# *Streams of William James*

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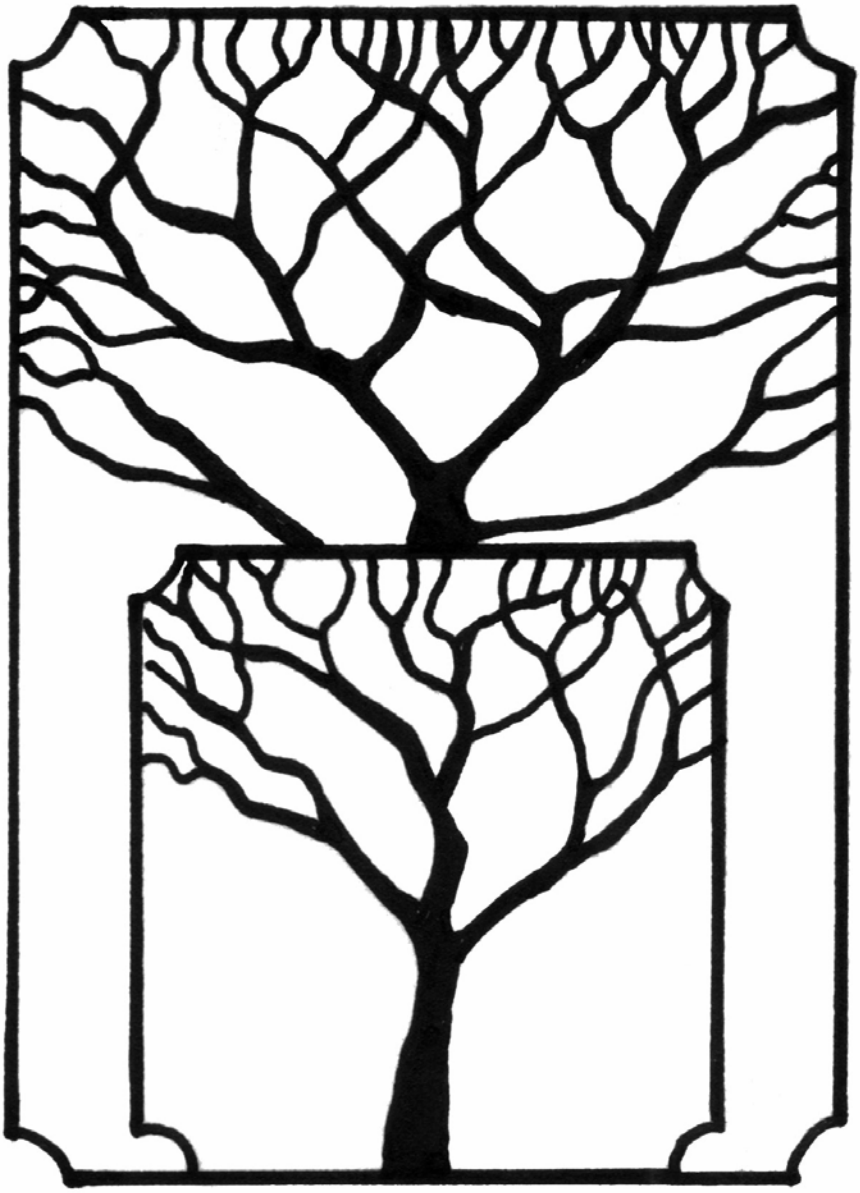
*Volume 5 • Issue 3 • Fall 2003*



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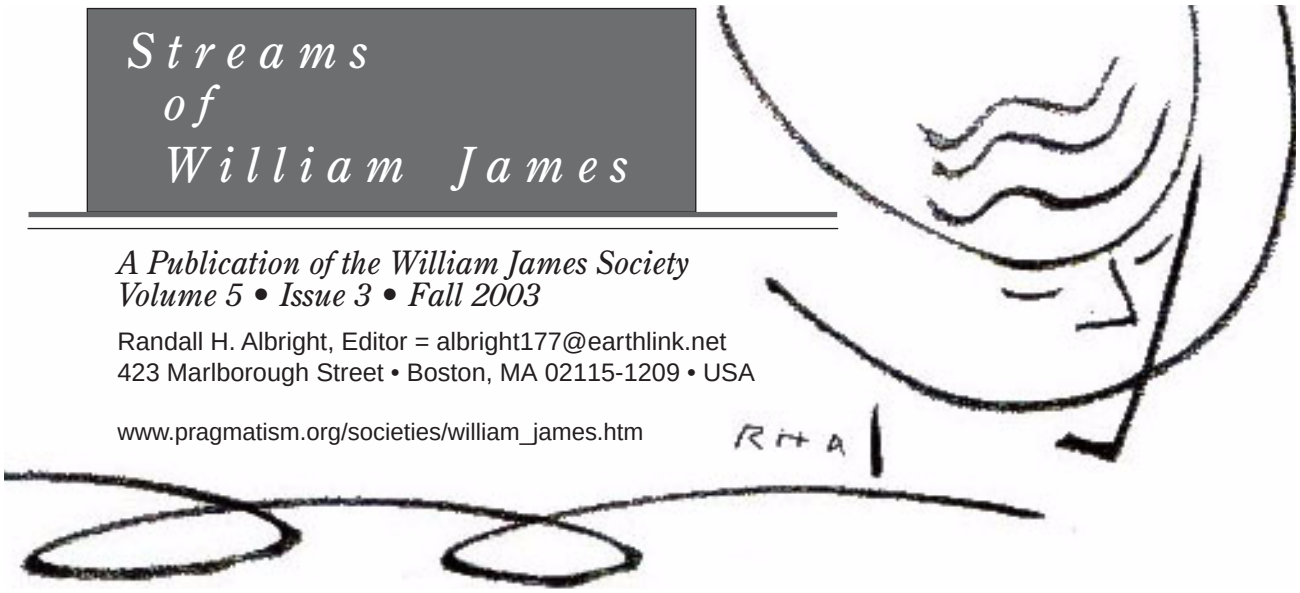
# *Streams of William James*

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—Article I,
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# *A Centenary Note*

*by Randall Albright*

At a key juncture in his Emerson Centenary Address, James referred to Emerson as an Artist[1] with a capital "A." Since it is my belief that James himself is best understood as an artist who employed science, religion, and other tools to both observe and persuade people through the more commonly applied labels by which he is known, to me that reference is the climax of his brief speech. Although this view of James is compounded for me by the fact that I classify myself as an artist, his friend and fellow psychologist, Théodore Flournoy, wrote of James's "Artistic Temperament,"[2] as have others.

Now, a century after James made the Emerson address, I sometimes ponder what became of "art" and the humanities as I roam many modern art museums, much less go to many films, or pass through the seemingly vast array of channels available on my TV set or WorldWide Web. What passes for art? What is valued by the curators or packagers? What sells with the consumers? And why does so much of it fail to inspire me? I think that art has been reduced too much, that life itself is often sold at a discount, that cheap thrills and pretense often pass for something more than I care to consider. So let me try to return the good name of art as I see it used in both Emerson and William James. First, let me recall to *Streams* readers that Emerson himself had a large view for the word "art." For example:

> Is not the selfish and even cruel aspect which belongs to our great mechanical works,—to mills, railways, and machinery,—the effect of mercenary impulses which these words obey? When its errands are noble and adequate, a steamboat bridging the Atlantic between Old and New England, and arriving at its parts with the punctuality of a planet, is a step of man into harmony with nature. The boat at St. Petersburgh, which plies along the Lena by magnetism, needs little to make it sublime. When science is learned in love, and its powers are wielded by love, they will appear the supplements and continuations of the material creation.[3]

Whoever is using the tools, people are creating either sometimes quite dangerous junk or possible beauty in their supplement to the preexisting material creation *a great deal of the time*.

John M. Robson footnoted Mill's first usage of "art" at the end of the first paragraph in *The Logic of Morals* (from the *System of Logic*, with which James was well acquainted at a young age and later taught a course on at Harvard). Mill wrote:

> The imperative mood is the characteristic of art, as distinguished from science. Whatever speaks in rules, or precepts, not in assertions respecting matters of fact, is art: and ethics, or morality, is properly a portion of the art corresponding to the sciences of human nature and society.[4]

John Robson footnoted:

> It is almost superfluous to observe that there is another meaning of the word Art, in which it may be said to denote the poetical department or aspect of things in general, in contradistinction to the scientific. In the text, the word is used in its older, and I hope, not yet obsolete sense.[5]

In John J. McDermott's 1986 *Streams of Experience*, I found it inspiring to read someone discuss James's Emersonian roots with such breadth, and also to continue the discussion with influences like these: "Albert Einstein, Werner Hiesenberg, Franz Kafka, Marcel Duchamp, and Louise Nevelson, to mention only a few who symbolize the revolution in the parameters and possibilities of our consciousness."[6] McDermott did not distinguish between two scientists, a novelist, and the two visual artists in this list. All have made an impact. In the words of William James:

> The progress of society is due to the fact that individuals vary from the human average in all sorts of directions, and that the originality is often so attractive that they are recognized by their tribe as leaders, and become objects of envy or admiration, and setters of new ideals.[7]

And in this quote from James:

> …the older tradition [of philosophy] is the better as well as the completer one…. philosophy, in order not to lose human respect, must take some notice of the actual constitution of reality.[8]

So perhaps art, like philosophy, is too small a word. To paraphrase the James quote above, our *lives* must endeavor not to lose a truly human, truly compassionate, respect between each other. We have our loved ones and the very real hope or despair of the planet at stake.

*—Randall Albright = albright177@earthlink.net*

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1. William James, "Emerson" in *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1982 [1903]), p. 110.
2. Reprinted in *William James Remembered*, Linda Simon, ed. (Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P), pp. 84-88.
3. Ralph Waldo Emerson, end of the "Art" essay from *Essays: First Series* (1841) in *The Oxford Authors: Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Richard Poirier, ed. (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1990), p. 194.
4. *John Stuart Mill: A Selection of His Works*, John M. Robson, ed. (New York: Odyssey, 1966), p. 344.
5. Ibid., pp. 344-345.
6. John J. McDermott, *Streams of Experience* (Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1986), p. 68.
7. William James, opening lines from *Some Problems of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1979 [1911]), p. 9.
8. Ibid., p. 14.

# *"Philosophy" in* The Varieties of Religious Experience:

## *From Theology through the Science of Religions to a Science of Convictions*[1]

*by Jacob Lynn Goodson*

### Introduction

William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* provides a good starting point for an investigation of the relationship between philosophy and religion. The eighteenth lecture of the *Varieties* is simply entitled "Philosophy." In that lecture, James discusses what he calls the "science of religions"[2] (James, p. 455). The last section of that lecture begins: "It would be unfair to philosophy, however, to leave her under this negative sentence" (James, p. 455). The "negative sentence" he is referring to is: "In all sad sincerity I think we must conclude that the attempt to demonstrate by purely intellectual processes the truth of the deliverances of direct religious experiences is absolutely hopeless" (James, p. 455). Upon returning to the last section we will find James's discussion on what he calls the "science of religions":

> Let me close, then, by briefly enumerating what she [philosophy] can do for religion. If she [philosophy] will abandon metaphysics and deduction for criticism and induction, and frankly transform herself from theology into science of religions, she [philosophy] can make herself enormously useful. (James, p. 455)

So how is James using the phrase the "science of religions"?

My thesis here is that James's transformation of theology into a science of religions is a nonreductive naturalization of theology. To defend this thesis, I will first discuss some contemporary criticisms of James in order to show how James's transformation of theology into a science of religions is nonreductive. Second, I will show how James's transformation of theology into a science of religions is his way of naturalizing theology. Third, I will show how James's naturalization of theology is exemplified by James Wm. McClendon and James M. Smith's "theology as a science of convictions" in their *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism*.[3] I will conclude by giving a summary of the defense of my thesis.

As will be observed throughout this essay, a close examination of James's *Varieties* reveals that James anticipated many of the concerns that are now leveled against his *Varieties*. I will also show how the solutions he offered are better than the alternatives offered by many of his critics today. That is not to say that James's solutions free him from criticism. Nor is it to say that James anticipated all of the concerns that have been raised about his *Varieties*. It is to say, though, that it is important and rather interesting to observe that James not only anticipated particular criticisms being raised now but also offered possible solutions to those criticisms.

### Contemporary Criticisms of James's *Varieties*[4]

The *Varieties* has recently been accused of presenting an unintelligible account of religious experience by both a prominent theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, and a prominent philosopher, Charles Taylor. Hauerwas and Taylor agree that James's *Varieties* needs some sort of communal understanding of religious experience to provide intelligibility to James's analyses of religious experiences. I argue elsewhere that the difference between Hauerwas and Taylor on this problem is the following: "Where Hauerwas criticizes James from a narrative approach to theology, Taylor criticizes James from a sociological approach to anthropology."[5] James, of course, anticipates these criticisms when he says: "I think we must conclude that the attempt to demonstrate by purely intellectual processes the truth of the deliverances of direct religious experience is absolutely hopeless" (James, p. 455). As we shall observe later, James could be added to my descriptions of Hauerwas's and Taylor's approaches mentioned above by saying that James takes a scientific approach to religion.

My argument in this section therefore will be that James not only recognizes the problem that Hauerwas and Taylor discuss but gives a positive alternative that Taylor fails to give and anticipates the theological alternative that Hauerwas does give. In my review of Taylor's *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*,[6] I show how Taylor failed to give us a positive alternative to

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1. This essay is dedicated to my friend, mentor, and teacher Donald G. Wester for teaching me how to read William James. The first class I had with Wester was a class on William James's later writings—which used many of the texts used in this essay; it was my freshman year of college at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Oklahoma. This essay is but a mere reflection of his influence on my thinking, and this dedication is but a small gesture toward the debt I owe him.

2. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1982.) Photo reproduction of original 1902 work published by Longmans, Green.

3. James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Defusing Religious Relativism* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity P International, 1994). An earlier version of this book is McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1975). I use the 1994 version of *Convictions* in this essay because it has more references to James throughout the book.

4. I am indebted to Todd C. Ream for helping me think through some of my criticisms of Stanley Hauerwas's interpretation of James that I discuss in this section.

5. Jacob Lynn Goodson, "A Review of Charles Taylor's *Varieties of Religion of Today: William James Revisited*," in *Streams of William James*, vol. 5, no.1 (Spring 2003), p. 30.

6. Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 2002).

the criticisms Taylor leveled against James.[7] Hauerwas's *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*[8] is a bit more complicated than Taylor's book only because it offers a positive alternative to James—namely a natural theology that is incarnational and the witness of the church which is based upon the narrative told through the bodies of Israel and of Christ. It is in this context that Hauerwas argues James's account of religion is reductive.

Hauerwas spends a lot of time discussing what he calls James's reductionism, and although he never attacks James on the grounds that he reduces theology to a science of religions we can certainly make some connections. Hauerwas admits that James claims to be a nonreductionist when it comes to religion, but Hauerwas reads James quite differently than James reads himself. Hauerwas says, "James's reductionistic account of religion is all the more seductive because it is so subtle" (Hauerwas, p. 65). Hauerwas attempts to demonstrate his argument using two examples, but neither of them are successful.

The first example concerns James's use of "sacrifice." All that James argues here is that knowing the sacrificed—Christ or the saints—is difficult on account that we were not there. Hauerwas turns this argument into a philosophical one—which it is not for James—by saying that James reduces Christianity to having a direct, empirical, and personal relationship with Christ and the saints. This criticism is full of assumptions concerning the philosophy of history. To say it briefly, the problem with Hauerwas's argument here is that he seems to think that empiricists cannot do history. But James does not have such a philosophy of history. In fact, James vehemently argues that a lack of empirical evidence should not deter religious belief.

The second example concerns James's use of "prayer." For James, prayer does not *necessarily* assume a deity who hears the prayer. Hauerwas rightly recognizes this understanding of prayer as problematic, but Hauerwas wrongly thinks that prayer without the ears of a deity is necessarily reductionistic. Whether Hauerwas knows it or not, he makes a better case that this understanding of prayer is not reductionistic when he argues, "The difficulty, of course, is whether James's understanding of subjectivity is the same as the understanding of the one who is in fact doing the praying, given that the latter at the very least assumes that there is a God to whom he or she prays" (Hauerwas, p. 66). Hauerwas gives James's argument for why he is not a reductionist when it comes to prayer because if the subject thinks he or she is praying to God, then—according to James—he or she is praying to God. This account of prayer is problematic, but Hauerwas is mistaken to use it to say that James has a reductive account of religion. Since this account is problematic, though, we need to explore it a bit more. Henry Samuel Levinson, in the context of his discussion on the science of religions, makes some interesting points that Hauerwas does not mention.[9]

First, concerning the subjectivist critique, Levinson mentions that in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* James Earle argues that if James is a subjectivist it is because of philosophy in general and not James's philosophy in particular.[10]

Second, following the problem of subjectivism in the specific context of prayer, James thinks that religious experiences are different from other experiences exactly because—like prayer—they assume that there is a greater community involved or at least a greater entity involved called a deity. According to Levinson's interpretation of James, prayer is only intelligible if the one praying "believes that someone else is realizing his intentions on his behalf" (Levinson 1978, p. 181). Levinson continues, "He [James] believes this to be the case because he knows that he must consciously obey specific rules for behavior if he is to enact relevant intentions" (Levinson 1978, p. 181). Thus, for James, prayer is only intelligible because of a community that follows particular rules—which is a connection between James and Ludwig Wittgenstein.[11]

Third, following Hauerwas's example of prayer, he makes an interesting point that should be discussed thoroughly here. Hauerwas says, "James thought he was providing a nonreductive account of religion, of matters such as sacrifice and prayer, because of his commitment to the pragmatic method" (Hauerwas, p. 66). Hauerwas is right to say that James was committed to the pragmatic method; it is what Hauerwas argues in the next paragraph that is questionable. According to Hauerwas, James should not dismiss theological claims if those claims fail the pragmatic test. Hauerwas says, "Indeed, if, as James says, some ideas are true only in relation to other truths (and thus not in relation to any practical consequences they might have in isolation from these other truths), then his refusal to consider substantive religious convictions as true cannot help but appear arbitrary and reductive" (Hauerwas, p. 68). But religious convictions can be

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7. See Goodson.

8. Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology: Being the Gifford Lectures Delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 2001* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos P, 2001).

9. Henry Samuel Levinson, *Science, Metaphysics, and the Chance of Salvation: An Interpretation of the Thought of William James* (Missoula, MT: Scholars P, 1978)

10. See William James Earle, "William James," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* 8 vols., ed. Paul Edwards, (New York: Collier-MacMillan, 1967), vol. 4, 241; also see Levinson 1978, p. 14.

