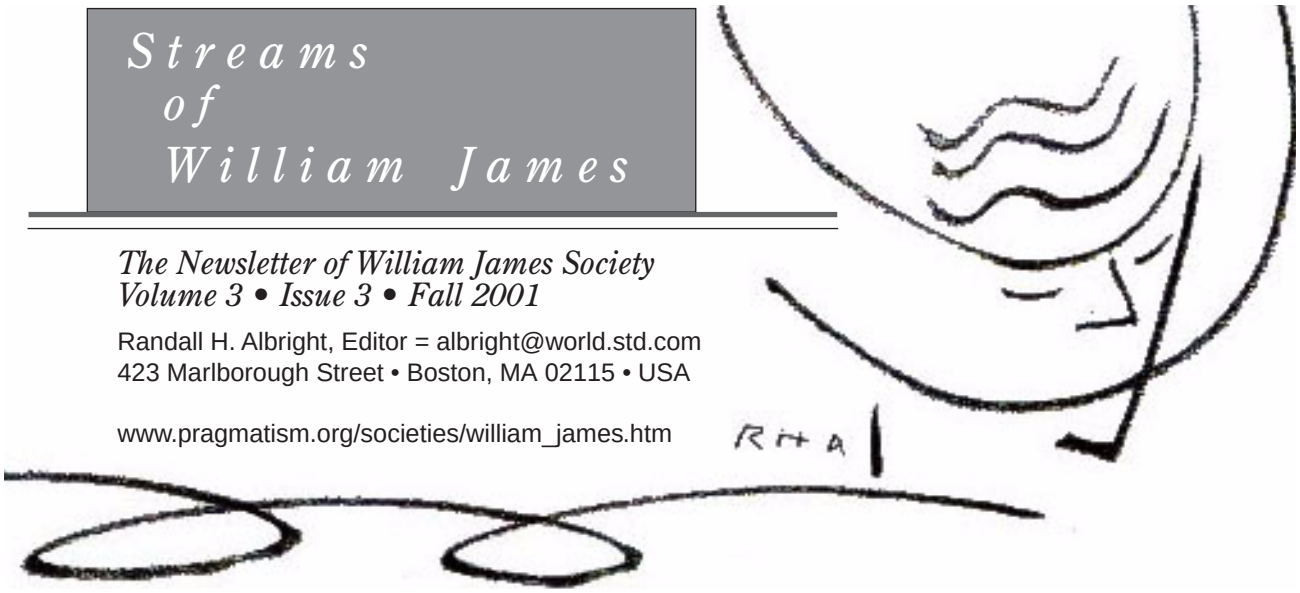
Streams of William James

The Newsletter of William James Society
Volume 3 • Issue 3 • Fall 2001

Streams of William James



The Newsletter of William James Society
Volume 3 • Issue 3 • Fall 2001

Randall H. Albright, Editor = albright@world.std.com
423 Marlborough Street • Boston, MA 02115 • USA

www.pragmatism.org/societies/william_james.htm

Spring 2002 Deadline

Please submit contributions as soon as possible for Volume 4, Issue 1. Tentative deadline to *finalize copy* is February 15, 2002. All scholarly contributions are evaluated in a blind, peer review process.

Deadline for initial drafts to Paul Jerome Croce, Guest Editor for a special issue of *Streams* dedicated to the centennial of the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, is February 1, 2002. For more information, see page 29.

Membership Information

2001 and 2002 Membership:
Basic membership is
$15/1 year; $25/2 years for an address in the USA;
$20/1 year; $30/2 years for an address outside USA.
Add $25 (in USA) or $30 (outside USA) if you want Vol. 1 (1999 - 80 pages) and Vol. 2 (2000 - 68 pages).

Higher Levels of Support:
Supporting Star - $75
Friend of William James - $150
Beacon Helper - $250
Benefactor - $500
Note: Contributions are not tax-deductible at this time.

2001 and 2002 Institutional Subscription:
$30/1 year; $50/2 years for an address in the USA;
$40/1 year; $60/2 years for an address outside USA.
Add $50 (in USA) or $60 (outside USA) if you want Vol. 1 (1999 - 80 pages) and Vol. 2 (2000 - 68 pages).

To join, please address a check to:
William James Society
c/o D. Micah Hester
Mercer University, School of Medicine
1550 College Street
Macon, GA 31207-0001

"The purpose of the William James Society shall be to encourage study of, and communication about, the life and work of William James (1842-1910) and his ongoing influence in the many fields to which he contributed."
—Article I,
William James Society Constitution

Table of Contents

Randall H. Albright • Newsletter Editor •
423 Marlborough Street • Boston, MA 02115 • USA

Published by the Philosophy Department • 308 Hanner Hall •
Oklahoma State University • Stillwater, OK 74078-5064 • USA

WJ, Spiritualism, and Unconsciousness "Beyond the Margin"

by Krister Dylan Knapp

Introduction

In this essay I would like to make some cursory remarks regarding one development in William James's thought, namely, how his contributions to the psychical research of Spiritualism helped him develop a theory of the unconscious. Psychical research in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries denoted the scientific investigation of supernormal and supernatural phenomena—mesmerism, hypnosis, telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, and the like. Historically, the manifestation of these phenomena have been bundled together with alternative socio-religious movements such as Theosophy, Anthroposophy, and Spiritualism (among others), the last of which espoused the view that spirits of the dead can and do communicate with the living, usually through a medium. Such phenomena, and their attending movements, are commonly referred to as *the occult* (meaning "hidden," "secret," or "mysterious" knowledge) and were investigated by a number of organizations, including the English and American Societies for Psychical Research, both of which William James was an active and leading member.[1]

William's initial curiosity with Spiritualism began as a child in the 1840s and '50s when it was a common topic of inquiry in his household, where his father and leading antebellum intelligentsia discussed it openly.[2] In his youth in the 1860s and '70s, especially during his medical studies at Harvard University, James developed an interest in mental pathology and began to link it with occult phenomena.[3] His professional commitment began during a winter trip to England in 1882-83, where members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) befriended him, and in 1884, when he expedited the founding of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) in Boston, the SPR's sister organization.[4] James became an active vice-president, organizer, financial contributor, and researcher of both organizations. His fascination with Spiritualism burgeoned with the discovery of Mrs. Leonora Piper, the famous Boston medium, whose seances he and his wife, (Mrs.) Alice Gibbens James, attended regularly between 1885 and 1890, and who became the locus of the SPR's and ASPR's research.[5] During the 1880s and '90s, William took several trips to Europe to meet with the SPR, debate with members of the scientific community bent on determining fraud, engage in committee work, and conduct research. He recorded his observations in an extensive series of lesser-known but highly significant analytical essays, book reviews, circulars and notes that offered precepts for scientifically evaluating the evidence, theoretical explanations for psychical phenomena, and hypostatized on the nature of hidden mental states.[6]

James's interest in psychical research influenced several notable developments of his thought including his theory of the unconscious. A central goal of psychical research was to scientifically explore mental states that differed from normal waking moments of consciousness. During the 1880s and '90s, the developments in psychical research, especially the investigations of trance-states of spiritualist mediums,

---

1. For a useful collection of essays on the occult in the United States, see Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow, eds. *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1983). While there exist too many histories of Spiritualism to list here, a provocative one with an excellent bibliography is Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997). For the first comprehensive and historical account of James and psychical research see my own work, "To the Summerland: William James, Psychical Research and Modernity in America," Ph.D. diss., Boston College, forthcoming, in which I argue, following Perry, that "James's interest in 'psychical research' was not one of his vagaries but was central and typical" (*The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. II, p. 155).

2. It is inconceivable that William would not have been introduced to Spiritualism during his youth given the copious writings on the subject by his father and his father's associates. Henry James, Sr. wrote three essay reviews on Spiritualism decrying its status. See "Spiritual Rappings," *Lectures and Miscellanies* (New York: Redfield, 1852); "Spiritualism New and Old," *The Atlantic Monthly* XXIX (March 1872): 358-362; and "Modern Diabolism," *The Atlantic Monthly* XXXII (August 1873): 219-224. Emerson, who was a favorite family friend and frequent guest at the Jameses, also lamented the advent of Spiritualism in a number of essays. See, for example, his remarks in his "Journals," "Familiar Letters," in a lecture entitled "Success," and in seven different essays, including "New England Reformers," "The Chardon Street Convention," "The Poet," "Nominalist and Realist," "The Man of Letters," "Worship," "Swedenborg, or the Mystic," and especially "Demonology," in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, E.W. Emerson, ed. (Boston, 1903- 1904) and *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, E.W. Emerson and W.E. Forbes, eds. (Boston, 1900-1914). An excellent discussion of Emerson and Spiritualism is John B. Wilson, "Emerson and the 'Rochester Rappings,'" *New England Quarterly*, 41 (June 1968): 248-258. Many, many other literati and intellectuals passed through the James household as well, each of whom wrote at least one composition on Spiritualism, including the historian and diplomat George Bancroft, editor and diplomat John Bigelow, poet and editor William Cullen Bryant, poet and essayist George Henry Calvert, essayist Richard Dana, novelist James Fenimore Cooper, editor and writer Parke Godwin, editor and political leader Horace Greeley, editor and reformer George Ripley, traveler and translator Bayard Taylor, critic and poet Henry Tuckerman, British novelist and socialite William Makepeace Thackeray, and poet and essayist Nathaniel Parker Willis. The works in which they discuss Spiritualism are too long to list here, but a full citation is available from the author upon request.

challenged James to repeatedly examine the nature of consciousness. This was particularly the case for the seemingly contradictory claims he made in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), in which he argued that consciousness is both like a stream, sometimes flowing smooth and continuous, and not like one, often fragmented and discontinuous. When he began the work in 1878, James believed that the mind could *not* be divided into two, seemingly unrelated components: it simply defied logic based on then accepted physiological and anatomical theories of the brain. But by the end of the book—one which had taken him twelve years to write during which time his views evolved—James came to believe that the mind could have multiple states, as the final chapter on hypnotism indicates. Here James suggested that hypnotic states were neither knowable nor remembered by individuals in normal waking moments. Perhaps there was something to this notion of hidden selves, what we sometimes refer to as the unconscious.[7]

The Unconscious

The history of the unconscious is, needless to say, long and complex. Despite its age, the best history of it remains Henri Ellenberger's classic *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, a nine hundred page tome which traced the development of what he called "dynamic psychiatry" from its ancient origins to modern theories of mind advanced by Janet, Freud, Adler, and Jung.[8] The middle section of the book is devoted to the "first dynamic psychiatry." Ellenberger traced its development from the German physician, Franz Mesmer, and his work with "animal magnetism," to James Braid and hypnotism, to the psychical research of organizations like the SPR, and to the various French, German, and Swiss schools of neurology and psychiatry that experimented with somnambulism (sleepwalking), hysteria, hypnotism, and hallucinations, among other altered and hidden mental states. Ellenberger's overall goal was to show that no other science or branch of knowledge had undergone as much metamorphoses as dynamic psychiatry. He concluded that by 1945 the two competing and incommensurable approaches to the study of the human psyche— Freud's and Jung's—defied scientists' expectations for unity, and he suggested that a synthesis might be achieved if psychologists and philosophers combined their efforts to shed new light on the psychic realities of the human mind.[9]

But Ellenberger should have looked more closely at William James, who had used his considerable skill in both these fields to suggest just such a synthesis. While Ellenberger did recognize psychical research and the advent of Spiritualism were of major importance in the history of dynamic psychiatry (because they provided psychologists and psychopathologists with new approaches to the mind, especially the scientific study of automatic writing of mediums in trance-states), and that William James understood these developments to provide a means of access to the unconscious, he pursued the matter no further.[10]

One scholar who has persistently pursued this aspect of James's thought is Eugene Taylor. Taylor argues that James's interest in abnormal psychology (under whose banner he includes psychical research), especially after the publication of the *Principles*, demonstrates that he did not turn away from psychology and toward philosophy, but rather maintained a psychologist's attitude toward knowledge and the world, indicating a coherent vision.[11] In his most recent effort, Taylor

---

3. James wrote copious essays, reviews, and notices on mental pathology throughout his lifetime, which are published in *Essays, Comments, and Reviews* in *The Works of William James*, F.H. Burkhardt, Gen. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987). A significant review from James's youth that relates mental pathology to the occult is that on *Du sommeil et des etats analogues* (1868), an eight-volume pioneering work on the medical benefits of hypnotism by the French physiologist Ambrose-Auguste Liebeault, pp. 240-245. His earliest review of a work on Spiritualism is *Planchette* (1869), by the New Thought writer and one-time editor of the Boston *Transcript*, Epes Sargent, in *Essays in Psychical Research* (hereafter *EPR*) in *The Works of William James* (1986).

4. There are several excellent histories of psychical research in England including Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), and Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985). There is as yet no adequate history of psychical research in the United States.

5. There are a number of sources for biographical information on Mrs. Piper, most of them inferior. For a useful overview, see Garner Murphy, "Piper, Leonora Evelina Simonds," in *Notable American Women, 1607-1950*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971), vol. III, pp. 73-75.

6. The entirety of these writings have been collected and published together for the first time in *EPR*. A notable volume that published some of this work is Gardner Murphy and Robert O. Ballou, eds. *William James on Psychical Research* (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

7. Certainly one modern psychologist has thought so. See the essay by Gertrude R. Schmeidler, "William James: Pioneering Ancestor of Modern Parapsychology," in *Reinterpreting the Legacy of William James*, edited by Margaret E. Donnelly (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1992), pp. 339-352. Schmeidler argues that James's work in psychical research in the nineteenth century laid the foundations for work in twentieth-century parapsychology, especially that on extra-sensory perception or ESP.

8. Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).

9. *Ibid*, pp. 896-97.

10. *Ibid*, pp. 82-85 and 120-21.

11. See, for example, Eugene Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States: The 1896 Lowell Lectures* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982).

argues that James's interest in abnormal psychology unified the disparate schools of psychology in the 1890s—as represented by German experimental thought and the French person- centered approach—and provided the bridge to James's radical empiricism evident in his works during the 1900s.[12] Taylor invokes James's phrase, "consciousness beyond-the-margin" to refer to non-normal states of consciousness, claiming that James believed there was neither an unconscious entity nor unconscious states, but rather multiple and divided states of consciousness, only some disparately aware of the other.[13] A closer look at the role of James's observation of psychical research, especially his views of Spiritualism, however, reveals that James was groping toward a theory of the unconscious. Although James's use of the term "consciousness" denoted a variety of meanings, the limitations of late nineteenth- century psychological language should not keep us from recognizing that James was discussing what we now call the unconscious.

William James and the Supernormal Unconscious

Around the time James published the *Principles*, he wrote two essays on psychical research which provide initial insight into his emerging views of the unconscious, beginning with his statements in the *Principles* that consciousness could not be divided. In "Notes on Automatic Writing" (1889) and "A Record of Observations of Certain Phenomena of Trance" (1890), he focused on his scientific study and personal experiences of Mrs. Piper's ability to write automatically while in a trance-state.[14] In these early essays, James found that her trance-state indicated "the consciousness of [a] subject split into two parts" one of which "express[ed] itself automatically through the hand."[15] This suggested the likelihood of unwitting motivation. By 1892, just two years after the publication of the *Principles*, James showed he not only accepted a divided consciousness but was busy exploring hidden and altered mental states. In his essay "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished" (1892), James widened the conception of what he now called the "strata of consciousness." Throughout he referred to the latent states/entity as "extra-consciousness," stating that there was a "simultaneous existence of two different strata of consciousness, ignorant of each other, in the same person."[16] He also invented several new terms to refer to experiences in these states, including "below the threshold," "above the threshold," "subconscious mental operations," and, most famously, "beyond the margin."

