

William James Studies

A publication of the William James Society

Volume 1 (2006)

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Article 1. <http://williamjamesstudies.org/1.1/editorial.html>

From the Editors:

William James Studies offers provocative new scholarship on the life, work, and influence of William James. This issue features essays by Randy Friedman, Amy Kittelstrom, Joel Krueger, and Ruth Anna Putnam focusing on religion, morality, pragmatism, and consciousness; and on James's influence on John Dewey and Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida. In addition, we present two addresses by past presidents of the William James Society, delivered at annual meetings of the American Philosophical Association: Linda Simon's "Wild Facts in Context" and Charlene Haddock Seigfried's response to a panel of scholars—John Capps, Megan Mustain, David Perley, and Richard Shusterman—reassessing Seigfried's *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*. Future issues of the journal will contain addresses by former presidents John McDermott and William Gavin. 1

Inaugurating this publication has been both complicated and deeply satisfying. We are grateful to the University of Illinois Press for agreeing to house the journal, and especially to Paul Arroyo, who has worked closely with us to design and plan the first issue. We greatly appreciate the support and responses of our distinguished Editorial Board and of many other scholars, as well, for their willingness to review submissions and their timely return of comments. And we are thankful, too, to those who submitted essays for this and future issues. The quality of these submissions has been impressive, and we hope you find these essays as significant and compelling as we do. We look forward to receiving essays for future issues. 2

Linda Simon
General Editor

Mark Moller
Managing Editor

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Article 2. <http://williamjamesstudies.org/1.1/simon.html>

Wild Facts: Lives in Context

Linda Simon

A biography is a constructed illusion. The merest wisps of a life, fragments that consist of words or images on paper, serve as evidence for a human being: evidence of flesh and blood and heartbeat, of breath, of desire, of fear, of countless unspoken, unwritten thoughts. From these fragments—even twelve or twenty-four volumes, even scores of boxes from the archives of Houghton Library—biographers invent coherence, which may or may not have anything to do with the inchoate complexities and contradictions of real, lived experience.

But coherence is such a temptation. We, after all, each of us, invent our own stories, which may or may not coincide with the story our husband or wife or parent or child, or colleague down the hall, would tell about us. Or even coincide with our own revised version from last year, or last week. And whose story represents our own reality? Whose is “true”? Surely not a biographer’s, who “reads” a subject from a distance of time and space, culture and perhaps class. It’s flimsy business, this business of biography, and yet not futile. Somewhere in the accumulation and conflation of many life stories, many perspectives, many rereadings of those fragments of evidence, we approach a sense of another self.

Each biographer necessarily creates a context for the fragments of evidence available, a context that reflects the biographer’s life and times as much as the subject’s. Before I talk about contextualizing William James, then, I’d like to say something about contextualizing anyone. Any biographical subject lives in a time and place, more or less; paying attention to that context, perhaps responding to that context, perhaps not; and creating a set of memories of that context. That context, as the individual processes and recalls it, forms a kind of force, and that force, for want of a better term, we tend to think of as “cause.” The cause helps us to understand effects: that is, decisions, beliefs, predilections to hold one idea rather than another, and actions or, sometimes in James’s case, inactions; and this thread of causes and effects generates, for the biographer, the shape of a life. But identifying a cause and attaching it to an effect is not inevitable; it has little to do with “truth”; it does have to do with the questions a biographer asks and the answers that seem possible.

Let me give you an example. I would like you to think about yourself for a minute, and pretend that a biographer is trying to understand this moment of your life: your attendance at a conference of the American Philosophical Association. The biographer is going to write a sentence about this event in her book about you, to try to characterize you here: how you are feeling, what you are thinking, what motivated you to attend, what the interactions you have here mean to you, how this event fits into your life, what is its significance. Here are some questions the biographer may need to address in order to write this sentence:

1. How do you feel about traveling in general? How did you get here, and how do you feel about that means of travel?

2. How do you feel about leaving your home so soon after the Christmas holiday?
3. How do you feel about attending a professional conference?
4. Whom might you know here, and how do those relationships affect your feeling right now?
5. If you are delivering a paper, how do you feel about that? Do public presentations make you nervous? energized? anxious? respected? vulnerable?
6. How do you feel about being in Washington? As I write this question, the nation is on “orange alert.” To what extent are you worried about being in this city at this time?
7. World events are swirling around us: to what extent are you thinking about these events during these few days? And if you are thinking about them, what are you thinking? Are you reading the daily newspaper? What are you reading? How does what is happening in the world make you feel about your professional choices in being a philosopher or a scholar?
8. How does your personality—being gregarious, or withdrawn, or solitary—affect your feelings at this conference? For example, did you come alone or with friends? Did you initiate or renew friendships here? Have you sought out company and if so, whose, and why?
9. What problems or concerns might you have brought with you? Do you see this conference as a few days to escape from those problems, or are you thinking about them even now, when you might be listening?
10. How do you feel, physically? It’s cold and flu season, and I wonder if you are tired, or achy, or feverish. Do you have a headache?
11. Where does this conference fit into your professional life? Are you interviewing for a job? Hoping for a promotion? Eager to have your work published?

12. How do you feel in the middle of winter, in general?

13. Why did you choose to attend this particular session?

14. And last, what are you thinking, sitting here? What are you paying attention to?

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Some of these questions are fairly straightforward. I can find out how you traveled here, for example, perhaps by checking your credit card statements; and if you hate flying, I may be able to find out from an email message that you sent to someone, which, even if deleted, I suspect exists somewhere in the vast celestial archive of computer trash. I might know, from my research, that you get depressed every winter, much as James did; and I might surmise, also, that you are tired because the semester has just ended, and you have worked hard. I can check the program to tell whether or not you delivered a paper, and you might write something to someone about how you felt it was received. Or one of your listeners might write something, which I might be able to discover if this listener was well known enough to have a recoverable paper trail. Your own comment about the reception of your paper may prove to be a problem because, who knows, you may be subject to self-deprecation or self-aggrandizement; and your assessment may or may not concur with the perception of your listeners. But which is important anyway: what you thought about yourself, or what others thought of you? Who is the “you” that exists in any moment?

The British child psychoanalyst Adam Phillips, in his book *The Beast in the Nursery*, quotes a passage about Wittgenstein, recalling a conversation that occurred during a visit to a friend in 1949, when Wittgenstein was 62: “Later, walking in the hills, he returned to the way in which we borrow—hints. He had seen a play, a third-rate, poor play, when he was twenty-two. One detail in that play had made a powerful impression upon him. It was a trifle. But here some peasant, some ne’er-do-well says in the play: ‘Nothing can hurt me.’ That remark went through him and now he remembers it. It started things you can’t tell. The most important things just happen to you.”¹

I hope you can see, then, how complicated this is: this writing of biography, this writing of one sentence about your attendance at this conference. I simply cannot get inside your mind; I need to rely on written evidence to verify my conclusions; and whatever I conclude will, inevitably, be influenced by my own feelings, my own perception of what can be true, and especially by my questions about what constitutes the context of your being here. I may not ask the most important question, the question that would help me truly to know who you are.

This process of sorting out cause and effect becomes fraught with risk when the biographer considers her subject’s intellectual life: in James’s case, his beliefs and his writings about philosophy, religion, and psychology, about which you will soon hear more. It is tempting, and, I think, wrong-headed, to create a context for professional work that is separate from a larger context of personal needs, desires, and legacy and from a larger context still that includes the swirling influences of the subject’s culture and historical moment. If, for example, I want to understand your own interest in James, I would guess that it involved more than academic background and training. Something drew you to his work, and I would guess that that something had to do with beliefs about your own sense of responsibility to the community, about your perception of the ways that you—and maybe your children—learn, about depression and anxiety, about the limitations and burdens of living in a democracy, about your own capacity for religious belief and prayer. About the contradictions between your own social and private selves. About, perhaps, nostalgia. All of the questions I asked earlier about your reasons for being at this conference and at this session I would ask about your professional work as a philosopher and scholar of philosophy.

Which is a long way to introduce what I’ll talk about this afternoon: the advent of electricity in the second half of the 19th century. When we consider religion and science in the age of William James, we can expand that context by considering technology, and what new technologies implied about nature and the human spirit.

I became interested in electricity, oddly enough, through my work on James and his quest to understand what he called the “wild facts” in the universe—apparitions, occult powers, telepathy—phenomena that suggested the existence of mysterious energies. Because many of James’s colleagues in his quest were physicists whose professional work focused on electricity, and because the language describing these wild facts borrowed significantly from the language used to describe electrical phenomena, I wondered how—or if—early

electrification was connected to the coincident intensification of their research. That question led me to histories of electrification, where I learned that in the last quarter of the 19th century, electricity was a force stronger in the imagination than in reality: there were few light bulbs, telephones, or electric trams in everyday use; people learned of the potential of electricity from the spectacular demonstrations they saw at fairs and from eager articles in magazines and their daily newspapers. Readers were invited to imagine themselves in control of a benign power—a power that would protect them. In fact, electricity's first use in homes was in batteries for burglar and fire alarms. Of course, the power would enhance comfort, too: door-openers, shoe polishers, and even a miniature train track installed around a dinner table to distribute plates of food would make everyday tasks easier. Elevators, carpet sweepers, fans, coffee pots, and sewing machines would transform housekeeping. But beyond this image of life made easy by a multiplicity of electrical gadgets, people were told that as wielders of electricity, they themselves would be transformed for the better. Once women controlled electrical power in their homes, once they freed themselves from mundane chores, they would evolve into man's intellectual equal. When electricity speeded up the pace of life, human evolution would proceed faster.

With such euphoric predictions, one would suppose that the public hardly could wait for electrical power in their homes; but although electrical companies worked hard to gain a domestic market, more than thirty years after Thomas Edison invented the incandescent bulb in 1879, barely ten percent of American homes were wired. Since the light bulb seems like an incontestably good idea; since we ourselves would be horrified at giving up electrification, I wondered why the 19th century public needed so much persuasion, for so long, to try electricity. Some reasons were not hard to discover. Alongside articles extolling electricity were others that reflected fear, distrust of the hyperbolic claims of electrical companies, and worry about the possible physical consequences of a new, untested technology. Accidental electrocutions made front-page news, as did terrifying explosions, caused by poorly insulated wires laid alongside gas mains. Articles warned about possibly malignant effects of electricity on the human body: blindness, for example, from reading by incandescent light. Electricity, moreover, was unreliable: in cities that had installed public lighting, bulbs and wires often failed, and repairs were slow and difficult. Few trained electricians were available to support the new systems. Most significantly, harnessing electricity seemed an act of transgression against the power of nature. Electricity, after all, was nature's most devastating force; lightning was electrical, and it seemed foolhardy to invite that force into one's home.

Yet at the same time, the application of electricity as a medical therapy spread rapidly, embraced with enthusiasm by physicians and patients. In the context of apparent resistance to electrification, the widespread appeal of electrotherapy as a mainstream medical treatment seemed even more puzzling. I knew that James and many members of his family had undergone electrical therapy: James for heart trouble, his brother Henry for digestive problems, their sister Alice for depression. Now I discovered that electrotherapy was not just one of the medical fads that the Jameses were prone to embrace, but a treatment endorsed by traditional medicine throughout America and Europe. Physicians routinely included a battery set among their office equipment, and major hospitals boasted an electrical unit, headed by a physician who took the title of Electrician. This form of electrotherapy was not the electro-convulsive treatment that came into use in the 1950s for severe and intractable mental illness, but included a variety of massages, baths, showers, and infusions. Sometimes gentle and benign, sometimes painful and punitive, electrotherapy was the treatment of choice for scores of common ailments, and especially for a newly diagnosed illness, neurasthenia, or nerve weakness, with which James was so familiar. Electricity, physicians believed, provided nourishment for depleted nerves.

The new technology, then, brought into popular discourse—that is, into newspapers, magazines, and public lectures—a consideration of beliefs about vitalism, spiritualism, and the consequences of scientific investigation: beliefs, of course, that were central to James's work. Vitalism, which held that electricity was the source of life itself, justified the conviction that applying electricity to the human body could strengthen and energize; at the same time, vitalism contributed to a fear of artificial electricity, since the force that energized this new technology was, in the popular mind, the same force that coursed through one's nerves. While people were willing to submit to the invasion of electricity into their bodies, with their own permission and administered by a physician whom they trusted, they were suspicious about allowing electricity to flow into their homes, where the force could stealthily invade their body in ways that they might not be able to control. It might even kill them.

Spiritualism intensified the beliefs of vitalism, asserting that one's soul, will, and spirit were electrical in nature: the spirit of the dead existed as disembodied energies; a person with a strong electrical force manifested a powerful will that could manipulate others, infiltrate their minds, and overwhelm them. All through the last half of the 19th century, Americans and Europeans from every class and educational background sat in dimly lit rooms where they witnessed tables turning, mediums communicating with the dead, apparitions materializing from behind gauzy curtains, and telepathic subjects guessing the contents of documents in sealed envelopes. They

attended “mesmeric evenings” where personalities were “read” by men and women claiming special empathic powers. They were attuned, in their own daily lives, to tremors of inexplicable feelings that might portend disaster to someone, far away, whom they loved. The language of electricity became a rich source of metaphor for sexual prowess and erotic feelings. But animal electricity and magnetism also suggested malevolence. Mesmerism implied emotional intimacy that could blur into feelings of being overpowered and violated by someone who could manipulate one’s thoughts and invade one’s private space. These disquieting notions about animal electricity formed a context for public understanding of artificial electricity.

Scientific research inspired uneasiness, as well, and surely undeniable fascination. Audiences flocked to see stunning displays of electricity, including such phenomena as lightning; shooting stars; a facsimile of the Aurora Borealis; an electrical model of the solar system; an electrified model insect, so realistic it could fool the eye; a fiery “halo” shimmering around a subject’s head as if evidence of beatification; or an electrified “Venus,” whose kiss gave new intensity to the notion of sexual attraction.² But scientific investigations also inspired worry. Many scientists’ conviction that in probing nature they were fulfilling God’s will was undermined, as the nineteenth century progressed, by the technological applications of their discoveries, applications that spewed fumes, created clamor and glare, and seemed to have as its ends the financial enrichment of businessmen rather than the enlightenment of humankind.

Scientists’ projects often seemed arrogant and foolhardy: to tamper with the electrical force risked causing an unbalance in nature; to tamper with nature at all risked punishment and retribution. Were accidental electrocutions really accidental? Or were they nature’s way of striking down transgressors? Scientists comprised a new class of experts whose discoveries about nature were publicized as having vast potential to change the world morally, socially, politically, and materially. In speculations about the future, electricity featured prominently as a power to effect great cultural changes. Such changes in themselves generated anxiety; but one risk of scientific research seemed especially terrifying: the possibility of a universe consisting of matter, and nothing more; a universe without a guiding intelligence, a universe without God.

As science pushed aggressively to uncover Nature’s secrets, the public encountered, in magazine essays, newspaper articles, and fiction, disturbing characterizations of scientists as heartless, godless, transgressors. If scientists accumulated knowledge, they did not necessarily impart wisdom. It was as late as 1834 that the term “scientist” entered the English language, the result of years of debate among members of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. As *scientist* came to replace *naturalist*, the difference proved troubling. A naturalist’s true vocation was not invention or innovation, but affirmation of a divine intelligence; to discover, as Emerson once remarked, a theory of nature that could explain the “occult relation” among all natural phenomena: in short, a theory that revealed God as the ultimate creative force, professed sympathy between humans and all other living entities, and enriched one’s sense of humanity. Early electrical investigators, such as Michael Faraday and Hans Oersted, shared this goal. But increasingly, scientists were becoming more and more specialized, revealing a partial view of nature according to their special vantage. A botanist or a physiologist, a neurologist or a chemist, delivered one theory and another into the world, fragmenting rather than unifying nature. Those discoveries made for sensational news stories, disseminated by the popular press, sometimes accurately, often not. “The immense amount of valuable knowledge now afloat in society enriches the newspapers,” Emerson wrote sardonically in 1848, “so that one cannot snatch an old newspaper to wrap his shoes in, without his eye being caught by some paragraph of precious science out of London or Paris which he hesitates to lose forever. My wife grows nervous when I give her waste paper lest she is burning holy writ, & wishes to read it before she puts it under her pies.”³ Emerson’s wife was not the only one growing nervous because of the onslaught of scientific information. With more than two hundred professional associations founded between 1870 and 1900, it seemed that there was an expert opinion on everything, opinions that often contradicted one another, supported by evidence that the public felt inadequate to evaluate. Especially in the sciences, expertise convinced non-experts that investigation of natural phenomena was an esoteric activity and that theories could not be evaluated by common sense. Most certainly they convinced a wary public that scientists were intent on reducing nature to mere matter.

James was one among many who resisted the idea of a materialist universe. In talks that attracted hundreds of listeners, in articles in popular magazines—the same magazines that published articles and fiction in which electricity was a central theme—James responded to his contemporaries’ concern about the consequences of scientific research; the limits of scientific authority; the possibility of affirming religious faith in a world that privileged the empirical; about, as he put it, “the contradiction between the phenomena of nature and the craving of the heart to believe that behind nature there is a spirit whose expression nature is.”⁴ James was skeptical about science’s claim of objectivity, asserting that belief in scientific method was itself a faith, like any other: scientists, he

said, held a “certain fixed belief,—the belief that the hidden order of nature is mechanical exclusively, that non-mechanical categories are irrational ways of conceiving and explaining such things as human life”; a belief, moreover, that excluded “capricious, discontinuous, and not easily controlled” experiences.⁵ James resisted the idea that science was barred from investigating whatever transcended matter: “the so-called order of nature, which constitutes this world’s experience,” he wrote, “is only one portion of the total universe”; and beyond the empirical there must exist “one harmonious spiritual intent.”⁶ We can explain James’s thinking about a materialist universe in academic, philosophical, and religious contexts, but we cannot exclude from his thinking the context of technology in his time.

Throughout the 19th century, electricity was temptress and seducer, feared and coveted, a force that could animate life or inflict death. Electrification threatened a public who treasured shadows and secrets, and who yearned, as James did so eloquently, for a universe in which “wild facts” preserved a feeling of wonder.

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Notes

¹ Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery*. London: Faber, 1998: 70.

² See Michael R. Lynn, “Enlightenment in the Public Sphere: The Musée de Monsieur and Scientific Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32.4 (1999): 463-476.

³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journal entry September 1848. *Emerson in his Journals*, ed. Joel Porte. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982: 393.

⁴ William James, “Is Life Worth Living?” *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy*. New York: Dover, 1957 [1897]: 40.

⁵ William James, “What Psychical Research Has Accomplished,” *The Will to Believe*: 324, 325, 306.

⁶ James, “Is Life Worth Living?”: 51, 52.

Jamesian Truth: Comments on Charlene Haddock Seigfried's *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*

John Capps

Charlene Haddock Seigfried's *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* does a great service to both James and his readers. First of all, she's untangled many of the threads that run through James' work. She provides a sense of order, and a level of explanation, that is otherwise missing in James. Second, she's made a forceful argument for a radically new approach to philosophy, one that she finds implicit in James even though he did not always seem prepared to accept it himself. This is a philosophical approach that emphasizes context and concrete, lived experience as opposed to the artificial certainties of empiricism and rationalism. Of course, Seigfried's argument isn't merely historical: in presenting this picture of James' philosophy she is suggesting that contemporary philosophers would do well to follow James' lead.

For this reason I'd like to focus on one of the chapters I find most stimulating: the chapter simply entitled "Truth." Of course, James' theory of truth is a frequent object of attack.¹ For example, whenever one wants to refute the pragmatic theory of truth, it is usually James' version that comes under attack. Evidently, it's all too easy, or too tempting, to argue against James' apparent equation of truth with utility. (Even fans of James cringe when he writes of true beliefs: "you can say of it then either that 'it is useful because it is true' or that 'it is true because it is useful.'") So at the very least it's refreshing to see James' theory of truth explained and defended. In addition, it's especially refreshing when we consider the current debate on truth: despite the continuing debate between and within various theories of truth (correspondence, minimalism, deflationism, etc.), and over the existence and nature of truth-makers, the pragmatic theory is rarely, if ever, discussed.

To give some background, Seigfried defends James' theory of truth by first pointing to the shortcomings of the correspondence theory of truth. As James argued, the correspondence theory only works in a limited number of circumstances: beyond a few clear paradigm cases it becomes increasingly difficult to understand either the details of the correspondence relationship or what, exactly, it is that corresponds to true beliefs. Instead, as Seigfried writes, "the pragmatist does not ask with what true ideas agree but what concrete difference in actual life an idea's being true will make" (293-294). The project is not so much to give a definition of the term "truth," but instead to describe the function that this concept plays in our discourse.²

From this standpoint "truth" is a term used to describe those beliefs that are capable of reliably guiding action to an expected outcome. We call a belief true when it successfully leads us to an anticipated experience. For example, my belief that there will be a full moon on the 30th of this month counts as true when, sure enough, I look at the sky that night and see a full moon. When that happens, we can certainly say this belief is *now* true, but we are naturally tempted to wonder if this belief was true a few weeks ago, when I first wrote these words. As I read James and Seigfried, it would not, strictly speaking, be correct to say that this belief *was* true until it *is* actually verified. Of course, there's not much harm, in the abstract, in saying that a belief is true in advance of its verification: ordinarily, it would simply be a gesture of linguistic courtesy to call such a belief true even though it has not yet been verified. But that's not to say that there's *no* harm in saying this.

Seigfried and James do argue that quite a bit of harm *can* be done when it is forgotten that calling an unverified belief true is *just* an act of courtesy. Doing this is to forget that truth depends primarily on the connections

between a particular belief, a course of action, and an experience. When that connection is forgotten, or given second status, then it is all too easy to treat truth as an abstract, timeless relationship between a proposition and some state of affairs. Treating truth as a timeless, abstract relationship raises all sorts of philosophical and practical problems which Seigfried and James suggest are best resolved by reconstructing philosophy along new lines.

I think James' critique of the correspondence theory of truth is correct as far as it goes. But I also want to say a few words on his behalf against those who would argue that he has not gone far enough. By doing so I hope to add to the case that Seigfried has already made. I also hope that these comments will contribute to the project of reconstructing philosophy that both James and Seigfried endorse.

Many philosophers would agree with James that the correspondence theory is unworkable. But some of these philosophers would also argue that an even more minimal theory of truth is called for. Some of these philosophers, such as Quine, endorse disquotationalism (as summed up in the Tarski schema "'p' is true iff p").³ The advantage of disquotationalism is that it seems to be the sort of theory that no one can disagree with (besides certain technical problems which don't concern us here). But it's not the most illuminating theory of truth, either, hence the temptation to make additions to it. Correspondence theorists, for example, might say that disquotationalism tells us what "truth" means, but this needs to be supplemented with an account of what *makes* a statement true: and this, of course, is where correspondence comes in.

I want to make a different point. While I see nothing wrong with disquotationalism, it also leaves important questions unasked and unanswered. In particular, it leaves us with an overly narrow understanding of why truth matters: in other words, that is, the importance of the concept of truth goes beyond its function in permitting "semantic ascent." Here it's worth returning to an important pragmatic (and Jamesian) question: what function does this word have in our discourse? What are we able to do with this word that we wouldn't be able to do otherwise? Looking at this from James' perspective, it's clear that calling a belief true stresses its connection to concrete experience. To say that a belief is true is to say that it has significance, that it is important, that it is reliable, and that it has proven itself in experience. If we didn't have the word "true" we would have to invent some other term to pick out those beliefs that have demonstrated their value in these ways. Simply put, the truth matters, and it matters in ways that minimalist theories cannot obviously capture.⁴

Here's another way of reaching the same conclusion: while it might be the case that disquotationalism tells us, in some narrow sense, what truth *means*, it obviously doesn't tell us how to distinguish true beliefs from false. That is, it doesn't provide us with a *criterion* of truth. In contrast, it's a strength of James' approach that his theory of truth is specifically oriented around this question. Because, according to James, the key to understanding the concept of truth lies in its practical consequences, or in the connection between a true belief and concrete experience, it also follows that an adequate theory of truth will provide us with a basis for distinguishing true beliefs from false beliefs.

Before moving on, though, I'd like to make one further point. One of the virtues of disquotationalism is that it sets no *a priori* boundaries on what sorts of statements can be true or false. Thus, disquotationalism is compatible with cognitivism in ethics: according to the disquotationalist it is obvious that ethical statements can be true or false since, after all, to say that it is true that "telling lies is wrong" is simply to say that "telling lies is wrong." So, ironically, while disquotationalism permits ethical statements to have truth values, it fails to explain why we would care that these statements are true. This is a point I will return to shortly.

Seigfried writes that James' theory is so revolutionary that "his new wine bursts the old bottles" (294). I think that's correct, and it leads to another point that is worth emphasizing: to the extent that James provides a *criterion* of truth he thereby avoids stating, in any deep sense, what *makes* a belief true. That is, he completely bypasses the contemporary question of "truth makers."⁵ That he does so is, I think, entirely to his credit. To begin with, as James was well aware, it is notoriously difficult to specify truth makers for the wide range of statements we normally take to be either true or false. The normal candidates for truth-makers—facts and things—aren't readily available when we say, for example, that it is *true* that one should not lie. While there are moral truths, it isn't at all clear that there are moral facts.⁶ Worse, the absence of moral truth makers, or at least the difficulty of identifying such a class of truth makers, can lead to the regrettable tendency to doubt whether moral statements can be true or false, which in turn leads to a kind of moral skepticism regarding the point of moral discourse in general. For James, concerned as always with the practical implications of a philosophical theory, such an outcome would be catastrophic.

Earlier I mentioned that one of the virtues of disquotationalism was its compatibility with cognitivism. The same is true of James' theory. Because he does not attempt to specify those facts or things that *make* a statement

true, he is able to preserve the common sense intuition that ethical statements *are* true or false. But is he justified in bypassing the question of truth-makers? I think he is, for the following reasons.

First, it's very difficult to identify truth-makers while staying within James' concrete perspective. To use an example of Terence Horgan's, what makes it true that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony has four movements?² It isn't as if Beethoven's Fifth exists as a discrete object in the same way that a table exists; likewise, attempting to identify Beethoven's Fifth Symphony with its many performances quickly becomes metaphysically inflationary.

The second reason James is right to bypass truth-makers is that, as he was well aware, once we begin to identify possible truth makers in a particular context, the list quickly becomes unmanageable. To take an example, what makes it *true* that the best way from New York to Philadelphia is via the New Jersey Turnpike? Certainly, in some general sense, it is the world that makes this true: that New York and Philadelphia are located where they are and that there is a twelve lane superhighway that (sort of) connects them. If the New Jersey Turnpike didn't exist, then obviously this statement would be false. But there are myriad other factors that we would also have to mention. One is our semantic norms: what we mean by "New Jersey Turnpike," etc. Another factor, which James stresses, is that this is a statement that has been verified, and it has been verified because it matters to people how to get from New York to Philadelphia. In this light, part of what makes it true that the Turnpike is the best way from New York to Philadelphia is simply that people care enough to look into it. In contrast, I'd hazard that there's no best way from, say, Banner, Mississippi to Helmer, Idaho (to take two towns at random) because this isn't, I would guess, the sort of thing anyone has ever cared enough about. Finally, we also need to remember that what makes the Turnpike the best route depends partly on one's goals. If one wants to make the best time then, at least ideally, the Turnpike is the best route. But if one instead wants to take a scenic route then the Turnpike is definitely not the best. Likewise if one want to travel from New York to Philadelphia by way of Graceland or Yosemite National Park. Obviously, the project of identifying truth makers can quickly spin out of control, in which case it isn't clear how this helps us understand whether a particular statement is true or false.⁸ It's much more straightforward to forego talk of truth-makers entirely and instead rely on James' account that truth is primarily defined by the instrumental role that true beliefs play in guiding behavior.

As always, these points come into clearer focus when we consider the role that normative statements play in our discourse and in our lives. It's an odd fact that, when philosophers discuss the concept of truth, they normally do so in relation to descriptive physical object statements: statements like "snow is white," "grass is green," or "this ball is red." The danger is that, by starting with statements like these, the resulting theory of truth will have difficulty with more practical (and moral) statements such as "one shouldn't violate the Constitution for political gain." I think it is an advantage of James' approach that such practical and moral concerns are never far from his attention: as Seigfried shows, he was consistently motivated to develop a philosophy which would address a person's real crises, which typically take a moral form, and to do so through an appeal to concrete experience.

Let me then sum up. In these few pages I hope to have added to Seigfried's defense of James' theory of truth. What stands out, I believe, is how a Jamesian theory keeps the question of truth's importance front and center: for James, the primary question is the *function* of this concept. In focusing on this question, a Jamesian theory not only bypasses correspondence theories, but it also goes beyond disquotationalism (and similar minimal theories) and, finally, questions the value of identifying substantive truth-makers for true statements. Bound up with this approach is a deep sensitivity, and commitment, to practical and moral issues: in fact, it could well be argued that this is exactly what motivates James to take the approach he does. As Seigfried argues, James' commitment to "the unresolvable tensions at the center of being human" (394), points in the direction of a radically different, and profoundly necessary, direction for philosophy.

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Notes

¹ A typical critique of the pragmatic theory of truth can be found in Frederick Schmitt's *Truth: A Primer* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995). For a sympathetic and insightful discussion of James see Harvey Cormier *The Truth is What Works* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

² Cheryl Misak makes a similar point in her updating of Peirce's theory of truth. The goal is not to give an analytic definition of the concept of truth in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for a propositions being true. Instead, she proposes a "pragmatic elucidation" of the concept of truth which describes the consequences of calling a belief true (*Truth Politics, Morality: Pragmatism and Deliberation* (New York, Routledge, 2000), pp. 58-9).

³ For more on disquotationalism see Hartry Field's *Truth and the Absence of Fact* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Paul Horwich's "minimal" or "deflationary" theory is a close cousin to disquotationalism (*Truth*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)).

⁴ Michael Lynch has also addressed this issue in *True to Life: Why Truth Matters* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2004).

⁵ D.M. Armstrong's *Truth and Truthmakers* defends the concept of truthmakers by working out the implications for a wide range of statements including negative, modal, and general truths (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶ I have in mind here the argument given by Mark Timmons in *Morality Without Foundations: A Defense of Ethical Contextualism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially Chapter 4.

⁷ Timmons, *op. cit.*, refers to this example on pp. 118-119.

⁸ I would argue that this is especially the case when the truths in question have an explicitly normative dimension: the *best* route, the *wrong* act, etc. It's noteworthy in this regard that Armstrong (see note 5 above) does not tackle these sorts of truths. James, I believe, would argue that these are actually the most important and most interesting.

Metaphor as Method: Charlene Haddock Seigfried's Radical Reconstruction

Megan Rust Mustain

Charlene Haddock Seigfried's elucidation of William James's use of metaphor stands, to my mind, as her book's greatest achievement. For once we understand James to be offering metaphorical explanations, his inconsistencies become much more philosophically bearable. Seigfried begins her book with an observation that lays bare the concerns of many of James's critics, namely that "his writings cannot be read for long—five minutes will do—without encountering contradictions."¹ Once we view James as a creator of metaphor and analogy, his inconsistencies take on a new light. James seems to say with Whitman,

*Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*²

Indeed, Seigfried's interpretation of William James as a creator of metaphors—a poet of sorts—allows us to see his imprecision and his inconsistency not as a failure of philosophical rigor, but rather as the chief success of what he thought to be his "message to the world in the way of *philosophy*."³

James did not merely *express* himself in analogies and metaphors. He did not merely offer metaphorical understanding as an *alternative* to traditional philosophizing. Rather, James did for philosophy what Seigfried did for James—recast complex, deeply held philosophical insights as metaphors more or less suited to addressing human problems and satisfying human needs. To better understand James's radical remodeling of the philosophical enterprise along these lines, we must engage several questions. First, what is a metaphor and what does a metaphorical explanation do that an explanation in terms of propositions cannot? Second, once we take the hermeneutic path and begin to think of philosophical theories as metaphors we must ask, what makes for a good metaphor? Finally, we must ask what it means to adopt metaphor as a philosophical method—what assumptions do we make, how are we to proceed, what consequences must we endure, what are the limits of analogical thinking? I turn now to addressing each of these questions in turn.

What is a metaphor?

In his lecture notes for an 1895 course on "The Feelings," James takes his first concerted stab at articulating a metaphysics of experience. His notes show him wrestling with many of the same problems that would later be taken up in his formal statements of radical empiricism—objects and subjects, plurality and unity, among others. In his lecture course, James proposes to approach these issues through the notion of what he describes as "the phenomenon the datum 'pure' experience."⁴ After examining this new notion over the course of sixteen pages of detailed handwritten notes, James abruptly changes tack. He drops the "datum" as his principle term, substituting for it the term "field." Why this shift in terminology, we might ask. James's marginal notes give us our answer: alongside the word datum on page sixteen, he scrawls, "use the word 'field' here for 'datum'—it is conveniently ambiguous."⁵ And, indeed, throughout the remainder of his notes he takes his own advice, privileging a terminology of 'fields' for the articulation of his insights.

