories are fundamental to the postmodern era (as Italian physicist Tito Arecchi points out in Jencks’ *Post-modern Reader* (pp. 350-353); and the evolution studied by Darwin and Wallace—the dynamic interactions between populations and their ecologies—exemplifies the “sensitive dependence on initial conditions” that characterizes the processes of chaos and complexity.¹

But the full extent of James’s challenge to “the materialist paradigm which characterizes modernism” was spelled out by Alfred North Whitehead. In his Lowell Lectures of 1925, published as *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead gave an unprecedented estimate of where James fits in the history of philosophy:

The history of philosophy runs curiously parallel to that of science. In the case of both, the seventeenth

century set the stage for its two successors. But with the twentieth century a new act commences. It is an exaggeration to attribute a general change in a climate of thought to any one piece of writing, or to any one author. No doubt Descartes only expressed definitely and in decisive form what was already in the air of his period. Analogously, in attributing to William James the inauguration of a new stage in philosophy, we should be neglecting other influences of his time. But, admitting this, there still remains a certain fitness in contrasting his essay, *Does Consciousness Exist*, published in 1904, with Descartes’s *Discourse on Method*, published in 1637. James clears the stage of the old paraphernalia; or rather he entirely alters its lighting. Take for example these two sentences from his essay: “To deny plumply that ‘consciousness’ exists seems so absurd on the face of it—for undoubtedly ‘thoughts’ do exist—that I fear some readers will follow me no farther. Let me then immediately explain that I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function.”

The scientific materialism and the Cartesian Ego were both challenged at the same moment, one by science and the other by philosophy, as represented by William James with his psychological antecedents; and the double challenge marks the end of a period which lasted for about two hundred and fifty years (143).

This is an extravagant claim, and no thinker I know has endorsed the picture Whitehead is driving at: James can be as big a turning point for the twentieth century and beyond as Descartes was for the seventeenth. Here’s how Whitehead explains it:

The reason why I have put Descartes and James in close juxtaposition is now evident. Neither philosopher finished an epoch by a final solution of a problem. Their great merit is of an opposite sort. They each of them open an epoch by their clear formulation of terms in which thought could profitably express itself at particular stages of knowledge, one for the seventeenth century, the other for the twentieth century (147).

The “materialist paradigm” that Jencks mentions and that Whitehead attacks² can most effectively be undercut by doing the kind of philosophy found in James’s *Essays in Radical Empiricism*—as we are about to see.

2) An intense concern for pluralism and a desire to cut across the different taste cultures that now fracture society.

Hilary Putnam has explained the James/Kant battle between pluralism and monism: “...James’s view might be summarized in the following way: the self isn’t a unity and the world isn’t a unity, and so Kant had the

¹ According to Arecchi: “People now speak of a third revolution in physics, to follow the first one sparked off by Galileo and Newton, and the second which took place during the first decades of this century and laid the foundations of relativity and quantum mechanics. This third wave may be called the physics of complexity” (350). The reader curious about the distinction between *chaos* and *complexity* should consult Paul Cilliers, *Complexity and Post-modernism: Understanding Complex Systems* London: Routledge, 1998; esp. p. ix.

wrong problem. The problem shouldn't be to show that the unity of the world is correlative with the unity of the self, but to show that the disunity of the world is correlative with the disunity of the self" ("James's Theory..." 4-5). My challenge here is to show that James's pluralism is "a difference that makes a difference," that can "cut across the different taste cultures that now fracture society." He does it by putting highbrows and lowbrows on the same level, as Hilary and Ruth Anna Putnam show in their "Commentary" (*Times Literary Supplement* [London] 21 June 1996, 14-15) on a brief reply James wrote to a former student and colleague in philosophy, Dickinson S. Miller:

In fewer than 200 words, James expresses a number of key themes in his thought. He says, for example, that he is a 'natural realist,' that his aim (as stated in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism*) is to produce a metaphysics and epistemology close to the natural realism of the common man. The 'common man' takes himself to perceive the ordinary objects of everyday life, whereas philosophers since Descartes have interposed certain types of private entities ("ideas" or "impressions" or "sense data") between the perceiver and that world of things and events in a public space and time. They have then struggled valiantly but unsuccessfully to reconstruct a public world out of what James calls "a congeries of solipsisms." James's response is to take experience seriously, to say that whatever is experienced is real, and that since we unreflectingly experience a public world, it is indeed a public world in which we live. Reading James will provide one with arguments in favour of natural realism, with an intellectual justification for believing in our studies what all of us believe outside in any case (14).

3) An obligation to bring back selected traditional values, but in a new key that fully recognizes the ruptures caused by modernity.

² See *Science and the Modern World*, *passim*. Note especially Chapter III: "The Century of Genius," and Whitehead's alternate praise and blame of the seventeenth century: "The answer... which the seventeenth century gave to the ancient question of the Ionian thinkers, 'What is the world made of?' was that the world is a succession of... configurations of matter.... This is the famous mechanistic theory of nature, which has reigned supreme ever since.... It is the orthodox creed of physical science.... It worked. *Physicists took no more interest in philosophy* [emphasis added].... But the difficulties of this theory of materialistic mechanism very soon became apparent. The history of thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is governed by the fact that the world had got hold of a general idea which it could neither live with nor live without" (50). Under what he calls "The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness" Whitehead goes on to critique both "the concept of simple location" and "the two correlative categories of Substance and quality" (51ff).

James wants to bring back romanticism (Wordsworth and Whitman, as Rorty points out, are his preferred poets) by moving ahead to a pragmatic/postmodern re-renaissance that retrieves not only the tragic optimism of the ancient Greeks, but even the traditional values of pre-literate peoples (Rorty "Religious Faith..." 99). In a footnote to the *Varieties* James argues that "...the divorce between scientist facts and religious facts may not necessarily be as eternal as it at first sight seems, nor the personalism and romanticism of the world, as they appeared to primitive thinking, be matters so irrevocably outgrown. The final human opinion may, in short, in some manner now impossible to foresee, revert to the more personal style, just as any path of progress may follow a spiral rather than a straight line. If this were so, the rigorously impersonal view of science might one day appear as having been a temporarily useful eccentricity rather than the definitively triumphant position which the sectarian scientist at present so confidently announces it to be" (449n).

As for the "new key that fully recognizes the ruptures caused by modernity," it may be useful to recognize that in seeking to bring back a harmony between religion and science, James challenges the reigning dogmatism on *both* sides. James never joined any particular church or religion, and his portrayal of God doesn't match the definitions offered in most creeds or catechisms.

First of all, James's God is finite: "The line of least resistance, then, as it seems to me, both in theology and in philosophy, is to accept, along with the superhuman consciousness, the notion that it is not all-embracing, the notion, in other words, that there is a God, but that he is finite, either in power or in knowledge, or in both at once. These, I need hardly tell you, are the terms in which common men have usually carried on their active commerce with God; and the monistic perfections that make the notion of him so paradoxical practically and morally are the colder addition of remote professorial minds operating in *distant* upon conceptual substitutes for him alone" (*Pluralistic Universe* 269).