James was not alone in his pursuit. His friend Frederic Myers—a British psychical researcher who had been trained in the classics—was exploring the same terrain. To help explain the strata of different mental states ranging from consciousness to "extra-consciousness," or what Myers had christened the "subliminal self," James deferred to him, writing,

> The ordinary consciousness Mr. Myers likens to the visible part of the solar spectrum; the total consciousness is like that spectrum prolonged by the inclusion of the ultra-red and ultra-violet rays. In the psychic spectrum the "ultra" parts may embrace a far wider range, both of physiological and of psychical activity, than is open to our ordinary consciousness and memory. At the lower end we have the *physiological* extension, mind-cures, "stigmatization" of ecstatics, etc.; in the upper, the hyper-normal cognitions of the medium-trance.[17]

In any of these states across the spectrum, James noted a person might have any number of varied experiences. As James viewed them, ordinary conscious experiences were like those of the visible parts of the solar spectrum, while "beyond the margin" experiences were like those of the non-visible parts. They existed, but they were difficult to access. To do so, one had to probe the inner states, or what he latter referred to as the "hidden self." "Each of us," James wrote,

> is in reality an abiding psychical entity far more extensive than he knows—an individuality which can never express itself completely through any corporeal manifestation. The Self manifests itself through the organism; but there is always some part of the Self unmanifested; and always, as it seems, some power of organic expression in abeyance or in reserve.[18]

James believed deeply that one effective way to access this power "in reserve," or what he sometimes called the "sublime reservoir," was to sit with a spiritualist trance-medium such as Mrs. Piper, who could tap into it during seances. Thus, Spiritualism offered a further understanding into the nature of "beyond the margin" experiences; it brought forth those experiences that were normally out of immediate awareness.

> We all have potentially a "subliminal self," which may make at any time irruption into our ordinary lives. In its lowest phases it is only the depository of our forgotten

---

12. Eugene Taylor, *William James: On Consciousness Beyond the Margin* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996).
13. *Ibid*, p. 35.
14. See *EPR*, pp. 37-55 and 79-88.
15. "Notes on Automatic Writing," *EPR*, p. 40.
16. "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished," *EPR*, p. 95.
17. *Ibid*, p. 98.
18. *Ibid*, p. 98.

> memories; it its highest, we don't know what it is at all.... [But] whatever it is, it is subconscious.[19]

By the early 1890s, then, James was groping toward a psychology of the unconscious via Spiritualism as a supernormal phenomenon.

William James and the Supernatural Unconscious

During the 1890s, James also explored a *supernatural* explanation of the unconscious via Spiritualism when he began assigning *metaphysical* status to the sublime reservoir. By 1909, he tried to explain his view in a long essay called "Report on Mrs. Piper's Hodgson-Control." Richard Hodgson had been an active and much respected researcher with the SPR and ASPR, known for his impartiality and strict adherence to scientific method, until his untimely death in 1905. His primary responsibility had been to investigate Mrs. Piper. After his death, he appeared as her "control" during seances—the spirit who acted as a liaison between the trance-medium and the spirit-world. At this point, James had prioritized the concept of the will in his philosophy and tended to accentuate its role in the intentions of human behavior. In this essay, among other things, he sought to explain the sublime reservoir in terms of multiple *wills* acting upon one another. So, when Hodgson's spirit appeared in seances with Mrs. Piper, he thought her unconscious and Hodgson's will might be interacting somehow. He called Mrs. Piper's unconscious energy the "will to personate." In a near-mystical passage he wrote,

> That a "will to personate" is a factor in the Piper-phenomenon I fully believe, and I believe with unshakeable [*sic*] firmness that this will is able to draw on supernormal sources of information. It can "tap," possibly the sitter's memories, possibly those of distant human beings, possibly some cosmic reservoir in which the memories of earth are stored, whether in the shape of "spirits" or not.[20]

James added, however, that there was more to explaining Spiritualism than merely invoking telepathy or the cosmic reservoir theories.

> If this will [to personate] were the only will concerned in the performance, the phenomenon would be humbug pure and simple, and the minds tapped telepathically in it would play an entirely passive role—that is, the telepathic data would be fished out by the personating will, not forced upon it by desires to communicate, acting externally to itself.[21]

In other words, James postulated that the will of the medium could not be the only one active during any given successful spiritualistic communication. There must be additional wills present in the seance; there must be what he called a "will to communicate" at work as well. To that will James designated a *supernatural* status; it was a spirit from the other world. Although somewhat unclear, James seemed to be arguing that this "will to communicate" floated in the cosmic reservoir, for he wrote,

> it is possible to complicate the hypothesis. Extraneous "wills to communicate" may contribute to the results as well as a "will to personate," and the two kinds of will[s] may be distinct in entity, though capable of helping each other out. The will to communicate... would be, on the *prima facie* view of it, the will of Hodgson's [or any deceased person's] surviving spirit."[22]

James was suggesting that Hodgson's surviving spirit was willing itself to communicate with James and other seance participants through Mrs. Piper from the sublime cosmic reservoir. This seems to imply he believed in the existence of surviving spirits and that they somehow communicated with spirits in this world through the unconscious.[23]

Short of a clear explanation as to how all these wills functioned, James offered a highly abstract metaphor.

> A natural way of representing the process [of interacting wills] would be to suppose the spirit to have found that by pressing, so to speak, against "the light," it can make fragmentary gleams and flashes of what it wishes to say....The two wills might strike up a sort of partnership and stir each other up. It might even be that the "will to personate" would be inert unless it were aroused to activity by the other will. We might imagine the relation to be analogous to that of two physical bodies, from neither of which, when alone, mechanical, thermal, or electrical effects can proceed, but if the

---

19. *Ibid*, p. 102.

20. "Report on Mrs. Piper's Hodgson-Control," *EPR*, p. 355.

21. *Ibid*, pp. 355-356.

22. *Ibid*, p. 356.

23. In addition to fraud, there were two competing theories to explain spiritualist phenomena. One (thought-transference) was that the minds of the sitters in the seance communicated telepathically amongst themselves. This was called supernormal communication, since it involved humans possessing abilities beyond their usual ones. The other (the spirit hypothesis) was that the spirits of the dead communicated with those of the living. This was called supernatural communication, since it invoked the ontological existence of godly entities. If the latter was true, James thought the soul might be surviving energy in the form of a will.

> other body be present, and show a difference of "potential," action starts up and goes on apace [between the two].[24]

The basic point to James's idea here is that Spiritualism definitely involved more than one entity's will. Questions such as: to whom did the two (or more) wills belong? what were their exact natures? how did they interact with one another (supernormally or supernaturally)? where did they reside (in this world or on the "other side")?, James frustratingly left unanswered. He did offer, however, one provisional conclusion. After one hundred pages of discussion and analyses, he wrote,

> it is enough to indicate these various possibilities, which a serious student of this part of nature has to weigh altogether, and between which his decision must fall. His vote will always be cast (if ever it be cast) by the sense of dramatic probabilities of nature which the sum total of his experience has begotten in him. *I myself feel as if an external will to communicate were probably there*, that is, I find myself doubting, in consequence of my whole acquaintance with that sphere of phenomena, that Mrs. Piper's dream-life, even if equipped with "telepathic" powers, accounts for all the results found. But if asked whether the will to communicate be Hodgson's [or that of any recently deceased person] or be some mere spirit-counterfeit of Hodgson, I remain uncertain and await more facts, facts which may not point clearly to a conclusion for fifty or a hundred years.[25]

James's partial resolution is simultaneously exciting and disappointing. On the one hand, it indicates that James believed that there *could* be some truth to the spirit-control theory—that spirits from the "other world" can and do communicate with those of the living through the trances of a spiritualist medium like Mrs. Piper. However provisionally, James developed the view that there must be an external will to communicate—not an earthly one, but a possibly supernatural one. On the other hand, James left undecided whether or not that will was Hodgson's (and by implication any deceased person's), or whether or not we could ever know whose spirit was trying to communicate with us.

Beyond the Margin Experiences and a Unified Theory of Mind

Between 1892 and 1909, James vacillated between the explanations of the unconscious as a supernormal and a supernatural phenomenon. Somewhere between the two lay what he designated "beyond the margin" experiences. Unfortunately, he was never very exact about what these were. They appeared to be something like opaque "spiritual" encounters that make individuals more aware of their selves and places in the universe as meaningful beings, and they appeared to belong exclusively to the private domain of the individual. Moreover, the individual did not appear to be in control of these experiences with regard to their frequency or longevity. Instead, "beyond the margin" experiences occurred quite infrequently, and they were definitely something that developed outside the normal realm of human consciousness and everyday life. For James, the unconscious seemed to manifest itself in the paranormal, but the sublime reservoir "out there" necessitated it. What that reservoir was, however, eluded James until the end. In 1909, one year before his death, he wrote in his final essay on the topic, "there is 'something in' these never ending reports... [of Spiritualism], although I haven't yet the least positive notion of the something."[26]

Typical of many of James's statements, this one indicated a false modesty; he *did* have a positive notion of the something: that Spiritualism revealed humans to possess unconsciousness (states or an entity or both) that contained the potential for supernormal if not supernatural communication between human souls. Although William James never fully developed this theory into an full-blown philosophy of the unconscious, he seemed to be groping toward what Ellenberger later imagined might unite the theories of Freud and Jung, albeit in a very different sort of way. "Beyond the Margin" experiences were a complex process of telepathic communication between a trance-medium, the sitters of the seance, and the sublime, cosmic reservoir where all unconscious memories of human wills were stored. It was for James simultaneously a psychological occurrence and a metaphysical phenomenon: a process that necessitated both the subjective, personal experiences that occur at the subconscious levels of the psyche and the objective, universal nature of the cosmos "out there" beyond the will of humanity. Thus, James's theory of the unconscious via Spiritualism combined psychology and philosophy, which was exactly what Ellenberger had wanted—a unified theory of mind.

—Krister Dylan Knapp is a doctoral candidate in the History Department at Boston College. Currently, he is writing his dissertation on the history of William James and psychical research, and teaching courses in the American Studies Department at the University of Massachusetts/Boston. Krister is also the author of "Should Wolves be Reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park?" Illuminare: A Student Journal in Recreation, Parks, and Leisure Studies *I (Spring 1993): 66-71. His e-mail is knappkr@bc.edu.*

---

[24] "Report on Mrs. Piper's Hodgson-Control," *EPR*, p. 356.

[25] *Ibid*, p. 359.

[26] "The Confidences of a 'Psychical Researcher,'" *EPR*, p. 371.

WJ and Robert Louis Stevenson: The Importance of Emotion

by Jack Barbalet

William James is among the best-loved thinkers, but this does not mean he is among the best understood. Take the case, for instance, of James's use of Robert Louis Stevenson, and what it means for James's own thought.

Arthur O. Lovejoy, a philosopher who studied at Harvard during James's tenure, summarizes a position that has become the conventional view. A distinguishing feature of James's ethical writings, Lovejoy says, is "an exceptionally vivid feeling for the underived and intrinsic value of almost all distinctive and spontaneous manifestations of human nature, the indefeasible validity of each personal point of view." He immediately goes on to say that this "gospel had been…powerfully preached before James preached it, by Whitman and by Stevenson—two lay moralists who, by reason of natural affinity of mind, seem to have influenced him not a little" (Lovejoy 1908 [1996]: 158). This is an assessment of James that has continued to be more or less accepted, as we shall see. We shall also see that it is entirely misleading in all of its significant components.

Stevenson and "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings"

Robert Louis Stevenson (hereafter RLS) was a Scottish writer, 8 years junior to William James (hereafter WJ). He died in Samoa at the age of 44 in 1894. He is best remembered today for his novels, especially *Treasure Island* (1883), *Kidnapped* (1886), and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). But RLS's reputation as a writer preceded the novels and was based on the essays he wrote from the late 1870s, which he continued to write throughout his short life. RLS was an essayist of great range and deep sensitivity.

RLS brought himself into the orbit of the Jameses in 1884 when he wrote a critical appreciation of the fiction of Henry James, WJ's novelist brother. From that time RLS and Henry James were on very cordial terms, socialized with each other, and maintained a lifelong correspondence. WJ read the novels of RSL for "relaxation," as he reports in a letter from 1886 (Perry 1935a: 394-5). He was also aware of RLS as an essayist. In a letter of April 1888, written to his brother Henry, WJ describes an essay of RLS, "The Lantern-Bearers," as "one of the most beautiful things ever written—you read his sentences over and over again, for everything about them is just *right*,—classic" (Perry 1935a: 406; emphasis in original).

When, in the mid-1890s, WJ delivered a number of public lectures in order to supplement his income, he drew upon the "The Lantern-Bearers" for one of these, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings." Together with two other lectures, "On a Certain Blindness" was delivered to young women at Wellesley, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, and a number of other schools (Simon 1998: 267). It was published, with its companion lectures, together with a public lecture series on psychology to teachers, in 1899 as *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*. While this is not the only reference to RLS in WJ's published work, it is the only discussion accompanied with extensive quotation.

In a similar vein to Lovejoy, WJ's biographer Ralph Barton Perry says that, in drawing on a number of like-minded sources, WJ in "On a Certain Blindness" is "testifying to the worth of life as revealed to an emancipated sympathy." In particular, RLS's "Lantern-Bearers" therefore contributes to WJ's "doctrine of the inward illumination of humble lives" (Perry 1935b: 273). This is a view still current (Feldman 1997: 317; Putnam 1997: 294-6). The issue here is not that these assessments are all wrong, but that they are not all right. Something significant is being missed.

The incomplete picture we find in Lovejoy, Perry, and others seems to be drawn by WJ himself. In the "Preface" to *Talks to Teachers*, just over 3 pages long, more than a page is devoted to "On a Certain Blindness." After expressing the fear that the essay may be taken as "a mere piece of sentimentalism," WJ goes on to say that its importance is in the fact that it "connects itself with a definite view of the world and of our moral relations to the same" (James 1899: v). The view of the world referred to here includes the idea that:

> [t]here is no point of view absolutely public and universal. Private and uncommunicable perceptions always remain over … The practical consequences of such a philosophy is the well-known democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality… (James 1899: v).

WJ describes this as the "pluralistic or individualistic philosophy" familiar to those who would have read his "volume of philosophic essays" (James 1899: v). The only such volume WJ published prior to *Talks to Teachers* was *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* published two years previously, in 1897. We shall come back to *The Will to Believe* later in this essay.

The reference to "democratic respect" is a political discernment absent from the text but located in the Preface as a result of the contemporary US "pretension…to inflict its own inner ideals and institutions *vi et armis* upon Orientals" (James 1899: vi). This is a reference to the annexation of the Philippines begun by the US in 1897, to which WJ was opposed. The idea of the individuality of each human life and its significance had enduring importance to WJ. But what all of the commentators seem to miss, which is central for WJ himself, is that what makes both the individuality and its significance possible is the fact of emotional engagement.