Here we have a fairly odd situation: a philosopher, in his role as teacher, has deliberately opted for ambiguity—over and against clarity—in selecting the terms with which he will explain his ideas to his students. (Not to say that obfuscation never happens in a philosophy classroom; however it is usually thought to be a failure of pedagogical forethought, not the product of a deliberate choice.) What, then, is James up to?

In the act of exchanging one term (“datum”) for another (“field”), James is treating his most central concepts as somewhat arbitrary, i.e. not inextricably connected to their referent. We might, it seems, use any number of terms to describe the world’s character. (Indeed, James later drops the field terminology in favor of the notion of pure experience.) For James, how we choose our terms depends not on their one-to-one correspondence to some ulterior reality, but rather on their suitability to the task at hand. As such, our terms are better thought of as evocative—of responses, actions, and consequences—than as strictly denotative. Here we have caught James in the act of writing, explicitly choosing one term over another on account of its evocativeness, treating his most important explanatory concepts as metaphors.

Seigfried writes that a metaphorical explanation works by asking us to reflect upon an experience in its “much-at-oneness,” in its contextuality.⁶ A metaphor is always insufficient, of course, never capturing a whole experience at one stroke. Experience always overflows the metaphors that the poet uses to provide her descriptions. A metaphor is explicitly a product of human interest; we choose our analogies to suit our purposes, be they aesthetic, moral, or practical. Yet analogies, unlike most propositions, reveal the limitations that come with selective interest; the author of a metaphor lays bare the fact that “the reality overflows these purposes at every pore.”⁷ Seigfried’s point, and James’s too, is that our experiences overflow *all* of our descriptions, be they metaphorical or propositional. The primary difference between a proposition and a metaphor, then, lies in the metaphor’s *avowal* of its origin in human interest, its *acknowledgment* of its status as an “ever not quite.”

Philosophers, and particularly those who do metaphysics, are not wont to rest content with partial descriptions. The narrow scope of a metaphor, its piecemeal mode of apprehension, is precisely the reason that it is not presumed to suffice as a full-fledged philosophical description. “Ever not quite” simply doesn’t cut it in a discipline that seeks the “once and for all.” James’s reply to such an objection is rooted in his *Principles*: the desire for comprehensive, unambiguous, simple descriptions is *itself* a human interest by means of which we (or at least some of us) selectively attend to, order, and deal with our experiences. And as both propositional descriptions and metaphorical descriptions are the products of selective interest, we have as yet no grounds to discard one in favor of the other. Indeed, as Seigfried points out, we have good reason to privilege the metaphorical, for metaphors reveal their own limitations and do not affect the posture of fully transparent, “once and for all” sorts of description.⁸

What makes for a good metaphor?

Once we admit the partiality of all our attempts to order the quasi-chaos of our experience, once we privilege the metaphor as our paradigmatic mode of thought and expression, we are left with the problem of determining which metaphors to use. By what criteria might we gauge the appropriateness of expressions that are so tightly bound to the transient, deeply personal interests of individuals? On a strictly personal level, we might use a simple pragmatic test, asking the questions of a poet: does my metaphor effectively deal with the aspects of this experience with which I am currently interested? Does this analogy help to satisfy my doubts? Does the order it gives to my experience allow me to do the things I want and need to do?

But on an interpersonal level, when our metaphors are used as vehicles for communication, the pragmatic test becomes somewhat more complicated. The question is not merely one of satisfying *my* interests, but also of enriching the experiences and satisfying the interests of others. Here the experience to which the pragmatic test defers is taken in a much broader context; it is not merely *my* experience, but *ours*. Taken thus more broadly, the funded, multifaceted character of experience comes more prominently to the fore—my experiences overlap with yours, your conceptualizations work to remodel my world. To address the appropriateness of any given metaphor is now not simply to ask the question of whether or not it satisfies an interest, but to ask the question of which interests are worth satisfying and to what extent. James clearly acknowledges that the great systems of rationalist philosophy satisfy our compelling aesthetic interests in consistency and unity, and yet he seeks publicly “to destroy the notion of a monistic Absolute of any sort.”⁹ He does so on the grounds that dogmatic rationalism satisfies our aesthetic interests at the cost of all of our other interests, most notably our moral interest in affirming the efficacy of human action. Thus rationalism not only fails to satisfy James’s own sense of life; taken in its public form, as embodied in communities and institutions, it actively works against our individual and collective moral efforts to effect social change.¹⁰ James rejects wholesale rationalism insofar as it is a stultified metaphor, which evokes an

aesthetic apprehension of the world only to leave the world behind. Rationalism, in short, forgets that it is a metaphor, and in so doing, it loses its transformative, evocative power.

The test of a philosophical metaphor, then, is twofold. First, does the metaphor harmoniously satisfy our diverse interests? And second, to the extent that it does not fully satisfy the vast range of human interests, does the metaphor disclose its conditions and limitations, announcing itself *as a metaphor*? 11

To witness this twofold test in action, let us return to James's lecture notes for a moment. He begins by describing the experienced world as a neutral "datum" as yet undifferentiated into objects and subjects. After discussing briefly the diremption of the datum into units by common sense, he recognizes that his notion of datum is but a snapshot of the world at a particular time. He then recasts the datum as part of a continuous stream which "is immediately continued, becomes determined & qualified by what follows."¹¹ Treating the datum now retrospectively, James struggles to metaphorically construct an image of the connections between the past datum and the present one. He finds that his datum metaphor confines him to speaking in cross-sectional terms, in which the relations between successive data are primarily supplied by cognition. It is at this point that James proposes to shift his metaphor from "datum" to "field" for reasons of convenient ambiguity. Although the "datum" metaphor satisfies the demand for a certain degree of precision in its delineation of discrete units of data, James finds that its preciseness subverts the equally compelling aesthetic demand for unity through contiguity and connection. His field metaphor allows us to see ourselves as *part of* the developing field, cognizant of the field in which we find ourselves, and with "nothing postulated whose whatness is not of some *nature* given in fields, that is not of field stuff."¹² The metaphor of a plurality of continuous fields, then, seeks to satisfy much of the aesthetic demand for unity without sacrificing the demand for discreteness. Thus, James's metaphor passes (however tentatively) the first arm of the pragmatic test I offered earlier, which called for our metaphors to provide room for the satisfaction of the diversity of compelling human interests. 12

And what of the second arm of the test? James is characteristically explicit in reminding his listeners that his philosophizing is a process of testing the viability of metaphors. He writes, "What have we gained by substituting mutual 'fulfillment' and 'postulation' of fields...for 'knowing & known'. What by substituting 'fields' or 'points of view' for egos?" "We certainly have gained no *stability*," he confesses. "But we have gained concreteness,"¹³ the demand for which had been all but dismissed by the philosophical systems of the past. Here James acknowledges the limitations of his metaphor in satisfying our demands for stability. But, he claims, the demand for stability has been overprivileged, dominating the philosophical enterprise to such an extent that it has become the sole mark of adequacy, so much so that the metaphors of stability—most notably those of rationalism—have quite forgotten their status as metaphors. Here, at least, James passes the second test with flying colors. 13

Metaphor as Method?

There is then a sense in which the importance of metaphors to philosophy lies not primarily in what they *do*—capture our imaginations, engage our emotions—but rather what they *do not do*—namely, masquerade as essential. The good news, therefore, is that we needn't all be professional poets in order to do philosophy. To adopt metaphor as a philosophical method does not require us to speak and write only in analogies, similes, and metaphors; but it does require us to rethink the roles and origins of our more prosaic language and the conceptual systems we build with it. As such, the metaphorical method asks us to loosen our notion of objective reference in the manner of the poet. It asks us to see the philosophical systems of the past and present as originating in and responding to real human needs—needs which may or may not be compelling in the current context. 14

This is an Emersonian task wherein we must recognize that "the point of *any* pen can be an epitome of reality."¹⁴ The various epistemologies, metaphysics, and political theories flow from such pens, each offering a vision of the world that inspires various types of feelings, beliefs, and actions: sympathy or animosity, engagement or cynicism, stability or restlessness, to name but a few. To *read* philosophy in a Jamesian way is to determine what responses an author evokes and what needs those responses satisfy. To *do* philosophy in a Jamesian way is to determine what needs currently require satisfaction and to craft philosophies that respond to them. To test our philosophies is to determine to what extent the needs chosen were the right ones, and to what extent the philosophies actually satisfy them. This test, James insists, can only be conducted experimentally, that is, in the living experiences of women and men. And where our philosophies fall short, as they almost surely will, our task is to reconstruct them in light of new evidence and previously unexamined human interests. 15

James thus indeed undertakes a radical reconstruction of philosophy. His own metaphors—fields, pure experiences, streams of consciousness, among others—are, of course, insightful, inspiring, and revolutionary in their own ways. These metaphors are typically hailed as the prime philosophical contributions with which we, in 16

our search for the center of James's vision, must contend. And although no commentator on James's work can afford to ignore the intricate inner-workings of his metaphors, I contend that the radical-ness of James's reconstruction primarily lies not in the particular metaphors he offers, but rather in his insistence that we see the task of philosophy as the creation and reconstruction of metaphorical images of the world which better suit the needs and interests of human beings in their personal and collective lives. Seigfried's detailed and vivid analysis of the centrality of metaphor in James's philosophy allows us to see this concrete hermeneutics as the center of James's unique vision, the thread that runs through most of his work, from the theory of selective attention in *Principles of Psychology* to his pluralistic metaphysics of radical empiricism.

In his own time, James saw that the dominant philosophical metaphors of rationalism and materialism were working to demean, rather than enrich, the lives of men and women. Rejecting those metaphors on moral grounds, James offered what he called a "pluralistic description of the world" as a philosophical alternative, and his 1903-1904 lecture notes give his reasons for this preference. The passage is written as an outline but looks and reads more like a poem, a form which I think makes it a particularly appropriate way to conclude this discussion.

17

Graft-theory

It means *Anarchy* in the good sense. [Hegel.]

It means *individualism, personalism*.

that the prototype of reality is *here & now*

that there is genuine novelty;

that order is being *won*—incidentally reaped.

that the more universal is the more abstract

that the smaller & more intimate is the truer. The man more
than the home, the home more than the state, or the church.

Anti-slavery.

It means tolerance, and respect. Skepticism

It means democracy as against systems which crush the individual.

Good systems always can be described in individualistic terms.

It means hero-worship & leadership.

It means the vital and the growing as against the fossilized & fixed,
in science, art, religion, custom, government.

It means faith and help.¹⁵

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Notes

¹ Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 8.

² Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in Floyd Stovall, ed., *Walt Whitman* (New York: American Book Company, 1939), 63.

³ William James, *The Correspondence of William James*, Vol. 8, Ed. Ignas K. Skrupskeles and Elizabeth Berkeley (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 505. Henceforth cited as CWJ. The letter, written Mar. 2, 1899, reads: "Since I have shuffled off the mortal coil Psychology onto Münsterberg, I even begin to feel as if I might end by doing something which might some day be called my message to the world in the way of *philosophy*, and it makes me look forward to the rest of life with a certain amount of interest. Surely the world needs messages of some sort in this deluge of militarism that is sweeping over it."

⁴ William James, *Manuscript Lectures*, Ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 213. Henceforth cited as ML.

⁵ ML, 220.

⁶ Seigfried, 210.

⁷ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, Ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 961.

⁸ Seigfried, 210-211.

⁹ CWJ 9:526. Letter of August 6, 1901.

¹⁰ Hence James writes in his review of Sturt's *Personal Idealism*: "Radical empiricism thus leads to the assumption of a collectivism of personal lives . . . variously cognitive of each other, variously conative and impulsive, genuinely evolving and changing by effort and trial, and by their cumulative achievements making up the world . . . I know of no more urgent philosophic desideratum of the present day." [William James, *Essays Comments, and Reviews*, Ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 545.

¹¹ ML, 214.

¹² ML, 228.

¹³ ML, 228.

¹⁴ William James, *Essays in Religion and Morality*, Ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 115. My italics.

¹⁵ ML, 311.

Explosive Metaphors and Vagueness: Seigfried's Contribution to James Scholarship and its Significance Beyond the Field of Philosophy

David Perley

When I initially began my journey into James's world, there were two secondary sources in particular that both provided hints and helped solidify my understanding of his thought.¹ These are William Gavin's *William James and the Reinstatement of the Vague*, and Charlene Haddock Seigfried's *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*. Prior to my more detailed investigation of James's works I made connections between the analytic understanding of vagueness in language and the linguistic techniques of mystics that proactively engaged the issues that emerge when language attempts to express, define, or delineate the ineffable.² When I turned my attention toward the works of James alongside Seigfried and Gavin's interpretations of him, I was pleasantly surprised to see him grappling with vagueness, although not as a sterilized feature of language that many analytic philosophers believe should be extricated from language in the interests of philosophical clarity, but rather as an essential, necessary component of life. Seigfried's work emphasizes vagueness as a pivotal aspect of James's reconstruction of philosophy and as a result of this interpretive framework I was urged to connect vagueness with James's allusions to a mystical method in philosophy that he suggested was an advantageous approach that enables philosophy to surpass the capabilities of scientific vision.

Seigfried's work emphasizes the important role of metaphor in James's reconstruction of philosophy. Incorporating metaphor into philosophical method enables the philosopher to integrate the vague and inarticulate into an intellectual realm typically known to avoid such margins, but metaphor does much more than this.³ Seigfried suggests that it is through metaphor that James is able to turn our attention toward the novel and unfamiliar, and it is this precise skill that he places at the heart of philosophy. Seigfried's work not only suggests why metaphor is so important, but it also adeptly shows us how James uses it. I key in on Seigfried's reference to explosions and James's metaphor of language as detonation as a radical instance of how metaphor is used both from the inner perspective to widen the philosopher's perceptual access to the world of experience as well as from the outer, social perspective to capture our attention to pay heed to the marginalized and unacknowledged—though vital—aspects of life.⁴ I offer James's recourse to metaphors of the mystical as an additional, radical instance of the detonative effect of James's philosophical discourse. Philosophical discourse must incorporate the social experiences of individuals in order to retrieve it from the realm of excessive abstraction. Theory impacts on how we experience the world, but experience also impacts on how theorizing actually takes place in a social and historical context. Seigfried's work clearly demonstrates the fruits of studying James for contemporary philosophy, but what might be even more important is that these fruits apply beyond the disciplines expressed by the term "philosophy"; James's call for an injection of life into the intellectual world is needed in any academic context that runs the risk of excessively extricating the theoretical from the social world of experience. Seigfried's method of presenting James, because embedded in his wider context of life and thought, is a clear example of how a historical, contextualized inclusion of broader horizons helps philosophy get things right.

In *Some Problems of Philosophy* James explains that the flux of life and experience "can never be superseded, we must carry it with us to the bitter end of our cognitive business, keeping it in the midst of the translation even when the latter proves illuminating, and falling back on it alone when the translation gives out."⁵ Language must

be used in tandem with the particulars of the perceptual flux. James's talk of translation sets up a problematic dichotomy between a real world and our translations of it, because our "translations" are part and parcel of said world, rather than something distinct and cut off from it. While James uses language that perpetuates such a traditional dichotomy, one of the things that Seigfried's work suggests is that while still trapped in such problematic dichotomies, James was working to overcome such a tension. So perhaps we can make James's statement less problematic and say that this is the need to integrate vagueness into the business of philosophy.

Maintaining an eye on the flux of life while in the midst of philosophizing includes the cultivation of a self-critical awareness of our temperament, attitudes, moods, and preconceived ways of interpreting the world. Hence we acknowledge that passions and other vague components of experience are "built into" our rational understanding of the world. If both concepts and the flux of experience contribute to the constitution of the world we live in, then what we precisely become aware of with self-critical awareness are the ways in which we shape and understand the world.⁶

Similarly, James uses problematic language when he speaks of philosophy as providing outlines for understanding reality. There are outlines and outlines, outlines of buildings that are *fat*, conceived in the cube by their planner, and outlines of buildings invented flat on paper, with the aid of ruler and compass. These remain skinny and emaciated even when set up in stone and mortar, and the outline already suggests the result. An outline itself is meagre, truly, but it does not necessarily suggest a meagre thing. It is the essential meagreness of *what is suggested* by the usual rationalistic philosophies that moves empiricists to their gesture of rejection.⁷

Given the contemporary, Davidsonian discussion that problematizes language of outlines and schemes and a reality that they correspond to, one might think that this was not the best place to show that James is suggesting a reconstructed view of philosophy. Nevertheless, both here and in the discussion of translation there is something important in what James says that goes beyond the problem of his choice of words. What is important is not simply that all outlines are meagre, or that translations fail to adequately capture the fullness of life, but that it is all a matter of *what is suggested* by those meagre outlines that makes all the difference in the world. In both instances James has to rub up against terminology that is not reflective of the core idea that reality comes to us as constituted by what has already been suggested by our previous, meagre outlines.⁸

Any arbitrary starting point in the philosophical articulation of the world of experience already includes the selections that the philosopher has attended to and extricated from the flux of life. We come to the philosophical table with "caked prejudices," so talking about the need to integrate vagueness is not enough if such talk falls on deaf ears. Rather, James saw the task of philosophy to be the shaking up of traditional philosophical viewpoints. Philosophical ears must be "deafened to the importance of talk," talk meaning primarily abstract intellectualizations that move away from life and its complexities to safe and sanitized philosophical bubbles.⁹ The paradox here is that James had to talk in order to do this! Therefore, as Seigfried does so well to show, James must shock his listeners and readers out of their philosophical complacency, and he employs powerful metaphors that serve as detonations that radically inject novelty into traditional discussions, urging us to re-examine what is familiar by acknowledging what is strange.

James's reconstruction of philosophy involves incorporating creative and poetic aspects of language that provide philosophy with better tools for accessing the world of living experience, tools that are blunted by a scientific emphasis on pure observation and the false sense of absolute objectivity that comes with it. Metaphor is a primary mode of expression for philosophy, both because it is metaphorical language that can best articulate and describe the sometimes vague and muddled world of experience, but also because of the evocative, performative and pragmatic social effect metaphorical language can have on the listener or reader. Seigfried is adamant that even when James holds onto the possibility of a realist basis for his philosophy, something that he cannot consistently and ultimately hold, he is fully aware that our access to whatever may be considered to be the real is always constrained by purpose and intention. *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* suggests that James possesses an understanding of metaphor that acknowledges the process of selectively attending to some aspects of the world of experience while neglecting others. Acknowledging these limitations, metaphorical, creative language is nevertheless able to provide wider access to the world of experience because it invokes more than the merely apparent. James chose very specific metaphors that minimized the limitations of our access to the world of experience. Ultimately for James, the right words can steer the conversation in the right direction, reveal even while concealing, and even more importantly than this, our choice of words has a transformative effect on how we subsequently view the world, participate in the world, and affect the nature of what the "world" itself is.¹⁰ By

steering the conversation in the right direction Seigfried has allowed James's own ability to change the world through the way we talk about it to become one of the pivotal components of his philosophical project.

Motivating James's philosophy is a desire to access, capture and describe the "full facts." In his radical empiricism, any object or concrete fact is never isolated, but is always surrounded by a fringe of relations and always exists in its contextual relations with other facts, not to mention that selected interests already shape the "fact." These relations and fringes exist just as do the "facts" which they surround and interpenetrate. One way of getting at the full fact is by using dramatic metaphors. As a multifaceted explanation, metaphorical language discloses more of the "much-at-oneness of experience."¹¹ If some structures do better at presenting a wider range of phenomena than others, then it is these structures (metaphors really) that must be first adequately created so that the project gets off in the right direction, even if we are always starting *in medias res*.

Since James is aware of how important these structures are, even for simply observing the world, he is in fact more concerned with "the process by which such productions come about" rather than simply interested in the structures themselves.¹² Our articulations are not only important for sketching an authentic picture of the world, but they also affect *how* we subsequently access and appropriate the world. There is therefore a necessity for articulation in order for experience to have any sort of impact on the world; without articulating experiences, they are silenced and self-marginalized. However, I suppose part of the problem here is that while these experiences might be articulated, they might not be heard. Whether by gradual hints and suggestions, or through shock, the point of philosophical articulation is not only description but also the creation of the possibility that novel topics become the focus of attention for individuals that have up until now kept such topics at the margins of their attention. Philosophy in this context is literally the attempt to get someone's attention—to get people's heads out of the sand.

James utilized metaphorical language like planted detonations in the midst of timeworn and familiar fields, evoking responses and unlocking the overlooked through the ripple effect caused by these "explosive forces." The ability to inject novelty into the way we see the world is, as Seigfried says, one of the skills that James believed ought to be incorporated into philosophy. Philosophy should engender the "habit of always seeing an alternative, of not taking the usual for granted, of making conventionalities fluid again, of imagining foreign states of mind."¹³ Philosophy should strive to see "the familiar as if it were strange, and the strange as if it were familiar. It rouses us from our native 'dogmatic slumber' and breaks up our caked prejudices."¹⁴ Therefore James's own philosophical contribution is not something separate from his metaphorical style.¹⁵ Because philosophers are comfortable and at home in their caked prejudices, what is needed is "the explosive force of the unexpected use of language."¹⁶ In this context Seigfried quotes from the *Principles of Psychology*: But if an unusual foreign word be introduced, if the grammar trip, or if a term from an incongruous vocabulary suddenly appear, such as 'rat-trap' or 'plumber's bill' in a philosophical discourse, the sentence detonates, as it were, we receive a shock from the incongruity, and the drowsy assent is gone.¹⁷

When we use radical detonations within language, these create wider opportunities for acknowledgement. Drowsy assent is removed, meaning perhaps that through these detonations we are made aware of alternatives that tend to fall outside of our field of selected interests. These are radical instances meant to provoke and evoke responses.¹⁸ This is one of the clearest indications that for James, philosophy must have an effect; its role is not mere simplification, clarification, but rather transformation at the level of lived experience. When we use metaphors, it is not that we are changing the meaning of the words—their meaning has to remain consistent precisely in order for the metaphor to have the evocative effect the Jamesian philosopher is looking for.¹⁹ So it is not what the words mean that provides the detonative effect, but rather how those words are used.²⁰

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An additional way of understanding James's motivations highlights the importance of creating opportunities for experiencing novelty. Novelty is explicitly linked with the philosophical return to life, not only in the sense of urging a turn toward novelty in experiences, but also the novelty inherent in every fresh attempt at philosophical articulation. Intriguingly it is the ability to bring the "integrally new" to the philosophical table that is most

explicitly linked up with James's reconstructed view of the mystical, based on both the insights of his mystical friend Benjamin Paul Blood and, at the time, the emerging, unique voice of the philosophy of Henri Bergson.²¹ In *Some Problems of Philosophy* he speculates that there are mystical ways in which the philosopher may extend his or her vision to an "even a wider perceptual panorama than that usually open to the scientific mind."²² It is precisely Seigfried's set up of James's explosive use of metaphor, and his own execution of it that corroborates the claim that James meant his references to a mystical method for philosophy to be precisely just such a detonation, most of all because this statement occurs in *Some Problems of Philosophy*, James's self-proclaimed attempt to get serious about philosophy. James appropriates the term and reconstructs it for his own purposes, certainly grabbing the attention of more scientific or positivistic thinkers who might have paused to consider the thought of their rigorous methodologies in some way being surpassed by a perspective that was typically associated with pathological states of mind. In another instance late in James's life, in one of his last published articles "A Pluralistic Mystic,"²³ he writes:

"Ever not quite!"—this seems to wring the very last panting word out of rationalistic philosophy's mouth. It is fit to be pluralism's heraldic device. There is no complete generalization, no total point of view, no all-pervasive unity, but everywhere some residual resistance to verbalization, formulation, discursification, some genius of reality that escapes from the pressure of the logical finger, that says "hands off," and claims its privacy, and means to be left to its own life. In every moment of immediate experience is somewhat absolutely original and novel. "We are the first that ever burst into this silent sea." Philosophy must pass from words, that reproduce but ancient elements, to life itself, that gives the integrally new. The 'inexplicable,' the 'mystery,' as what the intellect, with its claim to reason out reality, thinks that it is duty bound to resolve, and the resolution of which Blood's revelation would eliminate from the sphere of our duties, remains; but it remains as something to be met and dealt with by faculties more akin to our activities and heroisms and willingnesses, than to our logical powers. Let *my* last word, then, speaking in the name of intellectual philosophy, be *his* word: "There is no conclusion. What has concluded, that we might conclude in regard to it? There are no fortunes to be told, and there is no advice to be given—Farewell!"²⁴

Captured here is a succinct description of the movement of articulation from knowing its limitations in attempts 15 to articulate the vague and inarticulate, to speaking of a possible intimacy between words and life, to a heroic though integrative attitude toward the possibility of articulation. For philosophy to face the "integrally new" it must "pass from words to life itself." This does seem to suggest some sense of mystical abatement within mystery, but I want to distinguish between the ecstasy of mysticism resulting from an experience of oneness with the universe and the idea of a philosophical mysticism that articulates in the midst of mystery.²⁵

Metaphor and not merely silence is precisely one way of attempting to pass from words to life: to pass in this 16 way means to cease production of ultimate philosophical conclusions ungrounded in the never-repeating disclosures available within lived experience. The integrally new as new is ineffable, vague, mysterious, and unknown because it is always yet-to-be-experienced. James's avoidance of absolute conclusions, his attempts to combine philosophical positions (because each on its own is necessarily skewed and limited) is precisely a philosophy constituted by a mystical openness in the way Benjamin Paul Blood speaks of it, and not a mysticism that achieves an experience of the absolute oneness of being. Mysticism here has more to do with the rejection of an all-encompassing system itself, rather than absorption of philosophical tensions in a moment of mystical ecstasy. The perpetuation of mystery is analogous to the ever-elusive vagueness of ontological footholds and the perceptual flux. Philosophy, mystery, mysticism, and vagueness are now inextricably interwoven. Seigfried believes this might be an unfortunate outcome of James's philosophy, because "this deliberate refusal to precisely predetermine the area of investigation to avoid premature closure too often prevents James from coming to any closure at all."²⁶ However, this conclusion is dependent on whether the "deliberate refusal" is philosophical, i.e., whether James's "ever not quite" provides any closure or whether it provides the motivation to proceed in spite of the lack of closure.²⁷

If the goal of philosophy is either to articulate the concrete world of experiences as authentically as possible or 17 to create metaphorical tools that help broaden our access to said world of experience, in either case the historical, concrete situation is always front and centre. Thus philosophy itself must be grounded in the wider historical context of the themes, ideas, texts, philosophers, and events of interest to any given thinker. Attention to historical detail feeds into James's desire to provide as thorough, wide, and accurate an observation as possible. The emphasis on the historical component of philosophy is partly what I believe separates off and demonstrates the sophistication of some American philosophy today. Philosophy as articulated by philosophers like Seigfried has a fully integrated historical, concrete component, and it is in this sense that such a thinker as Seigfried stands out from the crowd of theorizers. Jennifer G. Jesse's review of Seigfried's *Pragmatism and Feminism* suggests that, while a work of major significance, it nevertheless offers too much information, information that essentially "buries"

Seigfried's argument and spends too much time "providing too many qualifications."²⁸ These are intriguing comments not only because they deflate Seigfried's attempt to exhaustively account for patriarchal, misogynistic, and sexist presuppositions in Classical American Philosophy in order to create a space for dialogue between pragmatism and feminism, but also because they miss the point of Seigfried's philosophical style *in general*.²⁹ It is interesting, namely, that a scholar who emphasizes the need for concrete, historical analysis to be a part of philosophy, what Seigfried calls in the context of James a "natural history methodology," should be chastised for doing the precise thing that she says is radically required to retrieve philosophy from the irrelevancies of excessive abstraction. If this is the case, Seigfried should not be accused of ever burying her argument with too many qualifications, or be criticized for being too thorough, as qualifications do nothing less than provide the necessary social context that in turn brings along with it the appropriate context of accurate meanings and interpretations. As James thought, a wide view trumps a narrow one.

James serves as a constant reminder of intellectualism and the dangers of overlooking how theory necessarily has clear effects on the world in which we live, and vice versa. This is nowhere clearer than from my own perspective as a scholar in the study of religion—where the linguistic turn, the decline of the popularity of the phenomenology of religion, and zealous attempts to make the discipline scientifically respectable have resulted in discussions that excessively abstract a topic that requires clear ties to the social world in which people experience religion. Chronic abstract discussions would benefit more from an emphasis on collecting the best possible set of facts or data, forcing a return to focussing on the world of theory *plus* experience rather than the black hole that some theoretical discussions have become.³⁰ 18

In the study of religion, James is caricatured as the champion of a transcendent, unseen divine power.³¹ However much people reproduce his sympathetic discussions of unseen realities, ultimately James was concerned with what finite human beings could intimately relate to.³² Mystery for James is what is overlooked, right in front of us, or directly under foot. Thus we have, in his early review of Blood's "The Anaesthetic Revelation" of 1874, James suggesting that the "secret of Being, in short, is not in the dark immensity beyond knowledge, but at home, this side, beneath the feet, and overlooked by knowledge."³³ Because we are comfortable with what is familiar, it is not easy to recognize or acknowledge that which falls outside of our repertoire of selected interests. 19

James's modesty when denying his ability to have mystical experiences is likewise echoed in his modest refusal to claim poetic or linguistic expertise. In a letter to Miss Lazarus (a poet) in August 1882, James talks of the "power of *playing* with thought and language" as the "divinest of gifts." Here is James with incredibly evocative prose in the midst of self-deprecation: 20

I am myself a prosaic wretch, and find myself reading little poetry, especially little that is not lyric, but I must say that when I *do* enjoy it I enjoy it very much. To you gifted ones who can float and soar and circle through the sky of expression so freely, our slow hobbling on terra firma must sometimes be a matter of impatience. I think the power of *playing* with thought and language that such as you possess is the divinest of gifts. You should not be too much professional artists at it, I mean too exclusively bound to it,—it ought to be the overflowing of a life rich in other ways.³⁴

Charlene Haddock Seigfried invites her readers into the world of James's philosophy that overflows with a "life rich in other ways," but the invitation is not merely as passive spectators; the invitation involves the participation in and continuation of work on Classical American Philosophy, especially insofar as it has a bearing on contemporary concerns. Like James's unfinished philosophical arch, what I truly admire is how Seigfried's work is intentionally left open for others to join in. This suggests that the composition of a book such as *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* is a communal event.³⁵ This is theoretically justified in all academic endeavours because "knowledge is developed interactively among communities of inquirers and given conditions."³⁶ 21

If philosophy itself is defined as the "habit of always seeing an alternative," then philosophical vision is itself the starting point for the acknowledgement and recognition of marginalized views. In James's view, the philosophical mind must breathe diversity, and reflect how all minds are always attending to certain particulars while simultaneously omitting others. "For James this perspectival character of our perceptions enhances rather than distorts our understanding of reality and therefore it should be encouraged in philosophical reflection, not rejected as a merely subjective distortion of presumptively unbiased analysis."³⁷ This enhancement only occurs if we pay attention to the alternatives, and hence the "challenge for philosophy today is to open itself up to the dissenting voices that are not being heard."³⁸ If philosophy for James is about being heard and getting people's attention, then I think Seigfried has successfully caught our attention and likewise shown the validity of her own claim that the study of philosophy should go outside of typically prescribed bounds. From my perspective as a scholar of 22

religion, her insightful interpretation of James not only caught my attention, but what is suggested by her work has created a far-reaching ripple effect into my broader concerns with the study of religious diversity and tolerance. Nevertheless there is a sense in which Seigfried's work still needs to be heard and acknowledged within the discipline of philosophy, where her insights are perhaps most required, but the extension of such work beyond philosophy should be commended, demonstrating that she herself practices what she preaches.

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Notes

¹ In a recent email exchange with Charlene Seigfried, where she was replying to questions about her own intellectual biography in relation to James's philosophy, she explained that she was attracted to "writers who give only hints, instead of completely worked out systems," and it is in this sense that her own work provided the initial hints that motivated my developing work on James's philosophy.

² Such a preparatory background was appropriate as a preliminary to studying James because I gravitated toward an understanding of ineffability as it relates to vague and elusive features of individuals and entities within existence in general, rather than ineffability related to mystical experiences or the divine. See, e.g., David Perley, "Vagueness: An Additional Nuance in the Interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's Mystical Language," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 22/4 (2005): 57-83.

³ This of course refers to the well-known expression that is part of Gavin's title, the "reinstatement of the vague," that occurs in *The Principles of Psychology*. James extends the phrase in *Psychology: A Briefer Course* to a "reinstatement of the vague and inarticulate," suggesting at the very least that these themes are inextricably connected.

⁴ Seigfried has already pursued this in the context of the recovery of feminist connections with Classical American Philosophy in *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

⁵ William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 45.

⁶ As Seigfried quotes Dewey in her "Has Passion a Place in Philosophy?": "[P]hilosophy is not mere passion but a passion that would exhibit itself as a reasonable persuasion." See "Has Passion a Place in Philosophy?" in Hugh McCann and Robert Audi, Eds., APA Centennial volume, 2003, *Journal of Philosophical Research* (2003), 51. The Dewey quote occurs in "Philosophy and Democracy" in *The Middle Works*, Vol. 11. (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 46.