11. There are many connections between James and Wittgenstein; I will mention some other connections in passing throughout this essay. Unfortunately, I will not be able to elaborate on the connections between James and Wittgenstein here; fortunately, though, others have made the connections well—especially Russell Goodman, Hilary Putnam, and Everett Tarbox. I especially recommend Goodman, *Wittgenstein and William James* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U P, 2002).

true for James, and they are neither "arbitrary" nor "reductive" because the truth of the claims is based upon the practices of the community. The irony of this criticism is that in his Gifford Lectures,[12] Hauerwas assumes a pragmatic criterion of truth that is similar to that of James's pragmatic criterion of truth.[13]

James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith do a good job of using a pragmatic criterion of truth for religious convictions.[14] For McClendon and Smith, this use of the pragmatic criteria of truth for religious convictions is called perspectivism—which is an attempt to escape the foundationalist problems of both imperialism and relativism. McClendon and Smith admit that they share "broad sympathies" (McClendon and Smith, p. 42) with the pragmatists—namely James and Richard Rorty[15]—in their position called perspectivism. McClendon and Smith make the connection with James and Wittgenstein that both deny a doing/saying distinction in the following sense: "saying is in fact a kind of doing" (McClendon and Smith, Ibid.). McClendon and Smith argue that religious convictions are true or false based upon linguistic practices—which is a Jamesian version of Wittgenstein's language games. McClendon and Smith's perspectivism provides a good initial response to Hauerwas's accusation that James is a reductionist.

I will return now to Henry Levinson to help us finish what McClendon and Smith started. Also, I use Levinson here because his defense of James's nonreductionism leads us well into how James uses the phrase the "science of religions." Levinson's defense of James's nonreductionism uses Charles Darwin as a comparison. Darwin says that we cannot specify how actual populations and species are produced because the causes of reproduction are unobservable. They are merely molecular accidents between particular organs of the body, but the particular organs are not known fully because the causes of reproduction are unobservable. We must evaluate their ecological belonging and thus categorize them within their particular population. Levinson now makes the comparison:

> The same holds, according to James, for religious experiences. To "reduce" religious experience to some sort of psychological or physiological or sociological phenomenon does little to characterize or evaluate it—particularly inasmuch as any describable human phenomenon is, on James's grounds, in some sense psychological, physiological, and sociological. (Levinson 1978, p. 187)

Levinson's textual defense of James's nonreductionism in the *Varieties* also has connections with Wittgenstein—namely what Wittgenstein calls "family resemblances." I mention this connection now because it will help us understand James better when he says,

> …we are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn. The pretension, under such conditions, to be rigorously "scientific" or "exact" in our terms would only stamp us as lacking in understanding of our task. Things are more or less divine, states of mind are more or less religious, reactions are more or less total but the boundaries are always misty, and it is everywhere a question of amount and degree. (James, p.39)

An accusation such as James being a reductionist does not seem plausible after these explorations. What is interesting in the case of Hauerwas is that he claims several times that he is a follower of Wittgenstein, but he does not recognize that James's nonreductionism is similar to that of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language.[16]

I will conclude this section briefly by returning to Taylor's *Varieties of Religion Today* because Taylor exemplifies a nonreductive approach to James's *Varieties*. Levinson rightly argues, "To distinguish religious experience by reference to its psychological, physiological, and/or sociological origins is not to distinguish it at all. If it is to be distinguished, it will be distinguished as a pattern of (observable) behavior which is different from other such patterns" (Levinson 1978, p. 187). Prima facie, it seems that Taylor makes the mistake of reducing James's *Varieties* to "sociological origins." But Taylor does not make such a mistake; Taylor is a good example of the nonreductionism that Levinson says is in James's *Varieties*. That is to say that Taylor exemplifies Levinson's argument: "If it is to be distinguished, it will be distinguished as a pattern of (observable) behavior which is different from other such patterns" (Levinson 1978, p. 187). Taylor thoroughly discusses patterns of observable behaviors and their differences from other such patterns.[17]

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12. In a responsive letter to an earlier draft of this essay, Hauerwas interestingly says that the whole point of his Gifford lectures was to use the pragmatic criterion of truth without using the notion of criterion. I think Hauerwas is quite right to summarize his Gifford lectures that way because throughout the Gifford lectures—especially in the introduction and the last chapter—Hauerwas's arguments and criticisms assume a pragmatic criterion of truth. For example, early on in the Gifford lectures Hauerwas says, "I show why the truthfulness of theological claims entails the work they do for the shaping of holy lives" (p. 17). There are many more examples in his Gifford lectures of his use of a pragmatic understanding of truth.

13. See Stephen Webb, "The Very American Stanley Hauerwas," in *First Things 124*, ed. Richard Neuhaus, (New York: The Journal of Religion and Public Life, June/July 2002), pp. 12-14.

14. See McClendon and Smith. The whole book can be read as an argument for how the pragmatic criteria of truth can be used for religious convictions.

15. McClendon and Smith share "broad sympathies" namely with the Rorty who wrote *Philosophy and the Mirror of Natur*e because it discusses the problems of the epistemological foundationalism that McClendon and Smith are trying to avoid; see Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U P, 1979).

16. Not only is Hauerwas fond of Wittgenstein, but the case has been made that Hauerwas is thoroughly Wittgensteinian; see Brad Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2001).

To summarize this section, James anticipated the criticisms he currently receives. What is especially important in this section is James's awareness of the possibility of the problem of reductionism. His awareness led him to rightly conclude, "…the attempt to demonstrate by purely intellectual processes the truth of the deliverances of direct religious experience is absolutely hopeless" (James, p. 455). This discussion of James's recognition of these problems leads us to his nonreductive naturalization of theology.[18]

### James's Naturalization of Theology

It is my contention that theologians like Hauerwas need to address what I consider to be a radical statement in James's *Varieties*: "If she [philosophy] will abandon metaphysics and deduction for criticism and induction, and frankly transform herself from theology into a science of religions, she can make herself enormously useful" (James, p. 455).[19] James knows this claim was radical at least in the sense that he was going against Lord Gifford's will in his lecture entitled "Philosophy" in the *Varieties* in the sense that, as Hauerwas argues, "James's attempt to secure human significance is his response to a quite different understanding of science than that of Adam Gifford" (Hauerwas, p. 49). What is James doing when he "frankly" argues for a transformation of "theology into a science of religions"?

First, James thinks his use of science in psychology can be applied to his religious investigations.[20] As Charlene Haddock Seigfried argues, "…in *Varieties* he [James] felt competent to apply his scientific expertise in psychology to religious phenomena…."[21] Psychology is obviously a science. It would be difficult to make a good case that religion is a science in the same sense—which is why James calls it a "science of religions." He is not trying to make "religion itself" a science, but he is proposing a new alternative—a "science of religions."

Second, James argues rather clearly for a sort of naturalization of theology:

> By confronting the spontaneous religious constructions with the results of natural science, philosophy can also eliminate doctrines that are now known to be scientifically absurd or incongruous.
>
> Sifting out in this way unworthy formulations, she can leave a residuum of conceptions that at least are possible. With these she can deal as *hypotheses*, testing them in all the manners, whether negative or positive, by which hypotheses are ever tested.…She can do this the more successfully, the better she discriminates the common and essential from the individual and local elements of the religious beliefs which she compares.
>
> I do not see why a critical Science of Religions of this sort might not eventually command as general a public adhesion as is commanded by a physical science. (James, pp. 408-409)

James makes a solid proposal for how his "science of religions" ought to be practiced. It is like any other scientific enquiry: develop your hypothesis, and test your hypothesis. If we use this method to test religious beliefs, then we will not only "eliminate doctrines that are now known to be scientifically absurd or incongruous" but will also "eventually command as general a public adhesion as is commanded by a physical science."

Third, James's naturalism is not merely a scientific naturalism but is also a sort of religious naturalism—which is another reason why it is nonreductive. As David C. Lamberth argues,[22] James offers "a 'religious' version of naturalism" (Lamberth, p. 135). He says that James thinks "religious persons might content themselves with the offerings of such a naturalism" (Lamberth, Ibid.). This religious naturalism may seem to place the science of psychology and the science of religion in some sort of conflict, but James's naturalism avoids this possible conflict. Lamberth interprets James's claim, "in religious experience we feel ourselves connected [with] the subconscious continuation of our conscious life" (James, p. 403), as avoiding such a conflict: "This, James thinks, is the strongest statement of the objective *truth* of religion to which an empirical (naturalistic) psychologist can assent." (Lamberth, p. 136) Therefore, theology is a continuation of our natural life and not a sort of addition to it.

James's transformation of theology into a science of religions is a sort of naturalization of theology in the sense that James wants theology to be a physical science—that is, to be understood as a continuation of our natural life.

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17. See Taylor, pp. 3-29.

18. For a religious use of "nonreductive," see the following: Warren S. Brown, Nancey Murphy, & H. Newton Maloney, eds., *Whatever Happened to the Soul?: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress P, 1998). I refer to this text because it gives a good balances of both scientific and theological problems. Following Nancey Murphy's lead, my use of "nonreductive" can be summarized as religious experience supervenes on ordinary experience. Although Murphy never uses James in her wonderful argument, many Jamesian tones are there. Thus, I especially recommend her essay: "Nonreductive Physicalism: Philosophical Issues" (pp. 127-148).

19. It would be interesting to discuss James's claim concerning the abandonment of "metaphysics and deduction for criticism and induction;" unfortunately, though, I cannot do that here. For a good source on that problem, see the following: David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge:, UK Cambridge U P, 1999). Although Lamberth never addresses this exact quote in James's *Varieties*, he does argue that James's pluralism allows him to seemingly shift away from metaphysics without ever abandoning a metaphysics of pure experience; thus, according to Lamberth, James reconstructs metaphysics based upon his radical empiricism.

20. See Levinson, *The Religious Investigations of William James* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1981), pp. 71-94.

21. Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1990), p. 198.

22. David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U P, 1999)

Because he wants it to be a physical science, he proposes a way to practice theology as a physical science. His naturalization of theology, though, is not a strict scientific naturalism but is also a religious naturalism—which fulfills my thesis that James's transformation of theology into a science of religions is a nonreductive naturalization of theology.[23]

### "Theology as a Science of Convictions"[24]

James argues that the "science of religions" is not equivalent to "religion itself"; thus the science must avoid pure theoretics.[25] Following that advice, McClendon and Smith propose a way to practice "theology as a science of convictions." McClendon and Smith describe their use of "theology" as the following:

> *the discovery, examination, and transformation of the conviction set of a given convictional community, carried on with a view to discovering and modifying the relation of the member convictions to one another, to other (non-convictional) beliefs held by the community, and to whatever else there is.* (McClendon and Smith, p. 184)

I think this use of "theology" would be satisfactory to James—as will become clearer throughout this section.

McClendon and Smith's interpretation of James's use of "science of religions" is the following:

> William James, toward the end of his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, suggested that the old dogmatic theology was about to be replaced by a new, philosophically pure "Science of Religions," to which the *Varieties* itself was making "a crumb-like contribution." James must have had the development of experimental psychology, with which he had so much to do, in mind as a model. The "science of religions" would be impartial and would "presuppose immediate experiences" as its subject matter. The fruit of this science, James hoped, would be a common body of conclusions about religion. To this common body each scientific inquirer would add, according to his predilections and faith…. (McClendon and Smith, p. 184)

McClendon and Smith read James's usage of "science of religions" in a similar way that I do—that is, as a move toward a sort of naturalization of theology.

There is a possible problem with James's use of "science of religions"—that is, it may risk a sort of scientism. McClendon and Smith address this problem. According to McClendon and Smith, James was not only aware of this problem but offered a solution to it. I quote McClendon and Smith on James's solution:

> …while the science might be "impartial" to any one of the several religions (as theology was not), it would have its "internal difficulties"; notably, it would be biased against the claim that "the essence of religion is true," a bias James sought to overcome…. (McClendon and Smith, pp. 181-182)

Nancey Murphy's *Theology in an Age of Scientific Reasoning* is helpful in understanding how theology is to adopt scientific methods—as James suggests—but avoid a sort of scientism.[26] Murphy argues that for theology to be scientific, it must have a "hard core"—that is a conviction or set of convictions that are logically related.[27] This "hard core" must be sustained against possible refutations, which makes the convictions or set of convictions nonfoundational in the sense that they are contingent.

Since these convictions or set of convictions are contingent, Murphy is able to envision a pluralism of inquiry—which is obviously a Jamesian vision. As McClendon and Smith argue, "There may be a *scientific exploration of convictions* even in a convictionally pluralist world" (McClendon and Smith, p. 182). The possible problem of scientism is thus defused by the recognition that science is not only limited but also contingent, nonfoundational, and pluralistic.

McClendon and Smith's proposal to practice theology as a science of convictions begins as a vision of

> a discipline that is consciously convictional, plural in form, responsive in many ways to many sorts of empirical data, and open to the rational modes of adjudication (the role of language, the loci of appeal, the social matrices of encounter, reform, etc.)…. More than any rival candidate we can envision, such a discipline would deserve to be called a "science of convictions." Or for a less novel but still provocative name we would call it *theology*…. (McClendon and Smith, pp. 183-184)

Following James's experimental psychological method, they outline their "science of convictions." Religious data is gathered, and the scientific method is in the inquiry of convictions. The methodology and the "hard core" convictions should be based upon empirical investigations. Both require serious inquiry based upon—in theology, for example—contemplation, meditation, and reflection. This

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23. For a thorough analysis of James's naturalism, see Phil Oliver, *William James's "Springs of Delight": The Return to Life* (Nashville, TN : Vanderbilt U P, 2001), pp. 27-35, pp. 129-138, and pp. 192-209. In this essay, I follow Oliver's use of naturalism: "Naturalism just says that whatever is real, experienced, or experiencable is part of nature" (Oliver, p. 137).

24. I borrow this title from McClendon and Smith, *Convictions*, pp. 180-196.

25. See James, p. 467. For a helpful discussion on this use of science of religion, see H. O. Mounce, *The Two Pragmatisms: From Peirce to Rorty* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 120-125.

26. See Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U P, 1990).

27. Murphy follows Imre Lakatos's usage of "hard core" in her *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning.*

outline thus ends with the hope:

> Perhaps…the science of convictions that *we* envisage might make room, not only for common empirical data, but also for those aspects of convictional belief in which folk are (and so far ought to be) separated. (McClendon and Smith, p. 182)

Thus, the proposal for a "science of convictions" made by McClendon and Smith is one which shares the conviction with William James that the investigation of convictions can be as pluralistic as possible without losing it efficacy.

The pragmatic question, then, becomes how will we know when this "science of religions" (in James's terms) and "science of convictions" (in McClendon and Smith's terms) works? Again, James provides the answer: we will know by its fruits.[28] As H. O. Mounce says, "James's conclusion [in the *Varieties*] is that a…survey of religious phenomena gives…reason for accepting the divine. The reason lies, of course, in the fruits of religion, these being the sign of truth" (Mounce, p. 124). Mounce rightly concludes—and McClendon and Smith would agree—that by using the pragmatic method in the *Varieties* James shows us how religious experience is based upon particular communities that share particular practices, and it is those particularities where truth claims find their intelligibility.[29]

## Conclusion

In this essay, I discussed William James's use of "science of religions" and have proposed—using McClendon and Smith—a way to practice James's usage of that science as a "science of convictions." First, I discussed how some contemporary criticisms of James were addressed by James himself; that discussion showed how James's use of the "science of religions" is nonreductive. Second, I showed how James naturalizes theology. Lastly, I proposed a "science of convictions"—which is a possible way to practice James's transformation of "theology into a science of religions." I appreciate McClendon and Smith's proposal not only because it is a help in understanding James's usage of the "science of religions," but because it embodies the method that James proposed in the lecture on "Philosophy" in *The Varieties of Religious Experience.*[30]

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28. See James, p. 300.

29. See Mounce, pp. 124-125.

30. Without the help of the following people, this essay would not be what it is now. I am especially indebted to Randall L. Ridenour for his meticulous editorial work that he did for me on this essay. I am also indebted to Randall Albright, Jürgen Habermas, Stanley Hauerwas, Angela Kristen McWilliams, John Shook, and an anonymous reader from *Streams of William James* for their helpful conversations, comments, and encouragement.

# *Was William James a Phenomenologist?*

*by Charles A. Hobbs*

## I. Introduction

It is well documented that Edmund Husserl's phenomenological philosophy was influenced by William James's writings.[1] Yet most of the scholarship on common themes within the phenomenological movement and James's philosophy has been focused largely on James's early work,[2] and most notably his *Principles of Psychology*.[3] In contrast, I focus in this essay on the position developed by James in the collection of (previously published) articles entitled *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, and I consider whether it can be intelligibly understood as a *phenomenological* position.

In some of these essays, James applies his insights regarding *pure experience* to several philosophical problems. This application is generally done in accordance with his earlier *Principles of Psychology*. Yet, how is it that this application of his earlier themes, in these later essays, relates to phenomenology? Put differently, can this *later* James be accurately considered as a *phenomenologist*? I contend that the answer to this question is *yes*, but, as part of this project, I also seek to inquire into whether or not such a phenomenological understanding of James is, ultimately, an important or valuable way of understanding his mature philosophy.[4]

## II. Phenomenology: Intentionality and Lived Experience

In order to answer the question of whether James was a phenomenologist, we must of course ask about what constitutes phenomenology. It can be characterized as a kind of *descriptive* and unprejudiced study of that which consciousness has as an *object*, one that describes such experience as it is lived.[5] As Dermot Moran has said, "Phenomenology is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena*, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer."[6] Nevertheless, it is not an easy task to *define* phenomenology or to find some common denominator in this movement, for there has been significant disagreement between the great phenomenologists[7] about the nature of phenomenology itself, and, as Herbert Spiegelberg has said, "…no one, not even Hegel or Husserl, has proprietary rights to a term like 'phenomenology.' It is older than both, and it is in this sense anyone's for the taking—and defining."[8] Nevertheless, there seem to be at least a couple of identifiable themes throughout the history of the phenomenological movement, the most important of which is probably that of *intentionality*.

This is certainly the term most clearly connected with phenomenology. The phenomenological tradition inherited the concept of intentionality from the philosopher-psychologist Franz Brentano, Husserl's teacher, and it refers to the state in which one directs, refers to, or points to something that is beyond him/herself.[9] For the phenomenologist, this directedness is the defining characteristic of consciousness. As Husserl said, intentionality indicates "…the unique peculiarity of experiences 'to be consciousness of something.'"[10] Of course, Husserl was a *transcendental* phenomenologist, and his "intentionality thesis" involves two main assertions. (1) Consciousness is directed toward a particular *object*, or consciousness is always conscious *of* something. (2) This *object* of consciousness need not have objective existence, although it may.