This core but neglected idea, of the centrality of emotions, is in the opening sentence of the piece: "Our judgements concerning the worth of things, big or little, depend on the *feelings* the things arouse in us" (James 1899: 229). He goes on to say that without feelings we should "be

unable to point to any one situation or experience in life more valuable or significant than any other" (James 1899: 229).This idea is crucial for WJ: he states it throughout all his key works. It is beautifully summarized in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* when he says:

> Conceive yourself, if possible, suddenly stripped of all the emotion with which your world now inspires you, and try to imagine it *as it exists*, purely by itself, without your favourable or unfavourable, hopeful or apprehensive comment. It will be almost impossible for you to realize such a condition of negativity and deadness. No one portion of the universe would then have importance beyond another; and the whole collection of its things and series of events would be without significance, character, expression, or perspective. Whatever of value, interest, or meaning our respective worlds may appear endued with are thus pure gifts of the spectator's mind (James 1902 [1958]: 128; emphasis in original).

What is not said here, but which follows from it, is that if the meaning of things derives from our emotional engagement with them, then we are unavoidably cut off from the meanings other person's experiences create for them.

The point of "On a Certain Blindness," then, is that we are blind to the "feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves" (James 1899: 228). Given the truth of the first proposition, spelled out in the previous paragraph, the second necessarily follows:

> We are practical beings, each of us with limited functions and duties to perform. Each is bound to feel intensely the importance of his own duties and the significance of the situations that call these forth. But this feeling is in each of us a vital secret, for sympathy with which we vainly look to others. The others are too much absorbed in their own vital secrets to take an interest in ours. Hence the stupidity and injustice of our opinions, so far as they deal with the significance of alien lives. Hence the falsity of our judgments, so far as they presume to decide in an absolute way on the value of other persons' conditions or ideals (James 1899: 229-30).

James is here restating a moral problem known to the eighteenth century philosopher, David Hume, who also placed emotions at the core of his system. "Sympathy," Hume says, "is much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and sympathy with persons remote from us much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous" (Hume 1777 [1966]: 229). In "On a Certain Blindness" WJ entreats his readers to expand the scope of their sympathies.

WJ's use of RLS is in the illumination the "The Lantern-Bearers" brings to the proposition that "wherever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant" (James 1899: 234). Six pages of RLS are quoted, finishing with the statement that:

> For to miss the joy is to miss all. In the joy of the actors lies the sense of any action. That is the explanation, that the excuse. To one who has not the secret of the lanterns the scene upon the links is meaningless (quoted in James 1899: 240).

The conclusions WJ draws from this are twofold: first, to be practically engaged means that we are dead to all joys but our own, and second, extraordinary insight may connect us with another, as through love, and then we experience the transformative capacity of emotions in which "the whole scheme of our customary values gets confounded, then our self is riven and its narrow interests fly to pieces, then a new centre and a new perspective must be found" (James 1899: 241).

After presenting RLS in "On a Certain Blindness," WJ draws on a large number of further cases. These are quotations of varying length from no fewer than twelve additional writers, including his colleague Josiah Royce, William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, Leo Tolstoi, and W.H. Hudson. The results of this survey, with which the essay is concluded, are both negative and positive: it is forbidden to "pronounc[e] on the meaninglessness of forms of existence other than our own;" at the same time we must "tolerate, respect, and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways, however unintelligible they may be to us" (James 1899: 263-4). The epistemological corollary of this ethical injunction is that "neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer" (James 1899: 264). All of this follows from the core idea that emotional engagement endues value, interest, and meaning.

RLS's Emotional Intelligence

Lovejoy is correct in his recognition that WJ and RLS had a "natural affinity of mind," for both are profoundly aware of the importance of emotion in all aspects of social being. It is this faculty in RLS that we saw WJ appreciate in "On a Certain Blindness." At this point it is appropriate to demonstrate RLS's Jamesian sensibility to the affective dimension.

If the test of insight is attention to the non-obvious and to the counter-intuitive, then RLS demonstrates profound insight concerning the nature and significance of emotions. In an essay on the American writer and visionary Henry David Thoreau, RLS expresses great impatience with Thoreau as a political thinker and actor, and as a man (Stevenson 1882: 114-42). The details need not concern us here. Of particular interest, though, is that RLS later reevaluated Thoreau in light of facts he learned after writing the original essay. Whereas he had earlier thought Thoreau priggish, puritanical, and cold because—RLS believed—he was untouched by sexual involvement, RLS later learned that Thoreau had experienced a profound but tragically concluded love affair. RLS then wrote that "in the light of this new fact, those pages, seemingly so cold, are seen to be alive with feeling" (Stevenson 1882: 22). The feeling here is a feeling that masks Thoreau's

pain, which repressed life and blood, as RLS says.

In his later discussion of Thoreau, then, RLS perceived an emotion central to Thoreau's persona but outside the range of general awareness of emotions and which confounds most expectations concerning emotion, because it is an emotional antidote to emotion. This is, at the individual level, the pattern of emotional involvement repressive of broader emotional expressivity and experience that the German sociologist Georg Simmel identified at the social level as the "blasé feeling." In his classic essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Simmel shows that at the root of the non-emotional and rational demeanor and behavior of big city dwellers is an emotional cloak of remoteness, distance and indifference (Simmel 1903 [1971]). These are specialized emotions indeed that confound our commonsense understanding of emotion. They are not experienced as emotions, and only the most sensitive appreciation of emotions, such as Simmel and RLS each had, can detect and make sense of them.

The significance of Simmel's blasé feeling of the metropolitan type and RLS's sense of coldness in Thoreau is that these are reality-constituting emotions. Like all emotions, they arise in experience and influence the emoting subject's disposition to act and therefore to contribute to future outcomes of action. This aspect of emotion is broadly treated by WJ in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Practical Philosophy* (1897), and in other sources. It is also well understood by RLS.

In an essay first published 23 years before *The Will to Believe* appeared, RLS indicated the way in which our feelings constitute the limits of our experiences. In "On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places," he says:

> Nor does the scenery any more affect the thoughts than the thoughts affect the scenery. We see places through our humours as through differently coloured glasses. *We are ourselves a term in the equation*, a note of the chord, and make discord or harmony almost at will (Stevenson 1874 [1920]: 222; emphasis added).

This prefigures WJ's discussion, for instance, of the Alpine Climber related in the evocatively titled "The Sentiment of Rationality." Here the disposition of the climber determines the outcome of one's leap. Self-confidence and hopefulness produce a jump that would otherwise be impossible.Fear and mistrust lead to hesitation and a fatal fall: whichever emotion is engaged will be commensurate with an outcome, with contrastingly different consequences (James 1897: 96-7). WJ's statement in another essay reproduced in the same volume, that the "desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth's existence" (1897: 24) generates the possibility of misinterpretation that RLS was able to avoid when he said that it is always possible "that I can never hit on the right humour for this sort of landscape, and lose much pleasure in consequence" (Stevenson 1874 [1920]: 223). This is to acknowledge, as WJ did (James 1897: 97), that the determination of events by emotionally informed action is not open-ended.

What brings emotion to the center of consideration for both WJ and RLS is that human beings are understood as sources of agency in the world. Action involves the whole being, and in acting all the human faculties are implicated, including—indeed, especially—the emotions. The problem with people who think about things—philosophers, humanists, social scientists, and so on—is that they tend to privilege intellect over emotion. WJ will have none of this. Intellect is not an independent operation of mind, as we are forcefully told in *The Will to Believe* (James 1897: 92-3). The "immediate datum in psychology," WJ says in his monumental *The Principles of Psychology*, is not thought but rather the personal self: "The universal conscious fact is not 'feelings and thoughts exist', but 'I think' and 'I feel'" (James 1890a: 226). A little earlier he says that consciousness cannot be merely cognitive because it is principally purposive (1890a: 141). The substance and texture of purpose is always emotional:

> the conceiving or theorizing faculty…functions exclusively for the sake of ends that do not exist at all in the world of impressions we receive by way of our senses, but are set by our emotional and practical subjectivity altogether (James 1897: 117).

Without "emotional pertinency," says WJ, "there is little to care or act for" (James 1897: 83). Not only does emotion direct and energize action, it is the source of originality (1897: 247). Emotion is central to WJ's understanding of human will and human agency.

William James and Emotion

WJ's theory of emotions is widely known, and, it must be said, widely rejected. In the famous Chapter 25, "The Emotions," of *The Principles of Psychology*, WJ says: "My theory…is that *the bodily changes following directly the perception of an exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur* IS *the emotion*" (James 1890b: 449). A number of criticisms have been directed against this proposition and the theory it is connected with: it leaves emotion without function, it ignores the role of experience in emotion, it overstates the role of the body, and it is empirically false. I have shown elsewhere that each of these charges is simply wrong and arises from a serious misreading and misunderstanding of WJ's statement of the theory in Chapter 25 and his intentions (Barbalet 1999). This misunderstanding tends to be corrected when it is appreciated that the formulation above is part of an argument that emotion is embodied feeling and necessarily attaches to persons as an attribute of their physical selves. That is all. It was never intended to be a full statement of WJ's position on emotions, but at best an account of emotional feelings and consciousness of them (1890b: 451). WJ had very much more to say about emotions than is contained in Chapter 25 of the *Principles*.

We have already seen that WJ had much to say about emotions in *The Will to Believe*. Whereas Chapter 25, and its precursor "What is an emotion?", published in 1884, are

concerned with the embodied basis of emotional consciousness, the function or social and individual purposes of emotions are treated in other papers written more or less around the same time. A number of these are collected in *The Will to Believe*, and others as further chapters in *Principles*. Unfortunately, the treatment of WJ's account of emotions in both the psychological and philosophical literature seems to be unaware of these other instances.

The reason that WJ in fact gives so much attention to emotions, and attributes such primacy to emotions themselves, is because he believes that under certain conditions individual initiative can make a difference (James 1897: 244-5). Thus action can contribute to emergent realities. Action is only achieved through emotional engagement (1897: 85-6). He says that there is "a zone of insecurity in human affairs in which all the dramatic interest lies" (1897: 258).

> The zone of the individual differences, and of the social "twists" which…they initiate, is the zone of formative processes, the dynamic belt of quivering uncertainty, the line where the past and the future meet. It is the theatre of all we do not take for granted, the stage of the living drama of life; and however narrow its scope, it is roomy enough to lodge the whole range of human passions (1897: 259).

It is for this reason that WJ insists that emotion is central to all human action.

A serious reading of WJ's full discussion of emotions not only indicates the importance of the physical self for the direct experience of emotional feelings (James 1890b: 442-85). We also learn that persons know themselves only through an emotional apprehension of their needs and aspirations (1890a: 305-6), and that emotions influence perceptions of reality and beliefs concerning reality, as well as objects of theory (1890b: 307-15). Rationality itself, we discover, is founded in emotional experiences (1897: 63-110). The power of human emotion in underwriting values, meanings, and purposes necessarily has limits. Because emotions are grounded in individual experience, emotional trans-subjectivity is in practical terms extremely difficult. This fact is drawn to our attention in "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," and some of its implications are indicated. The insight behind these observations WJ shared with RLS. Both were extremely sensitive to the importance of emotions in human being, and human becoming.

—Jack Barbalet is professor and head of the sociology department, University of Leicester, England.
E-mail = jmb34@leicester.ac.uk

References

Barbalet, J.M. (1999). "William James's Theory of Emotions: Filling in the Picture." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*. 29 (3): pp. 251-66.

Feldman, Jessica R. (1997). "'A Shelter of the Mind': Henry, William, and the Domestic Scene." pp. 300-21 in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, edited by Ruth Anna Putnam. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hume, David (1777 [1966]). *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

James, William (1890a). *The Principles of Psychology, Volume 1*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.

James, William (1890b). *The Principles of Psychology, Volume 2*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.

James, William (1897). *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.

James, William (1899). *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.

James, William (1902 [1958]). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Mentor.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. (1908 [1996]). "William James as Philosopher." pp. 153-64 in *William James Remembered*, edited by Linda Simon. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Perry, Ralph Barton (1935a). *The Thought and Character of William James, Volume 1*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company.

Perry, Ralph Barton (1935b). *The Thought and Character of William James, Volume 2*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company.

Putnam, Ruth Anna. (1997). "Some of Life's Ideals." pp. 282-99 in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, edited by Ruth Anna Putnam. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Simmel, Georg (1903 [1971]). "The Metropolis and Mental Life." pp. 324-39 in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by Donald N. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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

Stevenson, Robert Louis (1874 [1920]). "On the Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places." pp. 221-30 in his *Essays of Travel*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Stevenson, Robert Louis (1882 [nd]). *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*. London: Collins.

Robert Louis Stevenson

The Nature of Experience in William James and Buddha

by Nishani Gunawardane

Despite the twenty-five hundred year lapse between the Buddha and William James, there are some striking similarities between their respective ideologies. James's "stream of thought" echoes Buddha's notion of life as *bhavasota*, or stream of consciousness. The emphasis on an empirical process-oriented self and its fluid interactions with an experientially constructed, fluctuating world is central to both traditions.

The immediacy of pre-reflective experience, in opposition to metaphysical speculation not grounded in tangible reality, is given primacy in both James and the Buddha. James speaks of the "cash-value of truth in experiential terms."[1] Truth does not reign in a realm of absolutes and universals where through the process of abstraction from life, it gains validity and signification through definition alone. For James, truth is not divorced from the experiential reality that bore it, but is "made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process, the process namely of verifying itself, its verification."[2] Truth derives its sustenance from experience as experience validates, strengthens and reshapes truth according to what satisfies, as James would say, "some vital human need." The "workableness" of truth in experience is crucial to its conception. The "workableness" of truth is found in Buddhism as well. As the Buddha's main focus was to alleviate the suffering of man through teaching him the means to liberation, he emphasized the importance of direct insight into the nature of reality. The two pervasive characteristics of existence are impermanence and insubstantiality, and the means to understanding these characteristics came from achieving a level of intuitive direct awareness that went beyond mere intellectual speculation and understanding. The unfathomable wisdom, *prajna*, along with *nirvana*, which is roughly alluded to negatively as freedom from ignorance, craving and suffering, resulting from this deep understanding, comes through a personal, direct experiencing of reality as it is. Primacy is given to the experiential aspect of existence. Metaphysical musings and adherence to any sort of empty conceptual framework are considered wrong thought and wrong view since these solidify the notion of enduring substances which in turn causes suffering through attachment:

> Any kind of feeling whatever... any kind of formations whatever... any kind of consciousness whatever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, all consciousness should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'[3]

The activity of "seeing" to which the Buddha refers is akin to experiential insight. This insight is gained through certain meditative methods such as *vipassanna* meditation in which one mindfully watches the arising and passing of mental and physical states of being. Through diligent application of this direct apprehension, the mind can be trained so that it is aware of the slightest variation in mental states. The emphasis on experience here is akin to that of James whose notion of truth as constructed by experience is central to his thinking. James's "vital human need" is indicative of the driving force behind Buddhist insight, namely the need to alleviate suffering through craving and attachment to objects/mental states of illusory subsistence. Both James and Buddha grounded "truth" as apprehended through direct experience. Regardless of whether the direct experience is something grappled mentally or physically, as long as it consistently turns out the same truth, it carries with it validity.