⁷ William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975 [1907]), 25.

⁸ James is appropriating traditional ways of talking about the tension between theory and experience, while simultaneously proposing that theory impacts on what is selected out of the world of experience and experience feeds into our choices of theoretical formations.

⁹ William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1977 [1909], 290.

¹⁰ This is definitely related to Seigfried's discussion in *Pragmatism and Feminism* of Gavin's idea of a re-discovery of material and a re-discovering. Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 42.

¹¹ Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 210.

¹² Ibid., 164.

¹³ William James, *Essays in Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 4.

¹⁴ James, *Some Problems*, 11.

¹⁵ Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction*, 214.

¹⁶ Ibid., 214.

¹⁷ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981 [1890]), 253.

¹⁸ I cannot help but be reminded here of the radical language expressed in the oracular fervour of an itinerant preacher like John Wesley, whose very words could at times trigger an immediate conversion experience. For example, in the sermon “The Almost Christian,” Wesley intends to shock his audience by progressively building what is presumed to be the emblematic image of the prototypical Christian, but then reveals that this is merely an “almost Christian,” because God has yet to authentically penetrate to the core of their being.

¹⁹ While this is part of Donald Davidson’s view of the meaning of metaphor, I first encountered it in a different context in a discussion of mystical language. Michael Sells explains that “it is only upon a foundation of conventional logic and semantics that the apophatic text, at the critical moment, can perform (rather than assert) a referential openness—by fusing the various antecedents of the pronoun, or the perfect and imperfect tenses, or by transforming the spatial and temporal structures of language at the level of article, pronoun, and preposition.” Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 8.

²⁰ Furthermore, how one reacts to the words is unpredictable, because each reader/listener brings their own context of selections and omissions to the table, so whatever novelty is experienced only arises within the context of already made selections.

²¹ James, *Essays in Philosophy*, 190.

²² James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 54.

²³ As his letter to Blood alludes to at the time of the article’s publication (1910), James is aware his time is almost up.

About the time you will receive this, you will also be surprised by receiving the *Hibbert Journal* for July, with an article signed by me written mainly by yourself. Tired of waiting for your final synthetic *pronunciamento*, and fearing that I might be cut off ere it came, I took time by the forelock, and at the risk of making ducks and drakes of your thought, I resolved to save at any rate some of your rhetoric, and the result is what you see. Forgive! forgive! forgive!

Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Vol. II, (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1935), 660. James dies shortly after publishing “A Pluralistic Mystic,” a clear attempt to suggest philosophy must broaden its horizons to incorporate marginalized characters such as the amateur thinker Blood.

²⁴ James, *Essays in Philosophy*, 190.

²⁵ This nuance of James’s understanding of mysticism differs from Seigfried’s association of mysticism with the lack of any need for ultimate justification that connects mysticism with the “highest rationality.” Seigfried, *William James’s Radical Reconstruction*, 31.

²⁶ Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction*, 150.

²⁷ Our ability to accept the mystical component of James's philosophy is not nearly as difficult as some philosophers might think once it is understood that we are talking about a philosophical mysticism that has humanized divinity (or divinized humanity) along the lines of Dewey's discussions of religion in *A Common Faith*. This is a mysticism that does not evoke transcendent ultimate realities but rather vague, elusive immanent ones, realities fused with our interests, temperaments, desires, and all our other human frailties. I believe in this context the mystical has less to do with the phenomenon of mysticism described at the extreme end of his spectrum of mystical states than it does with those lesser mystical affinities that James's describes in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, insofar as extreme mysticism takes as object a transcendent, absolute reality.

²⁸ Jennifer G. Jesse, review of *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*, in *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*. 18:1 (Ja 1997), 96-97.

²⁹ "Only when James's own interpretive horizon of patriarchal values is recognized and rejected are we free to appropriate the subversive feminine that is also part of his text." Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996, 141.

³⁰ Nancy Frankenberry's discussions of the importance of a pragmatic understanding of language for the study of religion (that emphasizes context) lose a grasp of the historical context of early pragmatic ideas, leaving the cutting-edge discussion lacking precisely the sort of breadth that Seigfried discusses in the context of James's philosophy. See Nancy Frankenberry, Ed., *Radical Interpretation in Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Frankenberry and Hans H. Penner, Eds., *Language, Truth, and Religious Belief* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999). Theoretical discussions need more concrete, historical "teeth," whether they are in philosophical circles or other disciplines. See also the excellent discussion in William E. Arnal, "Black Holes, Theory and the Study of Religion." *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*. 30:2 (2001): 209-214.

³¹ I am thinking here explicitly of Ellen Kappy Suckiel, *Heaven's Champion: William James's Philosophy of Religion* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); William G. Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997); Wayne Proudfoot, *William James and a Science of Religions: Reexperiencing the Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

³² The work of Barnard and Proudfoot explicitly refers to the 'unseen' many times more than James himself does in *Varieties* (in which he uses the expression 'unseen world' or 'unseen reality' approximately fifteen times throughout the entire book), perhaps demonstrating how distortions and omissions arise based on a particular skewed perspective.

³³ William James, *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 288.

³⁴ William James, *The Correspondence of William James*, Vol. 5, Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth Berkeley, eds., (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 233.

³⁵ She invites her readers to follow up on the samples of metaphors she brings in for the chapter in *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* on metaphor. In the context of *Pragmatism and Feminism* she sees it as more of an "invitation than a systematic treatise." Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism*, 4.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

³⁷ Ibid., 114.

³⁸ Charlene Seigfried, "Has Passion a Place in Philosophy?" in Hugh McCann and Robert Audi, Eds., APA Centennial volume, 2003, *Journal of Philosophical Research* (2003), 51.

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Aesthetic and Practical Interests and their Bodily Ground

Richard Shusterman

In Charlene Haddock Seigfried's fine book on *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*, she convincingly claims that the guiding key to James's interpretive practice in analyzing a philosophical position was to try to grasp the center of the philosopher's vision.¹ She further notes that James tends to understand such a center of vision as closely related to a distinctive attitude or feeling the philosopher had toward the world. As Seigfried astutely points out, James thought the defining characters or attitudes of individuals could be summed up by the particular mental or moral disposition in which they felt themselves most intensely alive and active. For James, by his own confession, "this characteristic attitude in me always involves an element of active tension, of holding my own, as it were, and trusting outward things to perform their part so as to make it a full harmony, but without any *guaranty* that they will ... and which, although it is a mere mood or emotion to which I can give no form in words, authenticates itself to me as the deepest principle of all active and theoretic determination which I possess."²

In Seigfried's richly informed reconstruction of James's philosophy, the "organizing center is taken to be the establishment of a secure foundation in experience which would overcome both the nihilistic paralysis of action and the skeptical dissolution of certain knowledge brought on by the challenge of scientific positivism" (S 2). In my brief remarks I want to follow her clue about James's characteristic attitude as an active tension seeking harmony. Given the strenuous ideal and vigor of James's temperament, I construe such harmony as a dynamic balance of concord rather than a frictionless quiescent unity. At the center of James's philosophical vision I see an active, dynamic tension in his combined emphasis on practical and aesthetic interests, interests that he both contrasts and links. Seigfried presents, in a chapter entitled "Practical and Aesthetic Interests," an excellently detailed analysis of James's diverse remarks about these varieties of interests, and I shall comment on her analysis and James's views on these matters before turning to consider what I regard as the central ground of both practical and aesthetic kinds of interest—and indeed of all interests for James—the sentient body.

Despite the centrality of the body for James's thought in general, he does not always fully recognize the amplitude of its role in aesthetic experience, though his basic philosophical views certainly seem to point in that direction. Similarly, this paper will note that James poses limits to the value of attending to the body in our practical life of action. The sentient body as organizing center could provide the experiential foundation to overcome nihilistic paralysis of action and excessive skepticism that Seigfried identifies as the organizing center of James's vision, but it is only a relatively stable foundation and cannot be entirely secure, given the fragility and vicissitudes of our somatic existence. Nonetheless, it seems to be the most serviceable and indispensable foundation we have, the home and primordial instrument of our action, feeling, and thought.

II

For properly understanding the relationship of practical and aesthetic values in William James's thought, we must recall how he experiences the tension between these values not as a mere abstract philosophical matter but most vividly, vitally, and painfully as probably the most central crisis of his early manhood, the dilemma of choosing a profession, a career for his life that would be aesthetically and emotionally rewarding but also constitute a practical livelihood. James's first ambition was to be an artist but though his father initially humored him in this enterprise

and secured him some instruction in painting, he soon made it clear that young William would have to choose a more practical field that would guarantee not only intellectual stimulation and respect but a reliable income. Science emerged as the field he had to pursue to please his father, a conflicted decision that apparently helped plunge him into his long struggle with neurasthenia and depression. James psychosomatic disabilities were what made him turn from experimental science to medical school and what made him take so long to finish his medical degree. If parental pressure (and filial love) urged the primacy of practical and swayed James's career decisively away from aesthetics and the arts, then we should expect that James's approach to the relationship of aesthetic and practical interests was invested with great personal meaning and feeling.

In her careful analysis of James's philosophical writings, Seigfried shows how these interests lie at the core of his thought. She cites his Hemholtzian account of attention in *Principles of Psychology*, according to which we identify as things precisely those complexes of sensible properties "which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us"; she also notes his insistence that aesthetic and practical factors are "irreducible ultimate factors in determining the way our knowledge grows" (S 118). But Seigfried further argues that besides their relationship as basic, independent but coordinate categories, the practical is sometimes affirmed as more basic and essential and as determining or generating the aesthetic. As she puts it, "the practical and the aesthetic function together as organizing principles for the human appropriation of experience, sometimes the one and sometimes the other predominating, and they are not ultimately independent sources of action. The aesthetic is understood both as having its origins in the practical and as raising issues which can only be solved, if at all, insofar as they are amenable to a practical test" (S 137). Even if James urges in later works (such as *A Pluralistic Universe* and *Essays in Radical Empiricism*) that our basic philosophical orientation is determined ultimately by very basic aesthetic preferences, these aesthetic interests and inclinations can be explained as growing out of our basic practical encounters of living in the world.

Seigfried follows James in essentially linking the aesthetic with rational or intellectual interests. The practical, she writes, "includes the emotional, the moral and other active needs, while the aesthetic includes, but is not limited to, intellectual drives such as those of profusion and simplicity and their reconciliation or harmony." And she carefully notes that for James, the "aesthetic principles" of rationality include not only those of "richness and of ease" but also the apparently somewhat overlapping needs of "unity", clearness" and harmony (S 118,120,131-2). In linking the aesthetic so closely to the rational and intellectual, he seems to downplay or minimize its deeply affective character as vivid, pleasing sensory experience that has particular appeal to our non-intellectual feeling. Indeed we often characterize the aesthetic more by its strong affect, emotionality and sensuality than by its rationality. As Habermas documents its role in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, the aesthetic has been repeatedly portrayed (and sometimes celebrated) as a contrasting "other of reason," not only because of its impassioned experience of delight but because of its bodily character and essential connection to our sensory experience that is grounded in our bodily senses.³

James discussion of aesthetic emotions in his *Principles of Psychology* strikingly accords with his rationalist aesthetic orientation.⁴ While James famously defines emotions in an essentially embodied way, he makes an exception for aesthetic emotions which he places in a special group of "subtle" emotions (those of "pure" aesthetic, moral, and intellectual pleasure and displeasure) that are described as "almost feelingless," wholly "cerebral" and "cognitive" and thus not at all dependent on feelings of "the bodily sounding board," though he admits that in much experience of the arts (especially for people with less refined taste) our aesthetic emotions are impure and contain a significant measure of bodily feeling (PP 1082,1085). One wonders whether James's preoccupation with the aesthetic principles of rationality, coupled with his deep respect for aesthetic refinement and art's spiritual potential, led him to disembodify and rationalize aesthetic emotion in his *Principles*, despite his intense appreciation of the body in that book and elsewhere.

The body is obviously of the essence of practical life, since we can perform no action without it. James asserts its primordial grounding of our experience quite explicitly: "The body", he writes, "is the storm-center, the origin of coordinates, the constant place of stress in [our] experience-train. Everything circles round it, and is felt from its point of view." "The world experienced," he elaborates, "comes at all times with our body as its center, center of vision, center of action, center of interest."⁵ For purposes of survival, if not also for other reasons, "all minds must take an intense interest in the bodies to which they are attached. My own body and what ministers to its needs are thus the primitive object, instinctively determined, of my egoistic interests. Other objects may become interesting derivatively through association" with it (PP 308).

One of the many remarkable features of James's *Principles* is its extraordinary precision of somatic introspection and description. In making his case for the essentially embodied nature of emotion and of thought itself, James not only deploys somatic introspection but argues that philosophers have been blind to the body's presence in thought and feeling because they have been insufficiently skilled or attentive in somatic introspection. They fail to

discriminate the bodily feelings involved in thinking and hence conclude that it is must be a thoroughly spiritual process. James, moreover, suggests some very helpful methodological insights for somatic introspection that anticipate some of the techniques currently used by contemporary somatic therapists engaged in heightening body-mind awareness and harmony for the promotion of better experience and improved use of the self.⁶ In this perspective, James stands as an exemplary prophet for the budding discipline of somaesthetics.⁷

III

However, together with James's masterful theoretical deployment of somatic introspection we find his dire warnings that such attention is harmful to our practical interests. Such introspection not only conflicts with his advocacy of leaving as much as possible of our practical daily life "to the effortless custody of automatism" or habit (PP 126); it also runs awry of what he calls the "law of parsimony in consciousness" (PP1107). Focused attention to bodily feelings "would be a superfluous complication" (PP 1108) that distracts us from the true ends of our practical enterprises rather than aiding their realization. Of course, when at an early stage of learning, the singer may need to think "of his throat or breathing, the balancer of his feet on the rope," but these forms of "supernumerary consciousness" are eventually best avoided in order to achieve true proficiency by concentrating on the ends—the right note or the pole one is balancing on one's forehead (PP 1108). As James later puts it, "the end alone is enough"; "we fail of accuracy and certainty in our attainment of the end whenever we are preoccupied with much ideal consciousness of the [bodily] means" and the internal (or "resident") feelings they involve: "We walk a beam the better the less we think of the position of our feet upon it. We pitch or catch, we shoot or chop the better the less tactile and muscular (the less resident), and the more exclusively optical (the more remote), our consciousness is. Keep your *eye* on the place aimed at, and your hand will fetch it; think of your hand, and you will very likely miss your aim" (PP 1128).⁸

James is certainly right that in most practical situations, when our already acquired habits are fully adequate to perform the actions and secure the ends we desire, it is not helpful to focus attention on the bodily means and feelings involved in such actions. But, as I have frequently argued², there are also many practical situations when our habits prove insufficient, either because the situations require unfamiliar forms of action or because our habits are defective, so that the desired action is either not performed successfully or is performed in a way involving excessive effort, pain, or other negative consequences. In such cases, a careful attention to our bodily means (and attendant feelings) of action can be very helpful, not only in improving the performance of the particular action on a single occasion but also in constructing improved habits for performing that action (and also other actions) in the future. Through such focused awareness, we can learn to feel when we are contracting our muscles more than is necessary and in places that conflict with the efficient execution of the movement desired; and such knowledge can instruct us to make the movement more successfully and with greater ease and grace. This improved way of performing the movement and its attendant proprioceptive feelings can then be reinforced into a new and better habit of action.

The enhanced awareness of one's movement and of its increased smoothness and experienced efficacy also provides aesthetic satisfactions. Such aesthesis of the sentient body, which unites aesthetic and practical interests in active life and not just in theory, would seem an exemplary case of harmonizing these sorts of interest (so often thought to be essentially inimical) and of providing an experiential basis that promotes the central aims Seigfried identifies of overcoming "both the nihilistic paralysis of action and the skeptical dissolution of certain knowledge brought on by the challenge of scientific positivism."

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Notes

¹ Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); hereafter abbreviated S.

² Letter to Alice James, in William James, *The Letters of William James*, ed. Henry James, vol. 1 (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920), 199-200.

³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1987).

⁴ William James, *Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), hereafter PP.

⁵ See William James, “The Experience of Activity,” in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 86.

⁶ I explore these matters in detail in Richard Shusterman, “William James, Somatic Introspection, and Care of the Self,” *Philosophical Forum*, 36:4 (2005), 419-440.

⁷ For a detailed account of somaesthetics, see Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), chapters 7 and 8; and *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, 2nd edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000). For critical discussion of somaesthetics, see, for example, the symposium on *Performing Live* in *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36 (2002) with articles by Kathleen Higgins and Casey Haskins followed by my response; see also Martin Jay, “Somaesthetics and Democracy: Dewey and Contemporary Art,” and Gustavo Guerra, “Practicing Pragmatism: Richard Shusterman’s Unbound Philosophy,” in the same issue of *Journal of Aesthetic Education*; and the symposium on *Pragmatist Aesthetics* in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 16:1 (2002) with articles by Paul Taylor, Thomas Leddy, and Antonia Soulez. For critical refinements and applications of somaesthetics to issues of bioethics and the new technologies, see Jerrold Abrams, “Pragmatism, Artificial Intelligence, and Posthuman Bioethics: Shusterman, Rorty, Foucault,” *Human Studies*, 27 (2004), 241-258.

⁸ For discussion of further reasons for James’s critique of somatic introspection in practical life, see “William James, Somatic Introspection, and Care of the Self.”

² See, for example, Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1997), ch. 6; *Performing Live*, ch. 8; “The Silent Limping Body of Philosophy,” in T. Carman and M.B. Hansen (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151-180; and “William James, Somatic Introspection, and Care of the Self.”

Is James Still Too Radical for Pragmatic Recognition?

William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy—Fifteen Years Later

Charlene Haddock Seigfried

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In reading John Dewey as well as William James these days, I'm struck by how often they refer to interpretation, both in regard to what they themselves are doing and as a method of philosophical procedure. There has been no abatement of explanations and refinements of James's pragmatic method and theory of truth over the years, but these are old topics, driven more by traditional preoccupations with truth claims and old metaphysical disputes than by the pragmatists' new visions. According to the pragmatists, Charles Darwin had created an ever-widening chasm separating the old dreams of a static coalescence of mind and being from the new insights into the ever-evolving ways we engage the world. The rather disconcerting fact that James more often proceeds by a hermeneutic method, including the extravagant use of metaphor, than by applying a pragmatic method, or even while applying the pragmatic method, is still not widely recognized, let alone developed further.

The more I work with William James and other pragmatists, the more convinced I am that the pragmatic method, powerful though it is, has had the unfortunate effect of overshadowing other methods also employed. As is often the case, John Dewey has said it most explicitly when he said that knowledge is not everything; it is only one small part of experience, and is, in any case, itself an experience. When we forget that the pragmatic method of determining facts is itself an experiential operation transforming self and nature/culture, it becomes just another abstract formula and loses its status as an innovative alternative to reductive epistemologies. Experience, for James, sparkles and entices through metaphor, which multiplies insights, and dries up and dies in formal languages, with their drive toward ever more precise singularity of meaning. After the success of *Principles* James wrote to his brother, Henry, that he now felt good enough about himself to begin—among other things—“never seeking a second metaphor, or a third, when the first or second were good enough.”¹ He thus attributed his habitual flow of metaphors to an expression of anxiety over finding just the right expression, rather than as an exuberance of creative insight for its own sake.

In James the pragmatic method itself was never formulated and analyzed in the precise, step-by-step terms developed over the years by Dewey. It is still advanced through metaphor: the pragmatic method leading to truth performs a marriage function, it is a leading that is worthwhile. It marks a few blazes and clears a path through the wilderness, but such “blazes merely circle towards the true direction” and will never get there.² This is because there is no ‘there’ there, no being-in-itself to which our beliefs must conform on pain of falsity, but only myriad ways of leading to goals which we ourselves have determined. When there are only ends-in-view, there are no ends as such. Selective interest operates all the way down. As James says: “The world we practically live in is one in which it is impossible (except by theoretic retrospection) to disentangle the contributions of intellect from those of sense.” Such contributions are ‘retrospective,’ not ‘introspective’ because they are actually new formulations, developed for a specific purpose, and not insights into the original perceptual facts. James immediately follows his proposition with its metaphorical equivalent, one in which it becomes evident that perspectives cannot be stripped off some original given, to lay its reality bare. He continues: “They are wrapt and rolled together as a gunshot in the mountains is wrapt and rolled in fold on fold of echo and reverberative clamor.”³ In such reverberations gunshot and echo cannot be prised apart. The belief that we could get back to or behind the reverberations to the

original, unreverberating shot is an illusion that motivates realism and correspondence theories of truth. James instead calls attention to a dynamic interplay that undermines the priority of either subject or world, a position best characterized as a hermeneutic circle, when he points out that “the more we see, the more we think; while the more we think, the more we see in our immediate experiences.”⁴ Only when discussions of the pragmatic hermeneutic circle replace discussions of the pragmatic method as an epistemological enterprise, will I feel that this one of my central theses has had some effect.⁵

We do not select a portion of the world to interact with because it is there but because we are interested in doing one thing rather than another. If the world answers to our desires, well and good, if not, we try something else. As James says, something is there, to be sure, but what and how it is, is up to us. The least unit is the ‘full fact,’ saturated with awareness of past, present, and future, of bodily awareness, and fringed by “who knows how much more?”⁶ To talk about what is really there apart from “my present field of consciousness [which] is a centre surrounded by a fringe that shades insensibly into a subconscious more” violates this radically empiricist fact of an irreducible perspectivism of fringe and focus and thus spins off into speculation.⁷

Megan Rust Mustain

Megan Rust Mustain’s insight that James does not just use metaphors but offers metaphorical discourse as an alternative to classic ways of philosophizing precisely grasps my contention that James thinks and argues through metaphors. When I was working on *William James’s Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*, I wrote the chapters on metaphor and James’s hermeneutical methodology last, even though they appear in the middle of the book, because the interpretive space this approach opened up would have taken over the whole project had I started with it. There was so much to say about it, so much that cried out for more detailed explanation, and so little that had been done, that I did not dare begin my project by exploring it. I hoped that this most intriguing and idiosyncratic aspect of his writings, which had been too long neglected, would spur a mini-industry on what has long been recognized as prototypically James, but which, paradoxically, has been under-developed by scholars. Instead, this fertile field has largely lain fallow.

This is why Megan’s paper—and David Perley’s, too, for that matter—are so welcome. Megan treats metaphor with the importance it deserves. As she says, what James early on called “the datum” to indicate what distinguishes radical empiricism from traditional empiricism is soon replaced by the word ‘field’ because “it is conveniently ambiguous,” and this is one more indication of James’s rejection of a correspondence theory of reality for one that recognizes that our understanding of reality is determined by what we find suitable to the task at hand. The evocativeness of metaphor is better suited to the myriad ways that experience can be taken than is a language of logical equivalence. John Dewey’s essay on the occasion of James’s death also praised him for “a clearness and a picturesqueness that will long be the despair of other philosophers,” but did not seem to recognize that his picturesque use of metaphor was more than a rhetorical device.⁸ Although by coupling picturesqueness and clearness, Dewey goes a long way toward such recognition.

Megan takes up the challenge to develop James’s pragmatic hermeneutics, indicating, for example, that the individualism of James’s emphasis on selective interests can be expanded to include shared experiences and interests. She also points out that the aestheticism of rationalism is incomplete and misleading because it does not take account of our practical interests. Her twofold test is intriguing and convincingly applied to James’s own notes. In doing so, she touches on James’s criterion of ‘concreteness,’ a pervasive reference to experience in James and one worth exploring further for the light it throws on his hermeneutics and preference for metaphor.

James’s hermeneutic approach emerges out of and puts into tension his phenomenological approach and this tension needs to be kept in mind if the wider ramifications of his thought are to be recognized.⁹ He intended to establish psychology as a strict science, based on observable phenomena, with no contamination from metaphysical or subjectively perspectival assumptions, but found that the selective interests disclosed in his approach as suffusing human consciousness also influenced his own descriptions. James’s empiricist approach is already radically empiricist in *The Principles of Psychology* and constitutes an original concrete or phenomenological philosophical analysis because it ties description to selective interests and because the findings so engendered become the basis for his interpretive or hermeneutical insights. Even while affirming the continued importance of a natural science of psychology and of the role of concrete facts as the bulwark of experiential claims, James astonishingly gives up his claim to having established such a science barely four years after publishing his *Principles*.¹⁰ And in a new Preface written a decade after *Principles*, he again reaffirms the importance of harmonizing the various schools of thought “on the common basis of fact,” but complains of the difficulty of treating psychology “without introducing some positive philosophic doctrine.” What James does not recognize,

but which we can in hindsight, is that he has already abolished the unproductive distinction between fact and interpretation in an original hermeneutical phenomenology, one which is best described in his own words: "The whole concrete course of an individual's thinking life is explicable by the cooperation of his interests and impulses, his sensational experiences, his associations, & his voluntary acts of choice."¹¹

By connecting James's use of a metaphorical method with the importance of recognizing that reality is determined interactively and that beliefs need to be tested and retested experimentally in light of both new evidence and previously unexamined and even newly created human interests, Megan demonstrates the importance of his concrete hermeneutics of metaphor. In fact, its centrality to James's thought is so important that its neglect goes a long way to explaining why the original and challenging way he evades both realism and idealism is still so little recognized, why his pragmatic theory of truth is still being forced into traditional models, and why the playfulness of his new beginning in radical empiricism is sobered down into a dull empiricism or metaphysics of process. Megan is right that James's hermeneutics of metaphor is more radical in its implications than any particular metaphor he actually uses, but I would also like to emphasize that if he is developing his arguments through the intriguing medium of metaphor, then precisely how he does so is also worth further attention and development. 9

Richard Shusterman

In an earlier abstract I received from Richard Shusterman, he begins with James's central vision of a personal attitude of active tension between his own stalwartness and the responsiveness of outward events in answering to his determination, all the while anticipating a harmonious, if somewhat precarious, outcome. I have been curious how Richard would relate these to his next topic, James's emphasis on practical and aesthetic interests. In *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*, I argued for the importance James's attaches to these two classes of interests. They virtually demonstrate the worth of any claim about the way the world is and validate pragmatic beliefs. Without them, we cannot explain what is worthwhile about a belief that is worthwhile, and therefore have no heuristic to replace the correspondence model of truth. As the only pragmatic *a priori* James recognizes, I hoped that my recognition of the singular warrant he attributes to aesthetic and practical interests would arouse either strong opposition or support, but it seems it did neither. Given the importance James attributes to them, I still find this neglect puzzling. It seems to be part of a blindness to James's intent to revolutionize philosophy and break old molds. In place of solid foundations, James leaves us with only a discernment of better and worse activations of interests and a concerned responsiveness to their consequences, but this is surely enough.¹² 10

Richard's connection of the center of James's vision with these determining interests and his interest in developing the way they play off one another, is therefore a welcome approach and one which I hope he will continue developing. He examines the relation of these and other interests to the sentient body, another emphasis of James which James himself highlighted, but which nonetheless remained underdeveloped in his writings and which would therefore benefit from continued attention. As Richard mines this rich field of bodiliness, I would only like to point out what I see as a slight difference in meanings and approach in James's writings. Richard says that James does not adequately recognize the relationship of the body to the aesthetic. He also makes the body foundational for all our actions, feelings and thoughts. Having not yet seen the developed paper, I am going to raise some concerns about these remarks, ones which he may have already answered, but in the interest of clarity, I will nonetheless raise. 11

Since the practical/moral and the aesthetic/intellectual interests are the final court of appeal for James in any judgments, it is difficult to see how the body could be the really final foundation. A live body, undivided into and irreducible to body and soul or matter and form, expresses itself through interests which can be classified into one of these two broad types, according to James. These cannot be further reduced to something outside them, certainly not to the body, since they are already the body as interested. When Richard says that James did not adequately understand the aesthetic dimensions of the body, he seems to be using a different meaning of 'aesthetic' from the one in play.¹³ The aesthetic, as co-ordinate with the practical, means that aspect of rationality that valorizes clarity and simplicity. It brings about and finds harmony in formal order, which is achieved by applying Occam's razor or the choice of the simplest among many equally workable explanations. Practical rationality, by contrast, brings aesthetic rationality down to earth by putting its choices to the test of specific courses of action in the interest of concretely better ways of life. Although aesthetic rationality would forever spin in the void unless it suggests approaches that are sufficiently developed and practically lived to provide evidence for their worth, the selective advantage of practical rationality also consists in the fact that it multiplies, rather than 12

restricts, possibilities because it is alive to the myriad seductions of kaleidoscopic experiences and the benefits to be gained by following up more than one possible course of action.

Since the practical, as one of the two classes of rational interests, means primarily in relation to the body, by sticking with James's reconstructed meanings, it can be said that what Richard claims James underplays is not the relation of the body to the aesthetic, but a fuller development of practical rationality. The neglect to read the pragmatists 'slant,' as Emily Dickinson would say, follows from our widespread failure to recognize their intent to begin philosophy anew and from our neglect of the new meanings they put into the old bottles of traditional philosophical terminology. One of my intentions in *Radical Reconstruction* was to read James inside out, as it were, and show the marvelous originality of his perspective and see what happens if James's new beginning in a hermeneutics of selective interest and a phenomenology of pragmatic concreteness were systematically developed instead of fitting his vision into an already determined tradition of philosophical meanings and vocabulary.

'Concreteness,' for example, cannot simply be reduced to 'the empirical' or to 'facts' or 'data,' as Megan has already intimated. It took me most of the chapters in the book to try to unravel its myriad and inter-related meanings, in the hope that this would provide the basis for a new focus in Jamesian interpretation and free his angle of vision at last from the alien encrustations that has held it captive to empiricist or idealist narratives. Multiple tensions pulling in different directions structure James's thinking throughout. These include the aesthetic and the practical, living and reflecting on life, the free play of selective interest and the embeddedness of concrete experience, an indifferent universe and one peopled by cosmic consciousnesses, humanistic pragmatism and a pragmatism still tied to transcendent rescue missions, and the sick soul and the healthy soul. His radically empiricist perspective is not best served by making a theory of truth or the will to believe or determinism versus free will 'the' central issue, as continues to be the case in many instances.¹⁴

David Perley

With great insight, David Perley shows the interconnections of themes that Megan and Richard have raised. He ties together the hermeneutical method of metaphor with the empirical method of observation and description, or—a Jamesian phrasing of David's that I prefer—the concrete historical world of experience. I appreciate his recognition of the concrete, genealogical method employed in *Pragmatism and Feminism* and its implications for a thorough reconstruction of philosophy as lived and transformative experience.¹⁵ I have since been intrigued to discover that Jane Addams used James's radical reconstruction of rationality as a way to explain the Hull House settlement's mission. Paraphrasing James's complaint that "it is no easy matter to find a world rational as to its intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and practical aspects," she continues that it is especially difficult when working in impoverished and oppressed neighborhoods. Nonetheless, in reflecting on the experiences of the Hull House residents over the years, Addams found she could best express the settlement outlook as a commitment to "this fourfold undertaking" of contributing to the world's rationality by "people of widely diversified tastes and interests."¹⁶

After briefly developing James's hermeneutics of metaphor, David then goes on to show how much philosophical mileage can be gained from close and imaginative consideration of particular metaphors, such as ones emphasizing vagueness. This calls to mind William Gavin's development of its many strands in *William James and the Reinstatement of the Vague*.¹⁷ As David says, the problem of such subjectivity and interpretive excess needs to be addressed by a method of discernment. However, James never really resolves the dilemma of proposing two conflicting criteria of judgment—sometimes he appeals to the adequate description of things as they are and sometimes to the selectivity of things as I need or expect to see them. He ironically lacked the very self-consciousness of the interpretive methods he was nonetheless developing with such acumen.¹⁸ He did realize the importance of the pragmatic method, of bringing one's insights to the test of actual outcomes, if chaos or forceful imposition of one point of view were to be avoided.

David uses the methodological tools he identifies in James to good effect by asking what this concrete, hermeneutical approach means for the aesthetically rational approach typical of contemporary studies of religion. He creatively appropriates James's interest in getting us to see the unfamiliar in the familiar, "of making conventionalities fluid again," the very definition James gives of philosophy.¹⁹ By taking seriously James's distinction of his own version of "the poet as visionary" from Emerson's intent to transmit "to earth a divine message" and instead divinize the everyday world, David proposes a reversal of the mystical method. It would be interesting to see where this leads him.²⁰

John Capps

Of course, I am very gratified to see John Capps take James's radically new approach for granted and move on 18
from there. It is a good thing that younger generations can, as Dewey as well as Feyerabend and Toulmin said, get
over rather than solve some problems generated by a given paradigm, instead of endlessly "chewing a historic cud
long since reduced to woody fibre."²¹ It is also wonderful to see such careful attention paid to the intricacies of
James's views of knowledge and truth, positions that have not, so far, made much of a dent in pragmatist
reworkings of traditional theories of truth.