Secondly, James is not even a monotheist: "[P]hilosophic theism has always shone a tendency to become pantheistic and monistic, and to consider the world as one unit of absolute fact; and this has been at variance with popular or practical theism, which latter has ever been more or less frankly pluralistic, not to say polytheistic, and shown itself perfectly well satisfied with a universe composed of many original principles, provided we only be allowed to believe that the divine principle remains supreme, and that the others are subordinate" (*Varieties* 124-125). See also a similar passage near the very end of *Varieties* which concludes: "Thus would a sort of polytheism return upon us..." (468).

You will note that in both instances James privi-

leges the “popular or practical” view of “common men” over the more prestigious views of “remote professorial minds.” This blurring of boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow theologies fits well with post-modernism’s “concern... to cut across different taste cultures” mentioned above (#2). And it’s also consistent with the approach taken by a post-Darwinian biologist / physiologist like James: in the long run, the more abundant ideas in the larger population are more likely to survive than the hot-house cultivars preferred by a much smaller population.

In 1904 James responded to a questionnaire attempting to study “the personal experiences of many individuals” concerning religion. Researcher James B. Pratt asked ten questions; I will cite portions of just two (with James’s answers) to illustrate the non-orthodox nature of William James’s beliefs.

6. Do you pray...? *I can't possibly pray—I feel foolish and artificial....*

9. Do you accept the Bible...? *No. No. No. It is so human a book that I don't see how belief in its divine authorship can survive the reading of it*

—William James, *Writings 1902-1910*, 1183-1185

Many individuals have read James’s writings on religion; *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in particular was a best-seller, reprinted again and again, and translated into many languages. To the best of my knowledge, however, no organized religion has embraced his views.

4) An acknowledgement of difference and otherness, the keynote of the feminist movement; indeed, the re-emergence of the feminine into all discourse.

Pragmatism and Feminism by Charlene H. Seigfried is clearly a key document here. Seigfried sees a linkage between the weak support given to pragmatism by academic American philosophy, and the strong affiliation between pragmatism and feminist thinkers today.

It may seem strange to talk about the marginalization of pragmatism in the wake of its resurgence, largely in response to Rorty’s dramatic rejection of the bankruptcy of analytic philosophy. But these recent developments cannot obscure the fact of widespread ignorance of the major theories and texts of pragmatism, a philosophical position that was once acknowledged as central to ‘the golden age of American philosophy.’ There is a bit of the social Darwinist in all of us that assumes it was a tradition tried and found wanting.... But from my perspective it seems to have been criticized and eventually relegated to the margins for holding the very positions that feminists today would find to be its greatest strengths. These include

(1) early and persistent criticisms of positivist interpretations of scientific methodology; (2) disclosure of the value dimension of factual claims; (3) reclaiming aesthetics as informing everyday experience; (4) linking of dominant discourses with domination; (5) subordinating logical analysis to social, cultural, and political issues; (6) realigning theory with praxis; and (7) resisting the turn to epistemology and instead emphasizing concrete experience” (21).³

As for the domain of psychology, Florence L. Denmark points out that William James “was an early champion of women’s rights as an ardent advocate of education for women. For example, he put his conviction into action when he made it possible for Mary Calkins to receive her graduate instruction at Harvard at a time when that university was opposed to admitting women to doctoral degree programs. Under the initial tutelage and continued support of William James, however, Calkins received what amounted to her Ph.D. from Harvard, although the actual degree was never awarded. Calkins later became the first female president of the American Psychological Association” (x).

Finally, since the rubric “difference and otherness” goes beyond gender: “Alain Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois at midcentury, together with feminist philosophers of science at the end of the twentieth century, demonstrate the continued importance of [William James’s] nonpositivist understandings of rationality and science as that of the pragmatists to the emancipatory agendas of minorities and women” (Seigfried *Pragmatism...* 189).

5) The re-enchantment of nature, which stems from new developments in science and A. N. Whitehead’s philosophy of organicism.

Let me cite here two further evidences of the high esteem in which Whitehead held WJ. It is no coincidence that Whitehead found much to praise in WJ; he saw him as useful in his own project of developing process philosophy in general, and a process theology in particular. In *Modes of Thought* Whitehead claimed: “In Western Literature there are four great thinkers, whose services to civilized thought rest largely upon their achievements in philosophical assemblage; though each of them made important contributions to the structure of philosophic system. These men are Plato, Aristotle, Leibnitz, and William James” (3). Anyone who has read both the 28 chapters of *Principles of Psychology* (1890) and the 20 lectures of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) should have a sense of James as an endless collector, gatherer, assembler (following Louis Agassiz, one of his mentors) of natural

3. Numbers added. Seigfried references Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (page 791) after this passage.

history specimens, case studies, experiments, reported mystic experiences of saints, poets, and others, altered states of consciousness from drugs or hypnotism, automatic writing experiments (some with a favorite student: Gertrude Stein), and much more.

And then Whitehead again, in 1945:

During a discussion of William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, he said: "The difficulty of communication in words is but little realized. If I had to write something about your [= Lucien Price] 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 he came to be more explicit concerning some of those implications, we have a shrinkage.

Something similar can happen in scholarship.... Consider John Dewey. In carrying on the philosophy of William James, I think he enormously narrowed it. With James the consciousness of the ever-present complexity and possibility in human experience is always implicit in his writing. Dewey is without it. William James's awareness of the wide scope and the interrelations of all questions made him one of the great philosophic minds in history (Price 337-338).

Let me note here that since the death of Whitehead in 1947, the biggest thinkers to agree with him about the pivotal role of William James in the history of philosophy would seem to be Richard Rorty, Cornel West, and especially Hilary Putnam. As for the Dewey/James comparison, both Rorty and West have expressed a preference for Dewey.

6) The commitment to an ecological and ecumenical world view that now characterizes post-modern theology.

In his "Appendix: Faith and the Right to Believe" to *Some Problems of Philosophy*, James is as ecumenical as one might wish:

Faith thus remains as one of the inalienable birth-rights of our mind. Of course it must remain a practical, and not a dogmatic attitude. It must go with toleration of other faiths, with the search for the most probable, and with the full consciousness of responsibilities and risks.

It may be regarded as a formative factor in the universe, if we be integral parts thereof, and co-determinants, by our behavior, of what its total character may

be (113).

But there is a further parallel between Jamesian and post-modern theology: I mean the possible connection or at least the encounter of Buddhism and Christianity. Let me start on the postmodern side with a leading Catholic theologian with a strong interest in postmodernism, Hans Küng. In seeking to promote "Inter-Religious Dialog in the Postmodern Period," Küng reviews briefly the philosophies of history of Hegel, Spengler, and especially Toynbee: "...Toynbee saw the ecumenical opening up of Christianity to the other world religions as an extremely urgent task. Indeed his view was that the twentieth century would be stamped on historical memory not for the invention of the atomic bomb but for the beginning of a serious dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism—the two most strongly opposed positions" (118).