While James makes a concession to conceptual frameworks within the limits of "workableness" in experience, and conception as conceived in conjunction with perception, the Buddha refrains completely from expounding and explicating any metaphysical theories as they do not serve the purpose of expediting liberation. When asked questions on the eternal nature of the world, soul, and whether the soul is identical with the body, the Buddha refrains from addressing the questions negatively or positively. In a metaphor concerning a poisoned arrow, he illustrates the futility of such questions in alleviating suffering:

> Suppose, Malunkyaputta, a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a surgeon to treat him. The man would say: "I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble or a Brahmin or a merchant or a worker—until I know what kind of arrow it was that wounded me-whether it was hoof-tipped or curved or barbed or calf-toothed or oleander... [4]

The emptiness of metaphysical musings, though intellectually stimulating to the mind, is an impediment rather than an aid to liberation. It solidifies the view of self, and the substantiality of the world in terms of permanence and enduring quality, which lead to craving, attachment, and sorrow.

James on the other hand extends the primacy of experience into the conceptual realm by way of the "Pragmatic Rule."[5] James coined the phrase "Pragmatic Rule" which is

---

1. James, William. "Pragmatism and Radical Empiricism." *The Writings of William James.* Ed. McDermott, John. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967) p. 311
2. Ibid, p. 312
3. Nanamoli, Bhikku and Bhikku Bodhi. "Sutta 22." *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya.* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995) p. 232
4. Nanamoli, Bhikku and Bhikku Bodhi. "Culamalunkya Sutta." *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya.* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995) pp. 534-5
5. James, William. "Percept and Concept—Import of Concepts." *The Writings of William James.* p. 238

a method of understanding and interpreting concepts. By applying the Pragmatic Rule, one can find the meaning of a concept grounded in sensible experience or "in some particular difference in the course of human experience which its being true will make."[6] Here again, the emphasis is on the experiential validity of truth, whether in direct sensible qualities, or in the impact it has on the unfolding of experience.

The emphasis on experience does not detract from the importance of concepts for James in understanding the perceptual experience. Translation of the experience into a conceptual order is a means of bringing about understanding because the "better we understand anything the more we are able to tell about it."[7] Illuminating the causes of something somehow leads one to believe that one has a better understanding of the thing itself. Likewise, the Buddha illuminated the causes of suffering which lead to the continuous cycle of birth and death, or *samsara*. It is this penetrating understanding of the first and second Noble Truths that will enable liberation.

Though Buddha remained silent on metaphysical issues and abstract concepts, James grounded both subjects in experience. The emptiness of a conceptual framework lies in the exclusiveness of what it manipulates. To establish a causal order from a chaotic universe, there is a process of uncovering the relations between abstracted concepts. In the isolation of focusing on abstracts, absolutes, and their uncovered relations, the deadening aspect of conceptual frameworks takes hold:

> Nothing *happens* in the worlds of logic, mathematics or moral and aesthetic preference. The static nature of the relations in these worlds is what gives to the propositions that express them their 'eternal' character... [8]

Percepts and concepts can exchange however in an almost symbiotic manner for man, the one deriving its sustenance from the other. Despite its limitations in depth and richness, the concept is a map, with its clarification and ordering of perceptions, which contribute to enhancing perception, though it can simultaneously draw away from its source there by limiting its usefulness to human motive. James strove to establish some sort of active exchange between the utility of concepts, as molded to experiential percepts that retained the vitality of the concepts without abstracting to such an extent that the conceptual structure took on a life of its own.

While for the Buddha, theoretical speculation is an impediment, for James, it is unsatisfactory because it does not strike the middle ground and serve tangible experience. The inherent unsatisfactory nature of the wandering mind, of man's need to strike a balance is illustrated in James's "Sentiment of Rationality" where theoretic philosophy with its emphasis on classification, and the conceptual framework oriented philosophy with its emphasis on universality, are both equally dissatisfying if subscribed to solely, to the exclusion of the importance of living experience:

> When weary of the concrete clash and dust and pettiness, he will refresh himself by a bath in the eternal springs, or fortify himself by a look at the immutable natures. But he will only be a visitor, not a dweller in the region; he will never carry the philosophic yoke upon his shoulders, and when tired of the gray monotony of her problems and insipid spaciousness of her results, will always escape gleefully into the teeming and dramatic richness of the concrete world.[9]

The "peace of rationality"[10] is found through ecstatic means when all attempts to subsume reality under logical, ordered headings fails to satisfy the incessant craving for order, and apprehension of the unknown in man. The "intellect itself is hushed to sleep,"[11] and "energetic living"[12] overshadows theoretical speculation, leaving it dry and brittle. Likewise, for the Buddha, "when phenomena appear to a noble one who is deeply concentrated and contemplating, his doubts disappear, as he understands their causal nature."[13]

The phenomena of existence as experienced is fluid for both James and Buddha. The tangible experience of James is a perpetual flux and not an amalgam of discrete events. The "stream of thought"[14] is an explanation of the process nature of experience, which flows continuously. It is characterized by personal consciousness, thought always changing, thought as continuous, thought as external to itself and thought as selective:

> Consciousness, then, does not appear itself chopped up in bits... it is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.[15]

The misleading nature of language leads one to think of thoughts as discrete things that carry no meaning further than its own. James brings to light the importance of the in-between ties that are just as important as the events themselves:

> ... for what we hear when the thunder crashes is not thunder pure, but thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it... the feeling of the thunder is also a feeling of the silence as just gone.[16]

---

6. Ibid
7. Ibid, p. 240
8. Ibid, p. 241
9. James, William. "The Sentiment of Rationality." *The Writings of William James.* p. 321
10. Ibid, p. 324
11. Ibid, p. 324
12. Ibid, p. 324
13. Kalupahana, David J. *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology.* (Albany: State U of New York P 1987). p. 25
14. James, William. *The Principles of Psychology, Volume I.* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981)
15. Ibid, p. 233

The Buddhist corollary to James's stream of thought is *bhavanga*. Though it may be mistakenly identified with the sub-conscious in the Western tradition, Buddhism does not support the view of differentiated consciousness because multiple types of consciousness cannot co-exist. The closest rendering of *bhavanga* in English is life-continuum or stream of consciousness:

> The Buddhist philosophical term for this type of consciousness is Bhavanga which means factor of life, or indispensable cause or condition of existence. Arising and perishing, it flows on like a stream not remaining the same for two consecutive moments.[17]

The stream of consciousness in Buddhist thought is further emphasized through Buddha's doctrine of dependent origination:

> Dependent arising is neither a mental fabrication that weaves together discrete sensations nor an a priori category of understanding through which experience comes to be filtered. It is an explanation of the experience of "dependently arisen phenomena." [18]

The causal law explicates the arising and fading of phenomena along the lines of "as a result of this, that arises," a continuous chain of becoming, each step conditioned by what preceded it.

In this stream of consciousness, pure experience is impossible since all phenomena coming into contact with consciousness is colored by interest, disposition and environment of the selecting agency. Pure experience presupposes a blank state of mind prior to the experience which is impossible since all thoughts inherit what has come before as the thought is conceived. For James, the arising of feelings bring along a succession of relations of infinite variety to correspond to the varying instances of feelings:

> If there be such things as feelings at all... when we speak objectively, it is the real relations that appear revealed; if we speak subjectively, it is the stream of consciousness that matches each of them by an inward coloring of its own.[19]

James does not claim to know the exact make-up of the ego, but what he can surmise is that it is what forms some sort of "liaison between all the things of which we become successively aware."[20] There is no space between consciousnesses, though one may not always be aware of one's state of mind:

> As the total neurosis changes, so does the total psychosis change. But as the changes of neurosis are never absolutely discontinuous, so must the successive psychoses shade gradually into each other, although their rate of change may be much faster at one moment than at the next.[21]

The changes in neuroses and psychoses are echoed in the notion of personhood. Vital to the Buddha's definition of personhood as a fluctuating psychophysical entity is the notion of interest/volition, or *sankhara*, and consciousness, *vinnana*, giving the person status above a passive collector of sense impressions.[22] Selective interest conditioned itself through environment, disposition, and perception is the filtering apparatus by which the flood of continuous perceptual experience is sorted and emphasized, or ignored. *Bhavanga* is arrested as sense-consciousness arises during an experience, followed by any form of mental investigation consciousness. For James, consciousness directs interest, and interest selects from the chaos of experience:

> ...consciousness is at all times primarily *a selecting agency.* Whether it is in the lowest sphere of sense, or in the highest of intellectualization, we find it always doing one thing, choosing one out of several of the material so presented to its notice, emphasizing and accentuating that and suppressing as far as possible all the rest. The item emphasized is always in connection with some *interest* felt by consciousness to be paramount at the time.[23]

The over-arching difference between the manner of thought of James and Buddha lies in the analysis of experience. The Buddha's methodology is formulaic and reflective, though like James, he uncovers the continual flux of experience and the lack of a permanent, subsisting entity that endures and conditions the stream of experience. James on the other hand, gave primacy to the pre-reflective immediate experience, and acknowledged that any type of reflective analysis of experience lacks the immediacy of the vitalizing feel of experiencing itself. Despite their different intents, Buddha and James uncovered common ground in their treatments of self and the unfolding of experience.[24]

—Nishani Gunawardane is starting a Masters program in religion at Columbia University this fall. She graduated with a philosophy BA from SUNY Buffalo in Spring 2001. This paper was originally written for Prof. Peter Hare's American Philosophy class in Fall 2000 at SUNY Buffalo.
E-mail= borodin1@hotmail.com

---

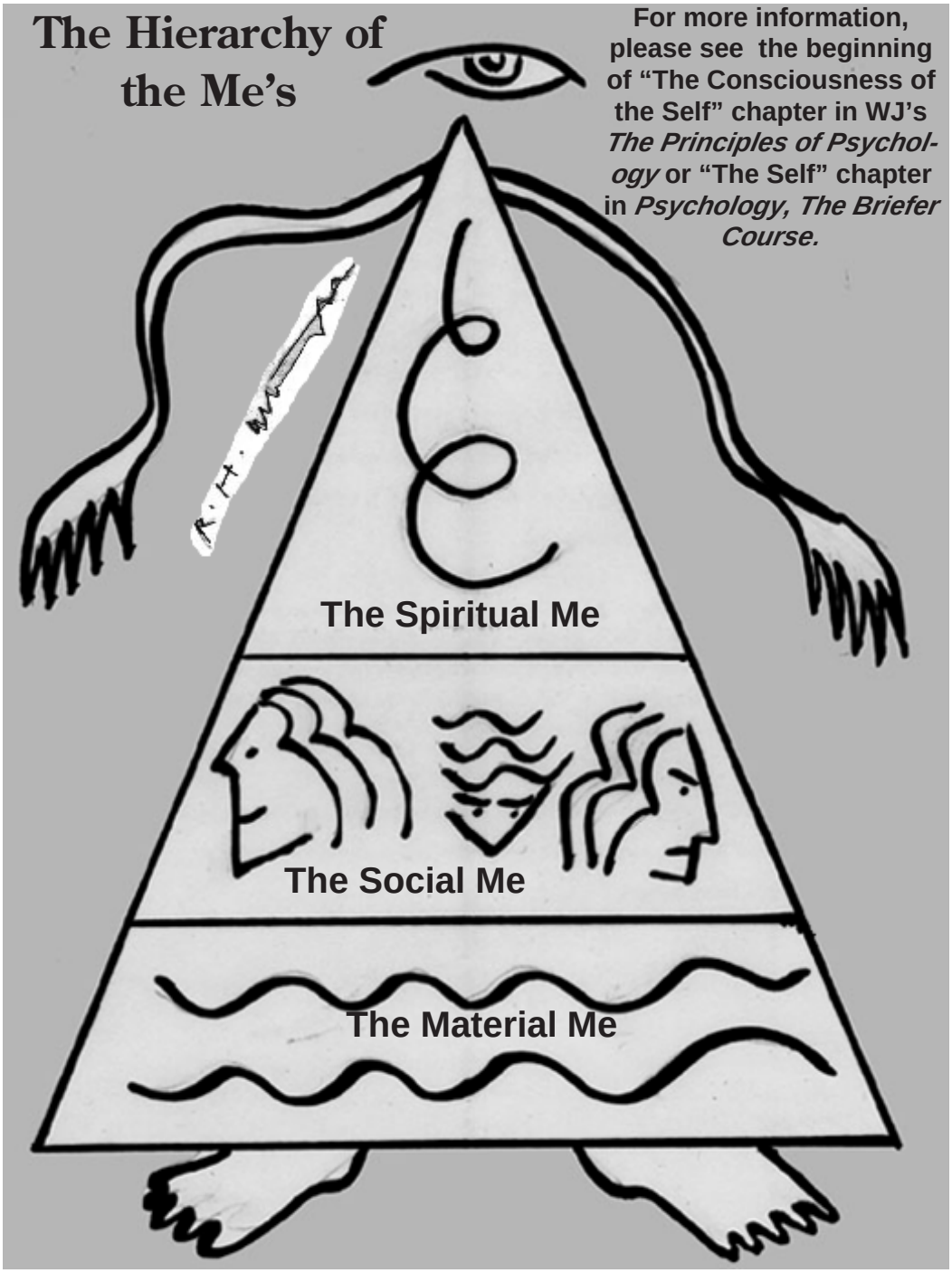
16. Ibid, p. 234
17. Narada, Maha Thera. *The Buddha and His Teachings*. (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980) p. 361
18. Kalupahana, David J. *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology.* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987) p. 26
19. James. *The Principles of Psychology, Volume I.* p. 238
20. Ibid, p. 235
21. Ibid, p. 236
22. Narada, Maha Thera. *The Buddha and His Teachings.* Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980. pp. 461-464
23. James. *The Principles of Psychology, Volume I.* p. 142
24. Mathur, D.C. "The Historical Buddha (Gotama), Hume and James on the Self: Comparisons and Evaluations," *Philosophy East and West* 28, no. 3. (Hawaii: U of Hawaii P, July 1978) p. 267

WJ and Niels Bohr

A good discussion of Niels Bohr's possible appreciation of William James exists in the "Paul Møller and William James" section of Gerald Holton's "The Roots of Complementarity" article, which appeared in *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 99, No. 4, pp. 1031-1038, in 1970. Thanks to Eugene Taylor for sharing this reference with the William James list-serve in December, 2000.

WJ and Theology

Donald Capps offers a reappraisal of "William James' Significance for Practical Theology" section of "A Sympathetic World," which appeared in the *International Journal of Practical Theology* (Berlin and New York: Walter De Gruyter), Vol. 4, pp. 62-89, in 2000.