I'm curious, though, about John's aversion to inflationary metaphysics. Now, it will come as no surprise to this 19
audience that I think that pragmatists, generally, are averse to metaphysics, unless this term is so reinterpreted as to
retain little of its formal meanings, though perhaps preserving the informal, common-sense meaning of 'the way
the world seems to be to me.'²² Identifying Beethoven's Fifth Symphony with its many performances is precisely
what John Dewey, for example, does, because the art work comes to be as art only in the transaction that takes
place between artist and medium or audience and performance. So, it exists, viz., 'is happening' as many times as it
happens. And for James there are as many 'givens' as there are ways of 'taking' the world; he says that it is
irrelevant whether we say that we find or create the world experienced because we are not dealing with an already
constituted world that perfectly matches a judgment, but with a transformation that brings about what it intends.
Such intentions are limited only by our experiences and imagination, and the world is pliable to our interactions.
James refused to join Occams's sect of the Knights of the Razor because he thought that it was only because our
whole lives are quests for the superfluous that we have been able to establish ourselves so reliably in the
necessary.³³ I would say that re-interpreting this insight as metaphysically inflationary is mixing up pragmatist
pluralism in regard to anticipatory and then fulfilled ends-in-view with a metaphysical world view or system and
vocabulary of presence. This in no way impugns John's sense that identifying truth makers is not a fruitful
approach, given the more satisfactory instrumental approach.

John clearly grasps that James's account highlighted practical and moral concerns and addresses real crises 20
because his primary question is the *function* of the concept of truth. With this focus, old problems and disputes are
simply bypassed for more pressing ones.

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Notes

1. WJ to HJ, 1 June, 1891, *The Correspondence of William James*, ed. Ignas Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, vol.
2, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 177.

2. William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975), 257-58 and Seigfried, *William James's
Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 22-25 and 396.

3. William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 58-59.

4. James, *Some Problems*, 59.

5. See page 281 and quote on page 297 of *William James's Radical Reconstruction*.

6. Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction*, 361.

7. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 130.

8. John Dewey, "William James," in *Middle Works, Volume 6: 1910-1911* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern
Illinois University Press, 1978), 91.

9. See Seigfried, "The World We Practically Live In," in Margaret E. Donnelly, ed., *Reinterpreting the Legacy of William James* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press, 1992), 77-89.
10. James, "The Knowing of Things Together" (1894), *Essays in Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 88.
11. James, "James's Preface to Ferrari's Italian Translation" (1900), Appendix III of *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. III, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1484.
12. Seigfried, "Like Bridges Without Piers: Beyond the Foundationalist Metaphor," in Tom Rockmore and Beth J. Singer, eds., *Anti-Foundationalism Old and New*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992, pp. 143-164 and "Devising Ends Worth Striving For," in Andrew R. Smith and Lenore Langsdorf, eds., *Recovering Pragmatism's Voice: The Classical Tradition, Rorty, and the Philosophy of Communication* (State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 115-128.
13. See Seigfried, "Weaving Chaos into Order: A Radically Pragmatic Aesthetic," *Philosophy and Literature*, 14:1(1990), 108-116.
14. See Seigfried, "Introduction," to Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (Nashville and London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), ix-xvii.
15. For a defense of my style, which I take to be typical of philosophies of experience, see Charlene Haddock Seigfried and Hans Seigfried, "Individual Feeling and Universal Validity," Steven Mailloux, ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 139-154.
16. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 308. Although in both essays called "The Sentiment of Rationality," James explains practical interests as being moral ones and aesthetic interests as identical to rationalistic intellectual ones, he also uses all these terms separately, leading to some confusion as to whether there are two or four broad classes of interests. The evidence suggests to me that he makes no fundamental distinction between the practical/moral and the aesthetic/intellectual.
17. William Joseph Gavin, *William James and the Reinstatement of the Vague* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 1992. See also Seigfried, "Vagueness and the Adequacy of Concepts: In Defense of William James's Picturesque Style," *Philosophy Today*, 26(Winter, 1982), 357-367.
18. See Seigfried, "The World We Practically Live In," 77-89; "William James's Concrete Analysis of Experience," *Monist*, Special Issue: Pragmatism: A Second Look. 75:4 (Oct., 1992), pp. 538-550, and "The Pragmatist Sieve of Concepts: Description Vs. Interpretation," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 87:11(Nov., 1990), 585-592.
19. James, *Essays in Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 4.
20. My own analysis of James's method in *Varieties of Religious Experience* has not yet been published. "The Legacy of William James: No Dogmas and No Doctrines?" The Science of Religions Conference: One Hundred Years of William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, University of Illinois at Chicago, Apr. 12-13, 2002.
21. Dewey, "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy," in *Middle Works, Volume 10: 1916-1917* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 47.
22. Seigfried, "Ghosts Walking Underground: Dewey's Vanishing Metaphysics," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 40:1(Winter, 2004), 1-29; "Pragmatist Metaphysics? Why Terminology Matters," *Transactions Charles S. Peirce Society*. 37:1 (Winter, 2001), 13-21, and "Experience, Anyone? Why Pragmatists Should Get Over the Realism/Anti-realism Debate," *Intellectual History Newsletter*, 20(1998), 24-32.

[23.](#) William James, *The Will to Believe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 105.

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William James and Moral Objectivity

Ruth Anna Putnam

William James wrote, "I cannot understand the willingness to act, no matter how we feel, without the belief that acts are really good or bad." I intend to defend that belief, but I shall first consider briefly the use James made of his claim. He continued, "I cannot understand the belief that an act is bad, without regret at its happening. I cannot understand regret without the admission of real, genuine possibilities in the world. Only *then* is it other than mockery to feel, after we have failed to do our best, that an irreparable opportunity is gone from the universe, the loss of which it must forever mourn."¹ Though James' premise asserts that a belief in moral objectivity is indispensable to moral effort, the point of his argument is that indeterminism is indispensable to moral objectivity, but that matters, in this context, only because a belief in moral objectivity is indispensable to moral effort. When James speaks of acts being really good or bad, he has at least the following two conditions in mind. (1) An act is really good or bad, if it makes a difference to how the world will be as a result of that act being done or not done. That is, of course, entirely compatible with determinism, and in this sense many things that are not actions—for example, earthquakes—are bad, and we regret that they happen. But when James speaks of regret here, he really means remorse. (2) Ultimately, for James, an act is really good or bad only if the agent has done, or failed to do, his or her best, has made, or failed to make, the maximum moral effort. For James, the latter condition requires that we have free will, that it is up to us whether we make that effort. I want to put that issue aside. In practice, when we engage in moral reflection, whether in daily life or as philosophers, we take it for granted that our sense of making choices, of being responsible for our decisions, is not an illusion.

Psychologically speaking, it is, however, not sufficient to believe that one's action will make a difference, one must also believe that the difference one's action will make *matters*; that the world will be, in however small a way, better if one chooses one way and worse if one chooses another. If one thinks that it does not matter at all, one might as well flip a coin rather than deliberate. If one believes that it matters only in one's own estimation, one succumbs more easily to the temptation not to do what one believes to be one's duty. For one form that temptation can take is just the thought that it is, after all, only one's own 'subjective' judgment that is one's reason for doing what one also feels like NOT doing. One might, for example, say to oneself, "I am much too good-hearted; I always think I ought to do something for others when no one else in my position would think so." Compatibilists as well as indeterminists can agree that, practically speaking, we must take the judgments that guide our conduct to be more than mere feelings on our part, if we are ever to withstand serious temptation. For when we succumb to the temptation NOT to do what we believe to be our duty, we tend to tell ourselves in some way or other that what we fail to do was not really our duty.

James argued for the view that it is not irrational to believe, as he himself did, in a world in which it is not a foregone conclusion whether one will do one's duty or not. Precisely that we can choose to obey or violate a moral norm gives the norm its point. Conversely, I claim, the norm's objectivity gives the choice its point. James would have agreed; he addressed the question of the objectivity of moral judgments, in particular of moral norms, in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life."² I don't intend to discuss this complex and very interesting essay in detail; I have done that elsewhere.³ Here I am interested only in what James has to say about the truth or objectivity of moral judgments.

I

In the very first paragraph of his essay, James tells us that, “there can be no final truth in ethics any more than there can be in physics, until the last man has had his experience and said his say. In the one case as in the other, however, the hypotheses which we now make while waiting, and the acts to which they prompt us, are among the indispensable conditions which determine what that ‘say’ will be.” (141) For an indeterminist like James, the hypotheses we now make and the acts we now do, are not fated, thus neither is the course of future inquiry. Nevertheless, one might hold that experience will inexorably force humanity to one final truth, at least in the physical sciences. Charles Sanders Peirce, James’ friend and co-founder of Pragmatism held that view—whether James shared it is debatable. In any case, James tends to be less interested in the Final Truth than in the many truths that make up our present beliefs. Concerning these, James considered it entirely possible that human beings might have developed, quite different systems of concepts to deal with their experiences, and thus that we might have developed quite different scientific theories.

Here I would like to add—James does not make this point, and I do not claim that he would agree or disagree with it—that the kinds of scientific questions we ask, the kinds of research we pursue, thus the hypotheses we examine and the theories we develop are determined by our interests, or in present day circumstances, more precisely by where the interests of scientists intersect with the interests of those who provide the funding for research projects. I do not, of course, deny the existence and value of pure science. The human interest in knowing for the sake of knowing, in pursuing disinterested research, is precious in itself and, as everyone should know, although funding agencies sometimes forget it, without progress in pure science, progress in applied science will soon come to a halt. Finally, as Hilary Putnam has pointed out repeatedly, what theories we take seriously depends, in part, on such cognitive values as simplicity and elegance, as well as more generally on what we take to be reasonable. This dependence of the truth, even in physics, on human ingenuity and human interest, will make, even in physics, a difference to the final truth, or, as I would prefer to say, to what our descendants will in the future take to be the best theories.

Here some philosophers will object that objectivity requires that the truth be radically independent of what human beings think and do. And since physics is our paradigm of objectivity, my account of physics must be incorrect. And they would even question James’ more limited claim that we might have developed an alternative equally adequate conceptual system. In contrast, these philosophers may well accept the parallel claims James makes with respect to ethics. He claims that whatever the point of morality may be—whatever the goal that it is to enable us to reach more successfully, as medicine is to enable us to live longer and healthier lives—both our conception of that goal and the manner in which we shall attempt to realize it will depend on what human beings now take to be that goal and what they now take to be their duties in its service. Just as future scientific theories depend not only on today’s successful research but also on today’s failures, so future conceptions of the moral life will depend not only on our moral victories but also on our moral defeats.

Philosophers who accept this characterization of the future of our moral conceptions but not the analogous claims with respect to physics, will use it as a basis for one or another form of non-cognitivism. James’ task and mine will be to argue (in section II) that this dependence on human thought and action is as unavoidable in physics as it is in ethics, and (in section III) that it is as compatible with objectivity in the case of ethics as it is in the case of physics.

II

Let us, temporarily, turn to the situation in present day philosophy. In “Pragmatism and Nonscientific Knowledge”⁴ Hilary Putnam has pointed out that no meaning can be given to the idea of knowledge independent of what human beings think and do. I would put it this way: The only kind of knowledge we can have is human knowledge, which is, whatever other conditions it has to satisfy, something human beings think, hence NOT something independent of what human beings think and do. Moreover, the subject matter of this knowledge is also on the whole and in many details causally dependent on what human beings believe and do. Since we and our actions and the effects of our actions are all part of reality, they are part of what objective statements are about.

Considering another claim made by some philosophers, namely, that the truth of objective statements is independent of actual or possible warranted assertibility, Hilary Putnam points out that, given this notion of objectivity, statements about particulars that can be perceived by human beings fail to be objective. For, given the appropriate conditions, true statements about perceivable particulars will be warrantably assertible. Apparently, philosophers who make the claims just criticized do not mean that objective statements need to be conceptually independent from human practices and beliefs. What then does “independence” mean?

For an answer let us turn to a philosopher who seems to be willing to accept the consequences of Hilary Putnam's argument. Bernard Williams is prepared to say that facts concerning human beings and facts concerning particulars that can be perceived by human beings are not entirely objective. His notion of the "absolute conception" of the world includes, he says, the concepts of physics but not *green*, and probably not *grass*. "It will be a conception consisting of non-perspectival materials available to any adequate investigator, of whatever constitution, and it will also help to explain to us, though not necessarily to those alien investigators, such things as our capacity to grasp that conception."⁵

If anything is non-perspectival, the fundamental concepts of physics are non-perspectival. The absolute conception, whatever else it might contain (how does it help to explain our capacity to grasp it?), will contain the fundamental laws of physics. That might explain why physics, understood as a compendium of the most fundamental laws of nature, is taken as the paradigm of objectivity. I do not object to taking physics as *a* paradigm of objectivity provided we recognize both that it is not the only paradigm and that physics is not a compendium of the laws of nature, whatever that may be. Physics is, at any given time, a compendium of what is at that time our (best) knowledge of the laws of nature. But our knowledge, I need not remind you, is a subset of what we think. I conclude that what we now take to be the best scientific opinion and what we will take to be that opinion in the future depends not only on what the universe is like but on what we are like, what thoughts we have, what questions we ask, and how we interpret the answers that our experiments provide.

To forestall possible misunderstandings, I want to make quite clear that the arguments against Williams are my arguments against a philosopher writing in the late twentieth century. My thinking is influenced by James, but I do not ascribe these arguments to him. Moreover, although Williams is clearly influenced by C.S. Peirce, Peirce, in my opinion, avoids the mistakes Williams makes. Thus my arguments are not arguments against Peirce. ⁶ Finally, nothing in my argument depends on accepting or rejecting Peirce's robust realism with respect to laws of nature, nor on the extent of James' agreement or disagreement with this.⁷

The objectivity of physical science rests not on a radical independence from human thought and action but, on the one hand, on the crucial role played by experience, by the interactions of human beings with the world, in anchoring the web of theory, and on the other hand, on the manner in which science is conducted, viz. that scientists are ever ready to revise their theories in the light of new and inassimilable experience and that science is a democratically structured cooperative enterprise. Both the democratization of inquiry and fallibilism are regulative ideals. Science is objective to the extent that it realizes these ideals and because it rests on experience. But what underwrites the objectivity of ethics? Where do our values come from?

III

James replies, and here he seems to play right into the hands of non-cognitivists, that in a world without minds, without minded beings, there are no values. It would not make sense to say concerning a world that could be completely described by physics and chemistry alone that one of its states was better than another. "The moment one sentient being, however, is made a part of the universe," James writes, "there is a chance for goods and evils really to exist." Things are good if that being thinks that they are good, but it would be "absurd to raise the question whether the solitary thinker's judgments of good and ill are true or not. Truth supposes a standard outside of the thinker to which he must conform; but here the thinker is a sort of divinity, subject to no higher judge. Let us call the supposed universe which he inhabits a *moral solitude*." (146).

Next, James considers a world with many sentient beings that are, however, indifferent to one another. This is a world, he writes, "in which individual minds are the measure of all things, in which no one 'objective' truth, but only a multitude of 'subjective' opinions can be found." Concerning such a world James writes, "Not only is there no single point of view within it from which the values of things can be unequivocally judged, but there is not even a demand for such a point of view." (147). Objectivity, a "standard outside the thinker" will arise only if there is a demand for it. And such a demand will arise only if the sentient beings in the universe, rather than being indifferent to one another, respond to one another's demands. James writes, "Wherever [actually living] minds exist, with judgments of good and ill, and demands upon one another, there is an ethical world in its essential features. Were all other things, gods and men and starry heavens blotted out from this universe, and were there left but one rock with two loving souls upon it, that rock would have as thoroughly moral a constitution as any possible world which the eternities and immensities could harbor. There would be real good things and real bad things in the universe; there would be obligations, claims, and expectations; obediences, refusals, and disappointments; compunctions and longings for harmony to come again, and inward peace of conscience when it was restored; there would, in short, be a moral life, whose active energy would have no limit but the intensity of interest in each other with which the hero and heroine might be endowed." (150)

This is both immensely appealing and extremely mysterious. It is immensely appealing because it explains in one stroke not only our collective need for an objective morality but also our individual motivation to live by that morality. But to say this is to rush to conclusions that have not yet been established. Consider these questions: 17

(a) How does the mere fact that some of us, perhaps most of us, care to a greater or lesser extent for some others produce a moral life?

(b) How does that same fact introduce a demand for an objective standpoint, and how is that demand met? 18

The answers to these questions, to the extent that one can answer them, are based, for James, on one crucial observation. He asserts, “without a claim actually made by some concrete person there can be no obligation, but there is some obligation wherever there is a claim. Claim and obligation are, in fact, coextensive terms; they cover each other exactly.”(148) Now, at first blush this seems false. Is it not possible for someone who takes absolutely no interest in other human beings to have desires? Might such a person not desire rain or sunshine, to be healthy or to be dead? But who would have the corresponding obligations? I believe that James’ answer must be that though such a person has desires, they are not addressed to anyone, hence they are not claims. However, James himself does not seem to have considered this case; in fact, he slides too easily from desires to demands to obligations, as when he writes, “Any desire is imperative to the extent of its amount; it *makes* itself valid by the fact that it exists at all. Some desires, truly enough, are small desires; they are put forward by insignificant persons, and we customarily make light of the obligations which they bring. But the fact that such personal demands as these impose small obligations does not keep the large obligations from being personal demands.” (149) I am not at all sure that small desires are desires put forth by insignificant persons, even Queen Victoria had small as well as large desires. And clearly, as James well knew at other moments even in the same essay, insignificant persons can have desires that make demands on the whole world, consider, for example, demands for food by the victims of famine. In fact, James’s use of the expression “insignificant person” is unfortunate; he must have meant to say, “persons who seem to us to be insignificant.”⁸ For, on the one hand, the Pragmatist insistence on the democratization of inquiry entails that every human being be considered significant. And, on the other hand, James ably and passionately defends the significance of every human being in “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” and “What Makes a Life Significant.”²

We live neither in a moral solitude, nor in a moral multiverse, i.e. a universe of beings that are totally disinterested in one another. However, we also do not live in a world of ideally benevolent creatures; thus when A makes a demand of B, B may refuse to recognize the obligation. Now that, by itself, does not undermine anything James says, for the obligation created by A’s demand may well be overridden by other more stringent obligations incumbent upon B. Or, again, B may consider A’s demand to be outrageous, reject it peremptorily. This too may be a part of the moral life. What is not part of the moral life, if James is right, is this: B does not even acknowledge that A has made a demand, or, to put it another way, B does not acknowledge that A is the type of entity that makes demands. B does not acknowledge A as a member of the moral community. Some people have this attitude toward animals of all kinds; most of us have it toward some animals. Some people, alas, have it toward some other human beings. Racism, anti-Semitism, intense tribalisms of all kinds produce wholesale an inability to recognize the humanity of the other. We have seen and continue to see all too often the horrifying effects of this. 19

I take it then that the answer to my first question—how does the fact that most of us care for some others produce a moral life?—is that people who acknowledge each other’s existence as human beings will make claims upon each other and experience these claims as imposing obligations, and that just is to form a moral community, and to live in such a community just is to live a moral life. In other words, there can be a moral life only where people recognize each other as fellow members of a moral community, and wherever there is such recognition, there is a moral community. Two souls that love each other are an easily imagined but also highly idealized example of what it is to recognize another as a member of the moral community. Perhaps “love” is the perfect word for this recognition, but I think, rather, that the word “love” should be reserved for perfect recognition, at any rate in the sense of “love” in which we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. 20

Let us probe James’ answer a bit more deeply. The question “what makes a moral life possible?” is open to two readings. It might mean: What must the world be like for morality to be possible, or it might mean what must people feel in order to be motivated to be moral. Consider the first interpretation. We saw earlier that for James one necessary condition for morality is indeterminism, although many philosophers attempt to show that determinism is compatible with moral responsibility. But we are now interested in a second condition. The opposite of a moral solitude is simply a world in which people have relations to one another, they need not in any sense love each other.¹⁰ People who interact with one another both cooperatively and competitively may not care 21

for each other, but they will care, if they are at all rational, to establish norms that will regulate competition and make cooperation fruitful. In such a world morality is possible, indeed it is what rationality requires. We know all too well, however, that if the sole motivation for abiding by the norms is one's own self-interest, or some other strong ego-centric feelings, then problems of compliance abound, ranging from the problem of the freeloader to the resort to violence when the norms do not appear to favor one's cause. James does not envisage such a Hobbesian world, and thus we are led to the second interpretation of the question "what makes a moral life possible?" namely, what will make us do our duty no matter how we feel? James' answer is that what moves us to do our duty, if we are so moved, is simply the fact that we recognize it to be our duty, and that, James says, means that we recognize someone's demands as establishing an obligation. But now, inevitably, there will be conflicting demands made, and thus we face conflicting obligations. That conflict gives rise to the demand for an objective standpoint. So we have answered the first part of our second question, namely, how does the mere fact that some of us care for some others produce a demand for an objective standpoint? The mere fact that some of us recognize the demands of others as imposing duties on us gives rise to the need for a point of view from which conflicts of duties can be bindingly adjudicated.¹¹ We must now turn to the second part of the second question: how is that demand met?

Here, even more than up to this point, I must admit that my exegesis has little direct support in the text. At this point in the essay, James says, in effect, the following. Here we are in a world in which people share a number of values (he calls them ideals) but where there is no agreement about many others. It is also a world in which not all ideals can be realized, nor all demands satisfied. As philosophers, James holds, we are obliged to believe that there is a best order of our obligations, or of our ideals (he says both) and that "there is a truth to be ascertained." However, James believes to have established that "that truth cannot be a self-proclaiming set of laws, or an abstract 'moral reason,' but can exist only in act, or in the shape of an opinion of some thinker really to be found." (151) Clearly, no one person's opinion, nor even the consensus of any number of people, will do. One person would simply dogmatize, and James prefers moral chaos to that. A consensus, on the other hand, is represented at any given time in any given place by what John Dewey was to call customary morality. James is quite willing to grant that customary morality has the presumption of correctness in its favor, just as our favored current physical theory has the analogous presumption in its favor. But in both cases the presumption is defeasible, as progress in science on the one hand and moral change on the other demonstrate. James is looking for a criterion by which to judge actual moral judgments by how they work out in practice. And he believes to have found it; he believes that it follows quite simply from the fact that everything demanded is a good that we should try to satisfy as many demands as possible. Or, as he also says, those ideals must be written highest which "prevail at the least cost." (155) All this is quite enigmatic, and this is not the place to try to unpack it. I tried to do that in as sympathetic a manner as I could in the essays mentioned in note 3. 22

Here I shall be less generous. I want to point out that James does not offer any guidelines for weighing demands against each other, although he speaks of weaker and stronger demands. Neither does James tell us how to compare ideals, or how to count claims. James urges us to maximize something (the number of demands met) or to minimize something (the number of ideals frustrated), but since he holds that there is no common denominator to which goods, or demands, or ideals, can be reduced—and I think he is right about that—James leaves us with exhortations rather than an account of "the standard outside the thinker" that is required for truth. 23

Nevertheless I believe, and here I am frankly speculating, that, on the basis of James' insistence that the moral universe requires mutuality, we can construct a kind of answer to the second question. We may, for example, recall Kant's explanation that treating others as ends is to make their ends our own. Treating others' demands as imposing an obligation on me seems to me something very much like, if not identical with, treating others as ends. If I make your ends my own and you make my ends your own, then we now have the same ends and we can come to a reasoned agreement on how to prioritize these ends, which need to be sacrificed for which others, and how to go about achieving those ends that survive the pruning. This may sound easy, but in practice it is an ideal toward which we strive, and should strive, but which we never wholly achieve. Nevertheless, we may borrow from political philosophy the idea that, as I said above, it is in our interest to establish norms, call them norms of justice, that will regulate our cooperation and our competition. If so, we can also envisage, for example in the manner of John Rawls,¹² rules of procedure that will enable us to sit down and reason together in order to arrive at these norms. I don't wish to push this too hard, however. I merely want to adapt the Rawlsian idea of the original position to the search for an objective point of view. I am suggesting that whenever, given a problem of conflicting moral or political demands, people sit down and reason together to find a solution fair to all parties, there you find moral objectivity. James was very much aware of the fact that as we include more and more people in the circle of those with whom we are willing to reason, and to whose reasons we are willing to listen, we make moral progress. (We may make even further progress if we include other sentient beings in the moral community. 24

I shall not explore that possible development here). Given this understanding, we can now give another interpretation to James' assertion that the final word in ethics must await the last man's say. It is not, absurdly, that the last surviving human being will be the ultimate moral authority, it is rather this. The opinion which emerges from our moral and social experiments and our discussions will not even have a chance to be final, in the sense that subsequent experience will not force us to revise it, unless every last human being is acknowledged to be a member of the moral community and has been given the opportunity to participate on equal terms in the moral conversation. Of course, in the real world, even if we could establish a humanity wide moral democracy, and even if that moral democracy were to achieve consensus, no consensus would be final. The world keeps changing, new opportunities for human flourishing and new obstacles, new problems, will arise; new answers will have to be explored.

IV

After a long and roundabout route we seem to be forced to conclude that, for James, the standard outside the thinker that truth in ethics requires is the opinion arrived at by fair discussion among all interested parties, meaning, ultimately, all of humanity. This conclusion needs to be modified. First, I seem to ascribe to James either a Rawlsian or Scanlonian contractualism or a Habermasian discourse ethics. I don't intend to do that—the text under consideration does not provide a sufficient basis for such an ascription. Neither do his writings on ethics in his later works. While I am suggesting that contractualism or discourse ethics provides one interpretation of the Jamesian appeal to people taking an interest in each other, acknowledging the validity of each other's claims, I believe that something less formal, more grounded in our actual lives, is closer to James' own thinking. Secondly, the discussion so far suggests that there is a single correct answer to every moral question, but that view is incompatible with James' passionate defense of pluralism and tolerance. I need to interrupt this discussion of "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" to correct the erroneous impression I may have created.

The opening sentence of the "The Moral Philosopher and The Moral Life" by insisting that "the last man" must be allowed to "have his experience and say his say" points out *inter alia* that both in physics and in ethics we are fallible; hence we can never know that a belief of ours in either ethics or physics will not be successfully challenged in the future. In physics, fallibilism was fully accepted even in James' day and continues to be so. In ethics, on the other hand, both dogmatism and skepticism flourished then and do so now. Yet it is surely evident that people who believe that they have the final truth in ethics cause far more harm than anyone might who would proclaim to have the final truth in physics. James rejected moral skepticism out of hand; he responded to dogmatism with a sustained defense of tolerance for a variety of ethical views, as long those views were not themselves intolerant.¹³

The sort of moral pluralism I have described must not be confused with moral relativism. Michele Moody-Adams' brilliant discussion of the failures of what she, following Bernard Williams, calls the relativism of distance makes clear how a commitment to that view makes it equally impossible to account for the persistence of chattel slavery in the United States for decades after its abolition in the British Empire, and to explain its ultimate abolition.¹⁷ Relativism disables us not only intellectually but also morally. By providing a fig leaf of intellectual respectability for moral laziness, it weakens our resolve to oppose inhumane practices in other cultures, for example, female circumcision, even when we know that certain members of that very culture are desperately trying to abolish the practice.¹⁸

In contrast, precisely because moral pluralists are willing to learn from other ways of life, they are also prepared to criticize those ways of life just as they are prepared to criticize their own. This willingness already implies that pluralists do not think of cultures as separated by impenetrable borders. Pluralists are not committed to saying that all ways of life are equally good, nor even that all ways of life are good. Some ways of life are atrocious, others have elements that are horrendous, and no way of life is as good as it might be. But what then happens to the idea of a "final truth" in ethics? I have already suggested that the reference to the last man's experience and say may be interpreted precisely in the spirit of pluralism as saying that in the search for the consensus that is to serve as our standard "outside the thinker" we must be sure to listen to all voices. Here I can imagine someone asking whether we must listen to the voices of the torturer, the lynch mob, the Nazi as well as the voices of their victims. While I am fully sensible of the temptation to say, "no, of course not", I want to argue against giving in to it. We need to know what makes one human being unable or unwilling to see and respect the humanity of another in order to learn to guard against any similar tendencies in ourselves. I said above that we will reject some claims made on us out of hand, and I distinguished that from not hearing the claim. Just so, we should hear the claims of the torturers but, of course, reject them out of hand.

Pluralism does not, I trust it is needless to say, commit one to holding that there are no points of agreement even among people of good will. In fact, the idea of the final opinion, reinterpreted as the idea of a possible uncoerced agreement in ethics, is an important regulative ideal. It is an ideal that encourages us to seek agreement, to continue talking, to avoid needless provocation, to deeply distrust demands to use force. I am not prepared to say that the use of force is never justified, but the regulative ideal of moral agreement will place enormous moral hurdles in the path of such a justification. I have been told that the philosopher Roderick Firth held that the use of force was justified only if one was SURE that using force would cause less harm than refraining from it. Finally, it is important to see that searching for moral agreement is not searching for a single way of life; it is rather searching for social arrangements that leave room for a variety of ways of human flourishing.

29

V

It is time to return to James' concern with actions being really good or bad. By answering the question, what makes a moral life possible, James answered one question he set himself, namely, the question of the meaning of terms like "good" and "right." He called this the metaphysical question, that is, he wanted to know what the terms "good" and "right" refer to. He answered, if I read him correctly, that they have meaning only in the context of a moral life. And for James, that may be as much as can be said. For there are many kinds of goods, even many kinds of moral goods. James praises the intuitionists for that insight, for resisting the reductionism of classical Utilitarianism.

30

His account of the moral life explained also how actions could be "really good or bad," for it was meant to establish the standard "outside the thinker" that is required for truth or objectivity. I have suggested that he found that standard in whatever results from cooperative moral inquiry.

31

Now someone might object that this is not a standard outside the thinker, that many thinkers, even the whole of humanity thinking, does not get us away from thinking, that is, from subjectivity. We encountered the analogous objection earlier with respect to physics. We answered then, as we must now, that there is no such thing as human knowledge without human thinking. In our earlier discussion I acknowledged that metaphysical realists insist that there are facts that are radically independent of human thinking, and I suggested that perhaps the laws of nature would fit that bill, although of course not our knowledge of those laws. Now, similarly, some philosophers have held that there are moral facts that are radically independent from what any human being may think; just as in the physics case, however, even if it were so, that would not make our knowledge of these facts independent of human thinking. Moreover, in the moral case, no candidates for radically independent moral facts come easily to mind. James concludes his search for the meaning (that is, the referents) of moral terms thus. "They mean no absolute natures, independent of personal support. They are objects of feeling and desire, which have no foothold or anchorage in Being, apart from the existence of actual living minds." (p. 150).

32

But now another objection may be raised against the account of moral objectivity given so far. We saw, in the physics case, that the content of our best theories depended in part on cognitive and even moral value judgments made in the course of inquiry. The total web of our beliefs includes both descriptions of facts and value judgments, but the objection runs, the physical theory itself is not about values and the whole web of beliefs is anchored in experience, that is, in observation of facts. In the case of moral judgments, or a moral theory, not only does the process of inquiry include the making of value judgments, but the outcome of the inquiry —the moral theory or moral judgment —is itself about values. Moreover, continues the objection, there is nothing that corresponds in the moral case to experience in the physics case. To respond to this objection, one must tell a long story, a story about the perception of values. I have tried to tell that story elsewhere.¹⁹ To fully defend the objectivity of moral judgments, James' account in the early essay that has been the focus of my attention must be supplemented both by James' later writings and by Dewey's much more detailed studies. I can only gesture here at one way one might proceed.

33

Consider this problem. Your friend has just undergone some rather unpleasant but not life-threatening surgery. You say to yourself that she would be cheered by a visit, and you conclude that you ought to go. But you really don't feel like going out again; you've had a hard day. Perhaps there is a compromise solution —you might talk to your friend on the telephone. You won't know, you can't know, whether you made the right choice until you've actually acted on it. Or perhaps, in this situation, one shouldn't speak of the right choice; it's rather a matter of a good choice. So, you go to visit your friend and you find her depressed, and you see her cheer up as your visit prolongs itself. Or, you go to visit your friend, and you find her surrounded by her mother, her sister, her fiancé. Whatever made you think she would be lonely? What's more all they can talk about is your friend's upcoming wedding. You feel like a fool for coming out, and you leave quickly.

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I use this example, trivial as it may seem, because it suggests another way in which a moral judgment can itself be evaluated, another way in which there is a standard outside the thinker. You had to decide what to do about your friend; you couldn't discuss it with her. Well, of course, in retrospect, in the second scenario, you would have been better off if you had called her and asked her whether she wanted a visit. But in the first scenario that would not have been the thing to do; being already depressed, your friend might have understood you to say, "I don't want to visit you," which might well have been worse than just not visiting. In retrospect we say that, in the first scenario, what you did was good. Not that, in the second scenario, what you did was wrong, but it wasn't a good thing to do. Your solution to your first problem—to visit or not to visit—led you into a new problem—how to leave this happy bunch of people gracefully. You might have learned something from this experience, namely, to think more carefully about the whole situation in which your problem is embedded. I am trying to illustrate here how one might apply a Deweyan process of inquiry to a personal moral problem. For Dewey, what he called growth and I am inclined to call human flourishing tended to function as an important end-in-view. I am suggesting how, in my second scenario, you might grow as a result of your embarrassing experience.