James was quite sympathetic to Buddhism, and Taylor reports (from the student notes of W. E. Hocking) that in his Spring, 1902 course on "Psychology and Religion" James "...gave an important comparison of Buddhism and Christianity, lauding them both as religions which transform the vision of evil, making them seem deeper and more adequate than other religious traditions" (94). And in 1904, "James heard the Theravada monk, Anagarika Dharmapala, lecture at Harvard on the major concepts of Buddhism. This must have included the Buddhist conception of personality as an ephemeral heap or conglomeration of conditions; the idea of *anatta*, that in all existence there is no evidence for a permanent, enduring underlying self; and that liberation meant the transformation of consciousness. Afterwards, James rose and proclaimed to the audience, 'This is the psychology everybody will be studying twenty-five years from now'" (147).

As for "ecological worldview" and "re-enchantment of nature," the best source is Bruce Wilshire's chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*. To quote just one passage:

James flirts seriously with Gustav Fechner's idea of an Earth-Soul. He speculates: Might not plants and animals and even Earth have their own sort of consciousness? Might not there even be the "knower of all" and we be "one with the knower of all and its constituent knowers" [PU, 155]? Such a knower would not be a dialectical logician. Broaching involvement with plant and animal beings, plant and animal consciousness, James is retrieving, at least implicitly, primal religious experience, Paleolithic, shamanic. Here repudiation of Cartesian point-instant mechanics generates startling consequences: the presence of the mythic past, the primal other, in the present pulse of experience.

(pp. 120-121).

Helmut E. Adler, also discussing James and Fechner, notes that: "The current 'Gaia' hypothesis (Love- lock 1988) has much in common with Fechner's scheme" (257).

Jencks definitely includes Gaia in his post-modern "rainbow coalition." "James Lovelock, the inventor and chemist who formulated the Gaia hypothesis," writes Jencks, "shares a view of nature as a self-organising system with the Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine. And his [Prigogine's] important *Order out of Chaos* (1979) relates to both catastrophe theory (Rene Thom) and the many chaos sciences which have defined a Post-Newtonian paradigm" (15).⁴

I believe that James was on to something when he wrote in 1904: "It is difficult not to notice a curious unrest in the philosophic atmosphere of the time, a loosening of old landmarks, a softening of oppositions, a mutual borrowing from one another on the part of systems anciently closed, and an interest in new suggestions, however vague, as if the one thing sure was the inadequacy of the extant school-solutions."⁵ That something may well have been the early stirrings of what we now begin to call "post-modernism" (PM for short). It occurs to me that, *pace* Lyotard, PM may include not only "incredulity toward metanarratives" of an older, narrower kind but also a quest for newer, more generous, more adequate metanarratives (Lyotard, xxiv). PM itself is emerging as just such an over-arching storyline—"The old synthesis is dead...let's build a new one!"

It may reassure some of those still uncertain about the coming of post-modernism to hear its "curious unrest" and "interest in new suggestions" summed up in a blessedly brief, even classic six-point formulation by ecumenist/ethicist Hans Küng:

Not just freedom, but also justice
Not just equality, but also plurality
Not just brotherhood, but also sisterhood
Not just coexistence, but peace
Not just productivity, but solidarity with the environment
Not just toleration, but ecumenism (ix; 67-69).⁶

—*This piece on James and Post-Modernism has been adapted from a larger essay that Bill DeLoach is working on. He can be reached by e-mail at wdeloach@memphis.edu; by snail mail at 2895 Young Ave., Memphis TN 38111.*

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⁴. The reader who prefers to retrieve James's "ecological worldview" from the vivid memories of those who knew him in large measure as a camper and hiker in the Adirondack wilderness of upstate New York is directed to Linda Simon's excellent collection of 25 memoirs *William James Remembered*; and in particular to James Jackson Putnam's "William James" (pp. 7-26), and to Josephine Clara Goldmark's account of the remembered experiences that she and her sister, Pauline Goldmark, had with William James: "An Adirondack Friendship" (pp. 172-198).

⁵. William James, "A World of Pure Experience," 1904; in *Essays in Radical Empiricism and A Pluralistic Universe*, 23.

⁶. The alert reader will note that the first three of these six "Post-modern Requirements," for any "New World Ethics" (as Küng calls them) both embrace and extend the traditional three modern ideals which inspired the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!

The Case of the Yellow Bicycles

by Randall Albright

When the City Council of Anti-Gravity voted in favor of a resolution to allow distribution of free yellow bicycles as a way to dissuade car usage downtown, Jasper could not help but smile and shake his head. To him, this seemed like a great, half-developed idea, but left in a precarious state. His sister was quicker to criticize it, though.

"It's just *stupid* to think things would be any different here than it's already been in the three other cities where it's been tried and failed!"

Jasper laughed as Sarah read aloud, "In Terra-Zone, the project had been conceived with only the highest intentions, including the insistence that there may be no power in the distribution or reclamation of the yellow bikes. In a few weeks, however, missing wheels and strewn yellow bicycle parts started littering the streets, instead."

"For example," said Jasper, "I may want to use the bike to go to the beach. There should be a few central locations where I can drop it off, however, and then walk from that point onward. Then, when I want the bike later, I can return it to another drop-off point. But somehow, somewhere, I should have to leave something that's a part of myself to reclaim as I drop off the bike. It doesn't have to be a driver's license or even a library card. Maybe... my watch? Some incentive to make sure that I won't just abuse the system."

Sarah continued to read, "The Mayor of the City voted with the majority, saying, 'I just think that anything we can do to get people out of their cars and onto bike is a good cause. I'm willing to give people the benefit of the doubt that they will be good citizens.'"

"Sure," smiled Jasper, "so I'll just take that bike wherever I happened to find it. Maybe while someone else was using it, and is temporarily going into the hardware store, praying to God it will still be there because locks are not part of the system... and then leave it down in some obscure corner where I then decided to walk the rest of the way."

"It just makes no sense," said Sarah, dead-pan and hard-boiled.

"To me, it makes half-sense, and that's its really tragedy," said Jasper.

Philosophical conceptions need to be modified in light of failed past execution and practical consequences if they are to remain viable.¹ To further amplify this example, I would warn that the society in "Anti-Gravity" is not very different from "Terra-Zone."

Who is legally going to be liable if someone returns a bicycle, abused, or someone falls because the screws were loose or gets hit while riding one? Are there going to be specially designated bicycle lanes? Have people considered rules of the road to follow, such as wearing a bicycle helmet? How would one sell this idea, either to private or public funding, or both, in light of these considerations? How could one make the *concept* as well as the *practical consequences* more

realistic and attractive?

Perhaps U.S. President John Kennedy's vision for the Peace Corps was "exactly the sort of organization James had in mind"² with his "The Moral Equivalent of War" address. One needs to look beyond the original noble intentions to see how the Peace Corps was actually founded, however, and how it continues to work today. How did U.S. President Bill Clinton try to expand on the idea with an *internal* AmeriCorps, with the added hope of allowing anybody to work their way through college by giving something back to their country? Are these programs working, for whom, and how might they be improved, be it through a government, profit, or a non-profit institution³?