WJ and Borges Again:
The Riddle of the Correspondence with Macedonio Fernández

by Jaime Nubiola

In a recent article in this newsletter (Vol. 2, No. 3, Fall 2000), Matthew Stephens concurred with my previous suggestion that the links between Jorge Luis Borges and William James should be explored (Vol. 1, No. 3, Winter 1999), but disagreed with my approach because I presented James as the metaphysical optimist and Borges as the pessimist. In Stephen's paper no evidence in favor of the Borges's supposed optimism is provided, except for his taste in books that partially overlaps with James's taste, and James is presented as a crypto-pessimist who "purposefully presented a cheerful face to the world of his readers." In my paper I had tried to suggest an explanation for the fundamental discrepancy between both writers — apparent in Borges's Foreword to the Argentinian edition of *Pragmatism*— as a matter of opposite temperaments or types of mental make-up: while a radical metaphysical pessimism nourishes all Borges's work, the work of James and with it all the American pragmatism is nourished by a radical metaphysical optimism.

Stephens explores some affinities between Borges and James (in particular their common appeal to Berkeley in justifying their denials) and suggests that "Borges's literary style is built on, or presupposes, a foundation of Jamesian empiricism" and that James's essays "Does Consciousness Exist?" and "A World of Pure Experience" from a stylistic view-point "approach the literary style epitomized by Borges." I agree on both counts.

In this short paper I will not pursue further our agreements or discrepancies. Instead, I will try to present James's connection with the Argentinian writer Macedonio Fernández (1874-1952), who was in some sense a mentor of Borges and might be considered the *missing link* between Borges and James. As Stephens writes, "in the 1920s, when Borges was finding himself as a writer, he had a close literary and philosophical friendship with the Argentine poet Macedonio Fernández, who at one time corresponded with WJ." When I learned about this correspondence years ago, I went to the Houghton Library just to check for Macedonio's letters among the William James papers: the result was extremely disappointing, because there was no entry for Fernández and no register at all mentioning him.

I soon became aware that the main source for that piece of information was Borges himself, and I began the search for the evidence available of that correspondence in Borges's texts. In a trip to Argentina on the occasion of the centennial of Borges's birth in 1999, Zulma Mateos, an able Borges scholar, provided me with a lot of information. Thanks to her, I was able to read Borges's moving remembrance of Macedonio Fernández, in which he recalls how Fernández read Hume, Schopenhauer, Berkeley, and James, and "not much more, because always he was quoting the same authors," adding that "occasionally, [Macedonio] corresponded with William James, writing to him in a mixture of English, German and French, 'because his knowledge, according to himself, of these languages was so scarce that he had to change constantly from one to another.'"[1] Thanks also to Zulma, I was able to check the volume of correspondence included in the published complete works of Fernández. There I was able to learn from the editor Alicia Borinsky that she had "not found letters by William James, with whom it is suspected that Macedonio had some correspondence that seems not to have left visible traces until now."[2] This was in some sense a dead end for my search. I was, however, able to read in that volume some letters from Macedonio to Borges in which Macedonio writes about his reading of James (*Pragmatism*, *Psychology*), asks Borges's help in the translation of a difficult passage from James's *Pluralistic Universe*, and suggests how much his thought is in tune with James's, but also that he wants to crown James's thought with metaphysics.[3] All these letters showed with clarity a lively interest and a good acquaintance of Macedonio with James, but it did not provide any evidence about the correspondence between the two.

At this point, I became almost totally convinced that the whole issue of the correspondence between James and Macedonio was an invention by Borges, like most of the scholarly references that appear in Borges's stories. My conviction was that in spite of the fact that most of the secondary bibliography about Fernández or Borges mentions that correspondence, none of the authors mentioned having seen the real letters, because they did not really exist. I was unable to find the real texts anywhere, nor did I believe that that correspondence, if it did exist, would not have left any traces, at least on James's part, in the Harvard Archives.

There was, however, a feeble thread still pending in the research. I had the reference for a short paper from the Argentinian philosopher Hector Biagini about William James and other North-American presences in

---

1. J. L. Borges, 'Macedonio' in 'Homenaje a Borges', *La Maga Colección*, Buenos Aires, February 1996, p. 11. There is a similar remark in 'Las memorias de Borges', *La Opinión Cultural*, 17 September 1974, p. xii.
2. A. Borinsky, 'Introducción', in M. Fernández. *Epistolario. Obras Completas*, Corregidor, Buenos Aires, 1976, vol. II, p. 8.
3. M. Fernández. *Epistolario*, II, pp. 21-24.

Macedonio Fernández, which had appeared in 1980 in a small journal in Salta, in the North of Argentina, but which fortunately had been reprinted the following year in the *Hispanic Journal*. When I received a photocopy of that old paper, I realized that it was almost the end of my search. In that brief but thoughtful scholarly paper, Biagini researched all the available sources about Fernández and his American connections, paying very special attention to the presence of James in Macedonio throughout his entire career, starting from his early reading of *The Principles of Psychology* in 1896 until the extremely admiring comments of Macedonio's last years presenting James as "the more intelligent and with a greater philosophical spirit" (1944), who "will still be read in one hundred years" (1931).[4]

So what about the correspondence between James and Fernández? Biagini reconstructs the items of that correspondence between 1906 and 1910 from the philosophical texts of Fernández compiled in volume eight of his *Obras Completas*. In that volume I was able to read the fragments of three letters from James dated October of 1906 (pp. 39-40), the 3rd of November of 1908, and the 27th of August of 1909 (pp. 237-238). It might perhaps be useful to transcribe the English text of one of these letters according to Macedonio, because it is also relevant for my discussion with Stephens about the supposed "fake optimism" of James:

> It touches me deeply to find myself taken so seriously by so evidently intelligent a man. Yes, it is the internal *alegría* which counts, and I like the 4 great perceptions which you ascribe to me, tho' I do not commit my 'theory of the emotions' with any moral conclusions. Believe me, dear Sr. Fernandez, most sincerely yours. *W. James*.[5]

But the scattered remains of the letters mentioned in Fernández's papers did not seem to me to be solid evidence. Could the whole thing be not an invention by Borges, but an invention by Macedonio? In a footnote Biagini states that Macedonio did not keep a copy of his letters and that the letters sent to him by James were lost. Biagini also reports having got in touch with I. K. Skrupskelis, who informed him that there were no traces of that correspondence extant in the archives and collections of James's papers that exist in several countries.[6] The track of the real letters was again lost.

There is now a more feeble thread still pending further research. In his valuable paper, Biagini writes that Macedonio's admiration for James was unaltered throughout his long life, to the point of hanging a portrait of James above his bed, which James had sent around 1909.[7] In a footnote Biagini adds that this photograph, with James's signature, was in the hands of Macedonio's son, Adolfo de Obieta. The next step should be to try to get in touch with Obieta or his heirs and to get a copy of that photograph and to publish it in *Streams* as the only remaining evidence of that old correspondence that affected Macedonio, who is hardly known today, so deeply and that through Macedonio was passed to Borges, one of the universal writers of the 20th century.

—Jaime Nubiola is professor of philosophy at the University of Navarra, Spain.
E-mail = jnubiola@unav.es

4. H. Biagini, 'William James y otras presencias norteamericanas en Macedonio Fernández', *Hispanic Journal*, 2 (1981), p. 106.

5. M. Fernández, *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos y otros escritos metafísicos. Obras Completas*, Corregidor, Buenos Aires, 1990, vol. VIII, p. 238. (I have corrected spelling errors.)

6. H. Biagini, 'William James y otras presencias norteamericanas en Macedonio Fernández', p. 108, n. 10.

7. "'William James, living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, U. S., Irving Street 95, sent me two photographs of him and several letters (...)." M. Fernández, *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos y otros escritos metafísicos*, p. 237.

WJ and John Dewey: A Contentious Partnership

by John R. Shook

The philosophical partnership of William James with John Dewey solidified in the first years of the 1900s after many years of mutually admiring correspondence. Dewey, together with former students at the University of Chicago, published *Studies in Logical Theory* in 1903. The book's preface identified James as the group's primary source of inspiration and James responded in 1904 with a book review heralding the work as a new voice of pragmatism.[1] Following James's announcement of the principles of radical empiricism in 1904, Dewey chimed in with his own similar version, agreeing that "a thing is what it is experienced to be."[2] Ironically, these events were to be the most harmonious period of their partnership. Already by 1905 the partnership was strained by disagreements on the nature of experience, the self, and knowledge. These problems only grew over the few remaining years of James's life. By 1908, two years before James's death, Dewey publicly called for the dissolution of pragmatism as a philosophical movement.

The evidence of their contentious professional relationship (their private admiration for each other never dimmed) is contained in publications and private letters. One fundamental issue, and the earliest to surface, was the question of how philosophical debate should be conducted. Dewey was not pleased by James's unrestrained enthusiasm for applying the label of "pragmatism" to philosophies having but a remote relationship with its core principle: that ideas must guide activity to have any intellectual content. Critics were thus content to attack only the more general and vague formulations of pragmatism, and they mostly ignored the detailed analyses of specific philosophical problems, to both James's and Dewey's frustration. In 1905 Dewey admonished his former student at Chicago, Addison W. Moore, for unreservedly accepting the label of pragmatism as standing for the work of the entire Chicago school.

> I have never known a myth grow so rapidly as that of "pragmatism". To read its critics one would think it was a positive system set forth for centuries in hundreds of volumes, & that its critics were the ones engaged in a tentative development of new & undogmatic ideas. But I object root and branch to the term 'pragmatism' (except in its origin limited sense) & would take objection to your article in so far as it seems to admit the label.
>
> Any name can only be onesided, and so it seems a pity to have any. Radical empiricism begs as few as any, tho I should prefer the term experimentalism to empiricism. Philosophy is Functionalism in the sense that it treats only of functions of experience (not of facts, nor of states, ideas, &); it is Geneticism is a mode of analyzing & identifying these functions; it is Instrumentalism as a theory of the significance of the Knowledge-function; it is Experimentalism as a theory of the test of worth of all functions. If I were a German I could stick all these words together and announce a new system. Doubtless. Meanwhile I think there is nothing to do but to peg away at the analyses of particular problems.... [3]

From our vantage point it does appear ironic that James, who represented a more individualistic strain of pragmatism, took great comfort in having as many allies (in name at least, if not also in action) as possible. But one of the dangers of collecting allies in this way is that genuine mutual understanding may not get established. James only partly grasped the details of the Chicago school's philosophy and he easily admitted it.[4] Often his would-be associates confounded James, and they likewise had objections to James's views. It is indeed striking that few philosophers whole-heartedly embraced "pragmatism." Charles Peirce notoriously renamed his philosophy "pragmaticism" in protest. Even F. C. S. Schiller at Oxford, one of James's closet allies, refused to permit "pragmatism" to label his philosophy, using "humanism" instead. Dewey rarely used the term pragmatism to apply to his own views, preferring "experimentalism" or "instrumentalism." But as the occasion demanded, and especially as the years passed after James's death, Dewey seemed happy to use the term.

One of the most important specific philosophical issues causing tension between James and Dewey was the proper definition of truth. Dewey came to believe that James often confused the notion that the satisfactoriness of experience brought about by an idea constitutes its truth with the quite different notion that the satisfactions brought by the consequences of the belief in an idea are signals of its truth. In the first notion ideas are means created, and thus truths are created, for the purpose of improving experience. In the second notion, ideas have a prior existence and a prior validity before the consequences are tested to learn their truth. Dewey argued in 1908 ("What Does Pragmatism Means by Practical") that he can agree only with the first notion while the second gives aid and comfort to rationalists and intellectualists who are content to find in pragmatism just a psychological account of how humans discover eternal truths.[5] At the conclusion of this article, written on the occasion of the publication of James's 1907 book *Pragmatism*, Dewey does a most un-Jamesian thing: he declares that the time has arrived to take down the banner of "pragmatism" and

disband the movement. He points out that the different aspects of pragmatism have been "uniquely" united by James, and suggests further progress lies in "more analytic clearing up and development of these independent elements." Dewey concludes that "'pragmatism' as a holding company for allied, yet separate interests and problems, might be dissolved and revert to its original constituents."[6]

In a letter written to James soon after this article was composed, Dewey explains that

> I have not attempted a review of the book, but rather of the pragmatic movement with reference to what present controversy seems to me to indicate as the points which require more explicit statement & development. Among other things I have become conscious of some points of possible divergence between Schiller yourself & myself—taken two by two all the way around; and I am not sure but that some misunderstandings among our critics might not be cleared away, if our points of respective agreement & possible disagreement were brought out. For example, the antecendents of humanism, *via* personal idealism, were distinctly an idealistic metaphysics. My own views are most much more naturalistic and a reaction against not merely intellectualistic & monistic idealism but against all idealisms—except of course in the sense of ethical ideals. Now, I seem to myself to be nearer you than I am to Schiller on this point, yet I am not sure. On the other hand, Schiller in his latter writings seem to emphasize that the good consequence which is the test of an idea is *good* not so much in its own nature as in meeting the claims of the idea, whatever the idea is. And here I seem to be nearer to him than to you; and yet again I am not sure. If there are real differences, and our critics are inclined to make combinations of our respective doctrines which no one of us alone would stand for, this may occasion account for some of the unsatisfactory misunderstandings in the present state of controversy.[7]

Dewey was especially concerned that the definition of truth must be approached naturalistically as well as empirically. James connected his empiricism with his pragmatic theory of truth in a 1905 article, claiming that "the 'truth' of our mental operations must always be an intra-experiential affair. A conception is reckoned true by common sense when it can be made to lead to a sensation."[8] James concludes his article with a pronouncement of his confidence that Dewey would agree with this theory of truth. Dewey's quick response in an article titled "The Realism of Pragmatism" gives his "hearty assent" to what James has said about truth, but then expresses "the hope that he [James] also conceives the matter in some such way as I have suggested" in a prior paragraph. In this preceding paragraph of Dewey's article he states that the regenerated empiricism of pragmatism must, in order to completely eliminate "consciousness" as an entity, depict all mental states such as sensations as biological events carrying significance and not as ghostly inner copies of actual real things. "Psychical things are thus themselves realistically conceived; they can be described and identified in biological and physiological terms."[9]

Dewey's demand that empiricism must be naturalistic and social did not receive the same emphasis from James. James's pragmatism placed a great deal of emphasis upon the question of the satisfactoriness of an idea for the individual using that idea and hence often offered a definition of truth that reduced it to a personal level. James rarely treated truth as a matter of social or universal satisfaction, in sharp contrast to both Peirce and Dewey's view that truth is always a social achievement made by people solving group problems.

James's dedication to individuality characterizes his entire philosophy, and this precipitated another dispute concerning the nature of the self. Dewey was convinced that individuality or personal selfhood was not any sort of given in experience or consciousness. In the chapter of *Principles of Psychology* on the stream of consciousness, James defines the stream as personal and individualized. This interpretation of the stream of consciousness (or "experience" as James came to abandon "consciousness") was completely foreign to Dewey. In a letter to A. W. Moore, Dewey describes his reaction.

> I... read James ch on the stream of cons. recently, and was impressed as never before with the inconsistencies…. James 'stream of con'. seems to oscillate between three things: (1) a literal reproduction in the psychical sphere of everything in the cognized or objective sphere… (2) that same objective content but differently viewed (as by a psychologist?)--that is to say the course of experience (not of thot or cons) viewed from the standpoint of the actual individual, John Smith, instead of from its own standpoint i.e. in abstraction from John Smith; (3) as a stream which is formally empty, but which grabs and manipulates its objects…. So far as I can (2) is the only possible interpretation & the only one consistent with 'non-existence of consciousness'. [10]

Dewey offered a rival theory of individuality, which depicts selfhood as a cognitive achievement of mental development nurtured through social relations. For Dewey, experience per se is not personal or private or individualized. In Dewey's 1908 article "What Does Pragmatism Mean By Practical" he points out their disagreement.