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1. See, for example, Herbert Spiegelberg's *The Phenomenological Movement* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), pp. 100-104.
2. See, for example, James M. Edie's *William James and Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1987), Hans Linschoten's *On the Way Toward a Phenomenological Psychology: The Psychology of William James* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne U P, 1968), and Bruce Wilshire's *William James and Phenomenology: a Study of "The Principles of Psychology"* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1968).
   A notable exception to my statement is John E. Drabinski's "Radical Empiricism and Phenomenology: Philosophy and the Pure Stuff of Experience" (*The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. VII, No. 3, 1993). This interesting essay focuses, as the title indicates, mainly on James's later work (as do I).
3. William James. *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950, 2 vols.) This monumental work was first published in 1890.
4. I also consider James's 1902 *The Varieties of Religious Experience* to be a kind of phenomenology, specifically a phenomenology of religion, but discussion of this will have to be left for another critical project.
5. The great historian of phenomenology, Herbert Spiegelberg, has said that "'Phenomenology' is, in the 20th century, mainly a name for a philosophical movement whose primary objective is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions. The term itself is much older, going back at least to the 18th century, when Johann Heinrich Lambert, in his *Neues Organon* (1764), applied it to that part of his theory of knowledge which distinguishes truth from illusion and error. In the 19th century it became associated chiefly with Hegel's *Phanomenologie des Geistes* (1807), which undertook to trace the development of the human spirit from mere sense-experience to 'absolute knowledge.' The so-called Phenomenological Movement did not get under way until the first decade of the 20th century…Phenomenology was not founded: it grew." See his *Doing Phenomenology* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 3.
6. Dermot Moran. *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 4.
7. I am thinking, among others, of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Emmanuel Levinas.
8. *Doing Phenomenology*, p. XXII.
9. Of course, Brentano inherited the term intentionality from the medieval scholastics.
10. Edmund Husserl. *Ideas*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson (London: Collier Books, 1931), p. 223.

This doctrine of intentionality expresses the view that each action of consciousness, each experience we have, is intentional. Consciousness is *of* something. It is an experience *of* something. Intentionality obviously applies to sense perception, for when one sees, one sees something; when one hears, touches, tastes, or smells, one is hearing, touching, tasting, or smelling something. That is, when I see, I see a visual object, such as a chair or a table.

Yet intentionality applies to *non-sensory* acts as well. When I imagine, I imagine *something*, such as someone walking down the sidewalk. When I remember, I remember something from my past. The same applies to expecting, judging, recalling, inferring, hoping, loving, hating, and similar activities. Each experience, each action of consciousness, corresponds to some object. Each act of intending has an intended object.[11]

Another way of putting this is that consciousness is, in a fundamental way, in *relation* to and with other things and events. It is not first something in-itself, only later entering into relationships. Rather, the relation to and with the other is part of the very nature of conscious acts. So, consciousness and the terms to which it is related are *codetermining*.

There are several aspects of an intentional act, so there are several questions that can be asked regarding it. To illustrate, consider the following act: "I think Clifford is in my house." This may be considered a description of an intentional act. One can ask "Who is performing this intentional act?", and the answer comprises a personal pronoun, name, or definite description. One can ask "What is this person doing?", and the answer is a verb. One can ask "What is this act about?"; in our example, I am thinking about Clifford. Finally, one can ask "What am I thinking about Clifford?" The answer to this is "Clifford is in my house."

I now employ Husserl's *phenomenological reduction*, which is a methodological device with which judgments are suspended.[12] That I think Clifford is in my house does not necessarily entail Clifford's objective existence, let alone his objective presence in my house. I might be drunk, hallucinating, or crazy. In other words, there are times when people perceive things that are not in fact there or believe in the existence of things that do not in fact exist. Neither should one conclude from the original statement that Clifford does *not* exist or is not in my house. The same is true of any thought. Descriptions of intentional acts do not indicate the objective nonexistence or the objective existence of what the acts are about.

As such, intentional acts and intentional objects are *interdependent*. That is, they have an internal as opposed to an external relationship. This means that the *acts of consciousness* and the *objects of consciousness* cannot be examined in isolation from one another. Rather, one examines each in terms of its relationship with the other one. Phenomenological descriptions show the interconnectedness of the intentional act with its intentional object. This is because the act of consciousness points to something beyond itself, the intentional object, and the object of consciousness presupposes the intentional act.

As has already been briefly indicated, phenomenology is a kind of descriptive and unprejudiced study that describes such intentional experience as it is lived. However, I do not seek to give the impression that the doctrine of *intentionality* is the only thing that the great phenomenologists have held in common. There is more than this, in terms of *existential* phenomenology. As Merleau-Ponty said in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, phenomenology "…offers an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them."[13] That is, it tends to be concerned with *spatiality*, *temporality*, and our *lived experience* of the world. Merleau-Ponty goes on to say that "It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide."[14]

### III. James's Radical Empiricism as Phenomenology

As W. T. Jones has said, James was "…one of the first philosophers to adopt what subsequently came to be called the 'phenomenological' approach, that is, an approach that seeks to start from, and confine itself to, a presuppositionless description of experience as it comes."[15] So, it seems, at least based on Jones's comment, that James's radical empiricism may be intelligibly understood as a type of phenomenology. Yet, in what way or ways is it a phenomenology? Also, what importance, if any, does this have for us?

This radical empiricism is found most fully, of course, in James's *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, which is a collection of essays published as a book in 1912, two years following James's death. This collection consists of twelve essays that appeared in various journals between 1904 and 1906.[16] James's first *formal* expression of his radical empiricism is found in the 1904 essays "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?"[17] and "A World of Pure Experience".[18] Accordingly, I give attention to these two essays, along with "The Notion of Consciousness"[19] and "The Experience of Activity".[20]

In "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?", James discusses

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11. Of course, the terms *intend* or *intention* are being used in a different manner than *intention* as a *purpose* one has in mind when acting.
12. Regarding the phenomenological reduction, Husserl said the following: "…instead of naively *carrying out* the acts proper to the nature-constituting consciousness with its transcendent theses and allowing ourselves to be led by motives that operate therein to still other transcendent theses, and so forth we set all these theses 'out of action,' we take no part in them; we direct the glance of apprehension and theoretical inquiry to *pure consciousness in its own absolute Being*." (*Ideas*, p. 140)
13. Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1962), p. vii. This work was first published in French in 1945.
14. Ibid.
15. W. T. Jones. *A History of Western Philosophy*, Vol. IV. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975), p. 299.

this radical empiricism in terms of its implications for our understanding of that which we term *consciousness*. The answer, in short, is that consciousness does *not* exist, at least not in the way that it is often understood. What *does* exist is *pure experience*.

Of course, that consciousness does not exist does not mean that we do not have thoughts. That would be a very strange and paradoxical assertion. The *point* here, rather, seems to be that consciousness should not be understood as a kind of entity, substance, or thing. Consciousness, as a kind of witness to experience, is never found *within* experience. On the contrary, it is an act or function, as opposed to some entity over and above one's body and experience. James says that the *thesis* of this essay

> …is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff 'pure experience,' then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter.[21]

James argues that any distinction between mind and body may be understood as presupposing something more fundamental. That is, such a distinction presupposes pure experience. However, James goes on to say that

> Consciousness connotes a kind of external relation, and does not denote a special stuff or way of being. *The peculiarity of our experiences, that they not only are, but are known, which their 'conscious' quality is invoked to explain, is better explained by their relations—these relations themselves being experiences—to one another*.[22]

It was his pluralism that required James to assert pure experiences as foundational. Also, the *radicality* of radical empiricism lies in its insistence that *relations* are just as important and real of an aspect of experience as those very things that are experienced.

James said that experiences are *pure* when they occur as they are prior to any conceptualization or analysis, and that "The instant field of the present is at all times what I call the 'pure' experience."[23] Furthermore, "It is only virtually or potentially either object or subject as yet. For the time being, it is plain, unqualified actuality, or existence, a simple *that*."[24] Given this, James, in "The Notion of Consciousness", suggests "…that primary reality is of a neutral nature…"[25] Only later can it be split in two.

James emphasized primary experience and was concerned by the danger of ignoring or leaving out such experience through excessive conceptualization. As a way of overcoming the mind-body dualism of much of the history of philosophy, he advocated returning our attention to the realm of the lived situation. The notion of pure experience means abandoning those habitual theories that are exemplified by the terms *body* and *mind*. One should try to suspend such interpretations so to regain a sense of life as it is lived, for terms such as the *mental* or the *physical* do not indicate metaphysically different kinds of entities. Rather, they simply indicate different aspects or functions of experience. As James says, "…in the light of the great variety of its relations, one and the same experience can play a role in several fields at the same time."[26] Thus within one context a given experience might be classified as a *mental* event, while in another context the same experience might be classified as a *physical* event.

These are clearly phenomenological assertions, and, in "A World of Pure Experience", James continues his discussion of radical empiricism in more detail. We are informed that James gives "…the name of 'radical empiricism' to my *weltanschauung*…"[27] He goes on to say that radical empiricism "…is essentially a mosaic philosophy, a philosophy of plural facts, like that of Hume and his descendants, who refer these facts neither to Substances in which they inhere nor to an Absolute Mind that creates them as its objects."[28] Yet, as he says, this type of philosophy is also different from classical empiricism in such a

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16. However, James first mentioned *radical empiricism* in the Preface to *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1897). He wrote the following: "Were I obliged to give a short name to the attitude in question, I should call it that of *radical empiricism*, in spite of the fact that such brief nicknames are nowhere more misleading than in philosophy. I say 'empiricism,' because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience; and I say 'radical,' because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and, unlike so much of the half-way empiricism that is current under the name of positivism or agnosticism or scientific naturalism, it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square." (pp. vii-viii)
17. Originally published in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Vol. I, No. 18, September 1, 1904.
18. Originally published in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, Vol. I, 1904, No. 20, September 29, and No. 21, October 13.
19. This essay was originally delivered in French at the Fifth International Congress of Psychology in Rome on April 30, 1905. "La Notion de Conscience" was translated into English by Salvatore Saladino. This seems to be a condensed and simplified formulation of the themes in "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" and "A World of Pure Experience". Fundamental to these themes is that "Thought and actuality are made of one and the same stuff, the stuff of experience in general." (*Essays in Radical Empiricism*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1976, p. 265) Here James sought to express "…several doubts which have occurred to me on the subject of the notion of consciousness that holds sway in all our treatises on psychology." (p. 261)
20. This essay was first delivered as the President's Address to the American Psychological Association, Philadelphia Meeting, December, 1904. It was first published in 1905 in the *Psychological Review*, Vol. XII, No. 1, January, 1905.
21. James. *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 4.
22. Ibid., p. 14.
23. Ibid., p. 13.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 268.
26. Ibid., p. 269.
27. Ibid., p. 22.
28. Ibid.

crucial way that James is compelled to add the term *radical* to his position.

The crucial point is that radical empiricism requires that philosophical discussion be understood strictly in terms of experience, and that no reality of experience be ignored. James says that

> To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its construction any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system*. Elements may indeed be redistributed, the original placing of things getting corrected, but a real place must be found for every kind of thing experienced, whether term of relation, in the final philosophic arrangement.[29]

So, James is indicating that the *radical* aspect of radical empiricism requires philosophy to be reconstructed independently of supporting and/or unifying, but non-experienced, metaphysical entities such as absolutes, egos, categories, matter, soul, or substance.

Radical empiricism indicates that there is only *pure experience*, and hence this is philosophy's fundamental datum. Yet radical empiricism does not involve the metaphysical assertion that the existence of trans-empirical things is intrinsically absurd. It is rather a kind of principle, a *methodological postulate*. Accordingly, radical empiricism affirms reality as what it is experienced as.[30] As a methodological postulate, it is pragmatic. For example, in "The Experience of Activity," James says that

> The pragmatic method starts from the postulate that there is no difference of truth that doesn't make a difference of fact somewhere; and it seeks to determine the meaning of all differences of opinion by making the discussion hinge as soon as possible upon some practical or particular issue.[31]

Next, James adds, as I have mentioned, that

> The principle of pure experience is also a methodological postulate. Nothing shall be admitted as fact, it says, except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient; and for every feature of fact ever so experienced, a definite place must be found somewhere in the final system of reality. In other words: Everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real.[32]

Yet there is more to radical empiricism than its role as methodological postulate. For this leads to the acknowledgment of *relations*. This is also another mark of James's departure from classical empiricism. As he says in "A World of Pure Experience," such traditional empiricism

> …in spite of the fact that conjunctive and disjunctive relations present themselves as being fully co-ordinate parts of experience, has always shown a tendency to do away with the connexions of things, and to insist most on the disjunctions.[33]

On the contrary, radical empiricism fully recognizes and affirms conjunctive relations.

James goes on to comment that the world seems to a great extent chaotic, and that "No one single type of connection runs through all the experiences that compose it."[34] Nevertheless, our experiences do seem to terminate in a kind of common perception. Radical empiricism, James says, "…is fair to both the unity and the disconnexion."[35] That is, it upholds both as genuinely real. So, radical empiricism treats both disconnection and unity fairly, and it never seeks to treat one or the other as some kind of illusion.

James next points out that "The conjunctive relation that has given most trouble to philosophy is *the co-conscious transition*, so to call it, by which one experience passes into another when both belong to the same self."[36] Your experiences and my experiences co-exist and interact in various ways, but mine are continuous with mine, just as yours are continuous with yours. This is such that our respective experiences do not become confused with one another. Within one's personal history, "…subject, object, interest and purpose *are continuous or may be continuous*."[37] That is, my personal history or biography is a process of change through time, and this change is itself immediately experienced. So, *change* here indicates continuity and not discontinuous transition. James now tells us that this continuity is a kind of conjunctive relation and that "…to be a radical empiricist means to hold fast to this conjunctive relation of all others, for this is the strategic point, the position through which, if a hole be made, all the corruptions of dialectics and all the metaphysical fictions pour into our philosophy."[38] James advocates taking this relation at face value. That is, we are not, as radical empiricists, to become confused by discussing it, for that might involve the use of words in such a way that we would invent conceptualizations that might neutralize the force of

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29. Ibid.
30. John Dewey made a remarkably similar point in his "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism", which was first published in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Vol. 2, 1905, p. 393-399 (the same journal in which James, just a year earlier, published "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" and "A World of Pure Experience"). Reprinted in *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1910) and in *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois U P, 1969-1991) *Middle Works* 3, pp. 158-167.
31. *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 81.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p. 22-23.
34. Ibid., p. 24.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p. 25.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.

this conjunctive relation of continuous transition. Moving on, James says that

> Throughout the history of philosophy the subject and its object have been treated as absolutely discontinuous entities; and thereupon the presence of the latter to the former, or the 'apprehension' by the former of the latter, has assumed a paradoxical character which all sorts of theories had to be invented to overcome.[39]

So, while representative theories, common-sense theories, and transcendentalist theories all sought to overcome or *solve* this issue, each conjunction needed to make such a relation intelligible is found, in full, in our actual, lived experience. James then says that this *problem* can be treated in three ways:

> (1) the self-same piece of experience taken twice over in different contexts; or they are
> (2) two pieces of *actual* experience belonging to the same subject, with definite tracts of conjunctive transitional experience between them; or
> (3) the known is a *possible* experience either of that subject or another, to which the said conjunctive transitions *would* lead, if sufficiently prolonged.[40]

James says that he cannot discuss all three of these within the scope of this essay. He then proceeds to give a short description of what he means by type 3, as reduced to type 2, in terms of Memorial Hall at Harvard University.

In other words, James seeks to elucidate the problem of the *cognitive relation*, that is, the problem of the *known* and the *knower*, as two aspects of one's experience. James says,

> Suppose me to be sitting here in my library at Cambridge, at ten minutes' walk from 'Memorial Hall,' and to be thinking truly of the latter object. My mind may have before it only the name, or it may have a clear image, or it may have a very dim image of the hall, but such intrinsic differences in the image make no difference in its cognitive function.[41]

James's *Memorial Hall* might be just some image. Yet if such an image allows for him to recognize Memorial Hall,

> …we may freely say that we had the terminal object 'in mind' from the outset, even altho *at* the outset nothing was there in us but a flat piece of substantive experience like any other, with no self-transcendency about it, and no mystery save the mystery of coming into existence and of being gradually followed by other pieces of substantive experience, with conjunctively transitional experiences between.[42]

So, one's ideas about an object external to his/her perceptual field do not necessarily share every property of the actual perception of the object. Yet they still have a relation with it. Such ideas lead us to the percept, for "That is what we *mean* here by the object's being 'in mind.'"[43]

After this, James proposes to replace the term *representation* with that of *substitution*. The central concern here is the problem of *objective reference*. That is, the problem is one of determining the significance of someone *meaning* something or *pointing to* something that is independent of present experience. James says the following: "Whosoever feels his experience to be something substitutional even while he has it, may be said to have an experience that reaches beyond itself. From inside of its own entity it says 'more,' and postulates reality existing elsewhere."[44] That is, he appears to be providing an analysis of what Continental phenomenologists term *intentionality*.

James says that we might account for such a relation in a couple of ways. First, the transcendentalist would construe this as a relation reaching across the *epistemological chasm* that is between one's representations and reality as independent of such representations. On the other hand, such a relation may be construed as existing simply between various aspects of one's experience, for "A positively conjunctive transition involves neither chasm nor leap."[45] James is clearly adopting this latter view, for our experiences have no clearly defined boundaries, for they are constantly in development and relation.

Next, James deals with the problem of the *other*, or, as he puts it, *the conterminousness of different minds*. He says that one postulates the mind of the other, "Because I see your body acting in a certain way."[46] That is, your conduct, gestures, and words are *expressive*, so I decide that your body, like mine, has an *inner life* or a mind. As John Wild has put it,

> When I play tennis with you, I see certain motions of your body and racket which are followed by results that are similar to those of the motions I observe in my own body and racket. On the basis of such analogies, I conclude that your motions are actuated by an unobserved spiritual principle, like myself, with feelings similar to mine.[47]

Yet this discussion deepens into the question of the nature of this body. James says the following:

> But what is 'your body' here but a percept in *my* field? It is

39. Ibid., p. 27.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p. 28.
42. Ibid., p. 29.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., p. 33.
45. Ibid., pp. 34-35.
46. Ibid., p. 38.
47. John Wild. *The Radical Empiricism of William James* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1969), p. 382. Unfortunately, it is only in the fourth and last part of this interesting book that Wild deals with James's *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. Most of the work deals with *The Principles of Psychology.* However, Part Four is so rich and valuable that I am tempted to forgive Wild for not devoting more space to James's later writings.

> only as animating *that* object, *my* object, that I have any occasion to think of you at all. If the body that you actuate be not the very body that I see there, but some duplicate body of your own with which that has nothing to do, we belong to different universes, you and I, and for me to speak of you is folly. Myriads of such universes even now may coexist, irrelevant to one another; my concern is solely with the universe with which my own life is connected.[48]

He then contends that the aspect of one's world that he/she calls the body of the other is where his/her mind and the mind of the other come together and are thus conterminous. James says that "Your mind actuates that body and mine sees it; my thoughts pass into it as into their harmonious cognitive fulfilment; your emotions and volitions pass into it as causes into their effects."[49] So, James is clearly no solipsist.

Thus, the objects of the other are the same objects as mine. Hence, "If I ask you *where* some object of yours is, our old Memorial Hall, for example, you point to *my* Memorial Hall with *your* hand which *I* see."[50] In short, *my* Memorial Hall is the same as *your* Memorial Hall, because we are talking about a common percept.

Distinctions of mind-body and/or subject-object presuppose pure experience. Such distinctions are secondary to immediate or pre-reflective experience, and, as Wild has said, "We must make an effort to place these interpretations in suspense, in order to regain the feeling of a lived situation."[51] Moreover, they represent just one approach to analyzing experience.