There are a number of benefits to getting many people out of cars and onto bikes. One is a side-effect of physical exercise, as James noted in "The Gospel of Relaxation." Another benefit of relying less on cars and more on bicycles is that current evidence suggests that cars create a substantial amount of carbon dioxide, which seems to be contributing to "Greenhouse Effect."⁴

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William James by Mrs. Montgomery Sears (1894-5?)

¹. See the "Philosophical Conception and Practical Results" essay by William James (1898) for more inspiration used in this article.

². Gay Wilson Allen, *William James, A Biography* (1967) [New York: Viking Compass Edition, 1969] p. 451

³. For an example of this, see <http://www.iicd-volunteer.org>

⁴. This issue is complex, however, as William K. Stevens writes in *The Change in the Weather* (New York: Delacorte, 1999).

How James Kidnapped Peirce¹

by Robert B. Talisse

In 1898 James published an essay entitled “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results.”² It was in this essay that James’s variety of pragmatism was given its first articulation; ‘pragmatism’ has been a “vague, ambiguous, and overworked term”³ ever since. James’s essay marks the first appearance of the word ‘pragmatism’ in print. 1998 thus marked the centennial of the term ‘pragmatism’.

My claim that pragmatism was officially launched by James in the 1890s rather than by Charles Sanders Peirce late in the 1870s may strike some as curious. For James himself in “Philosophical Conceptions” credits Peirce with coining the term as well as with being the first to formulate the main tenet of pragmatism, namely, the principle of meaning Peirce expresses in his 1878 article “How To Make Our Ideas Clear.”⁴ James goes as far as to refer to pragmatism as simply “Peirce’s principle” (348).

It is important to note, however, that neither in “How To Make Our Ideas Clear” nor in its companion piece, “The Fixation of Belief” does Peirce employ the term. Peirce’s 1905 essay, “What Pragmatism Is,” further complicates matters. There he announced his dissatisfaction with “what other pragmatists have written” and rebaptized his own philosophy ‘pragmaticism,’ a term he thought would be “ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers” (253).

H. S. Thayer, in his comprehensive and critical history of pragmatism, *Meaning and Action*, characterizes the pragmatist tradition thus:

Pragmatism is a method of philosophizing often identified as a theory of meaning first stated by Charles Sanders Peirce in the 1870s; revived primarily as a theory of truth in 1898 by William James; and further developed, expanded, and disseminated by John Dewey and F. C. S. Schiller.⁵

According to Thayer’s characterization, the pragmatist tradition is the working out of Peirce’s principle; it is the story of the collective efforts of those trying to “revive,” “develop,” “expand,” and “disseminate” Peirce’s theory of meaning. Thayer’s view thus tends to understate the disagreement and intellectual discontinuity among the first pragmatists.⁶ But it is no use to ignore or dismiss the dissonance. As the tradition celebrates its first century in existence, and prepares for the challenges of the future, a keen apprehension of our past, an understanding of our success and failures, is necessary for our continued growth. In this paper, then, I endeavor to come to terms with Peirce’s dissatisfaction with James’s expression of pragmatism. To *exactly what* in James’s expression did Peirce object, and—more importantly—is his dissatisfaction with James justified? I begin with the theory of meaning expressed in Peirce’s “How To Make Our Ideas Clear.”

I. Peirce’s Principle.

In “How To Make Our Ideas Clear,” Peirce undertakes several distinct, yet related objectives. In keeping with his anti-Cartesian campaign of the late 1860’s, Peirce first rejects the Cartesian notion of clear and distinct ideas. Descartes viewed these two properties as essentially ‘private’—clarity and distinctness is, for Descartes, a function of the manner in which a mind *perceives* or *apprehends* a given idea. Peirce objects that private clarity and distinctness of apprehension is lacking public criteria. Thus Descartes can honor no such distinction as that “between an idea seeming clear and really being so” (24). Barring the appeal to a *deus en machina*, how may one judge that he has or has not a clear and distinct idea? With nothing public contained in the Cartesian conceptions, one cannot guard against the “subjective feeling of mastery [of an idea] which may be entirely mistaken” (23). Peirce insists “it is now time to formulate the method of attaining to a more perfect clearness of thought” (24).

According to Peirce, the first step towards advancing the cause of clear thought involves the relocation of ideas from the inner, psychological world of the apprehension of a Cartesian consciousness into the public world of action and effects. On Peirce’s view, the clarity of an idea is a function of that idea’s meaning, in fact, to have clear ideas is to be “masters of our own meaning” (25). The pragmatic method for arriving at the meaning of a given idea is simple:

To develop [an idea’s] meaning, we have simply to determine what habits it produces, for what a thing means is simply what habits it involves... the identity of a habit depends upon how it might lead us to act. (30)

1. This paper was originally prepared for a session on “100 Years of Pragmatism” at the New York City Conference on the History of Philosophy and Religion, which was held at Hunter College in May of 1998. The author would like to thank those who participated in that session, especially John Shook, John Peterman, and Richard Rumana for the lively discussion that followed its presentation.

2. Citations to James’s writing will be parenthetical and will be keyed to McDermott, ed. *The Writings of William James*. “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” appears on pages 345 to 362 of that volume.

3. Richard Rorty, “Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism,” reprinted in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 160.

4. Citations to Peirce’s writing will be keyed to Buchler, ed. *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. “How To Make Our Ideas Clear” appears on pages 23 to 41 of that volume.

5. Thayer, *Meaning and Action*, p. 5.

6. A more recent attempt to present a synoptic view of the pragmatist tradition can be found in the late John P. Murphy’s survey, *Pragmatism: From Peirce to Davidson*.

By “habit,” Peirce means a standard course of action undertaken in response to specific conditions. “Meaning”, in Peirce’s vocabulary, is thus primarily a functional concept. For any idea, one may extract its complete meaning by drawing out the proposals for action which it suggests. To use one of Peirce’s examples, if I say of an object, X, that it is hard, I mean that there will not be many other objects that will be able to scratch X, but X will scratch many other objects. If we want to attain clearness in our ideas, we simply derive the pragmatic meaning of each; that is, we identify the operations each idea suggests:

Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have... our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object. (31)

In this way, Peirce connects meaning, and therefore clearness, to action. Our ideas are produced as a result of our perception of the world; certain objects produce certain “sensible effects” in us which generate our ideas of those objects: “our idea of anything is our idea of its sensible effects” (31). Thus an idea of an object is essentially a proposal or, perhaps more correctly, a prediction regarding the functioning of that object; in other words, an idea of an object is an idea of how that object will react to and with other objects.

An idea that is clear provides information concerning the kinds of operations one might perform with the object and the sort of behavior one should expect of the object in result. For example, my idea that a particular object, Y, is sharp suggests certain definite functional proposals: I may use Y to carve my initials into the trunk of a tree. If we want to make an idea clear, we simply locate the functions the idea involves.