> [A] synthetic pragmatism such as Mr. James has ventured upon will take a very different form according as the point of view of what he calls the "Chicago School" or that of humanism is taken as a basis for interpreting the nature of the personal. According to the latter view, the personal appears to be ultimate and unanalyzable, the metaphysically real. Associations with idealism, moreover, give it an idealistic turn, a translation, in effect, of monistic intellectualistic idealism into pluralistic, voluntaristic idealism. But, according to the former, the personal is not ultimate, but is to be analyzed and defined biologically on its genetic side, ethically on its prospective and functioning side.[11]

James could not have been pleased to read how Dewey classified his views with idealism, since James was determined to refute idealism using his stream of consciousness (or experience) theory. A rejuvenated empiricism that recognizes relations in experience could, in James's view, eliminate any need for idealism's notion of the Absolute Mind holding together fragmented human experience. However, James combined the discovery of experienced relations (which Dewey applauded) with an assertion that experience can provide direct knowledge of reality.

James's membership in the long tradition of empiricism is exemplified in this insistence that experience can provide direct knowledge of objects without that knowledge constituting the object. Idealism notoriously claims that knowledge must constitute any object, and hence all reality is necessarily dependent on mind for its existence. James rejected idealism by arguing that knowledge is a matter of external and contingent relations between a mind and an object, and therefore knowing is not necessary to the existence of the object known. This epistemology of immediate knowledge inspired many of his students, for example Ralph B. Perry, to develop a realism grounded on the assertion that objects have an independent existence apart from their entering into the relation with that kind of consciousness called knowledge.

Dewey believed that there is a potential contradiction between James's theory of immediate knowledge and radical empiricism. Radical empiricism, especially as developed in James's *The Meaning of Truth*, is admirably designed to explain why truth is a matter of experienced relations between two distinct experiences, the earlier experience indicating and leading towards the second. What need is there for any other sort of "immediate" knowledge that requires only one experience? Dewey's empiricism was also dependent on the notion of immediate empiricism, but he could not agree that any sort of knowing was provided by immediacy in itself.

> I must say that the immediacy of things appeals to me more and more as the ignored factor in philosophy. This quality has been insisted upon in the past by the Scotch school and by the German feeling school—in opposition to Hegel, e.g. Schleiermarcker [sic] etc. but they have interpreted it as a particular sort or kind of knowledge (or at least of acquaintance) which delivers special varieties of goods on its own account. Schiller and even James are not free from this fallacy.[12]

Dewey consistently held that the known object cannot be independent of the knowledge of it, because knowledge is established through problem-solving which, if successful, is partially responsible for creating the known object. Dewey's instrumentalism finds that knowledge is an active process of creating the known object, while James's epistemology was expressly designed to reject such a position. Naturally, many critics found Dewey's instrumentalism to be idealistic, because they were unable to see how Dewey construed all the processes of knowing naturalistically. Even James was wary of Dewey's insistence on interpreting all factors of knowledge and truth as phases and products of problem-solving. James explicitly denied Dewey's position in a letter to Schiller, saying that there is truth and knowledge apart from solving problems.[13] Dewey's theory of knowledge was designed expressly to prove that such a separation is impossible.

The distance between James and Dewey over the nature of truth can easily be exaggerated. If James's views on the nature of truth expressed in "The Will to Believe" are considered by themselves, the deep similarities with Dewey's approach are undeniable. The will-to-believe approach suggests that it is always necessary for any belief to create the conditions required for testing and (hopefully) confirming that belief's truth. Dewey also held that the proper function role of belief is to establish successful activity, thus creating knowledge and truth. However, James's essay is notoriously vague; he also appears to say that the will-to-believe approach is only legitimate with respect to those beliefs that science cannot confirm, such as religious beliefs. Such irregularities and inconsistencies in James's definitions of truth, found in many of his writings, seemed at times to be caused by an interest in finding a way to justify religious beliefs independently of scientific method. If scientific method could not justify morality, or religion, James offered a separate pragmatic methodology to justify belief in free will or God. Dewey could not agree with this application of pragmatism, because for Dewey's broad understanding of science, there was no justification apart from scientific pragmatic justification. Morality, for example, should be the scientific inquiry into solutions for moral prob-

lems. If there was no genuine role in this scientific inquiry for "free will," then the libertarian notion of free will should be abandoned.

In his reminiscences about James's impact, Dewey consistently credited James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890) alone, and not any of James's other writings. In Dewey's biography, written by his daughter with Dewey's assistance, we read that

> James's influence on Dewey's theory of knowledge was exercised not by the *Pragmatism*, which appeared after Dewey's theory had been formed, but by chapters in the *Principles of Psychology* dealing with conception, discrimination and comparison, and reasoning. Dewey has frequently recommended these chapters to students as a better introduction to the essentials of a pragmatic theory of knowledge than the *Pragmatism*.[14]

Dewey had no difficulty distinguishing the portions of James's philosophy that were congenial to his own views from the portions that caused antagonism. The specific philosophical disagreements between James and Dewey outlined here are sufficient to refute simplistic accounts of the history of pragmatism that see little difference between them. Yet they shared the same overall philosophical spirit and standpoint, and there is good reason to place Dewey next to James in the roll-call of those thinkers who herald the triumph of democratic individuality. In an address composed in 1942 to celebrate the centenary of James's birth, Dewey easily identified, and sympathized with, the heart of James's attitude towards individuality.

> I find the actual position of James to be well represented in a remark he quotes from a carpenter of his acquaintance: "There is very little difference between one man and another; but what little there is, *is very important*." It is this element which is precious because it is that which nobody and nothing else can contribute, and which is the source of all creativity.[15]

—John R. Shook is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the Oklahoma State University.
E-mail = jshook@pragmatism.org

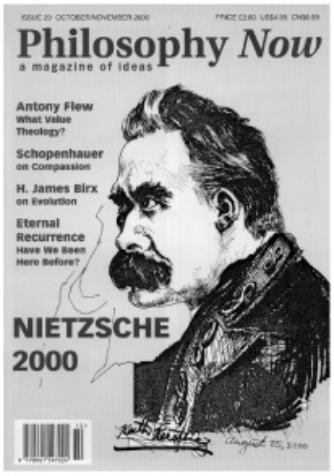
Notes

1. The deep connections between James's thought and the Chicago school of pragmatism are explored in Shook, "William James and John Dewey: A Common Vision," *Streams of William James* 2.3 (Fall 2000): 5-7.
2. William James, "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" *Journal of Philosophy* 1 (1904): 477-491, and "A World of Pure Experience," *Journal of Philosophy* 1 (1904): 533-543. Dewey, "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism," *Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1905): 393-399.
3. John Dewey to Addison W. Moore, 2 January 1905, in *The Correspondence of John Dewey, vol. 1: 1871-1918*, ed. Larry A. Hickman (Charlottesville: Intelex Corporation, 1999), #01827. This volume of Dewey's correspondence is hereafter indicated by *CJD1*.
4. For a sampling of James's and Schiller's expressions of frustration with Dewey's philosophical writing, alongside their confessed admiration for Dewey, see the following letters. William James to D. S. Miller, 6 December 1905, in *CJD1*, #019514; William James to F. C. S. Schiller, 3 August 1906, in *CJD1*, #09375; F. C. S. Schiller to William James, 27 May 1907, in *CJD1*, #04568.
5. Dewey carefully watched the evolution of James's thinking on the issue of truth. Upon hearing from James in early 1909 that he was gathering some essays together for a book titled *The Meaning of Truth*, Dewey offered several suggestions for carefully defining truth and truthfulness. See these letters from Dewey to James: 24 February 1909 in *CJD1* #04580; 15 March 1909 in *CJD1* #04581; and 21 March 1909 in *CJD1* #04583.
6. John Dewey, "What Does Pragmatism Mean By Practical?" *Journal of Philosophy* 5 (1908): 99.
7. John Dewey to William James, 28 November 1907, in *CJD1*, #04579.
8. William James, "The Essence of Humanism," *Mind* 13 (1904): 118.
9. John Dewey, "The Realism of Pragmatism," *Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1905): 325-326.
10. John Dewey to Addison W. Moore, 29 April 1908, in *CJD1*, #03271.
11. John Dewey, "What Does Pragmatism Means By Practical," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1977), p. 113.
12. John Dewey to Addison W. Moore, 29 March 1905, in *CJD1*, #01828.
13. See William James to F. C. S. Schiller, 15 July 1907, in *CJD1*, #09378. James was writing to Schiller primarily about Dewey's "The Experimental Theory of Knowledge," published in *Mind* in July 1907.
14. Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, 3rd ed., edited by Paul A. Schilpp (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), p. 23.
15. John Dewey, "William James and the World Today," *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 15, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989), p. 5. Dewey is quoting from William James's essay, "The Importance of Individuals," which appeared in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, 1897, pp. 256-7) to further articulate James's earlier view in the "Great Men and Their Environment" essay.

The author acknowledges The John Dewey Papers, Special Collections, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, for permission to quote the Dewey letters in this article.

Why Not?

"Philosophy what?"
Chuck Peirce



"C'est magnifique!"
Jean-Paul Sartre

Philosophy Now **is the news-stand magazine for everyone interested in philosophy. It covers all the debates – human rights, animal rights, the existence of God, the existence of existence, ethics, science, the environment, the meaning of life, the nature of consciousness, truth, knowledge and much more. We may not have all the answers, but we do have some of the questions...**

Philosophy Now **contributors often include leading thinkers like Roger Ames, Antony Flew, Mary Midgley, Anita Silvers, JJC Smart, and Richard Taylor. Recent issues have featured interviews with Donald Davidson (language), Dan Dennett (consciousness), Peter van Inwagen (religion), Jonathan Glover (political philosophy), Emmanuel Eze (African philosophy), Tu Wei-ming (Chinese philosophy), Roger Scruton (animal rights), Alexander Zinoviev (post-Soviet society) and John Searle (the mind, political activism, language), plus news, reviews, overviews, cartoons, humor and letters.**

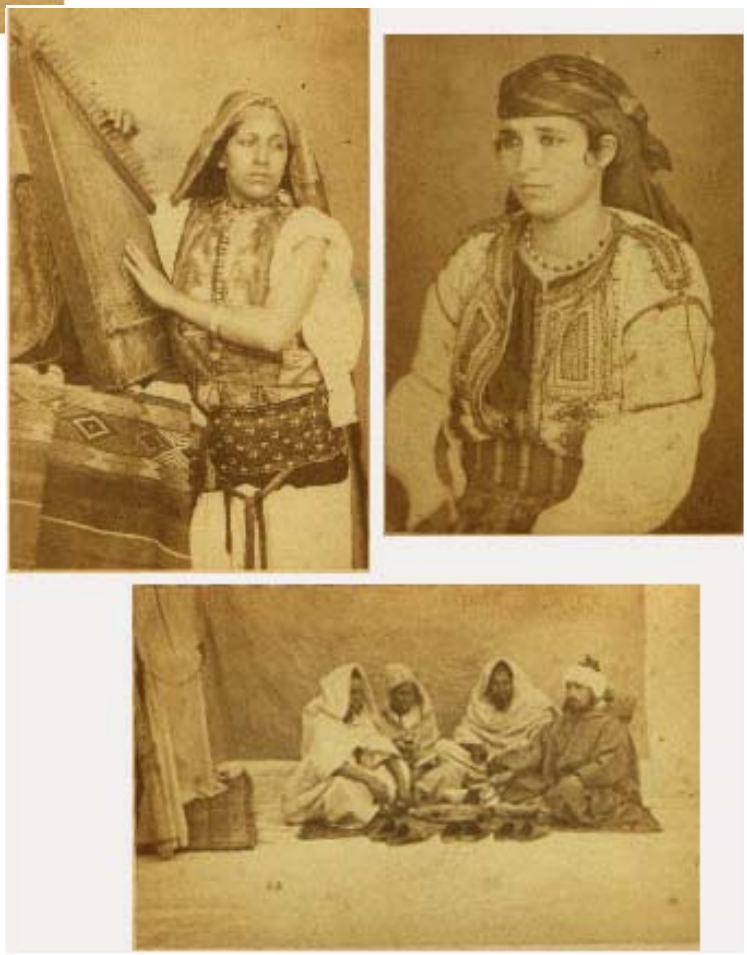
Our June/July issue focuses on Existentialism. You can buy it for $4.95 from selected news-stands and bookstores including most Borders and many Barnes & Nobles, or subscribe for six issues by sending $28.00 or your credit card details to:

Philosophy Now Subscriptions, The Philosophy Documentation Center,
PO Box 7147, Charlottesville, VA 22906-7147
phone (800) 444-2419 fax (804) 220-3301 email order@pdcnet.org
(please make checks payable to the Philosophy Documentation Center)

Special offer to members of the William James Society:
Seven issues for the price of six when you subscribe. Just mention this advert!

Philosophy *Now*
a magazine of ideas **www.philosophynow.org**

Photo Cards Owned by William James



Top Ten List of Tips for Reading William James

by Bill DeLoach

1. Three Words: Darwin, Darwin, Darwin.

James is a biologically-grounded philosopher who committed early and deeply to the thought of Darwin. The only book James reviewed twice (for the Atlantic Monthly and for the North American Review) was Darwin's *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication.* He was a medical student at the time (1868). His early teaching involved comparative anatomy and physiology. But he also expanded Darwinian thought to encompass larger domains than biology. "A remarkable parallel, which I think has never been noticed, obtains between the facts of social evolution on the one hand, and of zoölogical evolution as expounded by Mr. Darwin on the other," he began his 1880 lecture/essay "Great Men and Their Environment" (later incorporated in *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy*, 1897, p. 216). One of the best sources for connecting Darwin's ideas to James and his circle is *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism* by Philip P. Wiener.

2. Read anything about James by Hilary and Ruth Anna Putnam.

Thank God for the Putnams. She edited *The Cambridge Companion to William James* (1997). In the meantime, Hilary is digging deeply into James and finding him both difficult and rewarding. "Although James is usually thought of as a 'literary' philosopher, in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism* James wrote what even Bertrand Russell recognized to be serious technical philosophy. And indeed, these essays have the mysterious sort of depth that the most puzzling passages of the great philosophers seem to have: say, the Transcendental Deduction, in the case of Kant, and the Private Language Argument in the case of Wittgenstein. These essays—especially the fourth—'How Two Minds Can Know One Thing'—are difficult writings, whose importance in understanding James's views cannot be overestimated" *(James's Theory*, 3). Putnam underlines the James-Darwin connection by noting that the "anti-essentialism" both men shared can be a factor in challenging racist thinking.

> The traditional view in biology, the view associated with Aristotle (and, perhaps more fairly, with Plato) is that the real reality, the essence, is the type. In this traditional view, there is such a thing as the essence of a cat, that is, of the type Cat, and there is such a thing as the essence of a dog, that is, of the type Dog, and this essence is what is of scientific importance and interest. (As [Ernst] Mayr has remarked, racism can be viewed as an expression of this kind of essentialistic thinking; the racist thinks of blacks and whites and Jews and Caucasians and Asiatics as types with essential characteristics, rather than as huge populations that exhibit immense variation and have enormous amounts of genetic overlap). But for Darwin there was a flip: the reality is the variation (*James's Theory*, 6).