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There is more to the moral life, I am suggesting, than moral judgment, there is action. Indeed, action is the point of many (not all) moral judgments. Action and experience are the two ways in which the web of our beliefs and our value judgments is anchored in the world. Experience is an interaction between us and the world, though at times the world's action appears to overwhelm ours, and conversely, every action is an experience, though the effect on the world may be vastly more important than the experience is for the agent.

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Let us return, then, once more to James. The standard outside the thinker, whether it be for descriptions of fact or for value judgments—and, following John Dewey, I have argued more than once that no clear line can be drawn between those—is complex: it is made up of all of human experience as interpreted by human beings as the result of cooperative inquiry.

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Notes

¹ William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism" in his *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979), 135.

² William James, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" in *The Will to Believe*. Page references to this essay will hereafter be given in the text.

³ "The Moral Life of a Pragmatist" in Owen Flanagan and Amelie Rorty (eds.) *Identity, Character, and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 67-89; "Some of Life's Ideals" in Ruth Anna Putnam (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 282-299.

⁴ Hilary Putnam, "Pragmatism and Nonscientific Knowledge" in James Conant and Urszula Zeglen (eds) *Hilary Putnam: Pragmatism and Realism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 14-24.

⁵ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 140.

⁶ Specifically, Peirce distinguishes between beliefs whose objects are the laws of nature (an important part of the final opinion) and reality, the object of the final opinion, which includes the laws of nature understood not as mere Humean regularities but as real universals. The distinction between truth (a property of beliefs) and reality is clear in this remark. "The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object of this opinion is what we mean by the real." "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" in Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1935), vol V, (407-8)

⁷ Not only do limitations of space prohibit an examination of this issue, it is not germane to my topic. I mention it only in response to a concern of one of the anonymous reviewers for this journal.

⁸ I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this journal for this reading of the phrase.

⁹ In William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁰ I owe this point to Graham Bird although it is not his point. He argues that the alternatives to a moral universe based on love or sympathy are manifold, that our own world, for example, is one in which we are keenly, but not necessarily sympathetically, aware of competition. Hence we need a criterion or standard to settle disputes. See Graham H. Bird, "Moral Philosophy and the Development of Morality" in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, 263

¹¹ My argument in this section parallels James' answer to what he calls the metaphysical question, namely, what the words "good" and "bad" and "obligation" mean, that is, what they refer to. It also parallels accounts of the moral development of the child such as that given by Piaget. James' influence on Piaget by way of his friend Théodore Flournoy has recently been demonstrated by Michel Ferrari and Carol M. Okamoto in "Moral development as the personal education of feeling and reason: from James to Piaget" in *Journal of Moral Education*, vol. 32, No. 4 (2003): 341-354. Nevertheless one should be clear that James's account here is not a bit of developmental psychology.

¹² See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) and *Political Liberalism*, (New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1993).

¹³ See in particular his essays "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" and "What makes a Life Significant" in his *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁴ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of World Making* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1978).

¹⁵ Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Paperback Edition, 1995), 135.

¹⁶ See William James, *Essays, Comments and Reviews* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1987), 81-86, 154-169, and 173-176.

¹⁷ Michele Moody-Adams, *Fieldwork in Familiar Places: Morality, Culture and Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997), 98. Moody-Adams argues that moral realists, relativists and anti-theorists like Richard Rorty all fail to account for the persistence of slavery in the New World; that persistence, she argues, should be attributed to "a widespread and morally culpable capacity to ignore willingly the suffering of human beings."

¹⁸ For a more detailed and careful discussion of this example, see Michele Moody-Adams, *Fieldwork in Familiar Places*, chapter 5. In particular, I agree with her warning, "In many cases, in fact, a refusal to contemplate internal criticism of some cultural tradition will make one not a respecter of culture but simply an agent —however unwitting —of traditional oppression and abuse." (214).

¹⁹ "Perceiving Facts and Values." *Philosophy*, vol. 73, No.283 (1998): 5-19

Against Elitism: Studying William James in the Academic Age of the Underdog

Amy Kittelstrom

When William A. Henry III published *In Defense of Elitism* in 1994, he entered the culture wars on the side of tradition, conventional standards, and the association of excellence in thought and culture with its most common representatives: dead, white, elite males (DWEMs). With deliberately incendiary assertions like “You could eliminate every woman writer, painter, and composer from the caveman era to the present moment and not significantly deform the course of Western culture” and “blacks have an almost addictive attachment to past grievance,” Henry sought to provoke multiculturalists and feminists both inside and outside of the academy. Advocates of redefining literary and other academic canons across categories of difference—ethnicity, race, sexual preference, and gender—drew particularly strong derision from Henry, although they mostly ignored his book while busily restructuring departments and programs of study in their respective fields and dealing with more academically serious critiques. Nevertheless, Henry’s rhetoric and basic sense of the terms of the debate over diversity are useful for illustrating a long-standing impasse within the humanities that bears important relevance for the contemporary study of William James.¹

In his defense of elitism, Henry took great care to document himself as “a certified friend of the underdog,” in the words of one reviewer. Henry opened his book with a list of his liberal attributes, such as membership in both the Democratic Party and the ACLU, which points to the reach of the terms and values set by the academic age of the underdog, which started in about 1970 and so has enjoyed a reign unusually long for scholarly trends. Even thinkers situated within the left, and even those who dismiss many of the basic contentions of the “subaltern turn,” scramble to credential themselves and their subjects according to the framework that pits elite against underdog—and makes sure the underdog always wins. As the literary scholar Ross Posnock put it in a 1996 evaluation of the impact of cultural studies, “In the postmodern regime ... the intellectual, literature, the aesthetic, [and] intellectual history are all held under suspicion on grounds of complicity with the enemy, which include various instruments of white male power—universalism, cosmopolitanism, elitism.” Moreover, as one recent assessment of contemporary scholarship in the humanities claimed, “all choices are political choices ... every intellectual interest serves some end.” The implication is that those who study a DWEM blindly propagate various species of elitism by assuming that traditionally dominant voices deserve continued dominance and dismissing—or, worse, not even recognizing—the privilege that made both the DWEM’s work and his legacy possible. In such a charged atmosphere, even the most ideologically secure scholar, if irresistibly interested in an elite figure, tends to get a bit defensive.²

James scholars are particularly subject to this concern because James has become an archetypal symbol of the old elite that unjustly ruled the academic canon from the professionalization of the disciplines during the closing years of his life until the dawn of the academic age of the underdog. Indeed, a recent call for a history of thought inclusive of everyone from hack journalists to comedians singled out James as an emblem for all “canonical thinkers.” Similarly, when T.J. Jackson Lears suggests that scholars should “reject formulaic categories and fashionable slumming” by finding “fresh ways to complete the tasks that cultural studies has begun: to connect high and popular culture, William James and Big Bill Haywood, the Bostonian tourist and the Rocky Mountain High,” he implicitly concedes that James belongs to “high” culture and the elite.³

The tenor and substance of James studies have shifted considerably since George R. Garrison and Edward H. Madden's denunciation of the many "warts" of William James in a 1977 article that used the word "underdog" no fewer than six times.⁴ The academic age of the underdog has undermined not only canonical norms of study, but also the traditional tests of academic value: representativeness, originality, and influence. Although there is certainly tremendous diversity within James studies, many scholars have responded to the new, underdog-valoring norms of this academic age by seeking to rehabilitate James either by redescribing him as a figure allied with concerns over hierarchy and subject position or by reconstructing his thought in line with contemporary social and academic concerns. This essay will analyze these trends in James studies as well as offer a third way for justifying scholarship on this particular DWEM, a way that is both true to his own social context and conscientious about concerns over elitism and the reification of privilege: the use of James himself as a methodological tool. However difficult it is at this point to sustain arguments for further James studies on the basis of those considerable attributes of James as an individual and a thinker that justified his academic appeal during most of the twentieth century, James nevertheless deserves continuing study as a method for reaching beyond the DWEM, as a benchmark for the possibilities of social thought in his historical moment, and as an example—however limited, partial, and contingent—of scholarly action.

4

Rehabilitating James

Although the controversy over James's social reputation did not jeopardize the wider academic reputation of the enterprise of studying James until the culture wars following the subaltern turn, arguments over the degree of his sympathy for underdogs began much earlier in the twentieth century, with the first biography to treat his life and work comprehensively: *The Thought and Character of William James*, published in two volumes in 1935 by his student Ralph Barton Perry. In his bid to professionalize both himself and his discipline, Perry imposed on his mentor a developmental trajectory from psychology through religion to philosophy that continues to obscure the pre-professionalism of James's own intellectual milieu. Reflecting the concerns of his cultural moment, the Great Depression era, Perry also took care to present James as alive to the concerns of the masses, particularly the less privileged. The range of James's sympathetic intellect, according to Perry, caused "James invariably to side with the 'under dog'—with the Boers and the Irish against England, with the Filipinos against the United States, with religion or psychical research against science, with privates or laymen against officers, with the disreputable against the respectable, with heresy against orthodoxy, with youth against age, or with the new against the old." This characterization of James as champion of the underdog drew detraction from at least one critic before Garrison and Madden's enumeration of James's warts; eight years after Perry's biography, just a year after the centennial commemorations of James's birth, M.C. Otto voiced what would come to be a familiar criticism of James's ignorance of social concerns in an article entitled "On a Certain Blindness in William James." James expected of laborers far more than industrial conditions allowed, according to Otto, tending "to slight the environmental circumstances" by which "the better potentialities of human beings" are "thwarted, twisted, or entirely crushed out." Like Garrison and Madden would over thirty years later, Otto granted much of value in James's thought, but champion of the underdog he could not be, so secure was James in his own class privilege.⁵

5

This underdog/elite distinction, with James partisans making him out as a friend of the poor and disfranchised and James critics charging him with patrician elitism, constituted a major thread in scholarship on James throughout the twentieth century. The two other principal themes in James studies in this period were more specific to the particular disciplines of philosophy and literary studies. First, and from the moment James uttered the word "pragmatism" at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1898, disputes over pragmatism's meaning of truth and relative degree of technical proficiency acted initially as stepping stones for analytic philosophy's rise to dominance in England and America and, much later, as sticks of dynamite aimed at dismantling that philosophical bastion. This theme became conjoined with a result of the subaltern turn somewhat different from the problem of the underdog—the importation of French social thought into the humanities—and is therefore largely beyond the scope of this essay, although it has been fertile enough to produce much of what passes under the protean label "neopragmatism." While the "linguistic turn" has certainly been harnessed to the problem of the underdog, as in postcolonial studies, its impact on the development of today's many neopragmatisms has mainly yielded debates on how faithful such postmodern versions of pragmatism are to classical pragmatism, especially its epistemological dimensions and the role of experience in making truth. These debates, centering as they do on language, meaning, and disciplinary boundaries, rarely touch on the problem of the underdog.⁶

6

So too with the second dominant theme among James partisans and critics over the twentieth century, that introduced under the label "the pragmatic acquiescence" by Lewis Mumford in 1926. This critique charges James with offering a deceptively attractive way of evading the quandary of modern life by making do with the struggle itself according to present conditions rather than trying to transcend or fundamentally change those conditions.

7

Mumford complained that pragmatism is an “anesthetic” that keeps people in a perpetual state of “cultural adolescence.” This problem of pragmatism continues to be voiced by scholars writing on the left who are concerned about modern thought and the large-scale structural inequality of capitalism, but such critics of pragmatism do not tend to focus strictly on James—certainly not on James as an elite—and manage to operate outside the underdog/elite construct that came to dominate the academic viability of James after the subaltern turn.⁷

Leaving out responses to criticisms like Mumford’s and the technical philosophers, then, James scholars after the subaltern turn have consistently sought to shore up an image of James as a friend of the underdog as one way of justifying him as a research subject. Ross Posnock argues that James “insisted on the dignity of the underdog.” Another literary scholar, Frank Lentricchia, claims that James spoke for “the liberation of the small, the regional, the locally embedded, the underdog.” And Deborah Coon, the historian of psychology who argues for a James fundamentally not only socially active but downright anarchistic, portrayed his late nineteenth-century fears about the direction of society as bemoaning “the imperializing propensities of institutions, the domination of the weak by the strong, of the underdog by the bully.” Modern James scholars are often anything but secure in the sufficiency of James’s intellectual stature for justifying their academic work; they take great care to portray his social consciousness as suitably alive to the concerns of non-DWEMs.⁸

Studies seeking to rehabilitate James in the academic age of the underdog can be roughly classified into two groups. “Redescriptive” studies accept the general terms of the underdog/elite binary but insist that the bulk of James’s work and life served the less privileged members of society by articulating distinctively potent democratic ideas that favored the small and individual over hegemonical and normative forces in culture. “Reconstructive” studies, while often depending on redescriptive devices in their early stages, ultimately leave James to his historical moment and follow through on the implications of his ideas about pluralism in particular, co-opting his method for their own presentist aims. Although both forms of James studies are valuable for preserving a place for James in the academic age of the underdog, redescriptive studies have a more limited use because of the finitude of available evidence, while reconstructive studies are able to transcend the underdog/elite opposition by discarding James’s own subject position as a meaningful boundary for their own projects.

The two most prominent books among recent redescriptive James studies both focus on the public James, seeking to rehabilitate his reputation as an engaged political thinker, in contrast to the many studies that represent the private James along with his and his family’s idiosyncrasies. The historian George Cotkin argues for the importance of understanding James’s popular writings as a form of political activism in *William James: Public Philosopher* (1992). He subordinates the private James to his public importance by arguing that “[w]hat largely made James a successful public figure—someone to whom Americans turned for guidance and inspiration in many matters—was his ability to universalize his private universe into public discourse, as well as the reality that his private turmoil was the common cultural property of other Americans.” In order to make a case for a representative James-of-the-people, Cotkin links James to widespread phenomena like vocational crisis during the years of second-wave industrial reorganization, religious skepticism upon the rise of modern science, and especially the Civil War, which would prove such a fruitful causal force in the hands of Louis Menand in *The Metaphysical Club* (2001). Yet despite Cotkin’s avowal that his book would provide the “cultural context” for understanding James, that cultural context comes exclusively from secondary sources and therefore Cotkin’s James can do little to contribute anything new to the picture of his period. If James only reflected the general life of his time—a time of wide-spread social divisions, the institution of Jim Crow in the South, and growing nativism—he can hardly be held up as a champion of the underdog, although Cotkin convincingly demonstrates the importance of James’s popular style and anti-imperialist politics to his role as public philosopher.⁹

Joshua I. Miller, a political theorist, is able to redescribe James more forcefully in *Democratic Temperament: The Legacy of William James* (1997) because he does not take on the burden of James’s historical period, only the content of his writings. But Miller remains trapped in the underdog/elite paradigm as he hopes that “even while acknowledging the aristocratic cruelty of [James’s] words,” his own careful redescription of James’s thought might “rescue him as a democrat.” Throughout *Democratic Temperament*, Miller alternates between pointing out the varieties of James’s elitism and contending that a commitment to participatory democracy was the true center of his vision. However, as one reviewer noted, “[i]t takes quite a bit of stretching at times to render James politically correct.” Miller’s James sounds like—well, James: not even remotely capable of turn-of-the-twenty-first-century standards of antiracism, feminism, and opposition to ethnocentrism, heteronormativity, and class bias. Miller and Cotkin both do important work redescribing James’s life and thought with highlights on those areas where James shone in distinction to his peers, particularly his sensitivity to what is done in the name of democracy and what ought to be done to preserve the individual freedom of all, but redescription has gone as far as it can within the strictures of the underdog/elite opposition.¹⁰

Reconstructive studies of James, on the other hand, have a limitless potential for rehabilitating James in the academic age of the underdog because they are free to recombine James with contexts unimaginable by him in order to create something new out of the foundations of his thought. The scholar of religion Nancy Frankenberry, for example, uses James's radical empiricism only as a starting point in *Religion and Radical Empiricism* (1987). Taking as her central problem that of the tension between religious belief and cultural relativism, she is able to apply James's pluralism and radical empiricism to her argument for a theism no less real for its being able to respect other forms of belief. Her case for radical empiricism ultimately includes a way of thinking about which James knew very little indeed—the Buddhist concept of dependent origination—enabling Frankenberry to make something out of James's thought that James himself could not have made. Although Frankenberry's study is not directly concerned with the markers of the underdog (race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity), her driving preoccupation with the problems of modern belief and the cultural imperialism of a proselytizing Christianity make her project utterly germane to current academic concerns.¹¹

Two other recent reconstructive James studies similarly move the problem beyond the reach of James's own intellectual grasp. The philosopher Charlene Haddock Seigfried takes the pragmatism of James, Jane Addams, and John Dewey to argue for a pragmatic feminism in *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (1996). She does not dwell on James's overuse of the language of masculinity and his puerile ideas about the differences between male and female potential, as both detractors of James and rehabilitators in the vein of Cotkin and Miller, stuck in the underdog/elite paradigm, do. Instead, Seigfried acknowledges what she does not hesitate to label James's "sexism" and then proceeds to develop "a feminist radical empiricism" capable of recognizing "the strengths, ambiguities, and distortions of the feminine inscribed in the text." Her pragmatic feminism uses James as one tool for creating something almost wholly new.¹²

One final example of reconstructive James studies—and it is noteworthy that in this sampling it is the female James scholars who felt compelled to use James to go beyond him—both acknowledges the underdog/elite tension in James's character and retains Jamesian pluralism for a distinctly contemporary purpose. Literary scholar Carrie Tirado Bramen is very careful to point out James's "elitist and imperialist proclivities" in *The Uses of Variety: Americanism and the Quest for National Distinctiveness* (2000). She is particularly concerned, as Miller is, about James's bias toward the "college-bred," which both see as wrongly exclusive of individuals with other ways of knowing—and both see out of historical context (it was actually rather daring of James to suggest that the new generation of non-elites then graduating from the colleges expanding at that time might take leadership in a society accustomed to a very different kind of breeding). But Bramen is much more concerned with distinguishing between the many different uses of the concept of variety itself and with harnessing Jamesian pluralism to the current problems of multiculturalism, globalized culture, and identity politics. She takes what she can use of James and carries it determinedly through a text that evaluates the contributions of W.E.B. DuBois, Horace Kallen, regional writers, urban flâneurs, and the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, ultimately concluding with force and verve that the true part of James's pluralism says that we must make distinctions, we must risk controversy, we must "boldly affirm partiality in a world in which we can no longer afford to be impartial."¹³

Bramen's reconstructive study, along with those of Seigfried and Frankenberry and the most substantial findings of the redescriptive studies, show that James remains a vital subject even for those deeply concerned about problems of difference and equity because the fruits of studying his ideas remain fresh on the other side of the subaltern turn. But there is another reason to study James in the current academic climate: not despite his DWEM-ness, but because of it.

The Problem of the Inarticulate and the Web of Jamesian Discourse

The best argument for James as an appropriate research subject even in the academic age of the underdog is not that we need a "return" to research programs of the past, the basic claim of those who have started breakaway professional organizations like the Historical Society and the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, which separately charge their host disciplines with skewing research inordinately toward theory and the underdog. Nor is it that of the historian Elazar Barkan, who opined that "[o]ver the long run, hate of DWEMs is not better than misogyny." In fact, misandry—a word as rare as the phenomenon it describes—is arguably somewhat better than misogyny in a society whose power elites remain disproportionately white, male, heterosexual, and wealthy. Instead, the argument for James as a continually vital research subject must be as specific as his own intellectual biography and the work it has already produced, for it is there that numerous pathways to the underdog are found.¹⁴

The complaint against James as a research subject might reasonably be a charge of excess. He surely ranks with the Founding Fathers for the number of books and articles written about his life and thought, and with so many

thinkers and writers yet unrepresented in scholarly literature, why should any more ink be spent on James? This admittedly primitive construction of the problem yields several responses. Those who share the wish to neither replicate nor reify historical inequities, such as the exclusion of the underdog from academic study, might reasonably claim that focusing a study exclusively on James is at this point somewhat less valid than choosing to resurrect a forgotten figure or combining a study of James creatively with other figures as Bramen did. But an important qualification to this admission pertains to the character of the scholar as an inquiring and socially embedded individual. The social character of the scholar has become more important in the academic age of the underdog than it seemed in the days when the subject position of the scholar, as of the subject, was invisible, or “unmarked,” but operated no less powerfully in the construction of privilege for its invisibility—and perhaps more so.¹⁵ Moving beyond a frozen concept of subject positions as constituted strictly by race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality and taking both pluralism and historicism seriously makes it clear that James studies, like almost any field, are endlessly regenerative as long as the social composition of scholars themselves continues to evolve and history itself does not end. Scholars in different times and places are able to see different things no matter how faithfully they cleave to objectivity and the truth.

Underdog studies make two contested and provocative claims about subject position: that the location of the scholar along the continuum of categories of difference like race and gender and so on partly determines what sort of scholarship that scholar can produce; that the cultural context of scholars is forever intruding their consciousnesses as they interpret texts and represent them, making the scholarship a sort of joint project between scholar and subject. Without drawing from these observations the implications of the poststructuralists—and certainly not of those who would literally restrict the study of raced and gendered subjects to women of color, as the editors of journals like *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* do—both claims seem matter-of-factly valid, and productively so. No two scholars could produce exactly the same work no matter how long they tapped away at typewriters, and nuances matter in the business of ideas. Moreover, changing cultural conditions as well as evolving scholastic norms and theories alter what it is possible to see in a text, a body of work, a life. Each generation of scholars, then, particularly as its internal composition across categories of difference contrasts with that of previous generations, is capable of finding something different in the study of James or of any other fertile subject.

The second and more methodologically interesting concern stemming from the complaint over Jamesian excess can be framed under the label “the problem of the inarticulate.” After the subaltern turn, when social historians—to take one important shift within the humanities—strove to represent the forgotten figures of the American past, they had to invent new ways of doing history in order to locate their subjects and make them talk. The interest of social historians in understanding the past principally through the subalternity of historical agents reigned supreme over all other intellectual interests for them, yielding an extraordinary period of diverse forms of historical study including prosopography, community studies, and microhistory. But not everyone is intellectually fashioned for the reading of probate records. The type of scholarship yielded by the search for subalternity *per se* is different from scholarship produced by the search for ideas, and James scholars are constitutionally interested in ideas.

The underdogs in American thought and culture did not necessarily leave behind little more than records of their belongings and encounters with the court system, of course. Exceptional individuals from across categories of difference have made it into the academic canon on the basis of work they did despite barriers of prejudice and poverty. But by their very exceptionalism, it is hard to study individuals like Alain Locke and Anzia Yezierska other than as anomalies who stepped out of their culturally prescribed roles rather than representing their underdog constituents, and it is even more difficult to follow the lead of their lives and writings into any larger body of thought. The problem of the inarticulate began as a problem of academic prejudice, of generally white, male scholars representing an American thought and culture of continuous, comprehensive sameness of white, male power brokers. But after the subaltern turn, the problem of the inarticulate became the problem of giving voice to Americans who had little power or even literacy in their own cultural contexts. Therefore, even the most skillful works of recovery in this field—works including Jonathan Spence, *The Question of Hu* (1988), Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwives’ Tale* (1990), John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive* (1994), and Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett* (1998)—center around protagonists who cannot articulate philosophies for life, theories of mind, justifications for religious belief, or arguments for democratic pluralism no matter how creatively the scraps of their lives are pasted together.¹⁶

The problem of the inarticulate leads directly to the third and most important response to the complaint over Jamesian excess, which is what this bounty enables scholars to do that they cannot do elsewhere. In a 1999 article, the intellectual historian Daniel Wickberg rightly called for a history of thought that acknowledges that individuals from all backgrounds and subject positions had ideas. Wickberg argues that “we should stop characterizing late nineteenth-century thought in terms of James and a few other canonical thinkers.” Instead, we should read James

“in concert with hack journalism of the 1890s, joke books from that era, estate inventories and accounting records, without an *a priori* notion that one of these texts is more important or significant than the others.” Fair enough. But what Wickberg fails to establish in his argument is just how a scholar is to find the joke books and estate inventories that belong with James’s texts, or those of any other thinker already established in the canon. If our aim is to include the underdog in our academic conversations about ideas, how exactly is that underdog to be found? If we begin with a strong interest in the types of ideas articulated by James, such as pluralism and the notions that beliefs are experiments and democracy a rule for life, how do we locate underdogs who may have entertained similar ideas?¹⁷

Here is where Jamesian bounty comes in—the by-product of his canonical DWEM-ness—and the use of James as a method. In addition to all the biographies and monographs and articles written on James’s life and thought, James scholars have done tremendous work reconstructing his entire oeuvre, formal and informal. The Harvard University Press series *The Works of William James*, on which many scholars collaborated under the general editorship of Frederick Burkhardt, provides in nineteen volumes extensively annotated versions not only of all the works published in and immediately after his lifetime, but also of all the major papers stored at Harvard’s Houghton Library, including notebooks and manuscript versions of lectures and essays. James’s major writings are also available in numerous other collections, but the HUP series gives scholars anywhere not only what they would find at the archives, but more importantly the labors of its editors to explain which texts and thinkers James mentioned in his various cryptic notes. This achievement ranks along with that of Elizabeth M. Berkeley, Ignas K. Skrupskelis, John J. McDermott, and others in completing the twelve-volume *The Correspondence of William James*, which both reproduces and annotates the most important letters James wrote to his brother Henry or to anyone else and calendars every letter the editors found less important, along with brief guides to their contents. The *Correspondence* saves James scholars untold hours in visiting archives, deciphering handwriting, and—most importantly for the purposes of the academic age of the underdog—identifying just who all these strange correspondents of James’s were, and even what poems James quotes without attribution, or the full titles of books he truncated when recommending them. Add to these achievements Eugene Taylor’s reconstruction of the Lowell lectures—one of the few lecture series James gave without publishing them afterward—John Shook’s identification and collection of early critics and defenders of pragmatism, the bibliography of James’s writings begun by Ralph Barton Perry and continued by John McDermott, and Linda Simon’s selective compilation of reminiscences of James written by his friends and students after his death, and the available primary source base for understanding James’s life and work is astonishingly rich.¹⁸

This means that the reconstruction of James’s intellectual world is the work of years, rather than decades. Scholars can quickly learn what books James read, when he read them, what he thought about them, whom he told about them, with whom he argued, who argued with him, and what he and they thought they had in common. But this richness is useful not so much for reconstructing James’s own intellectual biography, which at this point needs only refinement, not establishment. Instead, the lucrative potential of the detailed preservation of James’s oeuvre lies in the recovery of his unlettered or at least relatively unknown peers. The treasure yielded by the reconstruction of James’s world is a portrait not only of James himself, but of an entire generation preoccupied with the problems of modern life: science, belief, and how to fashion society both to reflect and to support democracy.

Up to now, most work utilizing James as a method for reaching others has focused on peers or students of his already canonized, such as W.E.B. DuBois, Gertrude Stein, Horace Kallen, Jane Addams, and other pragmatists. This valuable work is supplemented by studies that begin to put James in a transatlantic context, an important connection that deserves considerable augmentation yet. But at least two vital contexts for James’s development remain to be explored, and from each equally vital questions flow, the answers to which might change the way scholars think about the period in which his ideas developed and, ultimately, the way his contributions and even his possible elitism should be understood.¹⁹

Religious reform is the first of these vital contexts reached through James, and indeed it was chief among his early developmental contexts (glorifications of the famous “Metaphysical Club” notwithstanding). A generally unheralded member of that Metaphysical Club—typically identified only through the compelling (and secularized) figures of C.S. Peirce, Chauncey Wright, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.—was Francis Ellingwood Abbot, author of *Scientific Theism* (1885) and active figure in all the circles of religious reform. James scholars like to begin stories of James’s life with the symbolic blessing bestowed upon him as an infant by Emerson, and references to the “Radical Club” where he met his future wife make rare appearances in the literature, but the religious reformers who ran such clubs under the benign but passionate inspiration of Emerson contributed a much more significant set of ideas to the intellectual agenda of post-Civil War America than has ever been recognized. The men among the religious reformers in the Radical Club, the Free Religious Association (FRA), the Ethical Culture Society, and

summer schools like the one in Concord run by Franklin B. Sanborn may have been disproportionately Harvard-educated—and therefore as elite as the rest of the traditional canon challenged in the academic age of the underdog—but what is so interesting about the dialogue among religious reformers in the period is how much of it was contributed by women and how open it was to what today would be called “people of color.”²⁰

Generalizations about a diverse group are difficult, but while religious reformers—and James’s friends—
26 included racists like Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, they generally believed themselves to have fulfilled the twin promises of romantic reform and the Civil War insofar as it was understood to have been a battle for universal freedom, a view immortalized in the anthem penned by the religious reformer Julia Ward Howe, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Out of this alliance between their identities and the fulfillment of democratic ideals like freedom and equality, religious reformers welcomed Frederick Douglass as vice president of the FRA, the overseas contributions of the Hindu Brahmo Somaj leader Keshur Chundeb Sen, the intellectual authority of Jews like Felix Adler and Stephen Wise, and the essays and addresses of feminists like Mary Grew, Mary Livermore, and Ednah Cheney—names not, until very recently and with the exception of Douglass, known much at all in academia. Although there are other documentary routes to recovering the identities of such underdogs, who fulfill all the strictures of subalternity except poverty, the intellectual connections preserved in James’s extensive oeuvre provide solid and substantial openings into a lost world where women shared the platform with men without apology and together articulated philosophies of life and mind available for scholars interested in ideas.²¹

The second context provided by James as method, social reform, overlapped with the first and provides
27 transportation into the period of progressive reform. While the religious reformers were primarily interested in developing modes of faith that matched their democratic ideals, within their circles individuals less interested in theology than justice met and moved outward to consider larger social problems. A few of these figures surfaced in Deborah Coon’s attempt to configure James as an anarchist, but because she was principally concerned with James himself she did not pursue reconstructions of what the radical anarchist Morrison I. Swift contributed to turn-of-the-twentieth-century discourse, or James’s brother-in-law the ethical culturalist William Mackintire Salter—who supported the Haymarket anarchists to the point of alienating his entire Chicago congregation, forcing a temporary move to Philadelphia—or even Thomas Davidson, who was so active in American intellectual circles up until the time of his death that obituaries called him one of the world’s twelve most learned men but who has been almost entirely forgotten since.²²

Davidson is the best vehicle for illustrating how James’s intellectual connections can be used to reach the
28 underdog. James and Davidson were fast friends from the era of the Metaphysical Club, and it is relatively widely understood that James made a point of visiting Davidson’s “Glenmore School for the Culture Sciences” in the Adirondack mountains of New York every summer in the 1890s and even for several years after Davidson’s death in 1900. But where scholars like George Cotkin and Bruce Kuklick have dismissed Davidson and his school as an unimportant manifestation of the amateur intellectualism snuffed out by the professionalization of the modern research university, it is not within that modern university that scholars can find thinking underdogs in significant numbers until rather late in the twentieth century. Instead, appraising Davidson’s worth through the lens of James’s valuation of his mind, scholars can reach into the intellectual world of Glenmore—where young women and men built cottages, heard and gave lectures, and wrote and thought with such apparent equity that one woman called Davidson “the only teacher I ever had who did not condescend to the alleged incapacity of a woman’s mind”—and beyond it to the Breadwinners’ College of the Lower East Side, a forerunner of the City College of New York deliberately catering to low-income students. Davidson established the Breadwinners’ College primarily to serve the Eastern European Jewish immigrant youths, male and female, who at that very moment in American history spurred such fear and loathing in the hearts of the country’s nativists that they were caricatured as “crooked, bearded, filthy, vulture-eyed ... hook-nosed and loose-lipped, grasping fat purses, in lean fingers, shaking greasy curls that straggled out under caps of greasy fur, glancing to the left and right with quick, gleaming looks that pierced the gloom like fitful flashes of lightning [sic].”²³

James’s own ambivalent views on immigrants are irrelevant to the scholastic yield gained by pursuing such leads
29 through his intellectual connections. His entertaining of “cranks” who diversified his intellectual worldview was well known even in his lifetime, yet scholars have not followed up on any but those already canonized by academic norms. C.S. Peirce, who was the crankiest of cranks in his lifetime, was lifted out of academic obscurity by one of Davidson’s own beloved Eastsiders, the philosopher Morris Cohen. Cohen resurrected the neglected figure of Peirce in order to build the technical philosophical edifice that, ironically, would in turn shield out idiosyncratic thinkers like James himself. But what of the other cranks in James’s intellectual world? Who was Benjamin Paul Blood? Henry William Rankin? Alexander McKenzie? The Chinese aspiring philosopher Solver Woo? The Polish pragmatist Wincenty Lutoslawski? How little anyone knows about James’s favorite hiking companion, the social activist Pauline Goldmark, and her sister Josephine, and their friend Edith Franklin Wyatt, who wrote a book

James liked and on whose hiking “knickers” and the liberation for women they represented James remarked, “I’m glad it’s come. I’m glad I lived to see it.” James preserved the homey wisdom of his carpenter in one essay, his guide to the North Carolina mountains in another, and the views of his niece’s seamstress in a letter. These laborers may be no more representative of their class than James was of his, but through James’s oeuvre scholars hear individuals who would otherwise remain forever voiceless.²⁴

Of the intellectual lives of any of these possible underdogs James’s own life must be but a footnote, but for the knowledge of their existence and of their validation by at least one very important thinker the use of James as method deserves credit. The deployment of James as a tool into the networks of spiritualism and psychic research—and therefore into a sphere where women exercised power unusual in their wider social moment—has at least begun, but James’s involvement in the circles of New Thought has yet to be made to produce much understanding of those circles, so preoccupied have James scholars been with shoring up his social reputation as spokesman for those who were squashed under the growing power edifice of licensed medicine. The use of James as method calls on scholars to forget about James’s own reputation and to utilize his documentary record to identify principal figures in each sphere in which he moved so that the privileged plenitude of his life and work can produce a more populist plenitude of lives and thinkers.²⁵

Form and Content

While composing the lectures that would become *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James wrote a letter to his son claiming that writing books was “easy enuff, ... You just get it out of other books, and write it down.” It is tempting to dismiss this as the playful wit of a loving father—and James scholars know that he did not in fact find writing easy, ever—but there is important truth in his remark, which bears on the usefulness of both the form and content of his writings for the academic age of the underdog. While James’s writings from *Pragmatism* (1907) on aspire to the technical style he himself disliked, the works that made him famous in his lifetime were indeed constituted almost as much by his selective appropriations from other thinkers as by his own original thought. Although it is well known that James rode the lecture circuit for over twenty years, scholars generally downgrade the value of this work as stemming from a pecuniary motivation, owing to a single remark James made about the income he received from these ventures. Whatever James’s own feelings and motives about the matter, however, the audiences he reached through these lectures and even more vitally through their published forms are an important avenue for understanding a wider public intellectual life. The sort of work that has begun to be done on Emerson’s similar public activity should now be commenced on James.²⁶

The two volumes *Will to Believe* (1897) and *Talks to Teachers* (1899), which were fruits of such lectures, sold well enough, but what is too often unremarked and yet to be established fully is how pamphlets that reproduced single lectures before their collection in anthologies were published, distributed, and read. James’s correspondence is full of readers’ responses, most of them grateful, although the puzzled dismissals by professionalizing philosophers of James’s brief for faith in “Will to Believe” get the most scholarly play. To one un-mined warm response, which carried with it the offer of publication, James replied that the lecture was already out as a pamphlet. “Is Life Worth Living?” (1895) had been delivered at the Ethical Culture Society of Philadelphia and the ECS chose to republish it, reaching untold numbers of readers. Untold, uncategorized, unanalyzed. A good sleuth could track down the birth and trajectory of many such pamphlets and thereby gain a view into the thinking public of the late nineteenth century.²⁷

In 1896 James remarked with wonder in a letter to his wife from the Chautauqua Institute of western New York that his hostess had his portrait in her bedroom over the words, “I want to bring a balm to human lives.” James was stunned: “Supposed to be a quotation from me!!!” But this line was repeated enough during his life and after his death to testify to his well-nigh religious appeal to a broad cross-section of American readers. James’s intention that his philosophy was “meant to be popular,” in the phrase of his fellow pragmatist F.C.S. Schiller, meant that he deliberately framed his arguments in accessible language illustrated with quotations both well-known and obscure. The form of his writings as an answer to ordinary American needs could be analyzed as a key to the elusive ordinary American reader. Yet even more interesting is how the content of James’s works transcended the underdog/elite dichotomy not only in his lifetime but today.²⁸

To explain the influence of William James, Ross Posnock once wrote of “the power of James’s own fermentative genius.” That power partly led Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, to devise a program that has had enormous cultural and social influence around the world in less than a century of existence. When Albert Camus visited a community library in East Orange, New Jersey, in 1946, he looked “in the card catalogue under philosophy: W. James and that’s it.” Today there is a William James Foundation devoted to socially responsible entrepreneurship, a William James Award for research on primary religious experience, a

William James fellow named yearly in psychological science, a William James middle school in Texas, and a William James Project at the Center for Cognitive Liberty and Ethics. Look on the internet and you will find dozens of sites, more amateur than academic, collecting quotations and texts from James. A pamphlet of uplifting quotations including words from James is direct-mailed for free to thousands of homes. On a postcard with a picture of a baby and a cat under the heading “FRIENDS” follows the epigraph: “Wherever you are, it is your friends that make your world. WILLIAM JAMES.”²⁹ The dazzlingly broad cultural currency of James challenges the fairness of confining him within the underdog/elite distinction.