Knowledge of the functions of an object produces in us habits of action regarding that object: whereas I may use Y to cut wood, I will not use Y as a back-scratcher, nor will I give it to a child to play with. With this notion Peirce establishes a *public* criterion of meaning-- the meaning of an idea is the observable function which it predicates of its object. Verily, Peirce believed the pragmatic meaning of an idea to be exhaustive:

If one can identify accurately all the conceivable phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept, *and there is absolutely nothing more in it.* (252)

There is nothing more in the meaning of the word ‘hard’ than the operational proposal of *will not be scratched, but will scratch*; “thus we come down to what is tangible and conceivably practical” (30). For only those ideas which can be identified with a certain object’s sensible effects will be meaningful.

In Peirce’s later writings, one discovers that this general notion of meaning is all he intended to denote with the term ‘pragmatism’. In a 1905 article, he writes:

I understand pragmatism to be a method of ascertaining the meanings, not of all ideas, but only of what I call “intellectual concepts”, that is to say, of those upon the structure of which, arguments concerning objective fact may hinge. (272)

In another article, Peirce insists:

Pragmatism is, in itself, no doctrine of metaphysics, no attempt to determine any truth of things. It is merely a method of ascertaining the meanings of hard words and of abstract concepts. (271)

The pragmatist’s interest in meaning follows from his duty to “Dismiss” metaphysical “make-believes” (256). Peirce distrusted most metaphysical conceptions because they could not be identified with any specific sensible effects leading to differences in habits of action. Be the world determined or vulnerable to an agent’s free-will, one’s sensations of the world remain unchanged, thus one’s ideas of the objects in the world do not vary, and so the adoption of either metaphysical view produces no alteration in action. The affirmation or denial of either concept implies no conceivable change in perceptual phenomena, therefore the dispute between “free-will” and “determinism” is idle, meaningless. This anti-metaphysical chore is the *raison d’être* of Peirce’s pragmatism. Peirce writes:

[Pragmatism] will serve to show that almost every proposition of ontological metaphysics is either meaningless gibberish ... or else downright absurd... (259)

Here we see that for Peirce pragmatism was not so much a philosophical outlook as a logical rule, a principle which keeps one on the road of scientific inquiry and helps one to avoid or remove metaphysical obstacles to investigation by delineating a criterion of meaning which acknowledges only that which is *public* and *testable*.

II. James’s Conception.

In “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” James appeals to Peirce’s theory of meaning, expressing the principle as follows:

If there were any part of a thought that made no difference in the thought’s practical consequences, then that part would be no proper element of the thought’s significance. (348)

James continues:

The effective meaning of any philosophical proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence in our future practical experience... (349)

James’s departure from Peirce is not evident in the above quotations. Like Peirce, James appeals to an idea’s “practical consequences” to determine its pragmatic

meaning. We begin to see the divergence, however, by examining how James construes the notion of a “practical consequence.” Whereas Peirce limits the notion of the practical consequences of an idea to those functional proposals which it predicates of its object, James designs his pragmatism to include within a given idea’s pragmatic meaning its implications for the psychological disposition of the believing subject.

The psychological character of James’s pragmatism is clearly demonstrated in his discussion of the debate between materialists and spiritualists. Noting that the issue does not concern a difference in sensation, but in temperament, James derives the pragmatic meaning of the materialist position:

In the vast driftings of the cosmic weather, tho many a jeweled shore appears, and many an enchanted cloud-bank floats away, long lingering ere it be dissolved-- even as our world now lingers, for our joy-- yet when these transient products are gone, nothing, absolutely nothing remains, to represent those particular qualities, those elements of preciousness which they may have enshrined. (354)

In a less poetic mode, James raises the “true objection to materialism.” According to James, materialism does not provide a “permanent warrant for our more ideal interests”, it is not a “fulfiller of our remotest hopes” (354), it results in “utter final wreck and tragedy” (354). Spiritualism, on the other hand, “has at least this practical superiority [over materialism]... it guarantees an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved.” According to James, the pragmatic meaning of spiritualism is:

A world with a God in it to say the last word, may indeed burn up or freeze, but when we think of him as still mindful of the old ideals and sure to bring them elsewhere to fruition; so that, where he is, tragedy is only provisional and partial, and ship wreck and dissolution not the absolutely final things. This need of eternal moral order is one of the deepest needs of our breast. (354)

James concludes:

Here then, in these different emotional and practical appeals, in these adjustments of our concrete attitudes of hope and expectation, and all the delicate consequences which their differences entail, lie the real meanings of materialism and theism.... Materialism means simply the denial that the moral order is eternal, and the cutting off of hopes; theism means the affirmation of an eternal moral order and the letting loose of hope. (354)

James’s pragmatic defense of spiritualism thus relies entirely upon psychological considerations. We are to accept spiritualism because it pragmatically involves cheerful psychological consequences: it grounds our hope for something better. On James’s view, the prag-

matic theory is not an attempt to propose a public criterion of meaning, but rather a procedure through which one draws out the psychological implications of accepting a particular belief. To be a pragmatist, at least with regard to metaphysical issues, is to assume those positions which allow for the greatest degree of psychological solace without any concern for how these comforting beliefs may or may not, as Peirce says, “coincide with the fact” (21).

Allow me to labor this point a bit further. By way of emphasizing the contrast between James and Peirce, let’s briefly turn to a metaphysical issue which is discussed by them both.

In the 1906 and 1907 lectures that became his book, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, James takes up the old metaphysical quandary regarding substance. In particular, James focuses his discussion on the notion of transubstantiation; that is, the Catholic view that the bread and wine, once consecrated by the priest, actually become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Catholics believe that during the Mass, the priest effects a change in the substance of the bread and wine, but not in their attributes. All the sensible qualities of bread and wine are preserved throughout the process of consecration; although the bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ, no sensible change occurs-- the body and blood look, taste, smell, and feel like bread and wine.

This notion of transubstantiation perplexed philosophers throughout the Middle Ages. Yet, according to James, once the ontological issue is considered pragmatically, the conflict dissolves into a question of psychology. In fact, James asserts that the issue of transubstantiation is “the only pragmatic application of the substance-idea” (392), the only instance in which the metaphysical concept of substance involves any practical dimension. If we deny the possibility of transubstantiation, we not only damage the thesis of theism (as construed by James), but we also disallow the psychologically comforting idea that in the Mass we “feed upon the very substance of divinity” (392). Our pragmatic justification for believing that the Eucharist is indeed the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ is strictly psychological.