Radical empiricism, of course, differs from the traditional British empiricism of Locke, Berkeley, or Hume, which maintains that knowledge comes, most fundamentally, from sensory experience. James took this one step further by finding connections between various experiences within experience itself. Moreover, such experience is not limited to that of the five senses, and radical empiricism is different from traditional empiricism in that it emphasizes the reality of *our experience* as opposed to our *experience of reality*. That is, while traditional empiricism focuses on one's experience of the world, radical empiricism focuses on one's world of experience.

Phenomenology shares these characteristics, for it too is a kind of radical empiricism. Given these considerations, I think it is fairly clear that, despite the fact that phenomenology eschews metaphysics, James can, in a general way, be intelligibly understood as a phenomenologist. Most important in this is James's conception of *consciousness* as intentional and his view of philosophy as a descriptive enterprise concerned with lived experience.

However, it should be noted there are also problems with this. In particular, there are problems if we are hoping to find a *Husserlian* phenomenology in James's radical empiricism. For example, Husserl's idea of a pure ego would not be acceptable. For we have seen that James clearly articulated a notion of consciousness that is non-egocentric. There is, as we have seen, the affirmation of intentionality, but this is different from a strictly Husserlian notion of intentionality. As Wild says, "…the self is from the very beginning a centre of double intentionality. That is, it not only projects intentional meanings towards others, but also receives them from others and responds to them."[52] So, this is, to coin a Jamesian phrase, a double-barreled intentionality.

In connection with this, while James may have been a phenomenologist, he was not one overly concerned with providing detailed accounts and analysis of the contents of consciousness. So, a Jamesian phenomenology is not of the so-called *transcendental* variety, but rather of the so-called *existential* variety. As such, perhaps a more congenial comparison can be made with Merleau-Ponty, who rejected Husserl's method of the phenomenological reduction.

What good do these considerations do us? Do we read the great historically recognized phenomenologists, such as Husserl or Merleau-Ponty, through the prism of James's writings? After all, as we have already noted, James was a major influence on Husserl and, consequently, on the Continental phenomenological tradition as a whole. The answer is clearly *no*, that is, there is obviously *not* a tendency to interpret those European philosophers *through* the work of James, even if that is a preferable way of teaching about the phenomenological movement. Rather, the great historically recognized phenomenologists receive a great deal of attention in and of themselves.[53]

It is true that we ignore historical connections and interconnections in the discipline of philosophy only at our own peril as philosophers. Yet I contend that we should read James in terms of *James*, however interesting we may find comparisons or interpretations via Continental phenomenology. His writings as a whole, and in particular his *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, are fruitful and valuable enough without having to be justified or made intelligible through another more fashionable philosopher or tradition.[54]

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48. *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 38.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 39.
51. *The Radical Empiricism of William James*, p. 361.
52. Ibid., p. 384.
53. The existence of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy is a testament to this.
54. I thank Larry Hickman and Matthew Gavlak for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

# *The Role of Temperament in the Philosophies of Emerson and James*

*by Megan Mustain*

The central claim of this paper is that the mature philosophy of William James may be fruitfully read as an attempt to take seriously Emerson's connected notions of temperament and character. For Emerson, character is the self-conscious expression of a person's intimate and original relation to the world. It is that by which a person shares in the life of things and colors the world in her own peculiar hue. The notion is rooted in Emerson's perception of a continuity between human experience and Nature, each affecting the other. Emerson speaks of this continuity as an admixture of power and form or of thought and Nature. Temperament, for Emerson, is the site of such relations; it is the site of the conjunction of the flux of Nature and the redirecting powers of each human being. Emerson implores us to be persons of character, that is, to trust in our continuity with the world, and to express those things which our unique relations to the world set in relief.

As early as his *Principles of Psychology*, James begins to wrestle with similar issues, couching them in terms of the selectivity of the stream of consciousness. By the time he gets to his works on radical empiricism and pragmatism, James becomes absorbed with the continuity of nature and experience, and explores the notion of temperament as the often unacknowledged force guiding human thought and action. In these Emersonian projects James describes a world both obdurate and subject to re-patterning. He tells us that it is temperament which is our most powerful resource in the reevaluation and redirection of the course of events. Unlike Emerson, who holds to the ineffability and unchangeable nature of temperament and character, James provides us with tools by which to examine the ways in which character is formed and the role it plays in our experiences.

In what follows, I will explore the ways in which James's philosophical project finds its roots in an Emersonian view of the world. In addition, I will discuss James's divergence from Emerson's quasi-essentialism regarding the genesis and permanence of character by integrating James's relational ontology with his statements on temperament in *Pragmatism*.

## I.

Emerson's account of character is a formulation which arises out of his vision of the continuity of nature and human experience. Emerson saw that the prevailing rationalist and mechanistic philosophies of his time had served to remove the sense of life from the world. Robert C. Pollock describes the twofold effects of the separation: "on one side, religion was losing a certain cosmic and natural quality, and, on the other, man's life in nature was being stripped of its spiritual dimension."[1]

The crux of the problem, as Emerson saw it, was that the creative dimension had been removed from the human sphere, that the possible had been conceived as something that was at best only once, long ago, in the original creative act. Against this conception Emerson writes, "It is a mischievous notion that we are come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago."[2] Experience reveals nature as a rhythmic flux—a vital and vigorous scene of possibility; thus Emerson continues, "as the world was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so it is to ever so much of his attributes as we bring to it."[3] To dismiss the experience of possibilities as mere fiction and to accept the divorce of the spiritual and the natural is for Emerson to submit to self-degradation. "Life is comic or pitiful as soon as the high ends of being fade out of sight, and man becomes near-sighted, and can only attend to what addresses the senses."[4]

Over and against the lifeless world of the mechanists and the rationalists, Emerson gives us a Heraclitean world in which "there is no sleep, no pause, no preservation, but all things renew, germinate and spring."[5] Emerson presents a world without fixtures—a world rife with possibility. He believes that we humans are apiece with this flowing world, and insists that "every man has the like potency in him, more or less. This wit is related to the secret of the world, to the primitive power, the incessant creation."[6]

The world is flowing for Emerson; it is alive. And any attempt to resist or check the flow is doomed to failure. In an open universe we live best by energetically seeking possibilities; we only *seem* alive when we resign ourselves to an existence bounded by our philosophies. "The only sin is limitation,"[7] Emerson writes, as with limitation comes the failure to see the emerging possibilities of living a life which manifests and incorporates the malleability of nature.

Emerson's stress on possibility served to counteract the reliance upon an inherited ethic. He implored the people of his time to throw off their outworn creeds and behold the world as the "mirror of the soul."[8] His epigraph in "Self-Reliance" epitomizes this desire for a reunification of person and world: "*Ne te quaesiveris extra*." "Do not seek yourself outside yourself."[9] When we discard our inherited separation of the creative human power from

1. Robert C. Pollock, "A Reappraisal of Emerson," *Thought* 32 (124), Spring 1957, p. 91.
2. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), p. 75.
3. Op. Cit.
4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," *Selections*, pp. 104-105.
5. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles," *Selections*, p. 176.
6. Emerson, Journal entry, Sept. 1857, *Selections*, p. 375.
7. Emerson, "Circles," *Selections*, p. 171.
8. Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," *Selections*, p. 115.
9. Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *Selections*, p. 147.

the world we come to see our lives are *natural*—and thus flowing. We come to see that "man is a compendium of nature,"[10] and that our connection to the world yields us insight and self-knowledge. To seek ourselves in ourselves is to look to that connection and to see ourselves as organic, vital, and thus charged with animating and redirecting the course of events. Looking inside ourselves, we find nature.

We each enjoy an original relation to the flowing world, Emerson tells us; and it is from this relation that all of what can truly be called "life" emerges. Each of us may breathe new life "through the forms already existing,"[11] may find malleable the forms and rhythms of the flux, and may, by abiding by the spontaneous insights we find in our world, "bring the past for judgment into the thousand-eyed present, and live ever in a new day."[12]

The spontaneous insights which emerge from a person's relation to the world yield a vision not merely of life, but of *this* or *that* life. Although Emerson rids us of a "mean egotism" in his famous "transparent eyeball" passage,[13] he acknowledges—indeed, revels in—the perception that "Nature is so pervaded with human life that there is something of humanity in all and every particular."[14] We color the world, animating it in our perceptions: "All things exist in the man tinged with the manner of his soul."[15] The world comes to us not ready-made but in the works, ready to *be made*; and as we see in both "Circles" and "Self-Reliance," the source of the creative making lies in the individual who embraces her spiritual affinity with the world. She is not content to merely have the world, but seeks to mix herself with it.

Where can we find this individual in the dynamic Emersonian universe? Emerson begs us to trust ourselves, but what is there to trust in a world of flux? How do we take our place in the ongoing creation? With such questions the reader of Emerson continually runs into the dilemma of integrating his fluid ontology and its repudiation of all claims to substantiality with his moral imperative of self-reliance.

Emerson's solution comes in the connected notions of temperament and character. In "Experience" Emerson describes temperament:

> Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and as we pass through them they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus…. We animate what we can, and we see only what we animate…. The more or less depends upon structure or temperament. Temperament is the iron wire on which the beads are strung.[16]

Temperament is the natural endowment of each person, and serves the function of limiting our perceptions. Using Emerson's painting metaphor, temperament is the artist's palette, the stable structure from which may issue creative brushstrokes. Temperament gives form to the flux. Itself unchanging,[17] but containing variety within itself in the form of "many-colored lenses," a person's temperament responds to changing circumstances by taking advantage of their plasticity. It does not merely filter the world through Kantian categories, but molds and forms the world to its purposes through a creative act. The structures of temperament are not imposed upon the world; temperament is rather the site of the interchange of the spiritual and material aspects of Nature. For Emerson, temperament is the divine presence in each person; with our temperaments spirit "does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us."[18]

For Emerson, temperament functions as the principle of form, giving structure—or color—to the world. Insofar as this coloring is *real* coloring, that is, so far as the flux is redirected or channeled in terms of the temperamental biases, temperament is not only form, but also power. Emerson tells us that "life itself is a mixture of power and form, and will not bear the least excess of either,"[19] and I take this to mean that the living world exists rhythmically, in a movement which takes on qualities as patterns. To the extent to which temperament is potent, i.e. insofar as it's coloring transforms the world, it is character.

"Character" is primarily an honorific term for Emerson, denoting the type of person whom Emerson calls a "genius" or "hero" or "divine person." For Emerson, "Character is nature in the highest form,"[20] and issues from a temperament which "encloses the world, as the patriot does his country, as a material basis for his character, and a theatre for action."[21] Character is temperament which trusts itself. Thus Emerson writes, "The face which character wears to me is self-sufficingness."[22] Character *takes itself* as issuing from nature; it sees that though there is the "constitutional necessity of seeing things under private [temperamental] aspects, or saturated with our humors…yet is God the native of these bleak rocks."[23] Thus the person of character takes up palette and brush with faith in the fact that the colors are her own divine estate and goes to work, painting everything she sees.

## II.

In Emerson's view, character is a call to live what Robert Pollock describes as "an individually wrought

10. Emerson, Journal entry, December 1840, *Selections,* p. 146.
11. Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," *Selections,* p. 115.
12. Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *Selections,* pp. 152-3.
13. Emerson, "Nature," *Selections,* p. 24.
14. Ibid., p. 49.
15. Emerson, "Character," *Essays: First and Second Series* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 268.
16. Emerson, "Experience," *Essays,* p. 257.
17. Thus Emerson writes in "Self-Reliance," "I suppose no man can violate his nature," *Selections,* p. 153.
18. Emerson, "Nature," *Selections,* p. 50.
19. Emerson, "Experience," *Essays,* p. 261.
20. Emerson, "Character," *Essays,* p. 273.
21. Ibid., p. 268.
22. Ibid., p. 270.
23. Emerson, "Experience," *Essays,* p. 271.

wholeness of human life."[24] The genuine individual, sewn into the fabric of the universe, is a focal point of the universal life of nature. Her character depends on the extent to which she takes up her focal place in the whole, i.e., is self-possessed. Pollock continues, "Each individual is thus called to live the life of the whole by following the line of his own essential bias and by holding to his own vantage point."[25] To refuse this calling is to thwart nature; it is to deny one's intimate connection to the world.

What follows from this disconnection? From the standpoint of nature, whose rhythms regenerate and evolve by human hands, stagnation is the chief outcome. The flux continues, to be sure, but its qualitative patterns—those temperamental hues—rigidify and set. Possibilities unseen go unrealized in the world; growth is shackled though movement continues. From the human standpoint, failure to perceive the continuity of self and world has equally drastic outcomes: "the whole character and fortune of the individual are affected by the least inequalities in the culture of the understanding."[26] Blind both to the flow of nature and to our place in it, we mistake what is for all that could be. Believing not in experience, we rid ourselves of meanings, hopes, and prospects, and live at "second-hand" upon the results of the experiences of others.

Emerson warns us that in the disavowal of our natural endowment, "our life is not so much threatened as our perception."[27] Emerson insists that the flux is primary[28] and that our failure to adopt a redirecting rôle threatens neither the existence of nature nor the structure of our temperaments. Rather, meaning is threatened: we treat objects as finished and ignore their plasticity; we disregard the prospective and vital; we prize fixed and abstract notions over the emerging and organic spirit; in short, *we lose the ability to see.* Seeing is a living act, an immersion in the world. "We see with our feet,"[29] Emerson tells us, and when we separate our experience from these earthy sources we cease to see, sleep-walking instead. "We see only what we animate,"[30] Emerson writes, and this gets more to the point, since to animate our world we must find ourselves in it. Insofar as we do not find our own constitutions to be *natural*—that is, insofar as we are not persons of character—we are not truly living: we do not animate and we do not see. The person of character sees because she animates; and she animates because her native constructive powers are not stifled by allegiance to outworn theories.

Character, it would seem, is Emerson's name for moral vision. It is that by which a person sees a situation as expressive of spirit and shot through with meaning, rather than as a mere collection of facts. Such a person's "original relation to the universe,"[31] her temperament, is attuned to the world's openness to meaning. Trusting in the presence of the divine power, the person of character has a certain immunity to circumstance. Emerson writes, "The natural measure of this power [character] is the resistance of circumstances."[32] But the person of character beholds the world as an efflux of spirit, a moral order in which the particular event "is ancillary: it must follow *him*."[33]

Temperament is an unsurpassable constitutional limitation. It is the "certain uniform tune which the revolving barrel of the music-box *must* play,"[34] or the palette from which we *must* paint. Though temperament acts by selection, emphasis, and mood, its principles of selection are inborn and unchangeable. This is to say that we are born with a perspective and the ability to see from it. Our limiting perspectives are divine in origin, though, and as such are more than limitations for Emerson; they are opportunities, callings, and duties. We must (and this is a moral "must") each take up our unique perspectives as gifts, painting everywhere from our god-given palettes, aware that who we are is at all times what the world-spirit created us to be.

Emerson's is not a "mean egotism" in the sense that coloring might be domination. He is a pluralist, believing that the creative spirit works through many temperaments. He writes, "I have learned that I cannot dispose of other people's facts; but I possess a key to my own as persuades me, against all their denials, that they also have a key to theirs."[35] The perception of one's own relation to the world brings with it a recognition of the temperaments of others. Thus we wish for others what we would wish for ourselves, namely, the opportunity to live at first-hand, coloring the world with their own colors. Nature seeks to harmonize temperaments, not to negate them. Thus Emerson writes, "Of course it needs the whole society to give the symmetry we seek. The party-colored wheel must revolve very fast to appear white. Something is earned too by conversing with so much folly and defect….Divinity is behind our failures and follies also."[36]

William James shares this pluralistic stance, as well as a faith in the power of the individual to remake the world. Like Emerson, James draws attention to the importance of temperament in human life and thought. In what follows, I will examine the rôle played by temperament in James's philosophy and, tying it to his radical empiricist ontology, will attempt to describe both the areas of continuity and of departure from Emerson's account.

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24. Pollock, "A Reappraisal of Emerson," p. 112.
25. Ibid., p. 113.
26. Emerson, "Nature," *Selections,* p. 37.
27. Emerson, "Experience," *Essays,* p. 255.
28. Thus he writes: "Nature ever flows; stands never still. Motion or change is her mode of existence." Emerson, Journal entry, December 1840, *Selections,* p. 146.
29. Emerson, "The American Scholar," *Selections,* p. 77.
30. Emerson, "Experience," *Essays,* p. 257.
31. Emerson, "Nature," *Selections,* p. 21.
32. Emerson, "Character," *Essays,* p. 269.
33. Op. Cit.
34. Emerson, "Experience," *Essays,* p. 258. Emphasis added.
35. Emerson, "Experience," *Essays,* p. 271.
36. Ibid., *Essays,* p. 260.

## III.

William James shares Emerson's faith in the continuity of self and world, and shares his mistrust of systems that would propose to deny that continuity. Like Emerson, James sees that the subjective and objective aspects of the world are separable only by a falsifying analysis. Both thinkers situate themselves at the site of the tension between a mechanical objectivity of meaning and the power of the individual to create meaning. Refusing to choose either complete objectivity or complete subjectivity, both James and Emerson find the overlap of the given and the creative to be the scene of possibility, the life of the world. From these thinkers we learn that the problem which arises from the traditional separation of subjective and objective is that of the denial of possibility to the world. Both Emerson and James took it as their task to reaffirm the reality of the possible in the everyday world.

In his "Centenary Address," James celebrates Emerson's vision of the possibilities latent in the present: "'The Deep to-day which all men scorn' receives thus from Emerson superb revindication. 'Other world! There is no other world.' All God's life opens into the individual particular, and here and now, or nowhere, is reality. 'The present hour is the decisive hour, and every day is doomsday.'"[37] In his own work James takes up this Emersonian task, stressing the possible over the final. Describing the pragmatic attitude, he writes, "It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality and the pretence of finality in truth."[38]

Emerson mediates the opposition of subjective construction and objective nature by "subjectifying" nature. He denies the existence of another world by attributing "spirit" to this one. Spirit is the moving principle of nature, that which gives the world as flux, putting it forth through human eyes.[39] The human subject is not, then, an imposition on the world, as both rationalists and empiricists would have it, but a functionary through which its flow is channeled. Emerson invokes a spiritual principle "inviolable by us,"[40] which imparts to each of us a unique temperament through which the flowing world is ushered.

James would have it another way. Though he shares Emerson's concern for the reinstatement of the possible through a unification of subject and object, James is loath to introduce a supra-empirical principle of unity. In his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James criticizes Emerson's "Spirit" as an abstraction: "Modern transcendental idealism, Emersonianism, for instance, also seems to let God evaporate into abstract Ideality. Not a deity *in concreto*, not a superhuman person, but the immanent divinity in things, the essentially spiritual structure of the universe, is the object of the transcendentalist cult."[41] James wishes to describe the interrelation of subject and object, but finds that the notion of an Absolute mind offers little help. Adhering to the "postulate" of radical empiricism, which states that philosophy must deal only with things in experience,[42] James distrusts Emerson's tendency (and his own!) to impose unity on the world from without, and he feels that Emerson's "Spirit" or "God" or "Divine power" functions in precisely this way.