James was unquestionably an elite; his attention to the subjectivity of the underdog is rightly contested. He may have been an elitist, insofar as his lack of social activism bespoke unconcern for certain groups maintaining their privilege while other groups lacked rights, although his character was that of neither an economist nor an activist but of a thinker whose pluralism made him extend the principle of divine sovereignty to all individuals in a time when even their political sovereignty was often limited. In assessing the current state of James studies, the entire spectrum of his thought as well as its social contexts, in his time and in ours, bears attention. For where the opposite of “elite” is “underdog,” the opposite of “elitist” is “populist.” And where the works of William James demonstrate his vast popular appeal far from the ivory tower of which he is seen as archetypal denizen, it is from the stance of populism rather than elitism that he may be investigated. 35

James once remarked that “the whole man within us is at work when we form our philosophical opinions.” So too with all varieties of scholarship and of less codified forms of thought. Thinkers find material in James that leverages more of their “whole” beings than James could ever have fathomed. What the historian Robert Dawidoff said of his craft—that “writing history is not altogether professionalized or historicizing but also direct: to remember the things in life that most move and express us and to act on them”—is really a pragmatic expression of James’s own central point. We use James and the resources his oeuvre provides to move and express our own concerns and those of our time. In this way we move the margins to the center, to borrow one final Jamesian concept, and create a new basis for future work in future academic ages.³⁰ 36

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Notes

¹ Most people probably signify the E in DWEM with “European,” but the relevant matter really seems to be their wealth and social position more than their ancestral origin, which is implied anyway in the conjoining of white and elite. William A. Henry III, *In Defense of Elitism* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). See especially chapters six and seven: “The Museum of Clear Ideas” and “Noah’s Ark, Feminist Red Riding Hood, Karaoke Peasants, and the Joy of Cooking.” The quotations come from pp. 79 and 119.

² Henry’s book was, unsurprisingly, given a favorable review by Jonah Goldberg in *The National Review Online* (May 13, 2002); an ambivalent review containing the quotation on Henry’s self-presentation as a champion of underdogs is Brian Bethune, “No Room at the Top,” *Maclean’s* (Oct. 24, 1994): 8. Ross Posnock, “A View from an English Department,” *Intellectual History Newsletter* 18 (1996): 18-19. David Bromwich, “Scholarship as Social Action,” in *What Happened to the Humanities?* ed. Alvin Kernan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 221.

The association of the subaltern turn with charges of elitism against those who study intellectuals is so ubiquitous that four other contributors to the symposium on “Intellectual History in the Age of Cultural Studies” in which

Posnock's words appeared similarly invoked the specter of "elites" and "elitism." See Alan Lawson, "Friends in Need: A Short, Bald Statement"; Michael S. Roth, "Thinking Tools: Intellectual History in the Study of Culture"; Carolyn J. Dean, "New Directions in Intellectual History?"; Charles Capper, "One Step Back, Two Steps Forward," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 18 (1996), 35, 38, 41, 66, 67.

³ Daniel J. Wickberg, "Intellectual History *vs.* the Social History of Ideas," *Rethinking History* 5:3 (2001): 392-393. T.J. Jackson Lears, "Against Anti-Intellectualism," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 18 (1996): 21. Some scholars are astute enough to turn the anti-elitism of the current academic age back in on its champions; witness Bruce Kuklick, also using James as an emblem of the old elite, saying that his colleagues argue that "[t]here are, for example, more critical things going on in turn-of-the-century America than the development of William James's ideas in the Harvard Department of Philosophy. At the same time, many of these astute critics of my favored genre are producing works that (in a less distinguished way than James) add to the corpus of works I like to study: my professional peers who commit a cultural study are writing heavily theoretical efforts that aim at probing the transcendental guts of our culture. These same critics, however, persistently claim that their work is of enormous importance for the culture at large." Kuklick, "Intellectual History at Penn," *ibid.*, 63.

⁴ James's faults of social consciousness are enumerated in George R. Garrison and Edward H. Madden, "William James—Warts and All," *American Quarterly* 29:2 (Summer 1977): 207-221.

⁵ Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935): II, 281. On Perry's professionalization, see Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), esp. 254-255. Otto's article, interestingly, appeared in the professional journal that replaced the more amateur, and therefore popular, journal to which James was a founding contributor, *The International Journal of Ethics*. M.C. Otto, "On a Certain Blindness in William James," *Ethics* 53:3 (April 1943): 184-191, 187.

⁶ Pragmatism was introduced to the public in William James, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," *Writings, 1878-1899* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 1077-1097. The most famous of the early philosophical critiques were Bertrand Russell, "Transatlantic 'Truth'"; A.O. Lovejoy, "The Thirteen Pragmatisms," collected with many others in John R. Shook, ed. *Early Critics of Pragmatism* 5 v. (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2001). Richard Rorty is the most visible philosopher to use pragmatism to revise the Anglo-American analytical tradition; Rorty's opening salvo against his own profession was *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979). Two contemporary pragmatists more faithful to the classical pragmatic tradition are Hilary Putnam and Richard J. Bernstein. See Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982).

For other neopragmatisms, see for a start Giles Gunn, *Thinking Across the Grain: Ideology, Intellect, and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); W.J.T. Michaels, ed., *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Richard Posner, *The Problems of Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

Two useful assessments of—and contributions to—these debates over neopragmatism are James T. Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?" *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture* ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 83-127; Robert B. Westbrook, "A New Pragmatism," *American Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Sept., 1993): 438-444.

⁷ Lewis Mumford abused pragmatism as part of his paean to nineteenth-century American literature in *The Golden Day: A Study in American Literature and Culture* (1926; Boston: Beacon, 1957), 95, 96. Mumford's view is repeated with some refinements in John Patrick Diggins, *The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Jeffrey Sklansky, *The Soul's Economy: Market Society and Selfhood in American Thought, 1820-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Sklansky extends the criticism to an indictment of James along with Emerson and others for allowing capitalism with all its exploitation of workers to happen. Rebuttals to both the complaint of the sort of philosophy pragmatism was and

the sort of person it made possible appear in James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and to the latter in James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

⁸ Ross Posnock, [untitled review], *The Journal of American History*, 85: 1 (June 1998): 270; Frank Lentricchia, "The Return of William James," *Cultural Critique* 1:4 (Autumn, 1986): 11; Deborah J. Coon, "'One Moment in the World's Salvation': Anarchism and the Radicalization of William James," *The Journal of American History*, 83:1 (June 1996): 94.

² Studies that focus on James's personal psychology include Cushing Strout, "William James and the Twice-Born Sick Soul," *Daedalus*, 97 (Summer 1968): 1062-82; Howard M. Feinstein, *Becoming William James* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Linda Simon, *Genuine Reality: A Life of William James* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998). George Cotkin, *William James: Public Philosopher* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 21, 22-36, 79-88. In an obvious overreach, Louis Menand goes so far as to call James's trip to Brazil "his Civil War" in *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001), 137.

¹⁰ Joshua I. Miller, *Democratic Temperament: The Legacy of William James* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 23. Charles W. Anderson, "William James and Democratic Theory," *The Review of Politics* 60:2 (Spring, 1998): 394. I would add to the list of redescriptive studies Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), which treats James along with representatives of non-DWEMs like W.E.B. DuBois and Jane Addams to argue for their collective cosmopolitan pluralism. I treat Hansen's text at some length in "Progressive Patriotism," *Reviews in American History* 33:2 (June 2005): 233-240.

¹¹ Nancy Frankenberry, *Religion and Radical Empiricism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987).

¹² Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 115. Similarly, James Livingston creates a pragmatic tradition that James would have trouble recognizing in *Pragmatism, Feminism, and Democracy: Rethinking the Politics of American History* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹³ Carrie Tirado Bramen, *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americanism and the Quest for National Distinctiveness* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 64, 304.

¹⁴ For the Historical Society and the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics—both, interestingly, housed at Boston University—see their websites: [www.bu.edu/historic] and [www.bu.edu/literary]. Elazar Barkan, "History and Cultural Studies," *History and...: Histories Within the Human Sciences*, ed. Ralph Cohen and Michael S. Roth (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1995), 367.

¹⁵ On the "unmarked" subject position, see Wayne Brekus, "A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting Our Focus," *Sociological Theory* 16 (March 1998): 34-51.

¹⁶ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Question of Hu* (New York: Knopf, 1988); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990); John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (New York: Knopf, 1994); Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

¹⁷ Wickberg, "Intellectual History vs. The Social History of Intellectuals," 392-393.

¹⁸ Frederick Burkhardt, ed., William James, *The Works of William James* 19 vol. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975-1988). Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, eds., *The Correspondence of William James* 12 vol. (Charlottesville and London: The University of Virginia Press, 1992-2004). Eugene Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States: The 1896 Lowell Lectures* (New York: Scribner, 1983). John R. Shook, *Pragmatism: An Annotated Bibliography, 1898-1940* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998); Shook, ed., *Early Defenders of*

Pragmatism 5 vol. (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2001); Shook, ed., *Early Critics of Pragmatism* 5 vol. (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2001). "Annotated Bibliography of the Writings of William James," *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 811-858. Linda Simon, ed., *William James Remembered* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Bramen, *Uses of Variety*; Menand, *Metaphysical Club*; Hansen, *Lost Promise*; Seigfried, *Pragmatism, Feminism, and Democracy*; Nancy Fraser, "Another Pragmatism: Alain Locke, Critical 'Race' Theory, and the Politics of Culture" and Ross Posnock, "Going Astray, Going Forward: DuBoisian Pragmatism and Its Lineage," *The Revival of Pragmatism*, 157-175; 176-189. Lisa Ruddick, "William James and the Modernism of Gertrude Stein," *Modernism Reconsidered* ed. Robert Kiely (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 47-63; Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*; Eliza Jane Reilly "Concrete Possibilities: William James and the European Avant-Garde," *Streams of William James* 2:3 (Fall 2000): 22-29; David Kadlec, *Mosaic Modernism: Anarchism, Pragmatism, and Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

²⁰ Abbot merits only a few lines in Menand, *Metaphysical Club*, 215. See accounts of Emerson blessing James in Paul Jerome Croce, *Science and Religion in the Era of William James Volume One: The Eclipse of Certainty, 1820-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 52; Simon, *Genuine Reality*, 19. For the Radical Club see *ibid.*, 150, 154-155. I began exploring this religious reformist context in *The Religion of Democracy: William James and Practical Idealism in Evolutionary America* (UMI, 2004) and continue in the similarly titled book manuscript.

²¹ The efforts of Livermore to represent outstanding women of her time have just been acknowledged with the new reissue of the volume she co-edited in 1897 with Frances Willard, *Great American Women of the 19th Century: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2005).

²² Coon, "One Moment in the World's Salvation." William Clark, "A Modern Wandering Scholar," *The Spectator* 85, no. 3 (October 6, 1900), 453-454.

²³ Cotkin is so unclear on Davidson that he said Glenmore was in the Catskills; Cotkin, *William James*, 12. See also Kuklick, *Rise of American Philosophy*, pp. 59-61. On Davidson, see William Knight, *Memorials of Thomas Davidson: The Wandering Scholar* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907); the quotation is from p. 76. The anti-Semitic passage comes from Marion Crawford, *The Witch of Prague* (1891), excerpted in Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 174.

²⁴ Morris Cohen edited Charles Peirce, *Chance, Love, and Logic: Philosophical Essays* in 1923, after Peirce's death (New York: Harcourt Brace). See Edith Franklin Wyatt's letter of July 18, 1928 to Henry James III, for her recollection of James's graciousness, and James to Alice Howe Gibbens James, June 5, 1895, for the seamstress; both in the James Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University. James's carpenter's saying that "There is very little difference between one man and another; but what little there is *is very important*" was one of James's favorites; see for example "The Importance of Individuals," *Writings, 1878-1899*, 648. The guide is crucial to the argument in James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," *ibid.*, 842-3.

²⁵ On James and spiritualism, see R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128-151; Krister Knapp, *To the Summerland: William James, Psychic Research, and Modernity* PhD. diss., Boston College (UMI, 2003). On women in spiritualism, see Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); on New Thought, see Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

²⁶ James's letter to his son is quoted in Simon, *Genuine Reality*, 301. On Emerson's public lecturing, see Richard F. Teichgraber III, "'Our National Glory': Emerson and American Culture, 1865-1882," *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendental Movement and Its Contexts*, ed. Charles Capper and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1999), 499-526; Teichgraber, *Sublime Thoughts/Penny Wisdom: Situating Emerson and Thoreau in the American Market* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Mary Kupiec Cayton, "The Making of an

American Prophet: Emerson, His Audiences, and the Rise of the Culture Industry in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The American Historical Review* 92:3 (June, 1987): 597-620.

²⁷ See Fanny Rollins Morse to William James, letter of December 3, 1895, in *Correspondence* 8: 103-104.

²⁸ See James’s letter to Alice Howe Gibbens James, July 26, 1896 in the James papers at Harvard’s Houghton library; the quotation is repeated as “to find a balm for men’s souls” in an obituary in such a way as to imply it is well known. See “William James Dies: Great Psychologist,” *New York Times* (August 27, 1910): 7. See also M.H. Hedges, “The Physician as a Hero: William James,” *Forum* (December 1914), 880, where the phrasing is “I am seeking balm for the souls of men,” and Hedges, “Seeking the Shade of William James,” *Forum* (April 1915): 445. On pragmatism as a popular philosophy, see Schiller’s letter to Alice Howe Gibbens James, December 22, 1911, James papers.

²⁹ Ross Posnock, “The Influence of William James,” *Cambridge Companion to William James* ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 324. *Pass It On: The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1984), 125. Albert Camus, *American Journals*, tr. Hugh Levick (New York: Paragon, 1987), 38. [www.williamjamesfoundation.org]; [www.csp.org/WmJamesAwards.html]; [www.fortworthisd.org/profile/045mp.html]; [www.psychologicalscience.org/awards/james]; [www.dailycelebrations.com/011301.htm]; [www.cognitiveliberty.org/proj_williamjames.html]. Postcard (printed with soy ink, no less) is distributed by Compendium, inc., and is in author’s possession.

³⁰ James, “The Sentiment of Rationality,” *Writings, 1878-1899*, 525. Robert Dawidoff, “History...but,” in *History and...: Histories Within the Human Sciences*, ed. Ralph Cohen and Michael S. Roth (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 381.

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Deweyan Pragmatism¹

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Dewey's philosophy of religion, which admittedly does not occupy a great deal of his writing, represents a decisive move on his part beyond James. Many have pointed out that it was James who turned Dewey from Hegelianism to what becomes his instrumentalist rendition of Jamesian pragmatism.² In this article, I will concentrate on what Dewey borrows (and changes) from James: a notion of experience meant to bridge the gap between traditional philosophical rationalism and empiricism (and meant to take the place of both), and an emphasis on meliorism. I agree with those who argue that Dewey "naturalizes" James.³ James's moral multiverse and his relatively uncritical approach to religious experience are replaced by a rather transparent religion of pluralism (or democracy) and a notion of moral faith which points from individual experience toward the pluralistic, democratic community. It would be more accurate to say that religion itself, any religious tradition, and religious experience, are replaced by the religious function in experience, through which the beliefs of the many and their aspirations form the working hypotheses of a progressive community. Faith in the existence of some religious Being is replaced by moral faith in the future, a faith which does not point to a divine Being beyond our own existences. James describes religious experience in psychological terms. Dewey wants to move beyond description. And he wants to move beyond the category of religious experience, beyond the idea that there is a special and unique type of experience which reflects a unique reality. For Dewey, the religious aspects of experience only point forward. In Dewey, James's pragmatism becomes *instrumentalism*. Where James may be satisfied to accept certain beliefs and experiences (including "special" beliefs and experiences) at face-value and to judge them by their consequences, Dewey demands a reconstruction of the meaning of a belief before he is willing to discuss its value; and value, for Dewey, involves the power to exert an influence at the level of community and address and redress social problems.

Dewey reviewed James's *Pragmatism* in 1908. His article offers a glimpse of his interpretation of James's thought in general. For Dewey, Jamesian pragmatism is *best understood* as a "method of treating conceptions, theories, etc., as working hypotheses, as directors for certain experiments and experimental observations" (Dewey 1908, 86). This simple description points to the core of Dewey's inheritance of James. Dewey likes that James chooses pragmatism as the better alternative against rationalism. The difference between the meaning or function of beliefs (*conceptions, theories, etc.*) in rationalism and pragmatism is significant, and Dewey works through it when he presents James's account of truth:

Truth means, as a matter of course, agreement, correspondence, of idea and fact, but what do agreement, correspondence, mean? With rationalism they mean 'a static, inert relation,' which is so ultimate that of it nothing more can be said. With pragmatism, they signify the guiding or leading power of ideas by which we "dip into the particulars of experience again," and if by its aid we set up the arrangements and connections among experienced objects with the idea intends, the idea is verified; it corresponds with the things it means to square with. The idea is true which works in leading us to what it purports.⁴

Setting aside the question of the accuracy of this quick restatement of James, we can appreciate the forcefulness of Dewey's James. For Dewey, this is the best James. James stands alongside him in rejecting the metaphysical exile of ideas to the Realm of Ideas. For both, it seems, ideas are aspects of experiences and point us

back into experience. They are tools for work, guiding principles. Ideas find their value through work—they are working hypotheses to be tested. The “correspondence of idea and fact” is not a fixed relationship of form to particular. Ideas can be verified only as they play out in the world of working. An idea works itself into a fact.

Dewey distinguishes himself from James over a technical but crucial difference in their notions of truth and divinity. Dewey identifies two working notions of truth in *Pragmatism*. The first deals with *ideas as ideas*. He will set against this *truths*, “where the meaning of the object and of the idea is assumed to be already ascertained” (Dewey 1908, 89). The truth of an *idea* is discovered as it sets about working through “the stream of experience.” “In other words,” Dewey writes:

an idea is a draft drawing upon existing things, an intention to act so as to arrange them in a certain way. From which it follows that if the draft is honored, if existences, following upon the actions rearrange or readjust themselves in the way the idea intends, the idea is true. When, then, it is a question of an idea, it is the idea *itself* which is practical (being an intent) and its *meaning* resides in the existences which, as changed, it intends.⁵

Dewey’s point is that the meaning and truth-value of an idea is tied to its practical consequences, but is not exhausted by them. Its value as “true” is something to be worked out. In Dewey’s description we find hints of the social or communal aspects of his philosophy. An idea is set at play *upon existing things*, and affects other *existents*, which must *rearrange or readjust themselves*. In this sense, the truth of an idea reverberates, influencing other ideas and concepts and theories as it works itself out in the world of working. Or, better still, the *meaning* of an idea is found by looking forward through its reverberations, its expanding circles of influence and interrelation.⁶

The second “formula” for truth or meaning Dewey identifies in *Pragmatism* deals with *truths*. Here Dewey brings together two passages in James reviewed in Chapter Three: “What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion *were true?*”; and there can be “no difference in abstract truth that doesn’t express itself in a difference in concrete fact, and in conduct consequent upon that fact, imposed on somebody.”⁷ Dewey’s analysis is helpful, especially when we take into account James’s descriptions of religious beliefs in *Varieties of Religious Experience*. In this second kind of truth, the subject is taken to be an idea whose meaning is already assumed or pre-given; “it is implied that the conception, or conceptual significance, is already clear, and that the existences it refers to are already in hand.”

The question for this second version of truth is of its “value if believed.” For the first, *idea as working hypothesis*, Dewey emphasizes their “*meaning as programs of behavior for modifying the existent world*” (Dewey 1908, 90). James, judging only the value of ideas whose meaning is pre-given or assumed, lets the content slip by unexamined. For some ideas, then, Dewey writes, “it is difficult to see how the pragmatic method could possibly be applied . . . it seems unpragmatic for pragmatism to content itself with finding out the *value* of a conception whose own inherent intellectual significance pragmatism has not first determined by treating it not as *a truth*, but simply as a working hypothesis and method” (Dewey 1908, 92).

This marks a significant break between James and Dewey. Dewey makes this explicit when he handles a passage in which James writes about “the notion of God [which] guarantees an ideal order that shall be permanently preserved.” “Here, then,” James continues, “in these different emotional and practical appeals, in these adjustments of our attitudes of hope and expectation, and all the delicate consequences which their differences entail, *lie the real meanings of materialism and spiritualism*.”⁸ Dewey’s disagreement with James over his suggested understanding of God runs this discussion of the two kinds of truth into the divide between James’ supernaturalism and Dewey’s naturalism. Dewey’s reaction is worth citing at length:

Does the latter method of determining the meaning of, say, a spiritual God afford the *substitute* of the conception of him as a “superhuman power” effecting the eternal preservation of something; does it, that is, define God, supply the content for our notion of God? Or, does it merely superadd a *value* to a meaning already fixed? And, if the latter, is it the object, God as defined, or the notion, or the belief (the acceptance of the notion) which effects these consequent values? In either of the latter alternatives, the good or valuable consequences can not clarify the *meaning* or conception of God; for, by the argument, they proceed from a prior definition of God . . . If the pragmatic method is not applied simply to tell the *value* of a belief or controversy, but to fix the *meaning of the terms* involved in the belief, resulting consequences would serve to constitute the *entire* meaning, intellectual as well as practical, of the terms; and hence the pragmatic method would simply *abolish* the meaning of an antecedent power which will

perpetuate eternally some existence. For *that* consequence flows not from the belief or idea, but from the existence, the power. It is not pragmatic at all (Dewey 1908, 91).

The solution to this problem in Jamesian pragmatism will be found in and through what Dewey terms “reconstruction,” the recalibration and reconception of traditional philosophical and religious categories (the subject of a later section in this paper). The content of God, so to speak, should not be fixed, and then limited to or expressed through a personal, mystical experience. Religious experience can turn toward dogmatism, which allows, requires, or proves the fixed notion of an idea or belief, such as faith in God’s existence. But *abolishing* the pre-given or assumed meaning of a belief is not practical enough for Dewey. Referring to an exchange with James, in which James gets him wrong, Dewey writes, “I have never identified *any* satisfaction with the truth of an idea, save *that* satisfaction which arises when the idea as working hypothesis or tentative method is applied to prior existences in such a way as to fulfill what it intends” (Dewey 1908, 94). Neither a pre-given meaning of an idea, nor the reduction and identification of that meaning to the consequences of the idea ring true for Dewey.² Dewey takes from James two characteristics of truths: they are made, not provided *a priori*; and their value is dynamic, not static (Dewey 1908, 94).

In three other early essays on pragmatism, Dewey expands on his understanding of the value and meaning of ideas. James describes truth as something which happens to an idea. For Dewey, meaning happens to an idea. This characterizes his *experimental theory of knowledge*: “An object *becomes* meaning when used empirically in a certain way; and under certain circumstances, the exact character and worth of this meaning *becomes* an object of solicitude. But the transcendental epistemologist with his purely psychical ‘meanings’ and his purely extra-empirical ‘truths’ appears to assume a *Deus ex Machina* whose mechanism is preserved a secret” (Dewey 1906b, 304). It is obvious that Dewey would not display the same patience, or embark on the same descriptive psychological project James does in *Varieties*. The position that the meaning of any idea or belief can be passed over in favor of a judgment on its value in the life of the believer is tantamount to supporting an absolutist or monistic position. Deweyan pragmatism requires a complete de-mythologization: “To read back into the order of things which exists without participation of our reflexion and aim, the quality of which defines the purpose of our thought and endeavour is at one and the same stroke to mythologise reality and deprive the life of thoughtful endeavour of its reason for being.”¹⁰

This critical difference with James appears in Dewey’s later essay, “The Development of American Pragmatism.”¹¹ Here, Dewey argues that pragmatism does not make action the end of life, does not “subordinate thought . . . to particular ends.” He seems to take Peirce’s side against James, arguing that “the role of action is that of an intermediary. In order to be able to attribute a meaning to concepts, one must be able to apply them to existence. Now it is by means of action that this application is made possible. And the modification of existence which results from this application constitutes the true meaning of concepts” (*LW* II, 5).

Dewey emphasizes the “diversity of meanings” available to any given conception. “The greater the extension of the concepts,” he writes, “the more they are freed from the restrictions which limit them to particular cases, the more it is possible for us to attribute the greatest generality of meaning to a term.” Dewey throws his support behind James’s pluralistic philosophy, which both describe as competing with (and preferable to) philosophical monism. Dewey writes that “Monism demands a rationalistic temperament leading to a fixed and dogmatic attitude. Pluralism, on the other hand, leaves room for contingency, liberty, novelty, and gives complete liberty of action to the empirical method, which can be indefinitely extended” (*LW* II, 5, 8). I assume that the extension of the empirical method reaches back toward those ideas whose meanings have been assumed.

This may be one of the consequences for Dewey of what he describes as James’s “revision of English empiricism,” “a revision which replaces the value of past experience, of what is already given, by the future, by that which is as yet mere possibility” (*LW* II, 13). What for James is *radical empiricism*, Dewey claims as *immediate* empiricism (Dewey 1905b, 393). It provides Dewey with a kind of philosophy which does not lean on anything other than experience. Though, for Dewey, “all labels are obnoxious and misleading,” he wants to be clear about *his* empiricism: “Empiricism, as herein used, is as antipodal to sensationalistic empiricism, as it is to transcendentalism, and for the same reason. Both of these systems fall back on something which is defined in non-directly-experienced terms in order to justify that which is directly experienced” (Dewey 1905b, 393). James makes this point himself in his recalibration of traditional British empiricism. For Dewey, empiricists and rationalists alike err on the side of absolutism, believing that experience is mere appearance, that “cognition is imperfect, giving us only some symbol or phenomenon of Reality (which *is* only in the Absolute or in some Thing-in-Itself)—otherwise the curtain-wind fact would have as much ontological reality as the existence of the Absolute itself: a conclusion at which the non-empiricist perhorresces, for no reason obvious to me—save that it would put an end to his transcendentalism” (Dewey 1905b, 396). Dewey runs metaphysics and epistemology

together. If truth is exiled to a realm of Being in which humans (and existence) cannot play, then there really is no point in speaking about meanings happening to an idea, or about the value of an idea or belief being determined through practice and action.

Dewey's admittedly 'popeye-d' empiricism comes to the "truism that experience is experience, or is what it is" (Dewey 1905b, 399). Or, reality *is* how it is experienced and nothing more. Combined with Dewey's understanding of the experimental nature of belief, immediate empiricism is best understood (as is Pragmatism) as a "method of philosophical analysis" that provides the tools for discovering the meaning of concepts and theories *through experience*—"go to experience," he writes, "and see what it is experienced *as*." This, too, recalls James and his distinction between *Kennen* and *Wissen*, with the emphasis on knowledge as acquaintance. To discover the meaning of something, we put it in play, as opposed to trying to hunt down a pre-given or original essence (known to Reason alone). For Dewey, immediate empiricism sounds the end of "philosophical conceptions . . . as stimulants to emotion, or as a species of sanctions;" and presents a "larger, more fruitful and more valuable career [for them] considered as specifically experienced meanings" (Dewey 1905b, 399).

Throughout his discussions of experience and belief, Dewey emphasizes the background and consequences of the social or communal career of meaning(s). In fact, his conception of truth is much less a theory of truth than a theory of philosophy, which points away from traditional philosophical inquiry (both idealistic and empiricist) and toward *reconstruction*. This type of philosophy is supported by and meant to support democracy (or democratic ideals), which is in essence the political version of what James calls *pluralism*. Dewey terms his rendition of pragmatic philosophy *instrumentalism* to emphasize the further horizon of the experiments of belief, and the social setting or community from which they arise. Both beliefs and the philosophy that describes them as working hypotheses are instrumental in expanding the terms and complexities of the discussion which, abiding no *special beliefs*, transforms the community into a laboratory of experience. It may be the case that Dewey only allows for one special belief, instrumentalism.

Dewey's pragmatism "assigns a positive function to thought, that of *reconstituting* the present stage of things instead of merely knowing it" (LW II, 18). The "American Enlightenment" Dewey envisions is fueled by a type of philosophy which looks forward to a better future for which it actively works. In "Philosophy and American National Life," Dewey offers this as the most basic definition of Instrumentalism: a philosophy "which shall be instrumental rather than final, and instrumental not to establishing and warranting particular sets of truths, but instrumental in furnishing points of view and working ideas which may clarify and illuminate the actual and concrete course of life" (MW III, 77).