Peirce’s brief account of the pragmatic significance of the transubstantiation thesis accentuates the incongruity between his principle and James’s. In Peirce’s view:

We can consequently mean nothing by wine but what has certain effects, direct or indirect, upon our senses; and to talk of something as having all the sensible characters of wine, yet being in reality blood, is senseless jargon. (31)

Since for Peirce “our idea of anything is our idea of its sensible effects” (31), differences in the psychological implications of opposing ideas are not pragmatic differences. Peirce tells us that pragmatism has “nothing to do with the qualities of feeling” (272) which arises from an idea; the only difference that makes a pragmatic differ-

ence for Peirce is that which indicates a distinction in the functioning of the idea's object. Pragmatic differences are therefore necessarily *public* differences; private factors such as alterations in attitude or psychological disposition are not included within an idea's pragmatic meaning. Put another way, according to Peirce, James mistakes "a mere sensation accompanying the thought for a part of the thought itself." For Peirce, "it is impossible that we should have an idea in our minds which relates to anything but conceived sensible effects of things"; and given that our thoughts exist solely for the sake of guiding our actions regarding these effects, "it is absurd to say that thought has any meaning unrelated to its only function" (31). Peirce does not deny that certain ideas may have unfortunate psychological ramifications for some individuals, he simply asserts that such private accompaniments are not included within the pragmatic meaning of an idea and so have no pragmatic significance.

III. Conclusion.

Ralph Barton Perry's infamous observation, "... the modern movement known as pragmatism is largely the result of James's misunderstanding of Peirce" (Perry, 281) has been vindicated. James's version of "the pragmatic method" is incompatible with the Peircean formulation. James kidnapped pragmatism by broadening its conception of meaning to include the psychological effects of an idea on a given individual. Whereas Peirce used pragmatism in the service of deflating metaphysical balloons by exposing the meaninglessness of certain terms, James saw in pragmatism a way to *settle* the disputes of metaphysics.

According to James, metaphysical disputes were to be resolved through an appeal to psychology. One interprets the competing metaphysical claims in strictly psychological terms, and accepts the one which satisfies best one's psychological temperament. In fact, James claims in the first *Pragmatism* lecture that philosophy itself is merely a contest between opposing psychological types. The advantage of pragmatism, as James understands it, is that it best satisfies our psychological need for a world of both tough minded facts and tender minded principles, for a scientific world in which religion still makes sense.

I would like to close with two related critical points. Firstly, James's inclusion of psychological effects among an idea's pragmatic meaning marks a return to the kind of Cartesianism which Peirce developed pragmatism to undermine. Doesn't James firmly place the meaning of an idea back into the private realm of an individual consciousness? More importantly, if on James's view the *meaning* of a given proposition, *q*, is to some degree determined by the *effect* on my psychology which my belief that *q* implies, then *q* lacks a determinate, public meaning. If terms lack determinate public meanings, then it is difficult to imagine how one can begin to construct the community of inquiry Peirce—and, later, Dewey—envisioned. This implication, I submit, was the source of Peirce's initial dissatisfaction. It remains sufficient cause

for caution among contemporary pragmatists for whom community is a central.

Secondly, I question whether James's strategy for resolving metaphysical disputes is coherent. We saw earlier that on the Jamesian view, warrant for belief in theism is purchased at the expense of psychologizing the meanings of the key terms in the theistic thesis. For example, one's belief in God is simply a belief that there is hope for the universe. The proposition, "God exists," then, *simply* means that there is hope; it says *nothing* about whether there *actually is* such a being as God, it is wholly lacking in ontological content. Similarly, the proposition "I believe that God exists" *simply* reports that "I have hope for the universe"; it entails no ontological commitment to God's existence.

I doubt that serious religious believers can be content with the Jamesian translations of their most central and heartfelt commitments. In fact, I think that James quite misses the point and force of religious belief. Whereas James contains the meaning of religious propositions within the psychology of the religious believer, religious commitments are psychologically satisfying *precisely* because they point to something beyond the psychology of the believer. My belief that God exists will carry positive psychological implications only if I take my belief to mean that *there really is God*.

By extracting the ontological implications out of religious propositions, James has certainly resolved the tension between a scientific and a religious view of the world. But he has done so at the expense of the psychological force of religious belief—the psychological effect of a religious belief is derived from its ontological content. Lacking such content, religious belief is rendered impotent. Consequently, we conclude that, with regard to metaphysical issues, James's pragmatism undermines precisely what it was supposed to provide. On this score, James's pragmatism fails.

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Note: Robert Talisse and Randall Albright both invite responses and rebuttals to this article in a future issue of *Streams of William James*.

*The Effects of Alcohol*¹

by Mark Scott

The northern countries are beginning to abstain. The southern countries hardly understand abstinence. Change will come when a large number of invariable abstinent set an example by habitually drinking water. Such people, if they are prominent enough, will start a wave of imitation, either through challenge or rebuke. You may not join them, but they will help you nonetheless.

Individuals differ, but not by much. There are whole persons and half persons; there are firm persons and waffling persons. There are persons to whom the bare fact of an irrevocable decision is enough to cause a frenzy of desire to back out. Bernard Berenson is one. Such persons do not like to turn the key and lock themselves in. Others get relief and peace of mind by settling a question once for all and never opening that door again. I respect these differences.

The fascination of drunkenness, however, remains a mystery to me, as does the drunk who is incapable of anything, and yet happy. What is at the root of the delusion that a man full of drink is more of a man? Probably the strange happiness and courage that come from feeling that all restraints have been removed. It's the seduction of anaesthesia. Worry disappears. One couldn't care less.

I call it a delusion, because as anyone who has reached this state of drunkenness knows, the pain and fear and worry that go away come back sevenfold the next day.

Probably most people do not go so far, or do so only on occasion. The great excuse for most people's drinking is conviviality, sociability. You arrive at the gathering cold, morose, frustrated, tired—and soon you're laughing, telling stories, full of enthusiasm and fellow-feeling. A good deal of the business of the world is transacted in such a climate.

But even here, one pays. And what one pays may be worth the price, even in business. Elsewhere, though, it may not.

To work while drunk is a treacherous business. In most cases, it merely masks the fatigue one is trying to throw off and makes the work worse. It is hardly the case, either, that drunkenness makes for a good night's sleep—which is what's indicated when one is tired. To the extent that other drugs are used as stimulants to overcome fatigue, what I say of alcohol is also true of them. And young people especially should be

made to understand that what whips them up will eventually whip them.

The whole case against alcohol lies in its treachery. Its happiness is an illusion. Truth is not in it, despite what the poets say. It is not an expressant, or a stimulant, but a depressant, a numbing agent. We say stimulant; we mean anaesthetic. Any more than an ounce and a half a day is detrimental, and some people should not even take that much, if they take any at all.

From every point of view I see one conclusion: it is safer to drink cold water, or hot water, or any kind of water.

Especially here, in this overburdened, excitable America, with all its business and busy-ness, every ounce of handicap than can be added should be avoided, and the daily use of even the smallest amount of alcohol is probably a real handicap, increasing the fatigue and wear and tear of life, diminishing reserves of energy and recuperative capacity, and tending to shorten life.

Say what you will about quality of life, the value of fun, the need to let loose now and then, but the electric ephemeral hilarity with hangover afterwards is not the real quality. I know it seems a pity and a mean way of deciding a question to appeal to fear and safety, but it seems to be a generally accepted truth that it is better to be safe than sorry.