James, like Emerson, lays his emphasis on experience, describing it in order to point to its moral possibilities. But James goes beyond Emerson insofar as he refuses to place the ground of the creative impulse in a realm apart from human experience. Pragmatically considered, "Spirit" is a word which is used to explain the fact that human activity contributes to the being of the world. But Emerson often abstracts from the cash-value of the term and makes spirit an absolute ground for experience, rather than leaving it as an important *quality* of experience. James laments this absolutizing move:

> But whether this soul of the universe be a mere quality like the eye's brilliancy or the skin's softness, or whether it be a self-conscious life like the eye's seeing or the skin's feeling, is a decision that never unmistakably appears in Emerson's pages. It quivers on the boundary of these things, sometimes leaning one way, sometimes the other, to suit the literary rather than the philosophic need.[43]

Emerson, it would seem, stopped short of his avowed goal of finding creativity and possibility *in the world*.

We have seen that the Emersonian notion of temperament serves as the vehicle of creative spiritual activity. But what becomes of temperament when Spirit is stripped of its otherworldliness? Spirit, according to Emerson, gives temperament to the individual as a non-transferrable, non-refundable gift. The world is plastic, ready to be molded by temperaments; but the temperaments are, on their own level, fixed to adhere to Spirit's purposes.

James lauds Emerson's concern for the individual character of experience and the power of the single person to find possibility in the everyday. Is this not the upshot of Emerson's notion of temperament? For Emersonian temperament serves as the principle of individuation and the means of creative human activity. James takes seriously these functions of temperament, but seeks to ground them in the life-world, finding trans-empirical support of the type offered by Emerson to be misleading and, in the end, detrimental to the project of intelligently "remodelling" the world.[44]

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37. William James, "Emerson," *Essays in Religion and Morality*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1982), p. 114.
38. William James, *Pragmatism*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1975), p. 31.
39. See Emerson, "Nature," *Selections*, pp. 49-50.
40. Emerson, "Nature," *Selections*, p. 50.
41. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1985), p. 34.
42. William James, *The Meaning of Truth*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1975), p. 6.
43. James, *Varieties*, p. 35.

James's version of temperament is rooted in his early perception that thought is selective: "It is interested in some parts of [its] objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects—chooses from among them, in a word—all the while."[45] The principal factor in selection is habit. No fixed individual essence this, habit is of the nature of flexibility as much as stability. A habit is an organic relation to the world, to use subject-object language; in more neutral terms, a habit is a tendency within an organic flux. Habits are not given once and for all; they arise in response to a situation, and they endure only so long as they go unchallenged.

We may now see the emergence of temperament in James's habit-centered understanding of human activity. If, as he says, a person is a bundle of habits,[46] then temperament denotes the overriding quality of the bundle. James gives us several lists of generic temperaments: in *Varieties* he describes the healthy-minded and the sick soul; in his *Pragmatism* he lists the characteristics of the tender-minded and the tough-minded temperaments. And in *A Pluralistic Universe* James writes, "a man's vision is the great fact about him…. A philosophy is the expression of a man's intimate character, and all definitions of the universe are but the deliberately adopted reactions of human characters upon it."[47]

As each habit reflects the original relation of self to world, so too does the amalgamated temperament have its basis in worldly interaction. The complexity of human bodies and the variety of modes by which these bodies "have" the world yield an enormous number of organic habits, and thus a complexity of temperament. The changes to temperament are slight, making temperamental quality relatively stable.[48] But the changes do occur. Accordingly as the individual habits evolve and become more or less harmonized, the temperament of the person may be seen to change.

With the evolutionary emergence of intelligence in the world, the temperamental development of organisms became more complex. Temperaments could be nurtured, chosen to a certain extent, made self-aware. Emerson misses this point in his philosophy, a failure which William James does well to point out. He quotes Emerson, "When we see a soul whose acts are all regal, graceful, and pleasant as roses, we must thank God that such things can be and are, and not turn sourly on the angel, and say, 'Crump is a better man with his grunting resistance to all his native devils.'"[49] James comments on Emerson's failure to see the work of intelligence in creating ideals of character:

> True enough. Yet Crump may really be the better *Crump*, for his inner discords and second birth; and your once-born 'regal' character, though indeed always better than poor Crump, *may fall far short of what he individually might be* had be only some Crump-like capacity for compunction over his own peculiar diabolisms, graceful and pleasant and invariably gentlemanly as these may be.[50]

It is Emerson's allegiance to the notion of Spirit that blinds him to these most fruitful human possibilities. Emerson places temperament at the beginning of the individual's life, and speaks of character as purity of temperament, in each case ignoring the possibilities for growth which might issue from seeing them as a developing projects.

## IV.

Like Emerson, James sees the damage done by philosophies that disregard the rôle of temperament in their own genesis. He laments the neglect of temperament in philosophical discussions, writing that when we diminish the authority of temperament "there arises thus a certain insincerity in our philosophic discourses: the potentest of all our premises is never mentioned."[51] And temperament is potent because it is the full expression of our cumulative individual experiences. The clash of philosophies, seen as a clash of temperaments, bears witness to the multiplicity of allegiances and the requirement for any viable philosophy to satisfy the needs of each. When we see that theories are the expression of habits, we may treat them as fallible insights, employing them as instruments that need not outlive their usefulness. This pluralistic insight brings James to pose pragmatism as a method or an attitude which "stands for no particular results."[52]

We have likened Emerson's notion of temperament to a painter's palette. A gift of Spirit to each person, the palette serves as constitutive once and for all of our ability to relate to the world in an original way. The plurality of palettes provides a certain rhythm to the flow of the world. And the moral charge, grounded in Spirit, is to live from the constitution you have been given, to paint from your own palette, and to allow others the same opportunity.

With James, who takes seriously the plasticity of the world as well as the uniqueness of each individual temperament, we may readjust the metaphor. A Jamesian palette is a work-in-progress, a continual development of new colors. James gives us the task of re-mixing our hues. He

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44. William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Volume 2, ed. Frederick Burkhardt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1981), p. 1231n. James speaks of the volitional constitution of human beings, insisting that the world really is remade. He uses the term "remodel," an anticipation of Dewey's later term "reconstruct."
45. James, *Principles*, Vol. 1, p. 220.
46. Ibid., p. 109.
47. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1977), p. 14.
48. Thus James writes, "The most violent revolutions in an individual's beliefs leave most of his old order standing." *Pragmatism*, p. 35.
49. Emerson, "Spiritual Laws," *Essays*, p. 76.
50. James, *Varieties*, p. 195n. Second set of italics mine.
51. James, *Pragmatism*, p. 11.
52. Ibid., p. 32.

makes the painting *process*—our choice of palettes—the fundamental moral problem. We use only natural dyes, to be sure, but through interaction with the flowing world and the streams of thought we find in others, we may create new colors, borrowing from and adding to the palettes of others. In this activity we not only paint the world, but we do so intelligently.

By taking up human intelligence as an evolving and constitutive facet of the world, James out-Emersons Emerson. While Emerson felt the need to place the "immense intelligence" *behind* the motion of the world, James places it at the leading edge of experience as the power to remake not only the world, but also ourselves. James objects to the isolation of the Emersonian temperament, for indeed Emerson writes that "this masterpiece is best where no hands but nature's have been laid on it."[53] Such statements as this may be found throughout Emerson's corpus, and James rightly sees that they detract from his larger purposes. If we are able to paint, let's paint! James tells us. We do so to deal with our problems and solve our disputes, not to appease the abstract Spirit.

Following in Emerson's democratic legacy, in which triumph the everyday world and the abilities of even the least able person, James's philosophy remains true to its Emersonian roots. Indeed, as we have seen, James takes up the Emersonian maxim that the world really lays unfinished, ready to receive the guiding touch of each of us. But he outdoes Emerson in his insight that we, too, are unfinished and open to amelioration. Emerson's notion of character as temperament made self-aware holds also for James. But the awareness, James insists, does something more than let us see the spectacle. Becoming self-aware, we seek not only to harmonize with the given world, but also to harmonize our selves and our society. Thus whereas the Emersonian world-canvas is colored with blotches of vibrant, but perhaps discordant hues,[54] the Jamesian canvas is a social project, issuing in a blended amalgamation of well-chosen colors.[55]

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53. Emerson, "Character," *Essays, p.* 273.

54. An example of an Emersonian painting might be Kandinsky's "Several Circles," which shows a variety of overlapping but insular discs of color.

55. A Jamesian painting might be one of Rothko's panels, such as "Four Darks in Red," a piece whose colors intermix and accentuate each other.

*Stars*

*by R.H. Albright*

# *Numbered Among the Jameses:*

## *The Address at the Emerson Centenary*

*by Trygve Throntveit*

"The pathos of death is this," remarked William James at the Centenary of Ralph Waldo Emerson in Concord on May 25, 1903: "that when the days of one's life are ended…what remains in memory should usually be so slight a thing."

> It is as if the whole of a man's significance had now shrunk into the phantom of an attitude, into a mere musical note or phrase, suggestive of his singularity—happy are those whose singularity gives a note so clear as to be victorious over the inevitable pity of such a diminution and abridgement.[1]

Upon one's death, James suggests, singularity overcomes multiplicity in the experience of those left behind. But it is not a reconciling singularity, in which one's particular self is united with the world of larger experience. Rather, death is an abridgement in which it seems "as if the whole of a man's significance had now shrunk." Upon death, the multifarious thoughts and actions that coalesce into a self during life are distilled into what posterity perceives as their essence. While the body achieves union with nature, the soul is not dispersed but concentrated; and its ability to withstand disintegration and oblivion in future experience is a measure of its potency. The most powerful souls, then, are the most singular. In Emerson's case "the form that so lately moved on these streets and country roads…is now dust; but the soul's note, the spiritual voice, rises strong and clear above the uproar of the times," so that twenty-one years after his death "an ideal wraith like this, of Emerson's singularity, hovers over all Concord to-day."[2]

Would Emerson have welcomed James' view of his ultimate fate? Would this seeker after the Over-soul have relished the immortality of his "singular" soul? James seems to think so, focusing throughout the address on Emerson's radical individualism, and performing his own distillation of Emerson in the process: "The matchless eloquence with which Emerson proclaimed the sovereignty of the living individual electrified and emancipated his generation, and this bugle-blast will doubtless be regarded by future critics as the soul of his message."[3] James admits that this sovereignty of the individual derives from Emerson's belief that "through the individual fact there ever shone for him the effulgence of the Universal Reason." Yet he portrays Emerson as concerned less with the unity of an immanent "Cosmic Intellect" than with the diversity of each "angle of its eternal vision."[4] In fact, one finds in James' address many instances of a distinctly *pluralistic* reading of Emerson. For Emerson "the world is still new and untried"; "the present man is the aboriginal reality"; and "the past man is irrelevant and obliterate for present issues." Similarly "all God's life opens into the individual and particular, and here and now, or nowhere, is reality." "Never," claims James, "was such a fastidious lover of significance and distinction, and never an eye so keen for their discovery."[5] Has William James discovered Ralph Waldo Emerson the pluralist?

Though notoriously inconsistent and difficult to categorize philosophically, Emerson's belief in "Universal Reason" usually places him in the monist rather than the pluralist category. James himself defines Transcendentalism, the movement with which Emerson is most often associated, as a theory of the "absolute causal unity of the world."[6] Yet James was not the first to see Emerson as a less-than-perfect monist. In fact, one of the earliest to do so was a philosopher whose own position regarding the "numbering" of the universe had an immeasurable influence on James' own conclusions on the subject: his father, Henry James, Sr. In this paper I hope to show that William's decades-long dialog with his father over the question of "the one and the many" offers invaluable insight into the roots of his peculiar reading of Emerson. I will suggest that from this dialog emerged a fundamentally *dialectical* view of experience as both "one" *and* "many," and that it is a similar compromise between monism and pluralism which James attributes to Emerson and lauds him for in his Centenary Address.

### I

In his lecture "The One and the Many" of 1907, William James described the competing claims between the monistic and pluralistic understandings of the universe as "the most central of all philosophical problems, central because so pregnant. I mean by this that if you know whether a man is a decided monist or pluralist, you perhaps know more about the rest of his opinions than if you give him any other name ending in *ist*."[7] William had assessed his father's philosophy on this score thirty years earlier. In a letter dated September 5, 1867, he described Henry Sr.'s view of the universe as "a mere circle of the creator described within his own being and returning to the starting point."[8] As far as William was concerned, his father was a monist. But William applied this term to his father in opposition to his own pluralist leanings. As such it tells us little about the content of Henry Sr.'s conception of the universe. Did Henry Sr. indeed see the universe as one, and if so, how did he see it cohere? Or if he did not see it as one, where did he see it divided?

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1. William James, "Address at the Centenary of Ralph Waldo Emerson, May 25, 1903," in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 307.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 309.
5. Ibid., p 309, p. 310, p. 312.
6. William James, "The One and the Many," *Pragmatism* [1907] in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, p. 63.
7. Ibid., p. 59.
8. William James to Henry James, Sr., September 5, 1867. All letters cited in this article are from *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 4, eds. Ignas Skrupskelis and Elizabeth Berkeley (Charlottesville: U P of Virginia, 1995), hereafter cited as *Correspondence*, p. 195.

It may be useful to explore this issue of universal numbering in Henry Sr.'s mid-nineteenth-century context. In the northeastern intellectual circles in which Henry Sr. moved, Transcendentalism was the regnant brand of monism between 1830 and 1860. For most Transcendentalists, including Henry Sr.'s friend and correspondent Ralph Waldo Emerson, all aspects of existence were emanations of a universal spirit; thus everything was fundamentally *natural* as all things were of one essence. What was traditionally considered nature was merely the least distorted of the spiritual emanations, and consequently the clearest glass through which to view the universe. Any apparent discordance of existence was due to the mode of human perception described by Emerson as *Understanding*—the typical marriage of empirical observation and ratiocination. In place of Understanding the Transcendentalists extolled the innate, instinctual faculty of *Reason* as a means of apprehending existence in its unity and harmony. By leading into communion with an *Over-soul* comprising all nature and the totality of human interests, this ultimate reliance on one's own faculties reconciled radical individualism with cosmic unity.

The argument that Henry James, Sr. was a monist in the Transcendentalist mode is immediately undermined in the following response to William's letter:

> If we believed instinctively in *creation*, we should have no need [for] this hypothesis of Nature. For then we should see all the various forms of sense acknowledging a unitary human substance, and would regard any brute unintelligible quantity like what we call Nature, a sheer superfluity or superstition. But while we disbelieve in creation…we must believe in Nature as the objective source or explication (instead of the subjective product or implication) of all phenomena.[9]

In clear contrast to Emerson and the Transcendentalists, there was a fundamental dichotomy between "Nature" and "creation" at the center of Henry Sr.'s philosophy. Furthermore, it is only the failure to believe in creation that leads to the Transcendentalist view of nature as "an objective source or explication…of all phenomena." Henry Sr. defines the term *nature* in his essay "Our Sentiment of Otherness to God," and out of this definition the nebulous "unitary human substance" of creation begins to emerge as well:

> What, by the way, *is* nature? Popularly used, the "nature" of a thing means what the thing is *in itself*, or apart from everything else. Philosophically defined, it is the *principle of identity* in existence, forever differentiating creature from creator by stamping the one finite, subjective, conscious, the other infinite, objective, unconscious. It is in short, the principle of *uncreation* which is logically involved in all created existence, for man's spiritual creation…*is his plenary redemption out of the death and hell he is in by nature*.[10]

Henry Sr.'s greatest criticism of Emerson was the latter's inability to account for the basic dichotomy between nature and creation described above. Emerson's Transcendentalism led him to perceive nature as unified by a single shared spirit animating everything. It also led him to an individualistic reliance on Reason in pursuing true consciousness, or the apprehension of this unity. Henry Sr. both denied the unity of nature and abjured the highly introspective ethos of Emerson's radical individualism. In his estimation Emerson was purblind to the dialectical teleology of creation, a process which dissolved the particularities of nature and abolished the individual's consciousness of distinct identity. Because Emerson conceived of consciousness as the apprehension of an eternally unified creation, he was incapable of discerning creation's true nature as an inevitable but as of yet *incomplete* process. "Mr. Emerson," he writes, "had no spiritual insight into creative order, because he had no adequate doctrine of consciousness."[11]

Emerson's philosophical attitude was completely incompatible not only with Henry Sr.'s creation scheme but also his very temperament. Henry Sr. distrusted Emerson's faith, appropriated from German Romanticism, in a spiritually infused nature; he had inherited from his Presbyterian upbringing a Calvinistic belief in the division of the natural and spiritual worlds. "You don't look upon Calvinism as a fact at all," he wrote to Emerson, "wherein you are to my mind philosophically infirm."[12] According to Henry Sr., Emerson's Romanticism allowed for moral distinctions between right and wrong, but did not allow for any essential difference between good and evil. This relegated Emerson to the role of philosophy's "vestal virgin."[13] For Henry Sr., however, "all created existence," including both nature and the self-conscious individual, was the embodiment of particularity, or the "creature's separation from the creator"; it was thus evil itself, the very "death and hell" from which mankind needs redeeming. What is perceived by men as "all created existence" is not creation, but merely phenomena, or *uncreation*; the real, spiritual creation is as yet unrealized wherever the particularity of nature holds sway over men's minds. Thus Henry makes a distinction between what is normally thought of as the creation—the universe,

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9. Henry James, Sr. to William James, September 27, 1867. *Correspondence*, p. 205.

10. Henry James, Sr., *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James*, ed. William James (Upper Saddle River: Literature House, 1970 [1884]), hereafter cited as *Remains*, p. 210.

11. Quoted in F. O. Matthiessen, *The James Family* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1947), p. 428. Henry Sr. once wrote to Emerson that "being better satisfied with you than any man I ever met, I am [at the same time] worst satisfied." He saw Emerson as in many ways exemplifying the spontaneity of thought and action necessary to surmount that great barrier to creation, the consciousness of individual identity. But while he praised the "Invisible Emerson, the Emerson that thinks and feels and lives," he grew impatient with "the Emerson that talks and bewitches one out of his serious thought." "While your *life* is that sort which, so far as I can detect it, lays hold of my profoundest love, ever and anon some provokingly perverse way of speech breaks forth which does not seem to me to come from the life." These "perverse ways of speech" were Emerson's explicit expositions of his Transcendentalist philosophy, which Henry Sr. could not accept.

12. Quoted in Ibid., p. 43.

13. Ibid., p. 437.

the natural world—and a teleological creation which, as we will see, involves the spiritual redemption of mankind.