Do ideas have consequences? Do "Philosophic Conceptions" have "Practical Results"? No wonder Putnam goes on to conclude that "Darwin was the most 'pragmatic,' of scientists" (*James's Theory*, 7).

3. Use a Generous Time-Scale.

"One of the important philosophical advantages stemming from study of the historical development of philosophical movements and traditions is the insight that comes from observing the logical out-working of a set of ideas over a period of time that far exceeds the lifetime of any individual thinker" (*America's Philosophical Vision*, 85). Thus John E. Smith in "The Reflexive Turn, the Linguistic Turn, and the Pragmatic Outcome," which suggests that "One result [of the critical philosophy of Locke and Kant {i.e., the reflexive turn} and later Quine and others {the linguistic turn}] was the postponement of first-order philosophical questions on the supposition that these could be taken up again after we had set the houses of logic and language in order. Unfortunately, as I [Smith] point out, disagreements broke out again at the meta level and we were back at the beginning. Dewey attacked... 'the epistemology industry,' and pointed the way to new beginnings," which Smith calls "the Pragmatic Outcome" (*America's Philosophical Vision*, 85).

Nicholas Rescher uses such a time-scale in connecting James with Whitehead's process philosophy:

> As Whitehead himself thus emphasized, process philosophy does not represent the doctrines of a particular thinker, but reflects a major tendency or line of thought that traces back through the history of philosophy to the days of the pre-Socratics. Its leading exponents were Heracleitus, Leibnitz, Bergson, Peirce, and William James, and it ultimately moved on to include Whitehead and his school (Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, as well as Andrew Paul Ushenko), and also others such as Samuel Alexander and C. Lloyd Morgan (*The Promise of Process Philosophy*, 75).

James himself, in "Lecture VII: The Continuity of Experience" of *A Pluralistic Universe*, noted that "[I]t was only after reading Bergson that I saw that to continue using the intellectualist method was itself the fault. I saw that philosophy had been on a false scent ever since the days of Socrates and Plato, that an intellectual answer to the intellectualist's difficulties will never come" (*A Pluralistic Universe*, 260).

4. Use a Large Map or Globe.

Another title in the SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism* by Steve Odin, carries the story of Prag-

matism across the Pacific. Odin is especially interested in George Herbert Mead, who "has not generally received the same widespread attention as others in the American philosophical tradition such as C.S. Peirce, William James, Josiah Royce, George Santayana, John Dewey and A.N. Whitehead. However, in recent years there has been a renaissance of interest in the philosophy of Mead, triggered especially by its remarkable development into the communicative-interaction theory and the communicative-discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas" (*The Social Self*, 10).

Richard Rorty, in the meantime, looking across the Atlantic, continues to find Pragmatism in the "post-Nietzschean philosophy" of Europe. "I see Nietzsche as the figure who did most to convince European intellectuals of the doctrines which were purveyed to Americans by James and Dewey" (*Essays 2*, 1). Rorty also continues "[t]o see Darwin lying behind both Nietzsche and Dewey," and he now begins to see his own pragmatism as allied with "what a group of contemporary Italian philosophers have called "weak thought," (*Essays 2*, 6). There are "pragmatist passages spotted throughout Nietzsche's works," writes Rorty, "but the best source is sections 480-544 of *The Will to Power*." As for finding pragmatism in Heidegger, in addition to his own four *Essays on Heidegger* in a book by that name, Rorty notes with approval Mark Okrent's *Heidegger's Pragmatism*.

5. Read the Letters.

Before Ignas Skrupskelis and his colleagues began their Critical Edition of *The Correspondence of William James* (with National Endowment for the Humanities funding and ACLS support), fewer than 1,000 WJ letters had been published by his family and his first biographer. This edition is projected to run to 12 volumes. It will include James's correspondence with members of his immediate and extended family as well as with friends and professional colleagues. About 70 per cent of the known letters (some 9,300 at last count) will be included; the other 30 percent will be calendared and indexed. The first three volumes consist of the letters between the two brothers, William and Henry James. *Volume 4* (1856-1877) begins the general correspondence; *Volume* 9 (July 1899-1901) is the most recently published (March 2001) in the series.

6. Read Huston Smith.

In *Postmodernism's Impact on the Study of Religion*, Smith writes: "It has not been easy for us to maintain our bearings in this tumultuous century, so I propose to roll back the decades to its opening and ask William James to remind us what religion is. In his 1901-02 Gifford Lectures, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, he tells us that "religion says that the best things are the more eternal things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the final word" (*Postmodernism's Impact*, 262-263).

7. Read Bernard Baars.

And keep an eye on the journal he co-founded in 1989 and co-edits: *Consciousness and Cognition: An International Journal* for Academic Press. In 1994 Baars became the president of the Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness (ASSC), the only international scientific organization on the topic. After a lapse of almost a hundred years, Baars is returning the study of consciousness to the field of psychology, and he is working explicitly in the Jamesian tradition.

> By wide consent the foremost work on human mental processes, even today, is *William James's Principles of Psychology*, which appeared in 1890. The *Principles* offers thirteen hundred pages... it has given us classic descriptions of selective attention, mental imagery, hypnosis, habit and effortful concentration, the stream of consciousness, the basic arguments for and against unconscious processes, a theory of voluntary control and impulsiveness, the crucial distinction between self-as-subject and self-as-object, and much more. On many of these topics James's thinking is fully up to date, and it is embarrassing but true that much of the time he is still ahead of the scientific curve (*In the Theater*, 15-16).

Baars gives five examples to support his claim that "Entire research domains have been inspired by single passages in the Principles" *(In the Theater*, 16). But where Baars believes he can find ways to go beyond James's analysis of human consciousness is in combining Jamesian insights with cat scans, PET scans, and even more subtle technologies for imaging the neural activity of the brain over time.

Walter J. Freeman is another research psychologist who finds Jamesian ideas helpful in explaining *How Brains Makes Up Their Minds.*

8. Read Eugene Taylor.

I especially recommend *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin*. Taylor, of Harvard Medical School, has published widely on William James and psychology. His research in the James Papers and other Harvard area archives has retrieved from near-oblivion a considerable remnant of a set of eight Lowell Lectures James delivered in 1896 on *Exceptional Mental States*—what a later age now calls "abnormal psychology." This research and the resulting book "led to the discovery of some 936 volumes from James's family library, given to Harvard by his heirs in 1923 upon the death of his wife, Alice Gibbens James" (Taylor, *Exceptional Mental States*, ix). According to Taylor, "a vast amount of work is still left to be done on William James." His own interests include such topics as "a detailed chronological sequence of James's life, the personalities of the women who had a significant impact on his work, the root of James's interest in psychical research, his interpretation of the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the complex relationship that developed between Henry

James, Sr., Charles Sanders Peirce, Chauncey Wright, and William James, the vast web of relationships in James's larger family constellation, as well as James's connection to a host of personalities who did not fit into the worldview of his many later commentators" (*Consciousness Beyond the Margin*, ix).

Even if you don't share Taylor's background in comparative religions, or each of his many interests, you will probably agree that the *Annotated Bibliography* to *Consciousness Beyond the Margin* is immensely valuable, printed on pages 181-207. His mastery of the primary corpus of James's writings (and of most of the secondary and tertiary literature too), plus his painstaking archival research, make him a valuable worker in the Jamesian vineyard.

9. The next time you read Pragmatism...

You might emulate the method followed by Hilary Putnam: "When I do teach *Pragmatism*, my custom is to go through the lectures almost line by line" (*James's Theory*, 4).

And you might keep in mind the advice of Henri Bergson: "[P]ragmatism is one of the most subtle and nuanced doctrines that has ever appeared in philosophy—one is sure to go wrong if one speaks of pragmatism before having read you as a whole" (letter to WJ).

10. Read Ihab Hassan to connect James to postmodern thought.

Professor Hassan has been a leading scholar of postmodernism since the early 1970s, and his name keeps popping up in *The Post-Modern Reader* by Charles Jencks. When architect Paolo Portoghesi asks "What is the Postmodern", he notes that the term was "[u]sed systematically for the first time in 1971 by Ihab Hassan in relation to literature" (*Post-Modern Reader,* 210).

Susan Rubin Suleiman, discussing *Feminism and Postmodernism: A Question of Politic*s, notes:

> It is ironic that Lyotard's book, or rather its English translation, *The Postmodern Condition* (1981), should have become the required starting point for all current discussions of postmodernism by American and English critics, when Lyotard himself, in what I have called elsewhere a rare instance of *reverse importation* in the French-American theoretical marketplace, credited his use of the term to American critics, notably to Ihab Hassan (*Feminism and Postmodernism*, 318).

Hassan himself, after more than two decades of articles, chapters, and books about postmodern artists and writers, has this to say:

> William James may indeed prove, as I have argued, the man for our postmodern season. Intellectually hale and capacious, he throws open windows on our anxious, captious existence. He calls forth genial possibilities of commitment, without irony or dogma, without sterility or coercion.... [A]s William James said in *The Will to Believ*e, "I do not see why the very existence of an invisible world may not in part depend on the personal response which any one of us may make to the religious appeal. God himself, in short, may draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity. For my own part, I do not know what the sweat and blood and tragedy of this life mean, if they mean anything short of this (*Rumors of Change*, 136-7).

—Bill DeLoach = wdeloach@memphis.edu

Works Cited

Baars, Bernard. *Cognitive Theory of Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.

—. *In the Theater of Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.

Bergson, Henri, letter to William James 28 October 1909. In Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*. Vol. II. Boston: Little, Brown, 1935. p. 632.

Bryant, M. Darrol, ed. Huston Smith: *Essays on World Religion*. New York: Paragon, 1995.

Burch, Robert W. and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., eds., *Frontiers in American Philosophy*, Vol. I. College Station: Texas A&M UP, 1992.

Donnelly, Margaret E., ed. *Reinterpreting the Legacy of William James*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1992.

Freeman, Walter J., *How Brains Make Up Their Minds.* New York: Columbia UP, 2001

Hassan, Ihab. "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective" in Jencks, pp. 196-207; rpt. from Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1987.

—*Rumors of Change: Essays of Five Decades*. Tuscaloosa: U Alabama P, 1995.

James, William. *Essays in Radical Empiricism* and *A Pluralistic Universe*. Intro. by Richard J. Bernstein. Ralph Barton Perry, ed. New York: Dutton, 1971

—*The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy.* New York: Longmans, 1897; rpt. Dover, 1956.

Jencks, Charles, ed. *The Post-Modern Reader.* New York: St. Martins, 1992.

—"The Post-Modern Agenda." Jencks, ed. pp. 10-39.

Johnson and Henley, eds. *Reflections on The Principles of Psychology: William James After a Century.* Hillsdale: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1990.

Odin, Steve. *The Social Self in Zen and American Pragmatism*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1996.

Okrent, Mark. *Heidegger's Pragmatism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.

Putnam, Hilary. "James's Theory of Perception: A Reading of the Essays in Radical Empiricism," in Burch and Saatkamp, Jr., eds., pp. 3-23.

—*Pragmatism: An Open Question*. Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1995.

Putnam, Hilary and Ruth Anna. "What the spilled beans can spell: The difficult and deep realism of William James." *Times Literary Supplement* [London] 21 June 1996, pp 14-15.

Putnam, Ruth Anna, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Rorty, Richard. *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Rescher, Nicholas. "The Promise of Process Philosophy." in Burch and Saatkamp, Jr., eds., pp. 75-92.

Skrupskelis, Ignas K. and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, eds., *The Correspondence of William James Vols. 4-9*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995-2001.

Smith, Huston. *Beyond the Post-modern Mind: Updated and Revised.* Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing, 1989.

—"Postmodernism's Impact on the Study of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Winter: 1990; rpt. in Huston Smith: *Essays on World Religion*. ed. M. Darrol Bryant. New York: Paragon, 1992, pp. 262-278.

Smith, John E. *America's Philosophical Vision*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1992.

Taylor, Eugene. *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996.

—*William James on Exceptional Mental States: The 1896 Lowell Lectures.* Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1984.

— "The Case for a Uniquely American Jamesian Tradition in Psychology" in Donnelly, ed., pp. 3-28.

—. "New Light on the Origin of William James's Experimental Psychology" in Johnson and Henley, eds., pp. 33-62.

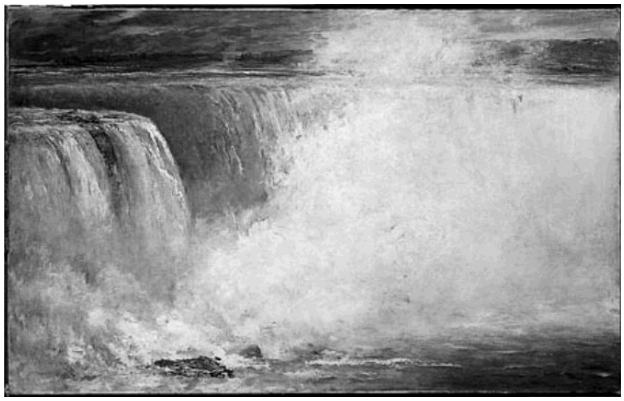
Wiener, Philip P. *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1949; rpt. Harper, 1965.

WJ and William Morris Hunt

By Randall Albright

How much did William Morris Hunt (1824-1879) influence William James? Perhaps part of the problem is that Hunt's legacy is in the visual arts and William's is in the verbal arts.

Niagara by William Morris Hunt (about 1878)



Let me repeat what for some are well known facts. Hunt was James's art teacher in Newport twice: once in the 1858-59 period and again in 1859-60.

Gay Wilson Allen noted that Henry James, Sr. took the family back to Europe during the time of James's interrupted art studies "to get William away from the influence of Hunt."[1] Allen believed, however, that "it would be futile to attempt to trace any lasting influence of William Hunt on his [James's] life, though the subjectivity of the Barbizon School would hardly have been uncongenial to the future pioneer in the psychology of consciousness."[2]

Others have not written off the influence so readily. Howard Feinstein, for example, compared James's and Hunt's similarity in temperament as well as other aspects of biography.[3] More than a few have commented on the enduring artistic element to James's own writing. Still others have seen an affinity between Hunt and Henry James, Senior, William's father.[4]

Baseball by William Morris Hunt (about 1877)

The following are some quotes that Hunt made to students which may sound mysteriously similar to some of James's own assertions as a teacher as well as philosopher, psychologist, and friend.