The Jamesian qualification of a difference which makes a difference, for Dewey, requires philosophy to "respond to the demands of democracy" (MW III, 74). This involves, among other things, a respect and appreciation for "the inherently significant and worthwhile place which the psychical, which the doubting, hoping, striving, experimenting individual occupies in the constitution of reality" (MW III, 75). This is where the ideals of pluralism hit the road. American thought requires "an absence of dogmatism, of rigidly fixed doctrines, a certain fluidity and socially experimental quality" (MW III, 76).

In an essay twice printed by Dewey, "Beliefs and Existences," he continues his attack on his understanding of *the fixation of belief*.¹² The central error and evil of philosophy is the disconnect it imposes between existence and the meaning of beliefs and concepts. The content of a belief is inextricably connected with its forward direction. For James, the argument was with those who would seize a spinning top to grasp its motion. Here, too, the correction is in favor of continued action, an appreciation of the belief in its natural habitat: "Belief, sheer, direct, unmitigated personal belief, reappears as the working hypothesis; action which at once develops and tests belief reappears as experimentation, deduction, demonstration; while the machinery of universals, axioms, *a priori* truths, etc., is the systematization of the of the way in which men have always worked out, in anticipation of overt action, the implications of their beliefs with a view to revising them in the interests of obviating the unfavorable, and of securing the welcome consequences" (Dewey 1906a, 124). The *personal attitude* is that which provides a belief with its working meaning, through experimentation. "All such fixities," Dewey writes, "whether named atoms or God, whether they be fixtures of a sensational, a positivistic or an idealistic system, have existence and import only in the problems, needs, struggles, and instrumentalities of conscious agents and patients. For home rule may be found in the unwritten efficacious constitution of experience" (Dewey 1906a, 117). Dewey is making at least three points: meaning is not fixed, and cannot be reduced from beliefs at work; philosophy must point itself forward and engage in the project of the reconstruction of reality; and the objects of belief are not mind-independent. Again, displacing belief from experience, from its context, is the ultimate harm of traditional metaphysics. It strips belief of that which gives it meaning, by dividing it *from its nature*.

After reviewing the basic terms of his argument for a notion of belief which looks forward toward its meaning, Dewey turns his attention to the category of *special* beliefs (Dewey 1906a, 128). Dewey tells his version of the story of the movement of Christianity away from “deliberate passionate disturbance . . . when the demand for individual assertion by faith against the idea of the total subordination of the individual to the universal . . . to become a theory, a theology, a formulation” (Dewey 1906a, 118). Eventually, the distinction drawn between this world and the world beyond (or above) gives rise to two classes of belief, natural and supernatural. Science and scientific inquiry plow the grounds of nature and produce knowledge, while the supernatural world, the realm of the moral and spiritual is given over to belief.¹³ Working at odds with science in order to protect itself, religion turns apologetic about its core beliefs or assumptions. “We build them a citadel and fortify it; that is,” Dewey argues, “we isolate, professionalize, and weaken beliefs . . . Hug some special belief and one fears knowledge; believe in belief and one loves and cleaves to knowledge” (Dewey 1906a, 128, 129).

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Dewey brings a thoroughgoing naturalism to bear on all types of belief, especially those special beliefs which linger beyond the reach of experience and experiment. When Dewey writes that free thought emancipates belief, he warrants experimentation in an ever broadening community of inquiry. Naturalizing special beliefs means eliminating their exemption from the experiments of knowledge and learning. It may be more accurate to say that naturalizing special beliefs here means ruling them out altogether.

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The Move of *Experience and Nature*

One of Dewey’s central philosophical texts, *Experience and Nature*, enjoyed revision into a second edition in his lifetime, in the span of four years. It marks his most concerted effort at presenting and explaining *empirical naturalism* (which is also called *naturalistic empiricism* and *naturalistic metaphysics*). As we have seen in his essays on pragmatism, Dewey maintained that the protection of some beliefs—their immunity from correction and reconstruction—marks a disastrous turn in the history of ideas. Introducing this work, Dewey spells out how he collapses the worlds of science and faith (morality), or, more accurately, naturalizes belief, to make it jibe with science (see Dewey 1929a, xiv). James provided the standard of *difference*. Dewey now adds a naturalistic or naturalism qualification. Every belief must be available for revision and recalibration. The “inclusive integrity of experience” is meant to replace traditional distinctions between Reality and Appearance and of science and faith (See Dewey 1929a, 48).

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To this end, Dewey points towards James’s description of experience as *double-barreled*: “it recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality” (Dewey 1929a, 10-11). Again, Dewey emphasizes that all ideas and beliefs must be made available (or, *empirical*) “so that they may be confirmed or modified by the new order and clarity they introduce into it.” The central consequence of Dewey’s naturalistic empiricism is that ideas and beliefs now “acquire empirical value; they are what they contribute to the common experience of man” (Dewey 1929a, 19). There is no meaning or value attached to an idea that does not come through experience (and which is not susceptible to revision). Ideas are no longer taken to be transcendental. Learning requires that “one go to his own experience, and, discerning what is found by use of the [empirical] method, come to understand better what is already within the common experience of mankind” (Dewey 1929a, 34).

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By collapsing or including ideas and beliefs into what James calls the stream of experience (along with Bergson and Husserl), and naturalizing these aspects of experience, Dewey does not become a relativist or skeptic. In fact, through his conception of experience as the replacement of an outdated and ultimately harmful metaphysics, Dewey becomes a *pragmatic realist*. In the first chapter of *Experience and Nature*, he writes, “That esthetic and moral experience reveal traits of real things as truly as does intellectual experience, that poetry may have a metaphysical import as well as science, is rarely affirmed, and when it is asserted, the statement is likely to be meant in some mystical or esoteric sense rather than in a straightforward everyday sense. Suppose however that we start with no presuppositions save that *what is experienced, since it is a manifestation of nature, may and indeed must, be used as testimony of the characteristics of natural events*” (Dewey 1929a, 19-20. Emphasis is mine). I am not arguing that Dewey is a Realist, in the traditional philosophical sense of the term. To do so would ignore the move Dewey explicitly makes beyond the reality-appearance distinction. Dewey’s concern is not with what there is, but on what ought to be.¹⁴

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In his treatment of *Experience and Nature*, Richard Gilmore argues that *testimony* requires a strenuousness and an openness which speaks of *discovery*. He writes, “what the discovery is a discovery of is that there is another aspect to nature, to things in nature, that is initially invisible. It will take a certain amount of undergoing, training, practice, and discipline in order to be able to perceive this aspect of things in nature, but once one has, nature itself is transformed, and access to the sublime is opened.”¹⁵ Discovery becomes a process of making continuous

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what has been torn asunder, the individual and nature, the visible and the invisible. Though Gilmore does not refer back to Emerson, the language he uses recall Emerson in *Nature*.¹⁶

Thomas Gardner picks up on this process and demand in Dewey. He argues that, for Dewey, experience “discloses nature.” It does so in two ways: “nature is the object of experience, in a very real, if common-sense way. Experience is also *in* nature, it is the “transaction that takes place between objects of nature when at least one of those objects is a human organism.” Gardner points back to Dewey’s contention that traditional metaphysics counts as real only selected features of experience and denigrates the rest. This is where he locates the source of Dewey’s emphasis on the positive or melioristic possibilities of philosophy: “By isolating the ‘good’ traits found in existence/experience (i.e., stability, certainty, completeness, etc.) and transforming them into the fixed traits of real Being, the traditional metaphysicians build an intellectual refuge from the ‘bad’ traits found in existence/experience (i.e., precariousness, uncertainty, incompleteness, etc.). According to Dewey, they encourage escape from the evils of nature rather than control over them” (Gardner, 395, 396, 399).

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Pragmatism as Reconstruction

In some ways, Dewey ‘out-pragmatizes’ James. This is most evident in his presentation of *reconstruction* as the technique both of naturalizing Jamesian pragmatism, and focusing it, especially where it is applied to religion. Working forward from James, Dewey turns to a reconception and rejuvenation of experience (empiricism). He questions the need to look outside of experience “to supply assured principles to science and conduct” (Dewey 1957, 77). Reconstruction carries with it two (connected) meanings, philosophical and democratic. They are complimentary, because the reconstruction of philosophy trains philosophy on the institutions of democracy and the aspirations of democratic society. Dewey’s leading principle in “Philosophy and the American Life” and “The Development of American Pragmatism,” guides his work in education theory as well as philosophy. Pragmatism becomes instrumentalism when it concerns itself with the “positive function of *re*constituting the present stage of things instead of merely knowing it;” and when it identifies or projects “an idea or ideal which, instead of expressing the notion of another world or some far-away unrealizable goal, would be used as a method of understanding and rectifying specific social ills.”¹⁷ This is the cause for and of philosophy, according to Dewey, “an attempt to find an intelligent substitute for blind custom and blind impulse as guides to life and conduct” (Dewey 1957, 126). Knowledge becomes instrumental as it becomes experimental.

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In the chapter “Moral Reconstruction,” Dewey applies reconstruction “in the moral and social disciplines.” The first consequence of Dewey’s naturalization of belief is the adaptation of the “pragmatic rule” of looking forward to determine the meaning and consequences of an idea (Dewey 1957, 162, 163). Coupled with the melioristic task Dewey sets for philosophy, we arrive at his basic reconstruction of the “burden of the moral life from following rules or pursuing fixed ends over to the detection of the ills that need remedy in a special case and the formulation of plans and methods for dealing with them” (Dewey 1957, 165). Fixed ends, like fixed meanings (of beliefs, ideas), are symptomatic of the rationalistic, monistic philosophies which Dewey and James find so repugnant. The “belief in fixed values” is taken to be a form of fanaticism, which differentiates between ideal and material goods, to the detriment of “those interests of daily life which because of their constancy and urgency form the preoccupation of the great mass.” The solution is to apply the method of the natural sciences, as Dewey sees it, to the reconstruction of moral life. “Inquiry, discovery take the same place in morals that they have come to occupy in sciences of nature. Validation, demonstration become experimental, a matter of consequences” (Dewey 1957, 168, 1701-171, 174).

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This rendering of moral ideals and principles does not make them less substantial than when they were simply understood as given, or accepted as pre-existent or *a-priori*. When the fixed values of beliefs are unmoored, set free, they become, in Dewey’s words, “the unforced flowers of life.” Dewey does not abandon the religious possibility. He seems to respect and in some sense demand its reappearance as a force in the life of the community. His task, and the one he addresses forcefully in *A Common Faith*, is to recover the vital sources (and functions) of religion.

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The Reconstruction of Religion

The most interesting reconstruction Dewey performs is found in the three short lectures of *A Common Faith*. In this gem of a book, Dewey turns his attention to the category of religious belief. His reconstruction of religion into the religious aspects of experience runs the same course as his reconstruction of philosophy. Religion, for Dewey, is best brought forward through its particular functions in and of experience, not as the dogma and doctrine of traditional religions. Dewey’s naturalistic account of religious experience is thoroughly anti sui-generis.

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The religious is not privileged or unique; in fact, the translation of religion is meant to direct it away from the rigid principles of religious traditions and toward the service of a pluralistic and democratic community.¹⁸ His approach, which he likens to the scientific method, is meant to be “open and public,” and not, like doctrine, “limited and private” (Dewey 1934, 39). Openness also means that he will not follow the part of James’s definition of religions in *Varieties* as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James 1961, 42).

Dewey sets the stage for his reconstruction of religion by asking about the role and place of supernaturalism in religion. The simplest definition of religion is the one with which Dewey begins. It is characterized by belief in unseen powers (“something unseen and powerful”) to which “obedience and reverence” is shown and from which emanate or through which are identified certain “moral motivations.” Dewey is very quick to distance himself from any strict definition or delineation of the fundamental characteristics of *religion*, arguing that “there is no such thing as religion in the singular. There is only a multitude of religions.” Religion is described as weighed down by “historic encumbrances,” which prevent “the religious quality of experience from coming to consciousness and finding the expression that is appropriate to present conditions, intellectual and moral.” Dewey here sounds very much like Emerson in his “Divinity School Address.” Part of the reconstruction of religion, then, is the rarefaction of the religious from particular religions. Dewey’s language is almost identical to that used earlier in “Beliefs and Realities”: “I am not proposing a religion, but rather the emancipation of elements and outlooks that may be called religious. For the moment we have a religion, whether that of the Sioux Indian or of Judaism or of Christianity, that moment the ideal factors in experience that may be called religious take on a load that is not inherent in them, a load of current beliefs and of institutional practices that are irrelevant to them” (Dewey 1934, 4-5, 7, 9).

It is difficult at this very early stage in his argument to break down Dewey’s conception of *ideal factors*. But we can identify at least two themes that resound from his earlier work in pragmatism. First, the focus on *present conditions* will lead to the identification (or assignment) of a melioristic purpose to the religious. Also, the transformation of religion carries with it a naturalization of religious beliefs. Dewey argues that “the religious function in experience can be emancipated only through surrender of the whole notion of special truths that are religious by their own nature, together with the idea of peculiar avenues of access to such truths.” He argues that an individual’s previous religious training and education *floods* the experience, coloring it—and justifying or providing it with meaning, pre-given (Dewey 1934, 33, 35). This first step allows Dewey to level the playing field. Through a turn to experience, dogma is replaced by religious beliefs that are now working hypotheses whose meaning is no longer assumed or accepted by virtue of their status as religious beliefs. Perhaps this move on Dewey’s part is what he finds lacking in James’ description (and endorsement) of certain religious experiences in *Varieties*—that is, these experiences reflect but do not reflectively reconstruct religious beliefs.

Dewey does recognize some purpose in experience which he identifies as *religious*. In part, this is expressed in the instrumentality or value of the religious: “If this function were rescued through emancipation from dependence upon specific types of beliefs and practices, from those elements that constitute a religion, many individuals would find that experiences having the force of bringing about a better, deeper and enduring adjustment in life are not so rare and infrequent as they are commonly supposed to be” (Dewey 1934, 14). The more important aspects of the religious, are the *ideal factors* that make it religious. It is helpful to re-emphasize Dewey’s usage of *religious* in place of religion; it represents only *attitudes* and not a “special entity . . . institution . . . or system of beliefs” (Dewey 1934, 9-10).

Though it may seem that Dewey has conflated the “content” of religious belief with its melioristic function or consequence, this is not the case. The contents of religious beliefs vary, though the category may be judged by the consequence of the belief. Dewey, through his naturalistic explanation of the religious aspects of experience, is not attempting to describe the “manner and cause of its production,” but that functional aspect of the experience which is melioristic (Dewey 1934, 13-14).

To prove his point, Dewey drops the language of “religious” in favor of “accommodation” and “adaptation.” (“Instead of accommodating ourselves to conditions, we modify conditions so that they will be accommodated to our wants and purposes. This process will be called adaptation.”) Religions claim, according to Dewey, to bring about this particular “change in attitude.” Dewey wants “to turn the statement around and say that whenever this change takes place there is a definitely religious attitude. It is not *a* religion that brings it about,” he argues, “but when it occurs, from whatever cause and by whatever means, there is a religious outlook and function” (Dewey 1934, 15, 16, 17). This move brings Santayana (and Emerson) back into the discussion.

Dewey turns to Santayana’s *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* in which Santayana describes the relationship between these two categories. The passage he quotes reads: “Religion and poetry are identical in essence, and

differ merely in the way in which they are attached to practical affairs. Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life; and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry. Poetry has a universal and a moral function, for its highest power lies in its relevance to the ideals and purposes of life” (Dewey 1934, 17). Dewey takes two things from this passage. First, he agrees with the connection Santayana draws between the imagination and the ideal, or ideals. Second, Dewey notes that the difference between something that intervenes and one that only supervenes “is the difference between one that completely interpenetrates all the elements of our being and one that is interwoven with only special and partial factors (Dewey 1934, 18). Emerson reappears when Dewey begins his discussion of the *harmonizing of the self*. The religious adjustment which brings the self in harmony with a greater universe comes to be through the functioning of the imagination (“imaginative extension”): “The *whole* self is an ideal, an imaginative projection.”¹⁹ The imagination leans forward and takes the individual with it into the future. The self develops and progresses as it fulfills the projections of the imagination.

Religious faith undergoes a similar conversion under Dewey’s pen. As he describes earlier in *Reconstruction*, faith has often been set apart or against knowledge. It is often placed in or “given to a body of propositions as true on the credit of their supernatural author.” Reason comes into play to structure and justify the faith or explain away (apologetics) discrepancies in the body of propositions. Dewey maintains that “religion necessarily implies a theology” (Dewey 1934, 20). But there is another kind of religious faith which is attractive to Dewey, *moral faith*: “Apart from any theological context, there is a difference between belief that is a conviction that some end should be supreme over conduct, and belief that some object or being exists as a truth for the intellect. Conviction in the moral sense signifies being conquered, vanquished, in our active nature by an ideal end . . . Such acknowledgment is practical, not primarily intellectual” (Dewey 1934, 20-21).

The turn Dewey is attempting finds its expression in the title of the second lecture in *Common Faith*, “Faith and its Object.” He is at pains to explain that intellectualizing the object of moral faith points faith in the wrong direction. Its object is *ideal* and so, too, imaginative. He writes: “They have failed to see that in converting moral realities into matters of intellectual assent they have evinced lack of *moral* faith. Faith that something should be in existence as far as lies in our power is changed into the intellectual belief that it is already in existence.” Dewey’s idealism (not to be confused with philosophical Idealism) moves forward into the world of working; while “intellectual schemes of idealism convert the idealism of action into a system of beliefs about antecedent reality” (Dewey 1934, 21-22, 23-24).

Finally, Dewey must add the one quality that makes “moral faith in ideal ends . . . religious.” As Emerson and James before him, Dewey turns to *emotion*: “The religious is ‘morality touched by emotion’ only when the ends of moral conviction arouse emotions that are not only intense but are actuated and supported by ends so inclusive that they unify the self.” Dewey adds that the attitude expands the usual meaning of the “moral” to include “art, science and good citizenship” (Dewey 1934, 22, 23). But the emphasis here is on the deep emotion at the heart of moral faith. The connection with Emerson and James may be found in James’s “The Psychology of Belief” and Emerson’s *Nature*. Both describe this particular emotion as deep and powerful, revealing frequently ignored or overlooked natural connections. For Dewey, *religious* seems to be an adjective which modifies a particularly powerful adjustment in many spheres of life. In this light, Dewey may out-naturalize or secularize Emerson and James. But Dewey does come very close to Emerson’s understanding of the necessity and power of a kind of faith or religious experience which opens the individual to her relation with nature.

Since *Common Faith* is an attempt by Dewey to reconstruct religion, he turns his attention to a reconstruction of the central conception or figure of most religious traditions, “God.” By naturalizing the supernatural, Dewey brings together experience, community, and moral faith. His exercise begins with a re-definition of “God” which strips it of ontological weight and meaning, and reconstitutes it as “the ideal ends that at a given time and place one acknowledges as having authority over his volition and emotion, the values to which one is supremely devoted, as far as these ends, through imagination, take on unity” (Dewey 1934, 42).

Reconstruction of religion includes a turn away from the kind of descriptive psychology of religion in James’s *Varieties* and toward the recognition of a community purpose or community of purpose. It is not the individual experience which attracts Dewey, but the function of the religious aspects of experience in and through community, the collective or unity of ideal ends *arousing us to actions*. Dewey is interested in the social function of the idea of a God. For Dewey, “God” is the “*active* relation between the ideal and the actual.”²⁰ Again, by *ideal*, Dewey does not mean *removed from the world*. Ideal is the projective or progressive possibility of imagination.

Progressive becomes an important motivation of Dewey’s reconstruction. In addition to his discussion of fanaticism, Dewey blames the “supernaturalization” of the ideal, with a conservatism, an escape from human responsibility for human problems. He argues that “men have never fully used the powers they possess to advance the good in life, because they have waited upon some power external to themselves and to nature to do the work

they are responsible for doing. Depending upon an external power is the counterpart of surrender of human endeavor. Dewey's reconstruction removes the possibility of the "accidental" and transfers responsibility for social change to the social realm—to individuals acting in concert.

Conclusions

By naturalizing James, Dewey avoids a great number of the problems which attach to anyone working through James's writings on religion. James description of "*something* mental that pre-exists, and is larger than" a person in *Human Immortality* is but one example of many (James 1956, 58). When James discusses religious experience, he comes to the brink of (and perhaps he occasionally crosses into) confessing to the existence of the ghosts in and around the machine. Even when he describes religious experiences in terms of their spiritual value, he ends up arguing that some beliefs in some supernatural existences are particularly helpful. Dewey avoids what Richard Gale identifies as James's own "divided self." 42

Deweyan pragmatism is functional and instrumental and divorced completely from the supernatural. If philosophy is to serve the role Dewey envisions for it, then experience must be able to change reality.²¹ Again, this pragmatic realism is not at all philosophical Realism.²² It is my contention that this aspect of Dewey's thought is exactly what has been missed by commentators such as Rorty. Dewey's empiricism is not an abandonment of philosophy as a force for change. It is also not a surrender to the chaos and confusion which come with experience or are so often the content of life in the world of work (and play). Dewey's approach requires imaginatively directing experiences through some *common faith* to the problems which a responsible community, that respects its democratic and pluralistic essence, must face. In this sense, Deweyan pragmatism is instrumentalist. Unlike James, Dewey does not accept and describe the content of special beliefs. His pragmatic method holds the content of ideas to revision, and so requires an attention to the meaning and value at-play of ideas 43

Dewey's Emersonian inheritances are not far afield. His attention to the melioristic value and function of traditional religious categories renews them as it reconstructs them. Dewey is concerned with the virtue of piety as well as with the adjustment that follows the recognition of belonging to a larger whole. Like Emerson, Dewey finds this force only once it has been liberated from its supernaturalist aspect. Only by replacing adherence with imagination and dogma with experimentation "is it possible to expedite the development of the vital sources of a religion and art that are yet to be. When philosophy shall have co-operated with the course of events and made clear and coherent the meaning of the daily detail, science and emotion will interpenetrate, practice and imagination will embrace. Poetry and religious feeling will be the unforced flowers of life" (Dewey 1957, 212-213). 44

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Notes

¹ In honor of Professor John E. Smith. The author wishes to thank Michael R. Slater for his insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

² See Backe, Buxton, and Phillips. All focus on the Dewey's early essay "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," as a turning point in Dewey's thought (though all do not agree on the centrality of James in Dewey's reconsideration of his own Hegelianism). As is widely quoted, Phillips argues that "James's *Principles* had a revolutionary impact on Dewey; he started to abandon Hegelian ideas and adopt a naturalistic position" (Phillips, 565). Buxton agrees that "before 1890, Dewey's views were clearly dominated by absolute idealist philosophy; after this date his familiar functionalist ideas became more clearly recognizable" (Buxton, 451). But Buxton argues persuasively that there was more than one cause for Dewey's shift. Backe takes the argument a step further by dismissing the notion that Dewey abandoned Hegelianism completely. He concludes: "While James seems clearly to have influenced Dewey by placing psychology in the biological world and by providing Dewey an avenue by which to abandon the obscure notion of an absolute self-consciousness, Dewey did not abandon Hegel's notion that truth can be found in the organic whole" (322).

³Richard Gale makes his case in “John Dewey’s Naturalization of William James” (Gale 1997).

⁴Dewey 1908, 85. The passages from *Pragmatism* are from pp. 198, 205-206, 80.

⁵Dewey 1908, 88. Dewey cites *Pragmatism*, 53.

⁶By “circles,” I mean to bring to mind Dewey’s *Emersonianism*: “I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no Past at my back” (Emerson 1996, 412).

⁷Dewey 1908, 89. He is citing *Pragmatism*, 45, 50.

⁸Dewey 1908, 91. The passages are from pp. 106, 107. The italics are added by Dewey.

⁹This points to an important distinction between James and Peirce. Peirce most certainly did not identify the meaning of any thought with the action it brought. Actions are always singular while beliefs, for Peirce, are general or conceptual. “It follows,” Professor Smith adds, “that thought and action, however they are related, can never be identical” (Smith 1978, 15, 24).

¹⁰Dewey 1906b, 307. Dewey seems to equate metaphysical realism with a mythologized view of reality, and anti-realism with a demythologized view of it. Of course, Dewey’s notion of democracy and secular society is never thoroughly demythologized and may be shown to rest on certain “myths” of liberal democratic philosophy and national identity. Michael R. Slater has pointed out that it is one thing to criticize the position that we can assume the truth of a given belief and pass straightforward to consider its practical value; it is another to criticize the position that we already know the *meaning* of the concepts we use—to criticize this is patently absurd. At any rate, there is some ambiguity on Dewey’s part.

¹¹This is taken from his *Collected Works: The Later Works, 1925-1953, Vol. 2: 1925-1927*. I will use the abbreviation *LW* II, for this and similar citations from his *CW*.

¹²The title of the essay was eventually changed from “Beliefs and Realities.” See *MW* III, 83.

¹³Dewey 1906a, 121. Dewey calls this the “bargain struck between science and faith.” See Westbrook, 419.

¹⁴This was suggested by a reviewer of the paper.

¹⁵Gilmore, 274. Following Borges’s interpretation of Heraclitus’s fragment on the river, nature is not the only thing which is transformed in and through *discovery*. The individual and her beliefs also change.

¹⁶See Emerson, 1996, 25, 24: “The visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world. The world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass. The visible world and the relation of its parts, is the dial plate of the invisible.”

¹⁷*LW* II, 18. See n.25. Dewey 1957, 124. Thanks to Mathew C. Day for pointing out Dewey’s affinity for Bacon. Dewey praises Bacon for “discovery of new facts and truths to demonstration of old;” testing received truth through experience and not accepting it as dogma; See Dewey 1957, 31, 33, 38, 82, 93.

¹⁸The similarities between Dewey and Mordecai Kaplan’s notions of reconstruction are striking. See Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993; and, Allan Lazaroff, “Kaplan and John Dewey,” in *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, New York: New York University Press, 1990.

¹⁹ Dewey 1934, 19. Dewey acknowledges this as the source of religionists' claim that the adjustment reflects "an influx from sources beyond conscious deliberation and purpose" (Dewey 1934, 19). Dewey points to this as a possible explanation for James's references to *unconscious factors* in *Varieties*.

²⁰ Dewey 1934, 51. Dewey rejects the "mystical" type of union which suggests a form of escape or a uniting with something (conceptual) already given (52).

²¹ See Dewey 1929a, 5.

²² See note 14.

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The Varieties of Pure Experience: William James and Kitaro Nishida on Consciousness and Embodiment

Joel W. Krueger

1. Introduction

The notion of “pure experience” is one of the most intriguing and simultaneously perplexing features of William James’s writings. There seems to be little consensus in the secondary literature as to how to understand this notion, and precisely what function it serves within the overall structure of James’s thought. Yet James himself regards this idea as the cornerstone of his radical empiricism. And the latter, James felt, was his unique contribution to the history of philosophy; he believed that philosophy “was on the eve of a considerable rearrangement” when his essay “A World of Pure Experience” was first published in 1904. While Western philosophy is still perhaps awaiting this “considerable rearrangement,” James’s notion of pure experience was quickly appropriated by another thinker who in fact did inaugurate a considerable rearrangement of his own intellectual tradition: the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida (1870—1945), the founder and most important figure of the Kyoto School of modern Japanese philosophy.

Kitaro Nishida is widely recognized as Japan’s foremost modern philosopher. His earliest major work, *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911), is generally considered to be the founding statement of the Kyoto School of modern Japanese philosophy. Other prominent Kyoto School figures, including Hajime Tanabe (1885–1962), Keiji Nishitani (1900–1990), and Masao Abe (1915–), each acknowledged the profound influence of Nishida’s work on their own intellectual development. Pluralistic in his outlook and comparative in his methodology, Nishida was throughout his life deeply influenced by a number of western thinkers and religious figures (a trait shared by most other prominent Kyoto School figures). For instance, Nishida speaks favorably of Augustine, Kant, Hegel and Bergson, and concedes that these Western thinkers, among others, had a hand in shaping his thought.

But it was with James’s formulation of pure experience that Nishida first believed that he had found a conceptual apparatus upon which he could ground the characteristic themes and concerns that have since been designated “Nishida Philosophy.” Additionally, Nishida felt that James’s idea of pure experience was able to preserve some of the more important features of Buddhist thought that Nishida looked to incorporate into his own system. Though he was only to practice Zen meditation for a relatively short time, the distinctively Zen concern with cultivating an intuitive, pre-reflective insight into the nature of reality and experience was conjoined, in Nishida, with the Western emphasis on logic and argumentative rigor in a somewhat unlikely alliance. Nishida’s life-long project was thus to wed the immediacy of experience as lived (what he termed “concrete knowledge”) with a more formal-rational analysis of the structures of lived experience, an analysis utilizing the concepts and categories of the western philosophical tradition as Nishida understood it. Very simply, Nishida in this way believed that he was attempting to synthesize the philosophical worlds of east and west into a new form of inquiry that would prove mutually enriching to both traditions. And like James, then, Nishida’s understanding of pure experience came to occupy the center of his entire life’s work. It did so despite the fact that his later writings offer a somewhat reformulated and expanded version of pure experience that is meant to move beyond the psychologistic overtones that Nishida came to feel infected his earliest writings.¹ Yet an understanding of the place and import of his initial formulation of pure experience is critical if one hopes to grasp the overall thrust of Nishida’s thinking (as well as the larger philosophical concerns of the Kyoto School considered as a unified

movement). Moreover, James's particular understanding of pure experience and its function within his thought is sharpened when contrasted with the distinctive nuances of Nishida's own development of the idea. Thus a comparative analysis is warranted.

In this essay, I develop several points of convergence in the notion of "pure experience" as formulated by James and Nishida. I begin with a brief consideration of James's formulation of "pure experience." I then move to an analysis of James and Nishida on the bodily self. I argue that both men offer similar models of selfhood and embodiment that challenge classical substantialist conceptions of the self, as well as the mind-body dualism generated by these substantialist models. Furthermore, I argue that their respective analyses of embodiment are meant to throw into high relief the intellectualist prejudices of western epistemology: that is, the persistent tendency to assume the human beings are first and foremost cognitive subjects. James and Nishida both offer a radically reconfigured picture of human reality, one which stresses not only the embodied character of our being-in-the-world but furthermore the volitional-affective character—in short, our *active* character—that is in fact our fundamental mode of existence. I argue that James and Nishida similarly contend that it is this embodied-active character that actually generates anterior cognitive structures. Put otherwise, body both precedes and shapes thought. This claim then leads both thinkers to search for an ontologically primordial dimension of experience intended to undercut traditional metaphysical dualism: hence, the centrality of pure experience within their respective systems. Finally, I conclude by considering a number of important ways in which Nishida's utilization of pure experience extends beyond that of James, in that it grounds both his analysis of religious experience and his ethics.

2. James on Pure Experience

The starting point of James's thought is a deeply (though not exclusively) empirical concern. His work as a whole is founded upon a consideration of concrete experience: the world as experienced by an embodied, embedded, and acting agent. Explicating the lived structures that constitute our uniquely human way of being in the world, James insists, is the key to understanding the antecedent categorizations, conceptualizations, and other intellectual ways of organizing the world that are founded upon these experiential structures, and which emerge through our action within the world. These intellectual structures ultimately reflect the practical concerns of human beings as they simultaneously shape and are shaped by the world they inhabit and act within. His "concrete analysis," as he terms it, thus provides the methodological trajectory of his philosophical considerations. James writes that "concreteness as radical as ours is not so obvious. The whole originality of pragmatism, the whole point of it, is its use of the concrete way of thinking."² And therefore all philosophical reflection, as an intellectual movement away from a more concrete analysis into abstract conceptual analysis, invariably must return "...back once again to the *same practical common-sense* of our starting point, the pre-philosophic attitude with which we originally confront the visible world" if it is to remain faithful to our lived experience.³ It is in concrete experience that the world as given, within the "aboriginal flow of feeling" that is the "much-at-onceness" of pre-conceptual phenomenal experience, that we discern the deeper features of reality—such as cause, continuity, self, substance, activity, time, novelty, and freedom.⁴ This "pre-philosophic" attitude through which we initially face the world is captured in James's development of the concept of "pure experience" as the foundation of his radical empiricism.