In this scheme, *uncreation*—i.e. all things created by God, but not yet unified in the teleological *creation*—is the fallen world of self-conscious man. In fact, the world remains uncreated because of man's self-consciousness. Nature is only a particularistic perception of the world by men who are themselves convinced of their own particularity: "I say that the sentiment which men have of their natural *otherness* to God…is a strictly *subjective* illusion of the mind with no particle of *objective* reality in it."[14] This uncreated world will pass when all men shed their illusory egos and dissolve into the universal man, the "unitary human substance" Henry Sr. mentions to William. "Nature has no positive function in spiritual creation," he writes.[15] Rather the uncreation of nature is the sign of man's alienation from God, proceeding from the same particularistic perception that leads man to see himself as separate from God. This is not to say that nature is an entity or force separate from God; Henry Sr. is a monist in the sense that he conceived of nothing existing beyond what issued from God. But nature is not a part of the teleological *creation:*

> Nature is always to be logically taken for granted in spiritual creation, as giving the creature subjective identity, or conscious distinction from the creator; but this logical virtue is all the merit it possesses or ever will possess. Especially it must not be thought to be itself created. For the whole and sole function of nature…is to constitute that suppositious realm of *uncreation*, or *not*-being, out of which man is logically held to be delivered by his creation.[16]

Nature is the perceived state of the universe before the spiritual creation, or dissolution of all subjective selves, has occurred. It is a state in which man has been redeemed "from the brutes," but not yet realized his true social nature. It is necessary to the entire process that will culminate in creation, the final dissolution of all selves into the "social or unitary form and order" which is man's ultimate and true redemption.[17] Ironically, it is Emerson's assumption of unity that, in Henry Sr.'s view, makes him the worst kind of pluralist, for by exalting nature as an expression of unity and individual consciousness as a means to apprehend it, he reinforces the two main barriers to a truly unified creation.

The form of social organization that constitutes this unified creation is highly ambiguous. It is described simply as a dissolution of egos into a universal man characterized by "God's most intimate and unstinted spiritual indwelling."[18] What is not ambiguous is that what William perceived as his father's monism is in fact a highly dualistic view of experience. Henry Sr. divides the universe very neatly into the natural and the spiritual, the phenomenal and the real, the uncreated and the created. In the dichotomy between the self-conscious and universal man, the dialectical nature of Henry's dualism is best exhibited: existence is either disunion or union, the former being the necessary predicate of its opposite. Henry in this light is neither a monist nor a pluralist, but a dualist.

## II

William's difficulty with his father's system stems from what he saw as its rationalist character: William could not accept as conclusive any explanation that interpreted direct experience according to *a priori* assumptions. As F.O. Matthiessen explains, William "grew to maturity in the era of Darwin and Spencer," and his "scientific training made him feel the need of coming to grips with the physical before trusting himself in his father's realm of the metaphysical."[19] Thus his difficulty with his father's notion of the creator, for example, lay not so much with the idea of a creator itself, but with its *assumption*. Writing to William, Henry Sr. diagnosed his son's difficulties with his rationalized cosmological order as arising "*mainly* from the purely *scientific* cast of your thought just at present, and the temporary blight exerted thence upon your metaphysic wit."[20] William's response supports his father's assessment. "You say that such and such *must* be the way in Creation, as if there were an a priori logical necessity binding on the mind," writes William. "This I cannot see at all in the way you seem to, altho' I may be quite ready to accept the content of your propositions as a posteriori hypotheses."[21] As Matthiessen suggests, this "scientific cast" of William's mind probably had as much to do with the intellectual climate of the times as with his natural leanings. From the Civil War to 1900, James T. Kloppenberg has argued, stretched an era in which certainty itself—whether religious or scientific—"had failed to survive."[22] It was a time of crisis for many intellectuals, and William James was no exception. That William was suspicious of the certainty his father had attained in a bygone era, is clear in their correspondence: "For myself, I shrink from trying to imagine too exactly these things…. You know…how skeptical I am, and how little ready to *assert* anything about [these matters]." And yet William was envious of his father as well, lamenting his inability to "attain to any such 'inexpugnable testimony of consciousness to my spiritual reality,'" as his father claimed to have done.[23] Meanwhile a more wholesale rejection of certainty led many of William's contemporaries to return to eighteenth-century thinkers for inspiration, and in particu-

14. Henry James, Sr., *Remains,* p. 207.
15. Ibid., pp. 212-213.
16. Ibid., p. 213.
17. Ibid., pp. 212 and 274.
18. Ibid., p. 212.
19. Matthiessen, *The James Family,* p. 114.
20. Henry James, Sr. to William James, September 27, 1867. *Correspondence,* p. 204.
21. William James to Henry James Sr., October 28, 1867. *Correspondence,* p. 218.
22. James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford U P, 1986), p. 25.
23. William James to Henry James, Sr., October 28, 1867. *Correspondence,* p. 221.

lar to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Thinkers like James' colleague and friend Josiah Royce found Kant's vision of dichotomous noumenal and phenomenal realms compelling "in light of the cultural disjunction between the religious and scientific spheres."[24] Kant's explanation of experience as necessarily impure because apprehended through categories in the structure of human consciousness appealed to a generation of philosophers who struggled with the obscurity and uncertainty of the true nature of existence.

William James, on the other hand, believed the Kantian notion of a static, structured human consciousness untenable. Instead, he saw the conditions of experience themselves as unstructured and dynamic. However, he also rejected the impossible criteria for certainty established by modern positivism, and refused to believe that experience was necessarily plural simply because disjunctions had not yet been reconciled satisfactorily. Admittedly William's vocabulary, especially at the beginning of his career, suggested pluralistic leanings. Even as late as 1907 he would write that "Pragmatism must obviously range herself upon the pluralistic side" in the problem of the one and the many.[25] As with his father, however, the apparently obvious label proves facile. Eschewing the "pluralist" moniker, the term William preferred was "radical empiricist," which he set in opposition to both monism and pluralism. As a radical empiricist, William trusted neither *a priori* assumptions about the coherence of the universe, nor premature judgments as to its plural nature; rather he concerned himself with the valuable conclusions one could draw from observed experience. "Radical empiricism alone insists on understanding forwards…and refuses to substitute static concepts of the understanding for transitions in our moving life."[26] It was this radical empiricism that would become more widely known as pragmatism:

> Pragmatism represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empiricist attitude, but it represents it, as it seems to me, both in a more radical and in a less objectionable form than it has ever yet assumed. A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant and the rationalist temper sincerely given up.[27]

William's emphasis on the "concreteness" and "facts" of empiricism, as well as his rejection of the "closed systems" and "pretended absolutes" of rationalism are the typical marks of a pluralist, as he himself admits. However, the difference between empiricism and radical empiricism, or pragmatism, is that while the former *concludes* a pluralistic universe from the variety of facts and experience, pragmatism "does not stand for any special results" whatsoever.[28] Pragmatism proceeds from the conviction that *currently* we cannot comprehend experience as unified based on what is observed. Pragmatism does not, however, exclude an absolute, a first cause, or an ultimate unity; it simply does not assume them. Pragmatism is not in this sense a philosophy, but "a method only."[29] It does not discover ideas, but creates ideas that have practical significance.

Thus the claim that William is a pluralist is based upon a confusion of his method with his conclusions, and it is a philosopher's conclusions with which the problem of the one and the many is concerned. William's conclusions, however, are difficult to determine. His very method precludes absolute conclusions about the universe, for such conclusions would become *a priori* assumptions and render the pragmatic method irrelevant. Therefore, we must look at the general directions in which William's method points him. We must ask what type of universe, monistic or pluralistic, William creates in his *provisional* explanation of experience.

William is like his father in that he is most concerned with the question of the one and the many as it pertains to human consciousness. Echoing Henry Sr.'s categories of consciousness—consciousness of nature, self-consciousness, and a universal spiritual consciousness rejecting both nature and the self—William explores the possibility of progressively expanding boundaries of consciousness in his own work. In "The Stream of Consciousness," William describes thought as necessarily divided in our perception into personal consciousness, "concrete particular I's and you's." And yet he implies that this experience of thought may not provide a complete picture:

> In this room…there are a multitude of thoughts, yours and mine, some of which cohere mutually, and some not. They are as little each-for-itself and reciprocally independent as they are all-belonging-together. They are neither: no one of them is separate, but each belongs with certain others and with none beside. My thought belongs with *my* other thoughts, and your thoughts with your other thoughts. Whether anywhere in the room there be a mere thought, which is nobody's thought, we have no means of ascertaining, for we have no experience of its like.[30]

Taken in context, the suggestion of a mere thought, impossible to experience through normal self-consciousness, is strikingly reminiscent of Henry Sr.'s doctrine of spirit in the uncreated realm. William's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* puts the issue in a theological context and offers a more direct comparison with his father's thinking:

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24. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*, p. 26.
25. William James, "The One and the Many," *Pragmatism*, p. 72.
26. William James, "Is Radical Empiricism Solipsistic?" [1905] in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, p. 339.
27. William James, "What Pragmatism Means," *Pragmatism*., p. 27.
28. Ibid., p. 27.
29. Ibid., p. 27.
30. William James, "The Stream of Consciousness" [1892] in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, p. 172.

> The further limits of our being plunge, it seems to me, into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely "understandable" world…. We belong to it in a more intimate sense than that in which we belong to the visible world, for we belong in the most intimate sense wherever our ideals belong. Yet the unseen region in question is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world. When we commune with it, work is actually done upon our finite personality, for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change.[31]

The echoes of William's father here are striking. There is a dichotomy between the world of self-consciousness and that of a broader consciousness beyond; this broader consciousness is the more intimately real because it is the seat of our ideals; and the accession of ideals from this "unseen region" works a redemptive change. "Each of us is in reality an abiding physical entity far more extensive than he knows," claims William, and thus "*the fact that the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come…is literally and objectively true as far as it goes.*"[32] Just as Henry Sr. contrasted the objectivity of God with the subjectivity of men, William asserts that "the world of our experience consists at all times of two parts, an objective and a subjective part."[33]

William thus divides all human experience in two, and he extends this dichotomy from human consciousness to the entire universe of experience. In "The One and the Many," William asserts that the true goal of the intellect is neither unity nor variety, but *totality*.[34] Monism and pluralism both are attempts to arrive at this totality by assuming its nature prematurely. However, looking at the world in its totality one has to recognize that all things are connected in as many ways as they are disconnected, and vice versa. "Everything that exists is influenced in *some* way by something else, if you can pick the way out rightly." However, "there is no species of connection which will not fail, if, instead of choosing conductors for it you choose non-conductors." Union and disunion are equally inherent in the universe, "just as with space, whose separating of things seems exactly on a par with its uniting of them."[35] We create connections or disconnections based on our subjective perception of the total. Though he approaches the subject from the opposite direction and is more wary of conclusions, William suggests essentially what his father insists: experience is a dialectic of union and disunion. The intellectual "family resemblance" is clear: Henry Sr.'s monism and William's pluralism both collapse into a fundamentally dialectical view of experience as both "one" and "many."[36]

**III**

William, though never ceasing to think of his father as a monist, readily acknowledged his intellectual debt to what the family referred to as "father's ideas."[37] Shortly before Henry Sr.'s death, William described the significance of his father's influence on his own thinking: "In that mysterious gulf of the past into which the present soon will fall and go back and back, yours is still the central figure. All my intellectual life I derive from you; and though we have often seemed at odds in the expression thereof, I'm sure there's a harmony somewhere, and that our strivings will combine."[38] Perhaps because his method of pragmatism was so dear to him, William was never able to look past his father's total reliance on *a priori* assumptions and recognize the harmony in their views of experience. But in Emerson James seems to find a hybrid, one that incorporates both an exuberant engagement with the full variety of experience and a faith in its potential unity. He finds, in effect, a dual nature in Emerson evoking both his father's philosophy and his own.

In his Centenary Address James says of Emerson that "perhaps the paramount impression one gets of his life is of his loyalty to his own type and mission. The type was that of what he liked to call the scholar, the perceiver of pure truth, and the mission was that of the reporter in worthy form of each perception."[39] Emerson the perceiver was the radical individualist *cum* radical empiricist. Within the "limits of his genius" he "dauntlessly asserted himself" so that he might gain insight into the world through his own immediate experience.[40] "This faith that in a life at first hand there is something sacred is perhaps the most characteristic note in Emerson's writings," says James. "In seeing freshly, and not in hearing of what others saw, shall a man find what truth is."[41] It is this refusal to privilege second-hand theory, tradition, or custom over the facts of direct experience that gives a pluralist tint to James' reading of Emerson. As James put it in his essay "Pragmatism and Humanism," the pragmatist conceives of the universe as "unfinished, growing in all sorts of places, especially in the places where thinking beings are at work."[42] James sees Emerson reveling in this constantly unfolding universe. "Let me mind my own charge, then, walk alone, consult the sky, the field and

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31. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982 [1902]), pp. 515-516.
32. Ibid., pp. 512 and 515.
33. Ibid., p. 498.
34. William James, "The One and the Many," *Pragmatism*, p. 59.
35. Ibid., p. 62.
36. However, unlike his father, William does not see plurality as arising from any fundamental distinction between God and the world, or between the mind of God and the mind of man. Hence the term dualist, which I believe is appropriate for Henry Sr., is not appropriate for William, due primarily to its connotative associations with both Classical Greek and Cartesian philosophy. Thus it is not a dualistic attitude that William has inherited from his father, but a dialectical conception of plurality and unity as logically compatible and interdependent (rather than mutually exclusive) aspects of the universe.
37. Henry James, *Notes of a Son and Brother* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 1.
38. Quoted in Matthiessen, *The James Family,* p. 132.
39. William James, "Address at the Centenary of Emerson," p. 307.
40. Ibid., p. 308 and pp. 308-309.
41. Ibid., p. 309.
42. William James, "Pragmatism and Humanism," *Pragmatism*, p. 113.

forest, sedulously waiting every morning for the news concerning the structure of the universe which the good Spirit will give me."[43]

But as the invocation of "Spirit" implies, Emerson's radical individualism and empirical attitude follow directly from idealist assumptions. "Through the individual fact," writes James, "there ever shone for him the effulgence of the Universal Reason. The great Cosmic Intellect terminates and houses itself in mortal men and passing hours." It is because individuals "open thus directly into the Absolute" that we "ought not to consent to borrowing traditions and living at second hand."[44] This direct experience of the Absolute balances Emerson's "type," that of perceiver, with his "mission," that of "the reporter in worthy form of each perception."[45] It is not enough merely to perceive, for the Spirit has chosen the individual as a means of expression. The individual must report his experience if he would "be adequate to the vocation for which the Spirit of the world has called him into being." It is not the subjective individual that Emerson idealizes, but rather the *authentic* individual, "the man who rests in his appointed…character."[46] In fact James sees Emerson reconciling the universal and the particular in his own person. Emerson strove to be both empiricist and idealist, perceiving all the facts of experience while reporting them according to the dictates of a character "appointed" by the Spirit that "called him into being."

In James' reading, Emerson sees this dialectic of the individual and universal reflected in all experience. "This same indefeasible right to be exactly what one is, provided one only be authentic, spreads itself, in Emerson's way of thinking, from persons to things and to times and places. No date, no position is insignificant, if the life that fills it out be only genuine."[47] In Emerson's view, according to James, Universal Reason did not radiate from every fact of experience; instead, it inhabited only the "authentic," the "genuine." "For Emerson," writes James, "the individual fact and moment were indeed suffused with absolute radiance, but it was upon a condition that saved the situation—they must be worthy specimens."[48] Significantly, this dichotomy of the authentic and inauthentic is analogous to that between creation and uncreation in the thought of Henry James, Sr. For both thinkers, experience is divided between the "created" / "authentic" manifestations of God ("the Cosmic Intellect") and those "uncreated" / "inauthentic" elements of experience inhabiting a realm of existence that is somehow less real, less "genuine." William also characterizes Emerson's view of experience in language echoing his own dichotomy of union and disunion. Just as truth is a grafting process for James, in which one creates connections between past and present experiences, Emerson's "sincere, authentic, archetypal" facts "must have made connection with the Moral Sentiment." Knowing "just which thing does act in this way, and which thing fails to make the true connection" was Emerson's gift, his "secret…of seership."[49] Finally, in William's view Emerson shares with both him and his father a belief in the potential triumph of unity over the present—or apparent—incongruence of experience. In this, too, Emerson "was a real seer. He could perceive the full squalor of the individual fact, but he could also see the transfiguration." The three philosophers would doubtless disagree as to the exact nature of this transfiguration. Yet one can hardly imagine any of the three denying what William describes as "Emerson's revelation": "The point of any pen can be an epitome of reality; the commonest person's act, if genuinely actuated, can lay hold on eternity."[50]

## IV

It is strange, somehow, that the "Address at the Emerson Centenary" is the only extended treatment of Emerson in William James' published works. Certainly there are pieces in which James offers an opinion on Emerson; often he is used as an idealist foil for pragmatism, while at other times one or another of his oracular pronouncements frame a sheet or two from James' philosophical sketchbook. This essay has not taken these brief allusions to Emerson into account. Instead I have attempted to examine the text as James most likely wrote it—unmolested by ghosts of past assessments or classifications. In place of these ghosts, however, another wraith hangs over the text—not Emerson's, but Henry James, Sr.'s. Henry Sr. introduced William to Emerson, both the person and the books. He wrote prolifically himself, and his son read almost every word while compiling his literary remains. In the correspondence between father and son the major philosophical questions that would vex William throughout his career—the problem of the one and the many, the existence and exercise of free will, the role of the intellectual in society—are addressed, and William's conclusions largely prefigured. Far too little scholarly attention is given to the intellectual influence of Henry Sr. on his son, and it is high time that the father be numbered again among the philosopher Jameses. In this case two is certainly better than one.

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43. William James, "Address at the Centenary of Emerson," p. 308.
44. Ibid., p. 309.
45. Ibid., p. 307.
46. Ibid., p. 310.
47. Ibid., p. 311.
48. Ibid., p. 312.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 313.

# *Whitehead's Reading of James and Its Context (Part Two)*

*by Michel Weber*

**Note:** This concludes an article, the first part of which was published in *Streams of William James*, Volume 4, Issue 1.

### Specific Impacts

As far as we know, only four *explicit* conceptual points of contact illustrate the dialogue of Whitehead with James. Accordingly, they are discussed in this section: (I) the epochal theory of time; (II) the concept of feeling; (III) the functional concept of consciousness; and (IV) the definition of the concept of religion.

### I. The Epochal Theory of Time

There has been—and still is—much fuss about the ins and out of Whitehead's adoption of an "ontological atomism" or "epochal theory of time." The first point to clarify is that he does not shift from a continuist ontology to an atomistic one: his early inquiries outspokenly refuse to question the mystery of the coming-to-be and passing-away; it is only when the philosopher decides to further question the *conditions of possibility* of genuine eventfulness that he passes the gates into the ontological field. Now, the reason for adopting a (refurbished) atomism is plural but can be easily triangulated: Leibniz's monadology, Planck's quantic thunder, and James's interpretation of Zeno's everlasting antinomies.