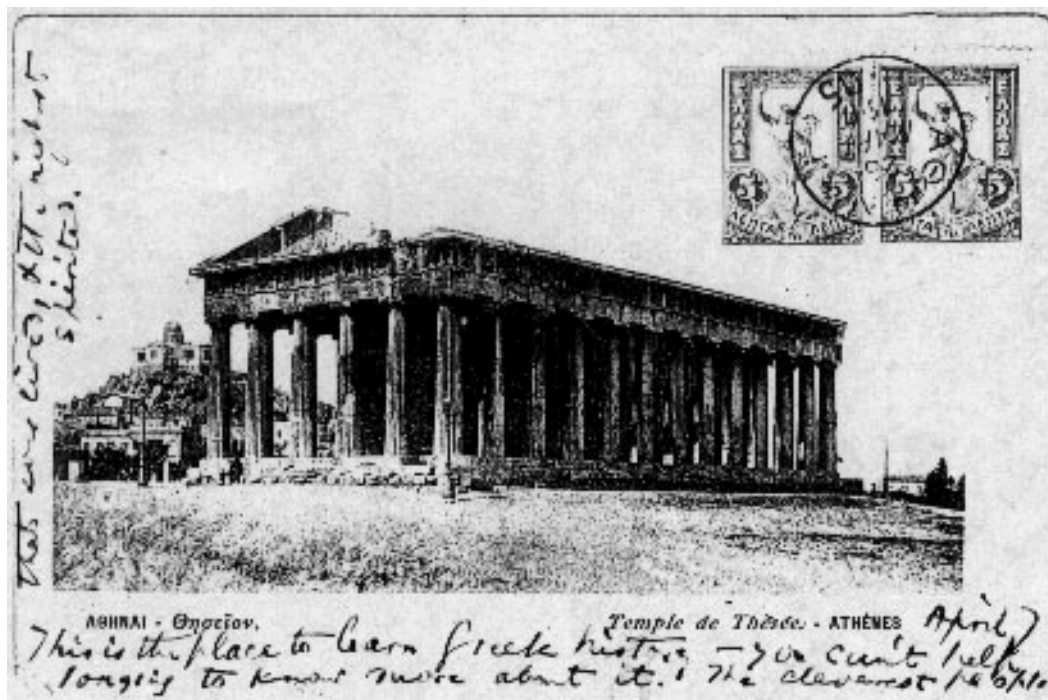
How, then, to be safe? There is the advantage of never having started, but many are past taking advantage of that. The best way to wean ourselves from intemperance is to fill ourselves with a love of temperance for its own sake. The idol of intoxication has to be replaced by another ideal. What is the other ideal? It is the ideal of having a constitution in perfect health that is as elastic as cork and never creaks or rusts or finds any situation that it can't meet by its own buoyancy. It is that sense of exhilaration one feels from simple, sober, perfect health on a fine Indian summer morning. The best excitement is that of one's own bounding life-blood.

This ideal of health is the coming ideal. It is getting a good start, and athletics are helping it. But this ideal of perfect health can itself be used intemperately, and become an idol, like that of excitement for its own sake before it. That, too, is treachery.

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¹ Composed from WJ's notes for a lecture on "The Effects of Alcohol," in the third volume of *Essays and Lectures* in the recent collected works of WJ available from Harvard UP.

Postcards from William to His Son Alexander, Spring 1905



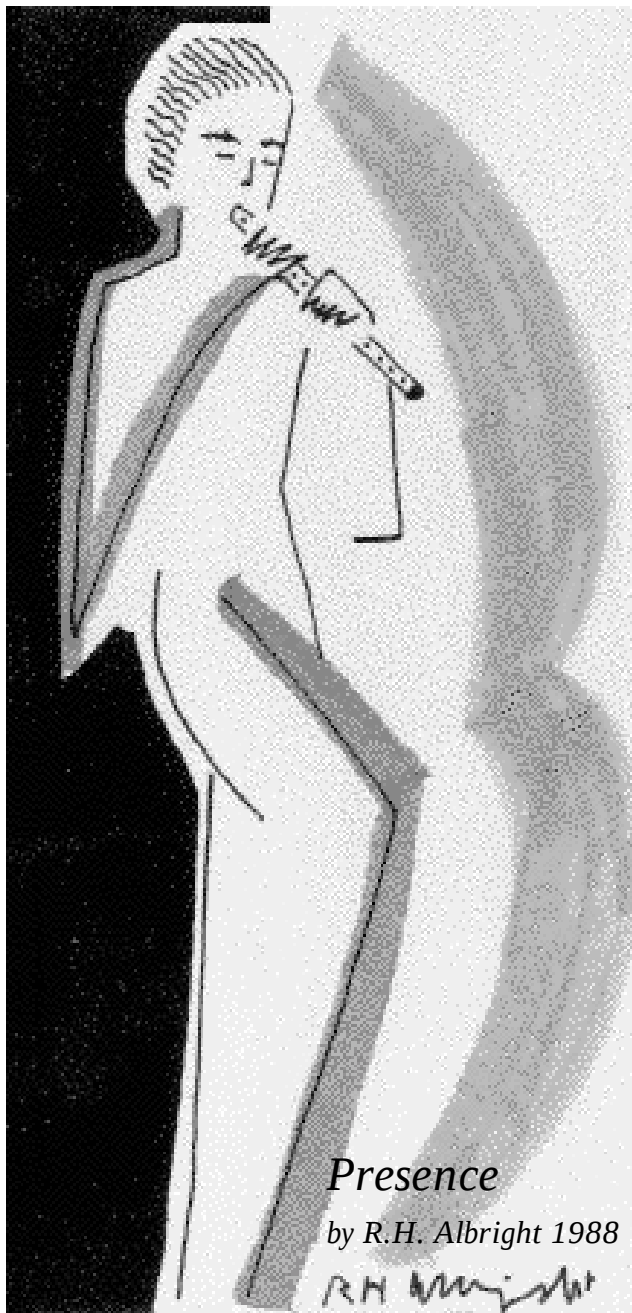
Temple of Theseus — Athens (written in French)

April 7: This is the place to learn Greek history-- you can't help longing to know more about it. The cleverest people that ever lived, & its brightest spirits.



Orvieto — [Artesian] Well of St. Patrick (written in Italian)

Extraordinary well, 200 feet deep, with a spiral way down to the bottom of it, wh.[ich] people travelled to get water out through solid rock. Love! WJ



Presence

by R.H. Albright 1988

R.H. Albright

Deathbed, beginning with lines from William James

by Mark Scott

"O call my brother back to me
I cannot play alone.
The summer comes with flower and bee—
Where is my brother gone?"¹

The day he died was warm and dry;
Dust was on the lawn.
December snow was pushed back high
Against rails no train passed on.

"He isn't there," my father said,
"Come on with us outside."
Then took my hand to pull my head
From the cold tide.

"He isn't there," my father said,
And grabbed me by the arm—
Then let it fall and left the bed.
A breeze came in and broke the charm.