James's brand of radical empiricism therefore looks to ground his empirical philosophy on the raw material of experience as given. Of this methodological principle he writes: "The postulate is that the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience."⁵ With his distinctive notion of pure experience, James looked to probe what he perceived to be the underlying experiential unity behind language and reflective or conceptual thought. Mirroring a basic Zen Buddhist presupposition that Nishida will later utilize for his own ends, James argued that conceptual analysis could never provide an exhaustive account of human experience in its phenomenal richness. And like Nishida and Zen, we can pinpoint a suspicion of concepts and conceptual analysis that underwrites James's formulation of pure experience. This suspicion led some contemporary critics to dismiss his claims on this point as endorsing a kind of undisciplined irrationalism and has contributed to a lingering caricature of James as anti-logical.⁶

Why the suspicion of concepts in James? An analysis of this feature of James's thought will prepare us for this tendency as we find it in Zen and developed in Nishida, discussed below. However, I cannot do justice to James's important position on this point within the confines of the present paper's concerns. Therefore I will limit my discussion to a few salient quotes and a bit of analysis. To begin simply, James was suspicious of the idea that conceptual or propositional thought functions as the primitive—and thus irreducible—interface between self and world. On this conceptualist or "intellectualist" line, as James refers to it, all thinking and experience involves concepts. No concepts, no experience. James instead argues that the phenomenal content of embodied

experience *as experienced* outstrips our capacity to conceptually or linguistically articulate it. In other words, James insists that many of our basic experiences harbor *non-conceptual content*. That is, many of our experiences have a rich phenomenal content that is too fine-grained and sensuously detailed to lend itself to an exhaustive conceptual analysis.⁷ For example, we can have visual experiences of colors and shapes of things for which we lack the relevant concepts (a previously unfamiliar shade of magenta or a chiliagon). And this ability holds for other sensory modalities as well. For our ability to describe or report a wide-range of tastes and smells lags far behind our capacity to actually *have an experience of* a nearly infinite spectrum of tastes and smells. In other words, the deliverances of our senses continually run ahead of both our descriptive vocabularies as well as our conceptual abilities. Though James does not address the notion of non-conceptual content as explicitly as many contemporary philosophers of mind—and furthermore, it's not clear that he's entirely consistent on this point, as I discuss below—James does continually insist that there is a truth to our concrete experience of reality that conceptual analysis and the formal truths of logic cannot explicate. Thus James is moved to write the following passage, which (not surprisingly) caused considerable consternation among many of his contemporary commentators:

I have finally found myself compelled to *give up the logic*, fairly, squarely, and irrevocably. It has an imperishable use in human life, but that use is not to make us theoretically acquainted with the essential nature of reality. Reality, life, expedience, concreteness, immediacy, use what words you will, exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it.⁸

However, to understand James's basic contention here, it is important to note that he does not dismiss the instrumental utility of concepts. (This point is one which a number of his critics failed to see). And James is certainly not suggesting that we disregard the formal truths of logic altogether, of course. Rather, his insistence that logic can be "given up" is an insistence that the problem at stake is not with concepts and logical truths *per se*, but rather with the way that philosophers (especially, once again, those endorsing an "intellectualist" view) habitually *relate* to conceptual and/or logical analysis. James claims that concepts are merely "map[s] which the mind frames out,"⁹ and which enable us to organize and cope with a particular aspect of reality making up the environment(s) with which we are concerned. He says elsewhere that "the only meaning of essences is teleological, and that classification and conceptions purely teleological weapons of the mind"¹⁰—retrospective reconstructions of the portion of reality that demands our attention at any given moment. In this way, concepts have a clear instrumental necessity. They are invaluable in both organizing our experiences as well as enabling us to report, share, and discuss our experiences with other language users. But concepts, James insists, do *not* capture the irreducible essence of that which they purport to describe. There is always another aspect under which a thing can present itself, another way that a thing can be investigated and categorized. Again, concepts pick out whatever properties of a thing that "is so *important for my interests* that in comparison with it I may neglect the rest."¹¹ In this way, concepts "characterize more than they characterize the thing."¹²

Problems arise, however, when the structures of our conceptual "maps" are thought to provide an isomorphic blueprint of the inner structure of reality itself. In Zen parlance, this presumption of isomorphism constitutes a "clinging" to thoughts and concepts. As long as we recognize the instrumental utility of concepts, which indicates both their necessity for human life and communication, as well as their intrinsic limitation when it comes to delivering over the reality of a life as experienced that forever exceeds comprehensive articulation, we can use them effectively. But James insists that when logic and concepts (both of which are a "static incomplete abstraction"¹³ of a more dynamic reality feeding our phenomenal experience) are taken to be a literal reflection of reality, our intelligence becomes distorted. The "static incomplete abstraction" is mistaken for the real, and the vibrancy of phenomenal experience is crystallized into static categories that fail to do justice to its lived richness. Thus James urges that "our intelligence cannot wall itself up alive" in logic and conceptual analysis, but must instead "at any cost keep on speaking terms with the universe that engendered it."¹⁴ This universe is the universe of pure experience.

In this way, then, James was ultimately concerned with a holistic appraisal of self and nature—including, it must be noted, a sensitive consideration of the *felt sense* of life in its perpetual unraveling—that emerges from the center of a life creatively engaged in everyday living. Rather than begin a separate investigation of self *and* nature, a dichotomy presupposed by his "intellectualist" opponents, James looked instead to inaugurate a new brand of philosophy that had, as its goal, a harmonious integration of self *in* nature. This consideration included the inarticulate (or again, non-conceptual) dimensions of our lived existence that continually defy purely logical or conceptual analysis. This feature was to be the cornerstone of his self-initiated "considerable rearrangement" of the methods and aims of philosophy as classically conceived. Moreover, it is an essential feature of his philosophy that sets him very much at odds with the more austere, purely epistemological characteristics of modern philosophical preoccupations.¹⁵ This pursuit of concreteness and immediacy led James to begin his investigations

with he termed “pure experience”: reality understood as “a that, an Absolute, a ‘pure’ experience on an enormous scale, undifferentiated and undifferentiable into thought and thing.”¹⁶

Pure experience for James therefore grounds any phenomenology of human experience. According to James, pure experience is the non-conceptual givenness of the aboriginal field of the immediate, a phenomenal field prior to the interpretive structures (and concomitantly, subject-object bifurcations or conceptual discriminations) that we subsequently impose upon it. Pure experience is prior to the reflexive thematizing of the cogito in language and thought. To use a Zen expression, pure experience is a pure *seeing*. It sees the world but does not thematize it. Nor does it organize it by employing various “teleological weapons of the mind.” Rather, it simply bears mute witness to the world in all its “blooming, buzzing confusion.” Refining this rather vague idea somewhat, James offers the operative thesis of his “principle of pure experience” when he says that

My thesis 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.¹⁷

James thus looked to locate a primordial experiential realm that undercut the dichotomized metaphysical and epistemological poles of both subjectivity and objectivity. His “pure experience” was in part a solution to the immanence/ transcendence paradox this dichotomy engenders. The intellectualist project of trying to reduce the objective world to categorical distinctions, or a purely conceptual analysis, ultimately failed due to the inability of human categories to adequately capture the richness and pluralistic vivacity of how things are, and how they are experienced in the phenomenality of their concrete becoming. Conversely, the empiricist attempt to reduce the subjective world to the objective world exhibited a kind of hermeneutic insensitivity, in that it failed to adequately concede the inescapable presence of *mediation* within our experience of the world, and the *perspectival* nature of this experience: the fact that our understanding is filtered through the contingencies of differing interpretive frameworks, conceptual filters as finite structures of human subjectivity (such as categories of language, history, culture, art, etc.) By locating his starting point within the realm of pure experience, James found a point of departure prior to the subject-object polarity that dualistic thinking posits as primary reality. And he does so without appealing to a trans-experiential principle of unification, transcendental “substances, intellectual categories and powers, or Selves” that belong “to different orders of truth and vitality altogether,” and that are subsequently required to bind together the empiricist picture of discrete, atomistic sense-impressions.¹⁸

Out of this aboriginal sensible muchness attention carves out objects, which conception then names and identifies forever—in the sky “constellations,” on the earth “beach,” “sea,” “cliff,” bushes,” “grass.” Out of time we cut “days” and “nights,” “summers” and “winters.” We say *what* each part of the sensible continuum is, and all these abstracted *whats* are concepts.¹⁹

For James, therefore, the phenomenal world is both ontologically and epistemologically prior to the objective world and the subjective world. James’s analysis led him to a primordial level of unified experience that arises prior to the subject-object distinction, and provided the ground for an ontology that harbors no aperture for any brand of metaphysical dualism. In doing so, he furthermore safeguards the irreducible primacy of our nonconceptual phenomenal experience, which emerges from the sensory modalities of an agent immersed and acting within a living world.

3. Nishida and James on the Bodily Self

Nishida quickly honed in on a feature of James’s notion of pure experience that he felt resonated with Zen Buddhist overtones: namely, that it was a state of experience *prior to the subject-object distinction*, and prior to cognitive reflection or conceptual analysis. He reiterates James’s formula when he states concisely that, “From the standpoint of pure experience, there is no such thing as an object divorced from the subject.”²⁰ (Though James felt that the non-duality of subject and object was one of the essential features of pure experience, this aspect does not appear to have the same significance for him that it does for Nishida, as we’ll see below). David Dilworth writes that this feature of pure experience, “‘the unity of subject and object’, becomes the central idea of Nishida’s whole career, which reached its culmination in an explicit Zen ontology of the ‘field of nothingness’ beyond subject-object distinctions.”²¹ This feature of pure experience was attractive to Nishida because it spoke to the Zen aesthetic religiosity subtly guiding his thought at this stage—despite the fact that Nishida seems to have intentionally avoided any explicit references to Zen in his early works. Nonetheless, the possibility of actually *realizing* pure experience within a lived practice soon became the basis for Nishida’s mature analysis of art,

morality, and religion. For, consistent with the fundamental principles of Zen, Nishida's use of "pure" is normative. That is, he argues that experience is "richest in its own subjective immediacy, after it has been 'emptied' of the noise of meanings or the illusions of words and ideas."²² According to Nishida, "Meanings and judgments are an abstracted part of the original experience, and compared with the original experience they are meager in content."²³ (Recall James's earlier remarks about concepts as "static abstractions").

Pure experience is thus normatively superior to any other mode of experience in which discriminations or distinctions of any kind have comprised the immediacy and spontaneity of an experience without dualistic bifurcations. And experience "purified" thusly discloses an intuitive truth about the inner nature of reality—an ontological and ethical truth that subsequently finds fruitful expression in the spheres of art, religion and morality. Yet the meaning found within these different disciplines ultimately originates, Nishida contends, from within the lived standpoint of pure experience. Nishida's earliest major work, *An Inquiry into the Good*, already reflects this contention. The major topics which comprise the book's structure—the question of Reality (Section Two), the Good (Section Three), and Religion (Section Four)—are all considered from the standpoint of pure experience (Section One). Thus it is that Masao Abe writes that, with *An Inquiry*, "Nishida has developed the system of pure experience."²⁴

To understand Nishida's conception of pure experience, we must first begin with a consideration of his notion of the self. According to Nishida, the authentic or "true self" is only realized in pure experience: it is a mode of being-in-the-world in which ego-consciousness has been negated, and the 'emptied' self actively engages the world and others in a state of selfless openness and radical receptivity. However, any attempt at a concise summation of Nishida's notion of the self is a difficult enterprise. It exhibits a complex structure, and harbors a detailed analysis of the many modalities of human self-awareness.²⁵ Additionally, it grew even more complex as Nishida's thought progressed, and his earlier analysis of pure experience was subsumed by his later formulations of the self as the place (*basho*) of Absolute Nothingness. Yet despite these alterations, we can say that both James and Nishida offer conceptions of the self that bear a number of striking similarities. These similarities become even more pronounced with their respective analyses of the lived body. To first begin simply, however, it is apparent that, like James, Nishida articulates an anti-essentialist model of personhood. That is, he, too, formulates a model of selfhood without appealing to a fixed substratum or permanent "something"—whether it be a single, self-sufficient substance or a transcendental unifying ego—that is alleged to comprise the most essential aspect of human reality standing over against an external world. Instead, Nishida agrees with James that the self is best understood to be a *process* or *relational field*.

In developing his model of the self, Nishida displays a very Jamesian concern with the situatedness of the body within its living ambiance—an organic, continually-changing environment or context of action that shapes and is simultaneously shaped by the somatic engagement of the body as it moves within this living ambiance. While these concerns are not as prominent in Nishida's earliest works, they later dominate his mature considerations of how to expand his initial analysis of pure experience to include its place within the development of the social-historical world and the temporal self. Both James and Nishida here anticipated a number of contemporary issues in philosophy of mind and consciousness research, in that each was deeply attuned to the critical role that embodiment and sensorimotor capacities play in both generating and shaping our cognitive structures and sense of self. James and Nishida each offer sophisticated phenomenological considerations of the subject-body and its generative function within the experience of selfhood. I will begin by looking at James on this point.

For James, the body is the organizing center and locus of continuity in all conscious experience. More simply, the body for James is the seat of personal identity. And the self for James is therefore not a fixed substance, but is rather constituted in the flux of temporal development and relational interaction of the lived body embedded within a particular environment or context of activity. Thus the self is not a pre-fabricated *thing* but rather a process of *becoming*. The self is continually in-the-making, constituted by a stream of acts of selective attention, which are themselves governed and shaped by the pragmatic interests and ends of human concerns as realized through our bodily engagements with our environment. James further suggests that this formative dimension of selfhood "exceeds either conceptualization or verbalization."²⁶ For "the return to life" at this primal level "can't come about by talking. It is an *act*."²⁷ This is not to suggest that he believes the sum total of states comprising our cognitive life to be ultimately reducible to our bodily-affective existence, however. Rather, James would argue that all conscious states contain within themselves an irreducible reference to the subject-body; and furthermore, that their meaning is determined by this reference. He writes in the *Principles* that any consideration of consciousness must not neglect

...the body, and central adjustments, which accompany the act of thinking, in the head. *These are the real nucleus of our personal identity....* They are the kernel to which the *represented* parts of the Self are assimilated, accreted, and knit on.²⁸

Similarly, in a characteristically rich footnote to “The Experience of Activity,” he writes:

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The world experienced (otherwise called the ‘field of consciousness’) comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest. Where the body is is ‘here’; when the body acts is ‘now’; what the body touches is ‘this’; all other things are ‘there’ and ‘then’ and ‘that’. These words of emphasized position imply a systematization of things with reference to a focus of action and interest which lies in the body; and the systematization is now so instinctive (was it ever not so?) that no developed or active experience exists for us at all except in that ordered form.... The body is the storm centre, the origin of co-ordinates, the constant place of stress in all that experience-train. Everything circles round it, and is felt from its point of view.²⁹

James thus argues for a conception of the self that sees the body and mind as part of a fluid, integrated whole. The self is constituted through the relational interaction of body, mind, and its lived environment.

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In a later work, Nishida also comes to see the body as the seat of personal identity. Like James, he emphasizes the non-conceptual character of pure experience—the subject-body understood as a non-cognitive circuit of engagement within its living ambiance or field of somaticity—and the generative function the subject-body fulfills in the structuring process of selfhood and personal identity. He terms this bodily immersion within a living ambiance the “dialectical” relation between self and world. Nishida suggests that it *reflection* (conceptual analysis) that introduces an existential bipolarity or distance between self and world. Reflection is always a retrospective reconstruction, through language and thought, of the purity and richness of preverbal bodily experience. Pure experience, however, is prior to this dualistic split. And the *acting body* is the point of interpenetration in which the self expresses itself *in action*, prior to thought. Thus by actively engaging the sociohistorical world, the bodily self simultaneously shapes and is shaped by the world of which it is a part. Subject and object distinctions are not applicable to this kind of “acting-intuition,” as Nishida calls it, which unfolds on a preverbal plane of pure experience. Acting intuition is the experiential mode of non-dual engagement with the world. It is a selfless mode of action in which “*the world becomes the self’s body*.”³⁰ In short, it is pure experience realized as an existential modality. More will be said about Nishida’s “acting-intuition” in a moment.

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As part of their analysis of the body and experience, James and Nishida (anticipating some of the most distinctive themes in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s later work) both stress the basic *ambiguity* of the subject-body as the malleable locus of our embodied existence. If the sense of self is generated by the lived experience of the subject-body, both men contend, the “self” that arises from this stream of experience is therefore a self with exceedingly fluid boundaries. Nobuo Kazashi encapsulates this point quite nicely when he suggests that

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The “ambiguity” in the sense of the indeterminacy or vagueness that permeates our existence in the world derives from the “ambiguity” of our embodied being in the sense of its irreducibility either to the transparency of self-consciousness or the inertia of matter.³¹

For both James and Nishida, the self simply *is* the continual modulation between the expansive self-transcendence of consciousness-as-selective-interest, and the contraction of the self experienced as a corporeal body—a material entity over against other material entities. James says that “our *full* self is the whole field [of experience], with all those indefinitely radiating subconscious possibilities of increase that we can only feel without conceiving....”³² The acting subject-body is the dialectical center of tension within this modulation, the exhalation and inhalation of the subject-body experienced both as seer and as seen, as motor of activity and as object within another individual’s field of experience. James suggests that this dialectical tension testifies to the fundamental ambiguity of the subject-body. It betrays an ability of the experienced self to “treat it [self] as physical or non-physical according as we take it in the narrower or in the wider context, and conversely, of course ... non-mental or as mental.”³³ This fact leads James to conclude in the following sentence that “the body is the palmary instance of the ambiguous.” And since the body is the seat of personal identity for James, we can conclude that the self is, too, “the palmary instance of the ambiguous.” Similarly, Nishida writes that a human being is not merely a concept-generating cognitive being, but furthermore a being “of which there is no self unless there is a body,” and “A body is that *which is seen* as well as *that which sees*.” The embodied self therefore harbors a fundamental ambiguity as its being. The subject-object being of the self for Nishida generates the bipolar model of his notion of acting-intuition. As subject, the body actively engages its environment; yet as object, it is the passive recipient of sensible

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intuitions pressed upon it by the environment that it in part creates and shapes. This active-passive circuit is the relational mode of our being-in-the-world and the basic structure of the embodied self.

It must be immediately noted, however, that the Jamesian and Nishidian self is not merely a rudderless oscillation between the two poles of self-as-subject and self-as-object, an anchorless *deus* lacking a corporeal *machina* to call its own. Rather, it is this self-as-oscillation that generates a living field of experience—what James terms the “field of consciousness,” and what Nishida refers to as the “lived world”—at the center of which is the subject-body. The subject-body provides an experiential orientation, and serves as a center of action from which the subject-body penetrates (and is penetrated by) the living ambiance of its environment through its practical concerns and selective activities. James writes that the “objective nucleus” of every human being’s experience is “his own body [which] is, it is true, a continuous percept.”³⁴ He continues: “...and equally continuous as a percept (though we may be inattentive to it) is the material environment of that body, changing by gradual transition when the body moves.”³⁵ Again, for James the self is constituted by the dialectical interaction of body, mind, and environment. The nodes of this relational circuit are what *collectively* generate our sense of self: an “ambiguous,” fluid self whose boundaries are continually shifting and changing.

The dialectical nature of embodied existence is given a more extended treatment at Nishida’s hands. According to Gereon Kopf, Nishida’s mature work distinguishes three epistemic attitudes (thought, will, and intuition) that establish three interrelated worlds of experience around the pole of the subject-body: the *phenomenal world*, the *lived world*, and the *actual world*.³⁶ The *phenomenal world*, according to Nishida, and the epistemic attitude of *thought* that establishes it, is the realm of everyday “inauthentic” experience. It is the world experienced from within the static *cogito*: a world of dualistic separations between self and world, subject and object. And therefore it is *reflection* that “carves up” the undifferentiated plenum of pure experience and, as James would put it, contracts reality to a limited number of aspects selected to meet some pragmatic concern. Thought is what separates pure experience into functional fragments, objects for a consciousness-as-selective-interest. And Nishida says that reflection is thus a second-order experience “adulterated with some sort of thought,” supporting the “addition of deliberative discrimination.” Thought establishes a binary structure within reality. Reflection “fixes” the self into a static *cogito*, or ego-self, as the enduring pole within the stream of experience. This is what pulls us out of the “quasi-chaos” of pure experience and introduces the existential separation between the self and a seemingly external world.

The *lived world* for Nishida is the phenomenological field of experience in which the hard mind-body/subject-object distinction is weakened (by being rendered *ambiguous*), and the active body is recognized as intimately linked both with the *cogito* as well as the “external” world in which it is embedded. If the static *cogito* of the phenomenal world confronted an external reality from the vantage point of the disembodied subject, the lived world is the experiential dimension in which the body is felt as the locus of an affective, somatic immersion within its living environment. It is in and through the body that the *cogito* injects itself into the world. The body is felt to be the instrumental expression of the *cogito* within its living ambiance, and thus their relation is felt to be one of unity and mutual interpenetration. The lived world arises from the active engagement of self and world.

Finally, the *actual world* is established by acting-intuition. Put simply, it is a non-dual field of pure experience in which mind-body/subject-object distinctions are not simply weakened but dissolved altogether. In practical action, the self assumes an experiential standpoint from which it engages the world immediately and pre-reflexively, prior to a reflective self-awareness that constitutes the conscious self *as* over against a world of objects. It denotes a state of knowing-by-*becoming*. Nishida gives some examples of this nondual state: “For instance, it is such occasions as a person’s scaling a cliff, holding on for dear life, or a musician’s playing a composition he has mastered,” or as “when our mind, forgetting both self and things, is lost in a sublime music, the entire world becomes a single melodious sound.”³⁷ Acting-intuition, as an existential modality, is the experiential standpoint from which embody pure experience, according to Nishida.

4. Nishida on Realizing Pure Experience

James’s and Nishida’s respective considerations of the self and our bodily existence share a number of intriguing parallels. Yet with their analysis of pure experience, which is ultimately meant to ground their analysis of the bodily self, the two men begin to part ways. As mentioned above, perhaps the most significant difference between James’s and Nishida’s respective notions of pure experience is that, for the latter, pure experience is a state that can be experientially realized within a lived *praxis*. Conversely, James seems to view pure experience as essentially a limit-concept. Though “pure experience” is the name James affixes to “the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories”³⁸—and thus remains still consistent with Nishida’s formulation of pure experience as non-conceptual bodily experience—he then moves away from

Nishida when he immediately announces that only an immature or malfunctioning consciousness can actually *have* a pure experience. That is, “only new-born babes, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet any definiten*that*...”³⁹ James suggests that, for a properly functioning consciousness, the flux of experience always comes as *given*; given to an organizing consciousness that immediately fills a pure experience “with emphases ... salient parts [that] become identified and fixed and abstracted” so that experience always arrives as already “shot through with adjectives and nouns and prepositions and conjunctions.”⁴⁰

Strictly speaking, then, we can never have an authentically “pure” experience anterior to the interpretive structures through which we engage the world. Experience for James always blossoms within a practical-thematic manifold, and unfolds as already encrusted with overlapping layers of meanings and pragmatic textures. Experience exhibits a teleological significance all the way down, it would seem. Thus it’s not clear that James would follow contemporary philosophers who claim that a significant part of our common everyday perceptual experiences are in fact non-conceptual, or “pure” in Nishida and James’s sense. But it’s not clear that James is wholly consistent on this point, given earlier remarks (cited above) suggesting that experience, *as experienced*, harbors phenomenal content that cannot be completely linguistically or conceptually articulated.

If James ultimately believes that we cannot have a “pure experience,” Nishida surely disagrees. For pure experience as *praxis*, as a state of awareness or an experiential mode of a deep ontological attunement—a mode of attunement “emptied” of all interpretive and discursive structures—will become the standpoint for genuine religious, moral, and aesthetic awakening. Pure experience is realized experientially as an existential modality of *intuition*. By “intuition,” Nishida has in mind a kind of inspiration or creative capacity of the self to peer into the inner nature of reality and the (non-conceptual) relational structure that binds all things together in a primordial interdependence. It is a mode of awareness that constitutes “a higher cognitive faculty for attaining a correct conclusion without employing inferential judgments.”⁴¹ In short, it is an intuitive apprehension of the basic unity of all things:

The intellectual intuition is nothing more than a further enlargement and deepening of our state of pure experience. That is, it is a disclosure of a great unity in the process of a developing system of consciousness. That a scholar acquires a new insight, or a moralist a new motive, or an artist a new imagination, or a religious figure a new awakening, are all based upon a disclosure of this kind of unity.⁴²

In fact, pure experience realized as an existential modality is equivalent to “a deep grasp of life,” which “the sword of logic cannot penetrate ... and desire cannot move.”⁴³ It is therefore not merely a limit-concept but an experiential standpoint. And pure experience, once again, becomes a normative principle that can be embodied in certain practices. Nishida thus erects a hierarchy of experiential standpoints, the foundation of which is his formulation of pure experience. (It would seem that conceptual analysis, if not at the extreme *other* end of the experiential spectrum from pure experience, would be very close to it). The richness and vivacity of reality as it is in itself is only “known” through this kind of intuition: a non-conceptual bodily consciousness” realized within a felt unity of self and world. And the realization of this standpoint of pure experience is finally for Nishida the standpoint from which we realize an authentic and integrated human reality, an awareness which finds its fullest expression in moral, religious, and artistic practices.

The basic form of Nishida’s development of pure experience, insofar as it is discussed in *An Inquiry into the Good*, is quite similar to James. Yet Nishida abruptly parts ways with James when he says that pure experience, realized as an existential standpoint, is equivalent to a kind of “true religious awakening.” Nishida’s disciple Keiji Nishitani, perhaps the most well-known Kyoto School figure in western circles, says that, “In essence, pure experience is something religious.”⁴⁴ To understand why Nishida’s pure experience is rendered with such profoundly religious overtones, we must understand his notion of Ultimate Reality, or what he calls absolute nothingness. Absolute nothingness is not a something apart from the dynamic of pure experience. Therefore Nishida’s identity of pure experience and absolute nothingness compels him to afford the former a status James will not give it. In short, pure experience for Nishida is both the primordial foundation of consciousness *and* the ultimate ground of all reality. Pure experience, realized as an existential modality within lived *praxis*, becomes a non-dual union with the ultimate ground of reality—with absolute nothingness. Consciousness is thus prototypical of ontology, for Nishida, for “the self is the key to explaining the universe.”⁴⁵ At the termination of the descent into the ground of consciousness, one reaches the ground of all reality. Pure experience is the exhaustively unitive state in which one unites with the Absolute. Nishida writes:

In the facts of direct experience, there is no opposition between subject and object and no distinction between mind and matter; matter in itself is mind and mind in itself is matter, and there is only one

actuality ... the unity of spirit and nature is not a unity of two types of systems—fundamentally they exist in one and the same unity.⁴⁶

At times, Nishida does not hesitate to call pure experience (understood as the absolute ground of reality) God. Consciousness of the nondual unity of the interiority of the self and the ground of reality within pure experience is thus an experience of God: 33

As discussed before, though God is personal we cannot view God as identical with our subjective spirit. God should rather be compared to the state of pure experience in which there is no separation of subject and object and no distinction between the self and other things. This state is the alpha and omega of our spirit and the true face of reality.⁴⁷

Awakening to pure experience—or an experience of God *qua* absolute nothingness—is therefore coextensive with a profound ethical awakening, according to Nishida. The ontological and ethical truths of Nishida's formulation of pure experience are therefore simply two sides of the same fundamental reality. When one has awakened to the ontological truth of pure experience, one has simultaneously realized a comprehensive ethical awakening. Nishida defines *love* as the deep union of subject and object: "To love something is to cast away the self and unite with that other."⁴⁸ And later, "When we are absorbed in something the self loves, for example, we are almost totally unconscious. We forget the self, and at this point an incomprehensible power beyond the self functions alone in all of its majesty...."⁴⁹ In the dissolution of the static ego-self that is realized in pure experience, the "emptied" self then enters into the deep self of everything else. It unites with the same ground of reality that grounds all other things. This intuitive experience discloses the fundamental circuit of interconnected relations that binds all things together at their foundation. And thus do we realize that, at our depths, we are essentially related to all other people and things. Pure experience for Nishida thus realizes the unity of being and value. 34

The *volitional* dimension of this discovery received the most attention in Nishida's later works. Following *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida's technical understanding of *acting-intuition*, discussed briefly above, and its relation to the "place" (*basho*) of absolute nothingness became the primary category for denoting the experiential dynamic through which embodied pure experience becomes realized in our relations with others, and expressed within artistic and religious practices. Nishida very quickly came to realize that the idealistic, voluntaristic tendencies of his early discussions of pure experience had failed to capture the dynamic *affective* aspect of pure experience considered as *praxis*. His more elaborate formulation of acting-intuition was meant to correct this deficiency, and to offer a more concrete explanation of how pure experience is realized within everyday existence practices. For pure experience was not simply a retreat into inner stillness. As a kind of aesthetic cultivation, the embodiment of pure experience was incomplete without an external expression in the realm of action and interpersonal relationships. Therefore pure experience, appropriated from James and reconfigured to meet Nishida's religious interests, realizes the unity of being and value—and it becomes the ultimate standpoint for human self-awakening and moral life. Whereas pure experience is the ground and starting point of human reality for James, it is rather for Nishida both the foundation as well as the terminal point of human development. 35

5. Conclusions

This essay has attempted to elucidate a central but difficult notion in the thought of two of the more creative and original thinkers of the last century. As discussed above, "pure experience" serves as the cornerstone of James and Nishida's respective ontologies. Consequently, both summarily reject any sort of dualistic rendering of the world that partitions off the contents of our mental experience from the concrete world of experience in which we embody and act out this content. Yet both thinkers equally reject a materialist view of reality. James and Nishida insist that the richness of our phenomenal life in its first-person immediacy cannot be reduced to an impersonal neural substrate, for instance, or some other wholly physicalist basis. Pure experience is therefore their attempt to secure a space for both the first-person ontology of consciousness as lived *as well as* the third-person ontology of the physical world in the greater structure of the real. It negotiates a "middle way" between the Scylla of dualism and the Charybdis of materialism. And it does so without lapsing into a phenomenalist or idealist denial of our thoroughly embodied, physical existence. Furthermore, the model of consciousness and embodiment that emerges from this ontology of pure experience is an attempt to preserve the truly "dialectical" (in Nishida's use of the term) relationship between self and world. Consciousness, for James and Nishida, is not a pre-given "thing" but rather an emergent process, shaped and fed by the body's agency: its action in and interaction with its world of experience. 36

Finally, it is interesting to note that Nishida, given his Zen orientation, seems to have been attuned to the ethical possibilities of pure experience in a way that James was not prepared to see. For Nishida, pure experience 37

can be cultivated in bodily practice and subsequently given aesthetic and ethical expression. Thus while Nishida expresses an obvious debt to James, his extension of pure experience, and particularly his vision of pure experience as a form transformative *praxis*, enriches James's discussion by introducing a practical dimension to the notion that James would likely have acknowledged as faithful to his larger pragmatic vision.

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Notes

¹ Of this Nishida writes, in "Upon Resetting the Type": "As I look at it now, the standpoint of this book is that of consciousness, and it might be thought of as a kind of psychologism. Yet even if people criticize it as being too psychological, there is little I can do now." He continues, "I do think that what lay deep in my thought when I wrote it was not something that is merely psychological." This remark is quote by Masao Abe in the introduction to Nishida's *An Inquiry into the Good* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).

² James, *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 115—116.

³ James evidently approvingly marked this sentence of Shadworth Hodgson, in the latter's "Common-Sense Philosophies," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1 (1888): 25. See Charlene Seigfried's *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 205.

⁴ James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 53—54.

⁵ James, *Pragmatism, and Four Essays from the Meaning of Truth*, ed. Ralph Barton Perry (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p. 199.

⁶ Critical reactions to James's perceived "anti-logical" stance are discussed in Ralph Barton Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James*, repr. (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996).

⁷ For several contemporary discussion of nonconceptual content in this vein, see Michael Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), Christopher Peacocke, "Nonconceptual Content Defended," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58 (1998): 381—388, and York H. Gunther, ed., *Essays on Nonconceptual Content* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

⁸ James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 96—97.

⁹ James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 43.

¹⁰ James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), vol. 2, p. 961.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 961.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 94.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*, p. 24.

¹⁶ James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 66.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁹ James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 50.

²⁰ Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 23.

²¹ David Dilworth, "The Initial Formulations of 'Pure Experience' in Nishida Kitaro and William James," *Monumenta Nipponica* 24 (1969): 93—111, at p. 97.

²² Ibid., p. 98.

²³ Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 9.

²⁴ Ibid., p. xvii.

²⁵ For an in—depth analysis of Nishida's understanding of selfhood, see Gereon Kopf's excellent study *Beyond Personal Identity: Dogen, Nishida, and a Phenomeno-logy of No-Self* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2001).

²⁶ James, "The Continuity of Experience," in *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 297.

²⁷ Ibid., p.297.

²⁸ James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, p. 341.

²⁹ James, "The Experience of Activity," in *The Writings of William James*, p. 284.

³⁰ Quoted in Nabuo Kazashi, "Bodily Logos," in *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World*, ed. Dortohea Olkowski and James Morley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 116.

³¹ Kazashi, "Bodily Logos," p. 110.

³² James, "The Continuity of Experience," in *Writings*, p. 296.

³³ James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 153.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Gereon Kopf, “Temporality and Personal Identity in the Thought of Nishida Kitaro,” *Philosophy East and West* 52 (2002): 224—245, at p. 238.

³⁷ Quoted in Yasuo Yuasa, *The Body: Toward An Eastern Mind-Body Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 65.

³⁸ James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 93.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴¹ Yasuo Yuasa, *The Body: Toward An Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, p. 66.

⁴² Quoted in *ibid*, p. 66.

⁴³ Kitaro Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 34.

⁴⁴ Keiji Nishitani, *Nishida Kitaro*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 95.

⁴⁵ Kitaro Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, p. 160.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 160—161.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 164.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 174.

⁴⁹ Ibid.