In support of his contention that there is a "becoming of continuity" and no "continuity of becoming" (*PR*, p. 35), Whitehead especially refers to James:

> These conclusions are required by the consideration of Zeno's arguments, in connection with the presumption that an actual entity is an act of experience. The authority of William James can be quoted in support of this conclusion. He writes: "Either your experience is of no content, of no change, or it is of a perceptible amount of content or change. Your acquaintance with reality grows literally by buds or drops of perception. Intellectually and on reflection you can divide these into components, but as immediately given, they come totally or not at all." James also refers to Zeno. In substance I agree with his argument from Zeno; though I do not think that he allows sufficiently for those elements in Zeno's paradoxes which are the product of inadequate mathematical knowledge. But I agree that a valid argument remains after the removal of the invalid parts.[1]

Whitehead basically agrees with James's reading of Zeno, but adds that modern mathematics—infinitesimal calculus—offer a decisive argument against the Greek. Curiously, he does not raise here the more fundamental issue that is the theorization of the fitness (the matchness?) of mathematics to the concrete.

*Process and Reality* is entirely built upon the adoption of an ontological percolation. From the perspective of the postmodern significance of Whitehead's thought, the atomization of the act of experience is of tremendous importance. It seals a mutual requirement between atomicity, liberty and novelty, thereby allowing a complete reformation of the old-fashioned philosophical substantialism and of its heir, scientific materialism. Independently existing "substances" with simple location are replaced by strings of "actual entities"—Whitehead's buds of experience. More precisely, the actual entities are hierarchized in societies, and in societies of societies, allowing both for the irruption of the unheard and its echoing in an ever-fluctuating cosmic tissue. As a result, the laws of physics are the mere "outcome of the social environment" (*PR*, p. 204): "The characteristic laws of inorganic matter are mainly the statistical averages resulting from confused aggregates" (*SMW*, p. 110). Let us note, by the way, that *The Principles of Psychology* also featured a revival of the Humean thesis of the relativity and contingency of the laws of nature.[2]

### II. The Concept of Feeling

According to Whitehead, "it is obvious that pragmatism is nonsense apart from final causation" (*FR*, p. 26). The problem of the meshing of the discontinuous and the continuous is vital for the British philosopher. How is it possible to categorize the stringing of present and past actualities, of final and efficient causation, of freedom and determinism? James saw as well that "novelty seems to violate continuity; continuity seems to involve 'infinitely' shaded gradation..."[3]:

> The same returns not, save to bring the different. Time keeps building into new moments, every one of which presents a content which in its individuality never was before and will never be again.[4]

Whitehead's technical answer lies in the asymmetrical structure secured by vector-like relationships. His more intuitive conceptualization lies in his extended use of the concept of feeling. Transitions are *felt* relations.

On the occasion of the examination of Bradley's notion of "feeling," a concept that expresses for him "the primary activity at the basis of experience" (*AI*, p. 231), the connection is established with James:

> I may add that William James also employs the word in

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1. *PR* quoting *Some Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. X; the footnote adds: "my attention was drawn to this passage by its quotation in *Religion in The Philosophy of William James*, by Professor J. S. Bixler."

2. "The laws of Nature are nothing but the immutable habits which the different elementary sorts of matter follow in their actions and reactions upon each other." (1890) (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), vol. 1, p. 104 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1981/83, p. 109].

3. William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of An Introduction to Philosophy* (1911) Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1996), p. 153 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1977, p. 79].

4. Ibid., pp. 147-148 [Harvard U P, 1977, p. 76].

much the same sense in his *Psychology*. For example in the first chapter he writes, "Sensation is the feeling of first things". And in the second chapter he writes, "In general, this higher consciousness about things is called Perception, the mere inarticulate feeling of their presence is Sensation, so far as we have it at all. To some degree we seem able to lapse into this inarticulate feeling at moments when our tension is entirely dispersed." (*AI*, p. 231)

The concept of feeling occupies a decisive place in Whitehead's lexicon. "Feelings" are the internal-external (vectorial) relationships that grant both the interdependence of all actual entities *and* their idiosyncratic atomicity. Referring to Bradley, he qualifies that naked awareness is an "experience itself in its origin and with the minimum of analysis" (*AI*, p. 231). Let us remark in conclusion that a very interesting study could highlight the proximity with the Jamesian concept of "pure experience."

### III. The Functional Concept of Consciousness

The renewal of the concepts of consciousness and ego-soul is of course in the continuation of the aforementioned issue of the ontological conditions of possibility of a total cosmic processualization.

> The two modern philosophers who most consistently reject the notion of a self-identical Soul-Substance are Hume and William James. But the problem remains for them, as it does for the philosophy of organism, to provide an adequate account of this undoubted personal unity, maintaining itself amidst the welter of circumstance. (*AI*, pp. 186-187)

In other words, if you allow the destruction of the substantialist platform, a difficult conceptual reconstruction—the replacement of the entitative concept of consciousness by a functional if not a serial one—has to take place in order to interpret the continuity evidenced by our experience. The death of the Cartesian Ego is evoked at length by Whitehead. Although "it is an exaggeration to attribute a general change in a climate of thought to any one piece of writing, or to any one author" (*SMW*, p. 143), he goes on in comparing Descartes's *Discourse on Method* with James's *Does Consciousness Exist*:

> No doubt Descartes only expressed definitely and in decisive form what was already in the air of his period. Analogously, in attributing to William James the inauguration of a new stage in philosophy we should be neglecting other influences of his time. But, admitting this, there still remains a certain fitness in contrasting his essay, *Does Consciousness Exist* published in 1904, with Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, published in 1637. James clears the stage of the old paraphernalia; or rather he entirely alters its lighting. Take for example these two sentences from his essay: "To deny plumply that 'consciousness' exists seems so absurd on the face of it—for undeniably 'thoughts' do exist—that I fear some readers will follow me no farther. Let me then immediately explain that I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function. (*SMW*, p. 143)

As usual, Whitehead is very level-headed in his reading. He further critically remarks:

> In the essay in question, the character which James assigns to consciousness is fully discussed. But he does not unambiguously explain what he means by the notion of an entity, which he refuses to apply to consciousness. In the sentence which immediately follows the one which I have already quoted, he says: "There is, I mean, no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made; but there is a function in experience which thoughts perform, and for the performance of which this quality of being is invoked. That function is knowing. 'Consciousness' is supposed necessary to explain the fact that things not only are, but get reported, are known."
>
> Thus James is denying that consciousness is a 'stuff'.
>
> The term 'entity,' or even that of 'stuff,' does not fully tell its own tale. The notion of 'entity' is so general that it may be taken to mean anything that can be thought about. You cannot think of mere nothing; and the something which is an object of thought may be called an entity. In this sense, a function is an entity. Obviously, this is not what James had in his mind. (*SMW*, p. 144)

What James's argument lacks, says Whitehead, is a clear definition—or better, a sharp analysis— of the concept of substance that is discarded. But Whitehead is identifying here a "blind spot," blaming as well his own writings: indeed one cannot find in the Whiteheadian corpus a discussion of the proximity and differences existing between the shades of meaning of the Greek and Medieval concepts of substance and of the Modern one. The Greek concept insists on *what is permanent in change* (basically, it is the question of the "ousia"); the Modern one insists rather on *what exists/stands by itself* and is directly correlated with a theological hypothesis (God as an independent existent unaffected by time). Whitehead does not really distinguish between these two concepts and mainly attacks the modern one from the perspective of its neglect of time ("fallacy of simple location") and because of the bifurcations it installs. Now, some scholars have argued that it is totally illegitimate to apply the criticism designed for the Modern concept to the Greek or Medieval one, that could be read, it seems, in a "process" fashion.[5] This point made, let us go on:

> In agreement with the organic theory of nature which I have been tentatively putting forward in these lectures, I shall for my own purposes construe James as denying exactly what Descartes asserts in his *Discourse* and his *Meditations*. Descartes discriminates two species of entities, matter and soul. The essence of matter is spatial extension; the essence of

5. See, e.g., Ivor Leclerc, *The Nature of Physical Existence* (London and New York: George Allen and Unwin Ltd./Humanities Press Inc., The Muirhead Library of Philosophy, 1972), or the last book of William Norris Clarke, s. j.: *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2001).

> soul is its cogitation, in the full sense which Descartes assigns to the word "cogitare". (*SMW,* p. 144)

Following James in this, Whitehead thus focuses only on the Modern concept. He concludes:

> The reason why I have put Descartes and James in close juxtaposition is now evident. Neither philosopher finished an epoch by a final solution of a problem. Their great merit is of the opposite sort. They each of them open an epoch by their clear formulation of terms in which thought could profitably express itself at particular stages of knowledge, one for the seventeenth century, the other for the twentieth century. In this respect, they are both to be contrasted with St. Thomas Aquinas, who expressed the culmination of Aristotelian scholasticism.
>
> In many ways neither Descartes nor James were the most characteristic philosophers of their respective epochs. I should be disposed to ascribe these positions to Locke and to Bergson respectively, at least so far as concerns their relations to the science of their times. (*SMW*, p. 147)

The debate between Descartes and James is not a final one, but rather a typical one for two main reasons. First, the vast majority of philosophical texts use the understanding of the author's peers to contrast and sharpen a personal vision. "When you are criticising the philosophy of an epoch," urges Whitehead, "do not chiefly direct your attention to those intellectual positions which its exponents feel it necessary explicitly to defend. There will be some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the variant systems within the epoch unconsciously presuppose. Such assumptions appear so obvious that people do not know what they are assuming because no other way of putting things has ever occurred to them. With these assumptions a certain limited number of types of philosophic systems are possible, and this group of systems constitutes the philosophy of the epoch" (*SMW*, p. 48). Second, in opposition with the dogmatic trend discoverable in some thinkers, the debate, as it is settled by Descartes, James and Whitehead, remains *open*.

### IV. The Definition of the Concept of Religion

James's heuristic definition of religion is well-known:

> Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual man in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*.[6]

Whitehead has meditated that text (to which he refers in his *Dialogues*: cf. supra) and so he writes in *RM*:

> Religion is the art and theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself and on what is permanent in the nature of things. This doctrine is the direct negation of the theory that religion is primarily a social fact. [...] All collective emotions leave untouched the awful ultimate fact, which is the human being, consciously alone with itself, for its own sake. Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness. [...] Religion is solitariness ; and if you are never solitary, you are never religious. (*RM*, p. 16)

Both Whitehead and James discard religion *qua* institution as the object of their thoughts. This does not mean that religious institutions are not worth debating: it is simply *another* debate that is further qualified as subsidiary. Religion *qua* social construct does not have the depth of meaning that religiousness has. What strikes the reader is the common insistence on solitude. But what exactly happened to the all-embracing interconnectedness? James's understanding of the *homo religiosus* will be the topic of a forthcoming paper.

### Panpsychism

There is one remaining question that ought to be treated before we conclude: *quid* of the possible influence of Jamesian panpsychism on the late Whitehead? The simplest answer is: since there is no such thing as a Whiteheadian panpsychism, trying to specify James's impact at that level would be like probing a conceptual mirage. It is mainly Hartshorne who has made that misleading claim—that is *totally* foreign to Whitehead's corpus. As Lowe says: "Whitehead did not call his pluralistic metaphysics a panpsychism, and was not happy when his student—myself for one—did so."[7]

A more sophisticated assessment of that question should involve *first* the precise definition of the incriminated concept, *second* the close study of its adequacy for James, and *third* for Whitehead—the two last quests further requiring the putting into perspective of the philosophical development of both thinkers and their possible interrelations. *Fourth*, Hartshorne's view is mentioned as a postcript. Needless to say, these points can only be sketched in this paper.

First, we need to flesh out the meaning and significance of the concept of panpsychism. Like most philosophical concepts, it has been used in various ways and carries nowadays a wealth of meaning that generally does not help clarifying the debate. The question that the concept seeks to answer is properly ontological: what can be predicated of *all* actualities? For the sake of the present short discussion, let us examine the two main sources of difficulties; by doing so we propose a 2x4 hermeneutical matrix.

On the one hand, the prefix "pan" can either refer to the Whole (cf. the concept of World-Soul) or to all parts (cf. the concept of hylozoism). A complementary—Leibnizian—version of that basic contrast is the one between aggregates and individuals.[8] Please notice that this first partition makes

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6. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* [1902] (New York: Penguin, 1982), p. 31 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1985, p. 34].

7. Victor Augustus Lowe, "The Concept of Experience in Whitehead's Metaphysics", in George L. Kline, ed., *Alfred North Whitehead: Essays on his Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 126.

no pretense of exhausting the set of possibilities (*tertium datur*); moreover it points at the necessity of the specification of the relation(s) existing between the parts and the whole.

On the other hand, the suffix "psychism" works at various *stages* or *levels* that can be heuristically identified and hierarchized in the following way. First, it stands for *psyche* itself and, in conjunction with the prefix "pan" leads irresistibly in the direction of animism. Second, it stands for *subjectivity*, i.e. for consciousness or at least for an awareness of some sort: self-experience is its key-word. Third, it stands for some *mental activity*, which means capacity of abstraction, of valuation, together with some freedom (or spontaneity, depending on how you define your variables). Fourth, it stands for *pure experience*, in the sense that everything that "is" either experiences or is experienced—full stop.

This perspective discloses an abstractive progression: psychism/subjectivity/mentality/experience. As usual in philosophy, the use of abstractions is quite paradoxical: it means both the quest for the ultimate generalities—that are not (necessarily) obvious for common sense, i.e., there is a distantiation from immediate experience—*and* it claims that, by doing so, it reveals the very marrow of any experience whatsoever. A good example is Plato, whose argument leads him to claim that solely the contemplation of *pure forms* is meaningful...because they are what is most *concrete*! This paradox, which stems from the disregard for sense perception inherited from Greeks, should lead us to be exceedingly careful in the handling of daring generalities.

Second, the nature and extent of James's panpsychism needs to be assessed. At the very least, it is doubtful that his entire philosophical development belongs to the same panpsychic level. Secondary literature offers two complementary misleading examples. On the one hand, Marcus Peter Ford has proposed an interesting analysis of the development of James's "panpsychism,"[9] but he offers no metacriterion such as the one we have just suggested with the quadripartite hierarchy of stages. On the other hand, W. E. Cooper[10] proposes a minimal contrast of the semantic shades of the concept of panpsychism, but factually ignores the intricated developmental side of the question. One could claim that the above abstractive progression is indeed at work in James, who first (already in the *Principles*) embraced a rather non technical (or gut) panpsychism—in 1909, he is still speaking of "mother-sea" or "common reservoir of consciousness"[11]—and later (in the *Essays in Radical Empiricism*) spelled the (dry) basics of a panexperientialist framework.[12] The quest for higher generalities and the striping of immediate (sometimes naive) experience of its "obvious" and "subjective" features are the two faces of the same coin. At any rate, these various conceptual stops do make sense from the perspective of the "infinite number of degrees of consciousness, following the degrees of complication and aggregation of the primordial mind-dust."[13]

Third, although there is no Whiteheadian panpsychism *per se* (remember that the term cannot be found in his corpus), it is now possible to understand how and why badly informed commentators are likely to qualify his organic philosophy as panpsychism. The late Whitehead is actually proposing a vision made of the most abstract form of panpsychism: the panexperientialist one. He does not climb the quadripartite ladder, but takes up residence straight away in the last level. Since his concept of "feeling" is quite unhappy in intersystematic context, we can speak of "vectorial connexity" instead, one advantage being that this highlights the theory of relations instrumenting his panexperientialism: internal (constitutive) and external (non constitutive) relations are geared in a very powerful holistic gesture. As a result, we end up with a (very) moderate form of dualism: on the one hand, subject and object are *intrinsically* interconnected, both in their becoming and in their being; on the other hand, there is an important structural difference at work between true individuals and aggregates. Although there is no evidence of James's influence here, we can see the speculative link between the two thinkers:[14] when James devised "the principle of pure experience,"[15] he has basically made the same move. Reality is through and through experiential.

Fourth, Hartshorne and his followers should be distinguished. Although he never changed his mind about panpsychism, in the seventies, Hartshorne himself preferred to speak of "psychicalism" (*contra* "physicalism").[16] Traces of his position can be found in some of the dissertations he has promoted, like Lawrence's and Gilmour's.[17]

## Epilogue

In one of his 1910 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entries, Whitehead refers the reader to James's *Pragmatism* (1907) on the question of "the one and the many."[18] As far as we

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8. This difference is stressed by Griffin, e.g., in David Ray Griffin, ed., *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy. Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne* (Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1993), p. 35n17.

9. Marcus Peter Ford, *William James's Philosophy: A New Perspective* (Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1982).

10. W. E. Cooper, "William James's Theory of Mind", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 28: 4, October, 1990, pp. 571-593.

11. William James, "Confidences of a 'Psychical Researcher" [1909], in *Essays in Psychical Research* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1986), pp. 361-375.

12. Griffin proposed the concept of "panexperientialism" in 1977 to name Whitehead's attitude: cf. David Ray Griffin, "Whitehead's Philosophy and Some General Notions of Physics and Biology", in John B. Cobb, Jr. & David Ray Griffin (eds.), *Mind in Nature: Essays on the Interface of Science and Philosophy*, Washington DC, UP of America, 1977. For a more recent discussion, see David Ray Griffin (ed.), *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy.* op. cit.

13. James, William, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), vol. 1, p. 149 [Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1981, p.152].

14. See our "The Polysemiality of the Concept of 'Pure Experience'," *Streams of William James*, Volume 1, Issue 2, Fall 1999, pp. 4-6.

15. Which claims that "nothing shall be admitted as fact […] except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient ; and for every feature of fact ever so experienced, a definite place must be found somewhere in the final system of reality. In other words : Everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing experienced must be somewhere real." William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, posthumously published by Ralph Barton Perry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976), p. 81.

know, this is the earliest reference to James in Whitehead's corpus. It is all the more significant that it occurs in a mathematical discussion and that James's book has been probably read at Cambridge, when Whitehead, while teaching applied mathematics, was apparently focusing his researches *only* on algebraic, geometrical, and logico-mathematical issues.

There is no other published evidence that Whitehead read James before he was offered a position at Harvard: James is simply not cited anymore before the 1925 Lowell lectures (whose expansion became *SMW*). And, indeed, Paul Weiss, who was one of Whitehead's assistant in Harvard, is convinced that he looked into James only when he settled down in the U.S.[19] Evidence cannot be found either in his personal notes or manuscripts, since they have been destroyed after his death, upon his request, by his wife Evelyn.[20] Although it is not entirely clear what happened to his (rather extended) library, some twenty-two of his books are now in the Milton S. Eisenhower Library (Johns Hopkins University), as a part of the Victor Lowe's legacy.[21] Among them, one can find the Longmans, Green and Co. edition (London, 1929) of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*—which he might thus have read only in the late twenties.[22]

The first thing to be said with regard to his personal edition of the *Varieties* is that Whitehead had most certainly read them *before* delivering the Lowell Lectures of 1926 (that became *Religion in the Making*). Either he had rediscovered Jamesian themes by himself—like the idea that religion is solitariness[23]—or he had read the *Varieties* no later than on the occasion of writing his lectures, which means that the volume housed in Johns Hopkins is not the first edition he has worked on. Furthermore, *CN* (1920) already mentions Bergson and, since Bergson and James philosophical developments are so intertwined,[24] it probably makes sense to claim that if he knew one he knew the other. The story here is that it is through his personal friend, Herbert Wildon Carr, author of *Henri Bergson: The Philosophy of Change*,[25] that Whitehead got acquainted with the Parisian philosopher.