> You thought it needed *more* work. It needs *less*. You don t get mystery because you are too conscientious! When a bird flies through the air you see no *feathers!* Your eye would require more than one focus: one for the bird, another for the feathers. You are to draw *not reality, but the appearance of reality!*[5]

> Lay aside your intelligence and draw things as they look to you, no matter if you don't know what they are.[6]

> It s the *doing* of the thing that s important! *Doing* is bad enough; but *not doing is worse.*[7]

> Keep yourself in the habit of drawing from memory. The value of memory-sketches lies in the fact that *so much is forgotten!* In time we must learn to leave out in our finished pictures these things which we now leave out through ignorance or forgetfulness. We must learn what to sacrifice.[8]

> Do your own work in your own way. Don t embroider other people s work upon your own, or you make an extinguisher to put out your own light. You can t have *all* the good qualities the drawing of Raphael and the color of Titian! You may wish to draw like this one and paint like that one, but you can t work better than you know. So you must be content to sing your own

1. Gay Wilson Allen, *William James* (New York: Viking, 1969), p. 62.
2. Ibid, p. 69.
3. Howard Feinstein, *Becoming William James* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984), pp. 117-18.
4. Paul Jerome Croce, for example, in *Science and Religion in the Era of William James: Volume 1, Eclipse of Certainty, 1820-1880* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1995), pp. 79, 80.
5. William Morris Hunt, *On Painting and Drawing* (New York: Dover, 1976), p. 3.
6. Ibid, p. 6.
7. Ibid, p. 8.
8. Ibid, p. 10.

> song in your own way. Be content with one quality. I know how hard you are going to find it. Corot could not have developed himself in this country. He would have been snubbed and laughed at, and advised to paint like one and that one, until he would have been pushed out of his own direction.[9]

Hunt was probably no small influence on James's Jean-François Millet-like drawings. Largely because of Hunt's advocacy, who was also a strong proponent of Turner, Delacroix, and other Romantic painters, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston assembled an unparalleled collection of works by Millet.

In thinking of James's philosophy, which often questions the lines between types or temperaments that he initially sets up, I ask: Is this Italian peasant boy more tender or tough-minded? To me, this androgynous figure embodies both.

Italian Peasant Boy by William Morris Hunt (1866)

In the introduction to Hunt's writings, Charles Movalli made this observation:

> Hunt often contradicts himself. You say that I told you yesterday to work in one way, and that to-day I tell you to work in another. Certainly; and to-morrow I shall probably suggest a third.... To avoid confusion, it should be remembered that the artist was directing his comments at individual pupils with specific problems to overcome. As he himself put it: Some needed hasty-pudding, some Albert D rer. He was not attempting to formalize one approach or method of art instruction. He was concerned with something deeper and more enduring.[10]

Helen M. Knowlton wrote:

> He quickly absorbed the significance of a book, and gathered from it whatever might help him. On his studio walls might always be found quotations from Emerson, written large, and with a blunt piece of charcoal....Writers on art generally irritated him, because they were too prone to regard the subject only from a literary stand-point. His copy of the writings of William Blake bristled with empathic evidences of his favorable and sympathetic marking.[11]

James did briefly note that he saw Hunt's murals in the state capitol of New York to his wife in July 1882.[12]

Sketch for the State Capitol in Albany (Discoverers) by William Morris Hunt (1878)

—Randall Albright = albright@world.std.com

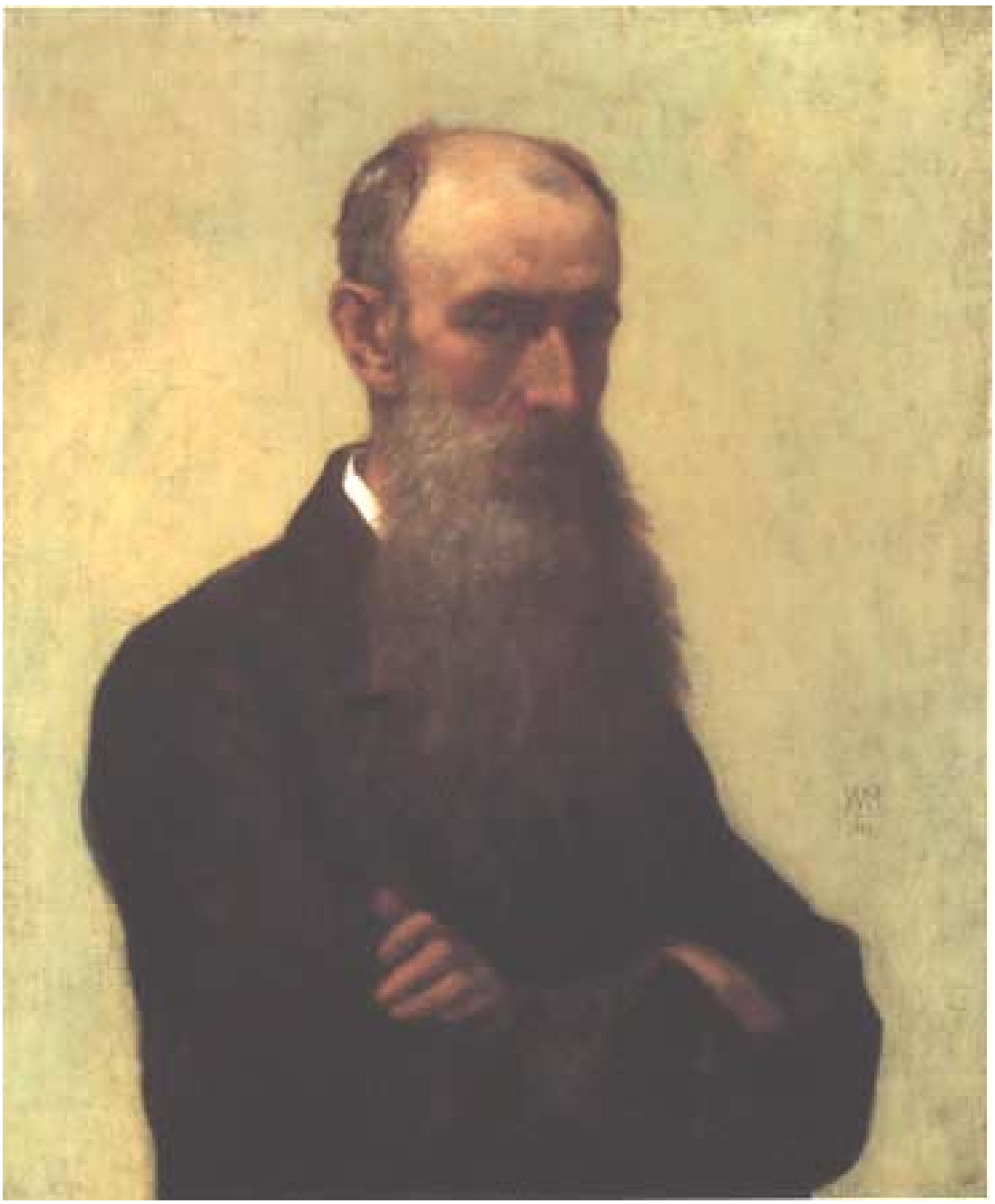
9. Ibid, pp. 89-90.

10. Ibid, p. xii.

11. Helen M. Knowlton, *The Art Life of William Morris Hunt* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1899), p. 94.

12. William James to Alice Howe Gibbens James, *The Correspondence of William James: Volume 5, 1878-1884* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia 1997), p. 224.

Self Portrait by William Morris Hunt (1866)



Artists Wanted!

In honor of the centennial of the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the William James Society is offering a $100 prize for art which will be featured on the volume cover of each issue in 2002. Preference will be given to illustrations that portray at least some of the lecture titles from this book. Although we encourage color, imagery will be reproduced in gray-scale in the newsletter. Imagery should either fit or be able to be cropped to 6" x 6" (15cm x 15cm). Other art may be published in 2002 issues of the newsletter, as well as on the website with artist contact information appropriately displayed. For more information, contact Randall Albright <albright@world.std.com>.

Deadline: February 1, 2002.

2001-2 Student Essay Contests

1) The Centennial of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

In honor of the centennial of the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the William James Society is offering a $100 prize and publication in *Streams of William James* for best student essay (4500 words, maximum) which considers this book. Although this contest is designed primarily for graduate students, we also encourage undergraduates and continuing education students. Essays that receive honorable mention will also be published in an issue of *Streams*.

2) What Makes A Life Significant?

The William James Society is offering a $100 prize and publication in *Streams of William James* for an essay (3000 words, maximum) that considers James's "What Makes a Life Significant" essay from *Talks to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* in relation to your own lived experience. Please do not reference views of other commentators, even if you are familiar with them. We encourage students at all levels, including those in continuing education, to submit work. Essays that receive honorable mention will be published in an issue of *Streams*.

To submit an essay for consideration:

1) Compose an e-mail to Randall Albright. Explain for whom the essay was originally written, class level, and other pertinent information.

2) Attach an electronic copy of your article in Rich Text Format (RTF) or Microsoft Word format.

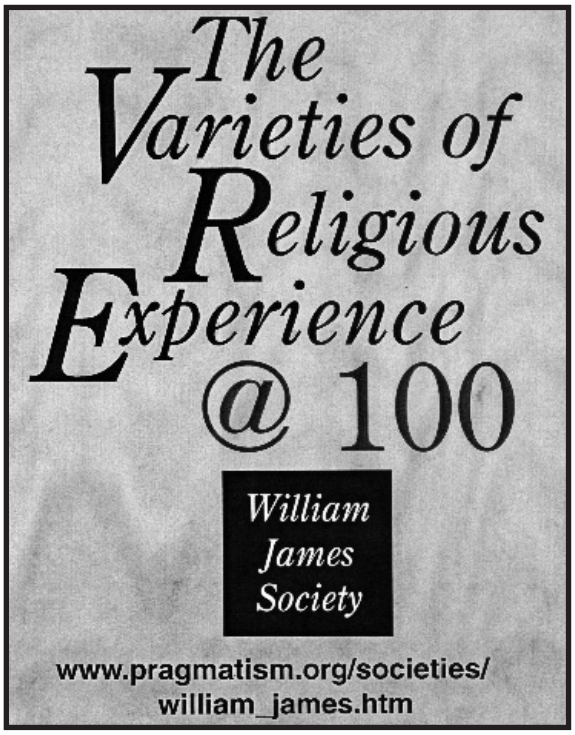
3) Use the CC option to send a copy back to yourself for inherent copyright protection and send to Randall Albright <albright@world.std.com>.

Deadline: April 15, 2002.

Call for A Psych. A Proposals

on The Varieties of Religious Experience

The William James Society and John Snarey are organizing a call for papers for a symposium proposal to be submitted for presentation at the 2002 annual conference of the American Psychological Association, which will be held August 22-25, 2002, Chicago, IL. The symposium aims to honor the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and to advance the current psychological study of religion within a Jamesian tradition. To submit a paper proposal for the symposium, e-mail a title (10 words or less) and an abstract (about 300 words) for your proposed contribution to jsnarey@emory.edu by Friday, November 16. Include your current position, complete mailing address, and phone numbers.



WJ at Meetings and Lectures

The 2001 Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion, held in Denver, Colorado, November 17-20, 2001, has panels on **Pragmatism and Empiricism in American Religious Thought** as well as **Philosophy of Religion**.

On December 28, 2001, William James Society's panel will be held at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division's meeting in Atlanta, GA. On December 29th, a **100th Anniversary of James' Varieties of Religious Experience** panel will be held at the same meeting.

The Swedenborg Society at Harvard University presents a lecture series on **The Spiritual Currents of American Pragmatism** by Eugene Taylor from October 28, 2001 through June 2, 2002. For details, contact Eugene Taylor <etaylor@igc.org>.

Note: We encourage any presenter to submit papers for publication consideration in *Streams of William James*. Contact Randall Albright <albright@world.std.com> for more information.

Call for Papers: Special Issue of Streams of William James

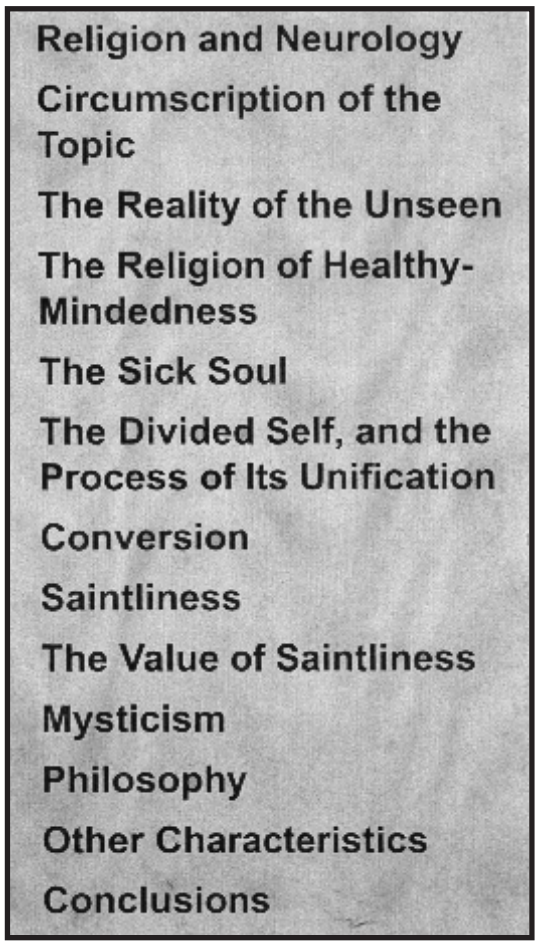
Streams of William James is devoting a special issue to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of its publication. We actively welcome contributions of articles and essays dedicated to James's most thorough and influential statement of his psychology of religion. The contents of this special issue will range from scholarly analyses of the text and its contexts, to essays of reflection on its influence, to likeminded evaluations of diverse "religious propensities." For a book that has remained in print through a century of tumultuous change, we seek to provide a forum for understanding its meaning and appeal and for fostering use of its methods for sensitive comprehension of the religious dimension of human nature.

For more information, contact the Guest Editor for this issue, Paul Jerome Croce <pcroce@stetson.edu>.

Word limit for final texts: 500-800 words for essays; 6000-8000 words for articles.

Deadline for initial drafts to Paul Jerome Croce:
February 1, 2002.

Paul Jerome Croce
Professor and Chair of American Studies
Box 8274, Stetson University
421 N. Woodland Boulevard
DeLand, FL 32720



Thoughts to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

by William James

If God is dead or at least irrelevant, ditto everything pertaining to the "Beyond," if happiness be our Good, ought we not to try to foment a passionate and bold will to attain that happiness among the multitudes? Can we not conduct off upon our purposes from the old moralities and theologies a beam which will invest us with some of the proud absoluteness which made them so venerable by preaching the doctrine that Man is his own Providence, and every individual a real god to his race, greater or less in proportion to his gifts & the way he uses them? The sentiment of philanthropy is now so firmly established and apparently its permanence so guaranteed by its beneficent nature that it wd. be bold to say it could not take its place as an ultimate motive for human action. I feel no *confidence* (even apart fm. my doubts as to the theoretical finality of "sensationalism") that society is as yet ripe for it as a popular philosophy and religion combined, but as I said above, no one can measure the effects of an idea, or distribute exactly the shares wh. different ideas have in our present social order. And certainly there is something disheartening in the position of an esoteric philosopher. The conscientious prudence which wd. wish to educate mankind gradually instead of throwing out the lore, and letting it educate itself, may be both presumptuous & timid. - - - - - Do you take? I only throw out these as doubts, and wd. like to know whether you have been troubled by any similar ones on the matter of policy.

—from May 15, 1868 letter, *The Correspondence of William James, Volume 4, 1856-1877.* Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, Eds. (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995), p. 303.