Tenderest love to all farewell Am going soon.
—good-bye (death) Cablegram to William in Cambridge, MA from his sister Alice in London,
March 5, 1892 *The Correspondence of William James, Volume 7* (U of Virginia Press, 1999) 246.

¹. *William and Henry James, Selected Letters* (U of Virginia, 1997). pp. 44-47. William began a letter to his brother Henry, on June 12, 1869 with these four lines from "The Child's First Grief" by Felicia Dorothea Hemans (1793-1835).

Letter from Henry James to Thomas Sergeant Perry on Sept. 2, 1910, about a week after his brother William's death

I sit heavily stricken and in darkness—for from far back in dimmest childhood he had been my Ideal Brother, and I still, through all the years, saw in him, even as a small timorous boy yet, my protector, my backer, my authority and pride. His extinction changes the face of life for me—besides the mere missing of his inexhaustible company and personality, originality, the whole unspeakably vivid and beautiful presence of him. And his noble intellectual vitality was still but at its climax—he had two or three ardent purposes and plans. He had cast them away, however, at the end—I mean that, dreadfully suffering, he wanted only to die.

—*Letters of Henry James, Volume II:167* (1920; edited by Percy Lubbock); quoted on page 345 of *The James Family* by F. O. Matthiessen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947)

Note: Special thanks to Casey Abell for exact date and recipient information

A Voice for Peace

I am only a philosopher, and there is only one thing that a philosopher can be relied on to do, and that is, to contradict other philosophers. In ancient times philosophers defined man as the rational animal; and philosophers since then have always found much more to say about the rational than about the animal part of the definition. But looked at candidly, reason bears about the same proportion to the rest of human nature that we in this hall bear to the rest of America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Polynesia. Reason is one of the very feeblest of nature's forces, if you take it at only one spot and moment. It is only in the very long run that its effects become perceptible. Reason assumes to settle things by weighing them against each other without prejudice, partiality or excitement; but what affairs in the concrete are settled by is, and always will be, just prejudices, partialities, cupidities and excitements. Appealing to reason as we do, we are in a sort of forlorn-hope situation, like a small sand-bank in the midst of a hungry sea ready to wash it out of existence. But sand-banks grow when the conditions favor; and weak as reason is, it has this unique advantage over its antagonists that its activity never lets up and that it presses always in one direction, while men's prejudices vary, their passions ebb and flow, and their excitements are intermittent. Our sand-bank, I absolutely believe, is bound to grow. Bit by bit it will get dyked and breakwatered. But sitting as we do in this warm room, with music and lights and smiling faces, it is easy to get too sanguine about our task; and since I am called to speak, I feel as if it might not be out of place to say a word about the strength of our enemy.

Our permanent enemy is the rooted bellicosity of human nature. Man, biologically considered, and whatever else he may be into the bargain, is the most formidable of all beasts of prey, and, indeed, the only one that preys systematically on his own species. We are once for all adapted to the military status. A millennium of peace would not breed the fighting disposition out of our bone and marrow, and a function so ingrained and vital will never consent to die without resistance, and will always find impassioned apologists and idealizers.

—William James, beginning of "The Peace Banquet," originally published in the *Official Report of the Universal Peace Congress*, held in Boston in 1904, and in the *Atlantic Monthly*, December, 1904. Re-printed in *Memories and Studies*, Henry James Jr. [his son], editor, (Longmans, Green and Co., London, Bombay, and Calcutta, 1911) p. 299-301

Gestalt Psychology?

There are many other facts beside the phenomena of contrast which prove that when two objects act together on us the sensation which either would give alone becomes a different sensation.

—William James, from the "Sensation" chapter, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) [Harvard UP reprint] 676

In Other Words...

'Other world?' says Emerson, 'there is no other world,'—than this one, namely, in which our several biographies are founded....The belief in the genuineness of each particular moment in which we feel the squeeze of this world's life, as we actually do work here, or work is done upon us, is an Eden from which rationalists seek in vain to expel us, now that we have criticized their state of mind.

—William James, from "Percept and Concept--Some Corollaries" chapter, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911) [1996 University of Nebraska Press re-print, preserving original typesetting] 110

Ralph Waldo Emerson made this comment which James is quoting to Sampson Reed, the Swedenborgian pharmacist who had inspired Emerson when he was a young man. In August 1821, Emerson heard Reed, three years older than Emerson, deliver an "Oration on Genius" address at Harvard (MOF, 16-17). In 1826, Emerson was profoundly impressed with Reed's *Observations on the Growth of the Mind* (MOF, 70-71). However, Robert Richardson notes this:

Emerson's moral idealism did not decline in the 1840s or even waver, but on questions of politics, social action, and metaphysics there is a new note of this-worldliness and practicality that grew on him in the months after the death of Waldo [his son]. When Sampson Reed answered Emerson's reservations about Swedenborg with "It is not so in your experience, but is so in the other world," Emerson shot back: "Other world? There is no other world; here or nowhere is the whole fact." Though he still cared about essences, he was increasingly ready to accept the reality of surfaces. He noted this year that "this new molecular philosophy goes to show that there are astronomical interspaces betwixt atom and atom; that the world is all outside; it has no inside." (MOF, 382)

—Randall Albright

Bibliography

MOF: Emerson, *The Mind on Fire* by Robert D. Richardson, Jr. (U of California, 1995)

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by Randall Albright

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And an Invitation

This newsletter can only be as good as more than the sum of the parts of those who actively contribute to it. I am *springing ahead* with this issue so that people can start to plan for summer.

Please send submissions *no later* than June 1st for the Summer issue. If you have something now, please send it *now* so that we have time to make the issue *great!* In the meantime, how about giving a subscription to a friend? Or... how can you help to build this into a larger, more pluralistic, and active Society?

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A New James Book

by Phil Oliver

James's famous "stream of consciousness" implies that our lives proceed with an ever-forward-inclining momentum which sweeps our personal histories smoothly along in its wake. It is an image of inexorable succession which seems little interested in those "bits" of experience which pause to savor the richness of pure presence, or of a present which partakes of the transcendent. Indeed, James says in the same rhetorical breath in Chapter XI of *The Principles of Psychology*, "it would be difficult to find in the actual concrete consciousness of man a feeling so limited to the present as not to have an inkling of anything that went before." Or, we should add, an expectancy about the future.

But we must remember that James is also a philosopher of transcendence, a celebrant of "the sufficiency of the present moment," on those prized occasions, those electric moments when we are graced with an immediacy of perception in which past and future fall away and our attention is fully riveted on what we see, hear, taste, feel, or apprehend in consciousness now. "This feeling of the sufficiency of the present moment-- this absence of all need to explain it, account for it, or justify it-- is what I call the Sentiment of Rationality."

—This is an excerpt from the "Flow" and the Stream of Thought chapter of a book, William James's "Springs of Delight": The Return to Life, to be published by Vanderbilt Press's Library of American Philosophy, currently slated for late Summer/Fall 2000 release. Phil Oliver's e-mail address is POLiver826@aol.com