More than this, one could argue that he has always had time for a little bit of eclecticism and that "Does Consciousness Exist" (1904) might have attracted his attention at the time. To flesh out a little bit what could appear as a purely gratuitous speculation, let us evoke the case of Whitehead's interest in theology: if one considers only the published evidence, one is forced to conclude that before the 1925 Lowell Lectures, the philosopher could not be bothered with that field. However, we learn from his *Dialogues* with Price that "during eight of these years in Cambridge [U.K.], he was reading theology. This was all extracurricular, but so thorough that he amassed a sizable theological library. At the expiry of these eight years he dismissed the subject and sold the books." (*D*, p. 13) And it is the case as well that during his student days, when he was a member of the elitist Cambridge "Apostles" discussion group, religious questions were discussed, together with all sorts of philosophical subjects. Lowe reviews that topic,[26] but does not mention discussions of psychological concepts—besides *telepathy*.

G. Sarton, the well-known historian of science has claimed that "original ideas are exceedingly rare and the most that philosophers have done in the course of time is to erect a new combination of them."[27] This could be the case in his discipline; in the history of metaphysics. However, we see every so often the daring expression of direct personal insights into the ontological texture of our world. Starting from that "pure" experience, the blissful philosopher attempts to engineer a novel system of thought as worthy as possible of the founding event. The problem is that attempts at rationalization will probably borrow conceptualities and/or itself spur much secondary thinking. The unmediated dialogue between experience and reason could then be bro-

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16. Charles Hartshorne, "Why Psychicalism? Comments on Keeling's and Shepherd's Criticisms," *Process Studies*, Vol. 6, N1, 1976, pp. 67-72. For a discussion of Hartshorne's differences from Whitehead and of his conceptual development, see for instance Lewis S. Ford (ed.), *Two Process Philosophers: Hartshorne's Encounter with Whitehead*, Tallahassee, Florida, American Academy of Religion, AAR Studies in Religion, Number Five, 1973 and Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Charles Hartshorne*, La Salle, Illinois, The Open Court Publishing Company, The Library of Living Philosophers, XX, 1991.

17. John Shelton Lawrence, *A. N. Whitehead's Panpsychal Theory of the Individual Existent*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Austin, The University of Texas at Austin, 1964; John Calvin Gilmour, *Analogical Generalization and Whitehead's Panpsychism*, Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Atlanta, Emory University, 1966. At an even more anecdotical level, let us remark that Lewis Ford prefers to speak of "pansubjectivity": "Pansubjectivity goes to the very heart of actualization itself." (Lewis S. Ford, "The Reformed Subjectivist Principle Revisited," *Process Studies*, Vol.19, N1, 1990, pp. 28-48, p. 43; cf. his "From Pre-Panpsychism to Pansubjectivity," in George Nordgulen and George Shields, eds., *Faith and Creativity*. St. Louis: CBP Press, 1987, pp. 41-61.)

18. Alfred North Whitehead, *sub verso* "Mathematics," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, XIth edition, vol. 17, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1910-1911, pp. 878-883, p. 881; reprinted under the title "Mathematics, Nature of" in the XIVth edition (vol. 15, London and New York, 1929, pp. 85-89); and later in the *ESP* volume, here p. 278.

19. Paul Weiss, personal communication to the author, 08/08/2001.

20. Victor Augustus Lowe, *A. N. Whitehead: The Man and His Work*. Volume I: 1861-1910; Volume II: 1910-1947 (edited by J. B. Schneewind), Baltimore and London, John Hopkins UP, 1985 & 1990, Vol. I, p. 246.

21. Lowe is the author of the bibliography of Whitehead (see the previous footnote), a work that he carried on for more than twenty years with the support of Whitehead's family. Unfortunately, he died before the completion of the second volume. For an inventory of his papers, consult the Alfred North Whitehead Collection Ms. 282 and 284, Special Collections, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, The Johns Hopkins University. <gopher://musicbox.mse.jhu.edu/00/mss/ms282.txt> and <gopher://musicbox.mse.jhu.edu/00/mss/ms284.txt>.

22. Here is what we have been told with regard to Whitehead's copy of James's *Varieties*: "Whitehead's copy of James's *Varieties* contains only one marginal comment. At the end of the second full paragraph on p. 431, Whitehead placed a vertical line next to the text that begins "But high-flying speculations like those of either dogmatic or idealistic theology..." Outside the line, he comments, "why." He has marked many other passages of text, but without comments." (Margaret Burri, Curator of Manuscripts, Johns Hopkins University, Special Collections, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, personal communication to the author, 05/10/2001.)

23. "Religion is the art and theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself and on what is permanent in the nature of things. This doctrine is the direct negation of the theory that religion is primarily a social fact. […] Religion is solitariness ; and if you are never solitary, you are never religious." (*RM*, p. 16)

ken to generate "second-order" speculations drifting from their shimmering experiential soil. Here lies the pathology of thought. But when speculations ("first-order" or "second-order") are (re)directed toward the full thickness of lived experience, rationalization brings forth contrasts and intensity in experience. There is a nobleness of reason; and it is linked with the fate of normal consciousness. Perhaps any fair assessment of the impact of the "borrowings" made by a given author need to be preceded by a—hypothetical—answer to these basic hermeneutical puzzlings.

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24. As Capek's meticulous inquiries have shown (cf. the "Further Readings" section).

25. London/Edinburgh, T. C. & E. C. Jack, The People's Book, 1911.

26. Victor Augustus Lowe, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 112-145.

27. George Sarton, quoted by John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Cosmological Anthropic Principle* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1986); issued with correction as an Oxford U P Paperback, 1988, p. 27. He has perhaps read Sainte Beuve's *Portraits littéraires*: "On retombe toujours, on tourne dans un certain cercle, autour d'un petit nombre de solutions qui se tiennent en présence et en échec depuis le commencement. On a coutume de s'étonner que l'esprit humain soit si infini dans ses combinaisons et ses portées; j'avouerais bien bas que je m'étonne qu'il le soit si peu." (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, vol. II, p. 466)

# *2003-2004 Student Essay Contest*

The William James Society is offering a $100 prize and publication in *Streams of William James* for the best student essay (4500 words, maximum) on William James. Although this contest is intended primarily for graduate level work, we encourage undergraduates and continuing education students to submit work as well. Essays that receive honorable mention will also be published in an issue of *Streams.*

One theme that we suggest students consider is the application of William James's ideas to a contemporary problem. We are, however, open to other topics and streams of thought.

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 <albright177@earthlink.net>.

**Deadline: May 15, 2004.**

# *WJS at A Phil. A East*

The William James Society is sponsoring a panel at the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, on Sunday, December 28, 2003, from 2pm– 5pm in the Grant Terrace of the Washington Hilton & Towers.

Linda Simon (Skidmore College) will give the presidential address.

Robert Talisse (Vanderbilt University) will then chair a panel on *Contextualizing William James: The Interface of Biography and the Scholarship of Ideas.* the session. Speakers will include Harvey Cormier (State University of New York, Stony Brook) on "Philosophy in the Life of James," John Danisi (Wagner College) on "Psychology in the Life of James," and John Roth (Claremont McKenna College) on "Religion in the Life of James."

Following the panel, D. Micah Hester will then chair the William James Society annual business meeting.

For more information, please contact D. Micah Hester <hester_dm@mercer.edu>.

# *Call for Papers:*
## *The Fourth Annual Donald G. Wester Philosophy Conference*

*William James's Philosophy of Mind:*
*A Celebration of the Centennial of William James's "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?"*

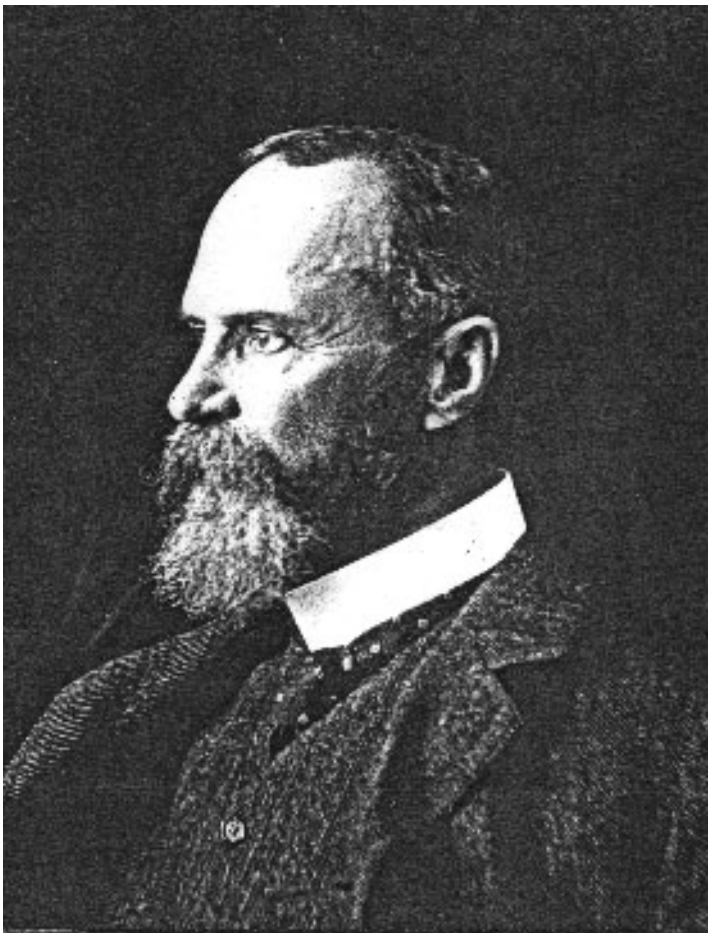
The Conference will be held at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, on April 3, 2004. The Keynote Speakers are Charlene Haddock Seigfried and Russell Goodman.

Papers on William James's philosophy of mind are welcome. Selected papers will be published in *Streams of William James.* Please do not exceed 3000 words.

**Deadline: December 31, 2003.**

Please address papers and questions about the conference to Jacob Goodson <jacob_goodson@hotmail.com>.

This conference is sponsored by The Pragmatism Archive at Oklahoma State University.



# *Book Reviews*

John J. Stuhr, *Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Philosophy.* Routledge, 2003 211 pp, $22.95.

Reviewed by J. Caleb Clanton

John Stuhr's new book, *Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Philosophy,* consists of ten essays, many of which have appeared previously in alternative versions, pulled together in an attempt to voice a new pragmatism, one that extends beyond a nostalgic regurgitation and recycling of old favorites like Peirce, James, and Dewey. I cannot adequately discuss all of the interesting issues these essays advance; I will instead concentrate on a few themes.

In the opening chapter entitled, "Thinking Beyond the Twentieth Century," Stuhr confronts the challenge of Emerson's "American Scholar," thereby setting the tone to the book: to construct a pragmatism appropriate to this new day. The author contends that we are living in a post-liberal world where concepts such as Dewey's notion of growth are no longer held as ideal within our various educational institutions. Thus, we have to construct new ways, given the texture of the terrain of the 21th Century, to achieve desirable ends like growth and increased possibilities for living lives.

While displaying a command of the more important figures in classical American thought—especially James and Dewey—Stuhr attempts to resurrect the philosophy of the now little-known American philosopher William Ernest Hocking. Stuhr argues that, while much of Hocking's philosophy deservingly lands him into the pits of obscurity, his analysis of the defects of liberalism alone makes him worthy of renewed attention. Stuhr also considers Sydney Hook's concept of democracy as a way of life, suggesting that democracy demands a personal but not private responsibility to increase inquiry and participation within the local context in which one is located. In "Relevances, Realities, and Rat Races," Stuhr praises John Lachs's attempt to make philosophy relevant to life and his pluralistic view of human natures. However, Stuhr criticizes Lachs's "faith in the possibilities of human natures" as being "uncharacteristically small in scope" (86). According to Stuhr, we have reasons to believe that the class of means-end integrated action is broader than Lachs thought, and we should take practical steps toward the further expansion of this class in the lives of people. The goal of making philosophy again relevant comes only with hard work and a sort of Herculean strength, a point Stuhr continually stresses throughout the book. He gives several recommendations to this end, suggesting practical steps that professional philosophy itself might take—from making use of a larger range of resources to restructuring graduate departments and the American Philosophical Association to reshaping attitudes.

Stuhr looks also to the traditions of critical theory and Continental thought as a way of bolstering his pragmatic project. His chapter entitled, "From the Art of Surfaces to Control Societies and Beyond," is experimental and interesting in its presentation, as it attempts to pull together Deleuze's preference for production, surfaces, and immanence with pragmatism. In "From Consciousness of Doom to Criticism," Stuhr argues for a push beyond Adorno that needs to come in the form of a non-dialectical view of criticism, one without a transcendental grounding. Following Foucault, Stuhr contends that criticism must always be genealogical, and he defends this sort of criticism against several sorts of challenges. In "Genealogy, Critique, and Transformations," Stuhr contends that opponents argue that such genealogical criticism, given its lack of transcendental basis, lacks a certain pragmatic potency. However, Stuhr responds by pointing to several examples in the work of Foucault that suggest the pragmatically transformative capacity of genealogical criticism.

The author most fully addresses the legacy of James in the chapter which bears the name of the book. Mapping out the genealogy of James's confidence in the future of pragmatism, Stuhr argues that James grew increasingly less assured that pragmatism necessarily marked the trajectory of philosophy. Echoing this disillusionment, Stuhr contends that his own genealogical and pluralistic pragmatism is "only one possible future for philosophy" (184). To say otherwise, on Stuhr's view, is to play the role of philosophical "assassin" and to undercut the genealogical and pluralistic nature of his pragmatism. In looking to the future, then, pragmatism must become more pluralistic than even James allows for, according to Stuhr.

It seems that Stuhr (as well as other pragmatists like James) must still confront that which troubles all pluralist proposals: pluralism attempts to reconcile conflicting doctrines that are not themselves pluralistic. Thus, it seems that pluralism must require that other doctrines accept pluralism; but it's hard to see how this is not simply another kind of monism. Stuhr also sets for himself the rather hefty challenge of going beyond the recent treatments of pragmatism by insisting that "sound theory" and "sane practice" be unified, not just in theory, but *in practice.* However, it remains a persistent challenge for pragmatists to avoid contributing merely another layer of metaphilosophy. Although Stuhr may have achieved less than going beyond "pragmatist scholarship," he makes a serious attempt in this book, one well worth noting.

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Jon Boorstin, *The Newsboys' Lodging-House or The Confessions of William James*. Viking Press, 2003. 342 pp. $24.95.

Reviewed by Jason Gary Horn

*The Newsboys' Lodging-House or The Confessions of William James* introduces a vivid crew of characters, ranging from the saintly to the dastardly, at it twists and turns within tangled threads of multiple plot developments, offering suspense, drama, melodrama, a murder, some mayhem, and a touch of the bizarre, all played out against the actions and inner conflicts of an emotionally unstable hero, William James. True to its confessional mode, the book emphasizes the hero's introspective view as he develops his attitudes on life. And John Boorstin leaves few parts of life untouched, as he leads his James from relative innocence to the truths of experience.

Boorstin grounds his fictional trek toward truth in fact: James's account of an anxiety attack he suffered after visiting an epileptic patient. Recognizing a potential fate in the image of this asylum patient, James wrestled with bouts of depression and recurrent thoughts of suicide for several years following the incident. Turning the facts as needed, Boorstin intensifies James's dreadful experience and textually commits his hero to the McLean Asylum for the Insane, where he meets a visiting Horatio Alger and reads Alger's *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Boot-Blacks*. Inspired by Alger's tale of little Emersonian street urchins making their way in the slums of New York, James checks himself out of the asylum and into the Lodging House Alger manages for "Newsies," the boys who daily hawk the city's newspapers.

Boorstin, drawing upon some of James's letters, presents a believable James of his own, one who leaves the sheltered existence at Cambridge and confronts the concrete particulars of his most abstract notions. "Stretched on the rack of conflicting belief, sundered between my irrational hope and my all too rational fear," James confesses to readers, "I determined that Alger's street arabs would become my agents of liberation" (36). And in a similar intimate mood, James later adds that he was seeking "some definitive evidence of the existence of the Good which would blot out my abysmal dread" (120). But Boorstin's James is unreliable as a narrator when reading his own intentions, which allows readers to sympathize with James as illusions shatter on his road toward self discovery.

And an often painful discovery it is, as Boorstin slips James into an adventurous stream that leads to befriending Alger and a particularly bright young newsie named Jemmie. Conflicts ensue as James learns of Alger's sexual encounter with one of his boys and gradually discovers the evil side of Jemmie. James also discovers his own potential for corrupt behavior after losing his virginity to Jemmie's sixteen year old sister, lying for Alger, convincing Jemmie to lie for Alger, procuring a back-alley abortion for his child-lover, covering up robberies, framing and sending enemies to prison, and finally breaking his promise of marriage and paying off his would be bride and brother with a large sum of money. Boorstin makes his James pay for "dabbling" in the lives of others, as he leads him and readers deep into the "workshop of being," to borrow from James's *Pragmatism*, where we work with James to make sense of his lodging-house experience.

Boorstin, however, never allows his James or readers to perch long upon any conclusion, as he joins James and Jemmie together in self-creation by interweaving their perspectives as narrators. The echoing of ideas and dovetailing of events between chapters reveal that both characters, though years a part, are just coming of age. Both are escaping a past and forging a new identity on the streets. Both make life worth living. And both find or make themselves through their choices. Although James expects Jemmie to live up to his expectations of the good life and attempts to retard Jemmie's maturing process in an effort to salvage the child's innocence (and his own?). But circumstances prevent James from thoroughly remaking Jemmie over as James. As Boorstin's plot suggests, the boy must father his own image, choose the self he will become by acting in the world.

This determining power of free choice thematically governs Boorstin's novel, as it seals the relationship between the book's dual narrators. Boorstin thrusts both characters into situations in which their actions determine their fate. Rather than waiting for the potential to transform into the actual—a painter, biologist, or doctor—James ultimately realizes that he must make choices that create identity. By novel's end, he also acknowledges that his "deterministic fatalism was less a philosophy than an excuse for abdicating the tyranny of choice," the inevitable "trauma of creating" oneself." For "whatever its essential stuff," James concludes, "my practical identity consisted entirely of those choices which I had made in the course of my life" (258-259).

This is one of the few conclusions Boorstin allows for his characters or readers and the nearest he comes to capturing the spirit of James. For while Boorstin plays with James's notion of truth, he scans only the surface of James's reasoning presenting truth either as a tool for personal gain or as a belief worth believing. James's notions of good and evil fare better within the narrative, however, as these forces find live possibilities; but Boorstin's final say on the subject through James rings more of a contemporary than Jamesian note: evil can be explained away by "exculpatory circumstances" (339).

But it would be unfair to Boorstin to read his book for James's philosophy. Novels open new worlds to readers or represent the world in a new way. Boorstin brings new life to James and his world with a zest that engages and quickens the imagination. We read and grope for answers with Boorstin's young truth seeker, as he crafts an identity on which to build a life. What could be more exciting—or significant?

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