



WILLIAM JAMES STUDIES

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WILLIAM JAMES'S TRANSCENDENTAL THEOLOGICAL VOLUNTARISM: A READING OF "THE MORAL PHILOSOPHER AND THE MORAL LIFE"¹

MICHAEL A. CANTRELL

ABSTRACT

William James has been charged with many transgressions, but being a divine command theorist is not yet one of them. This paper remedies that situation. "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" contains all the essential elements of a contemporary metaethical divine command theory of moral obligation. James's essay affirms that divine commands are both necessary and sufficient for, and constitutive of, moral obligations and that moral obligations are both overriding and objective in the relevant sense. Furthermore, as an interesting wrinkle, James in this essay argues that his conclusion that moral obligations are constituted by divine commands is a transcendental deduction from the moral philosopher's a priori commitment to the possibility of a unified system of moral truth. In so doing, James explicitly emulates the method of Josiah Royce. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of why James has not been recognized as a divine command theorist.

William James has been charged with many transgressions, but being a divine command theorist is not yet one of them. In this paper, I remedy that situation. As I charge, James is guilty of committing divine command theory. And in a curious sort of way, it makes sense. After all, one who wishes to avoid the extremes of Platonism on one hand and moral skepticism on the other—and who is open to the reality of greater-than-human powers—is likely to find a theologically voluntaristic² framework quite congenial.

I. PROLEGOMENA ON NORMATIVE ETHICS VERSUS METAETHICS

Let me begin by clearly stating two things that I am *not* arguing. First, I am not arguing that James believes that divine commands are necessary for moral *motivation* or for moral *behavior*—although, as Todd Lekan has pointed out,³ James apparently does hold something like this. Second, I am not arguing that James espouses a *normative* divine command theory—whether this is conceived as the view that we *ought* to obey divine commands, or the view that divine commands play a role in telling us what things we *ought* to do. On the

contrary, my argument is that James advances a *metaethical* divine command theory of moral obligation.

To understand what this claim amounts to, it is helpful to understand the distinction between two broad kinds of questions we can ask about morality. Suppose there is a debate about whether it is morally good to contribute to famine relief or whether one morally ought to change one's lifestyle in light of research on the global birth dearth. First, we can ask *first order* questions about whose position in the debate is correct (e.g., Is it, in fact, morally good to contribute to famine relief?). These are *normative* questions. But we can also ask *second order* questions about what the parties in the debate are doing as they engage in it.⁴ For example, typical second order questions include "What is the meaning of 'moral value'?" or "What is the nature of the property of 'being morally obligated'?" Generally, metaethical questions are second order questions *about* first order normative questions. A discussion is metaethical if it aims to say something interesting and informative about the moral concepts used in some moral discussion or about the moral properties (e.g., x's being morally good, x's being morally obligatory, x's being morally permissible, etc.) referred to.

In arguing that James advances a metaethical divine command theory of moral obligation, then, I am arguing, not that he holds any *normative* version of divine command theory, but rather that he espouses the metaethical view that understands moral obligations as being (metaphysically) *constituted* by divine commands.⁵ Consequently, because the argument below is *about* James's metaethical views, it might be helpful to conceive what follows as a *third order* discussion that attempts to illuminate James's own *second order* views about *first order* moral questions.

II. JAMES'S "METAPHYSICAL" DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

With these preliminary issues out of the way, let us lay down the requirements for a position to qualify as a metaethical divine command theory of moral obligation. Such a position must meet four criteria. The position must hold, first, that divine commands are *sufficient* to constitute moral obligations, and second, that divine commands are *necessary* to constitute moral obligations. Third, the position will have a place for genuinely *moral* obligations as those practical considerations that *override* or take deliberative priority over all others.⁶ And fourth, it will hold that moral obligations are *objective* (in the sense that we humans can be mistaken about them).⁷ In what follows, I show that the metaethical position that James develops in his essay, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," meets all four of these criteria. Hence, as the author of that essay, James does, in fact, assert a kind of divine command theory.⁸

In "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," James declares that there are three questions in ethics which must be carefully distinguished. First is the "psychological" question which inquires into the origin of moral ideas and judgments. Second is the "metaphysical" question that inquires into the *meanings* of moral terms. And third is the "casuistic" question, which James describes as inquiring into the "*measure* of the various goods and ills which men recognize."⁹ Most contemporary philosophers would place this third question under the heading of applied ethics. Casuistry is very similar to modern applied ethics, but it belongs to an older and broader tradition than what modern ethicists would comfortably refer to under that heading. As for James's first two questions, *metaethics* is the contemporary subfield that investigates psychological issues such as the origin of our moral notions and metaphysical issues pertaining to the nature of moral properties. Therefore, James's responses to these questions properly fall under the heading of metaethics. In what

follows, I am primarily concerned with James's treatment of the second, "metaphysical" question. Although James describes this question as inquiring into the *meaning* of moral terminology—a *semantic* concern—as we shall see, his treatment of this question indicates that he really is concerned to explore the *metaphysical* issue of what *constitutes* the realities that are referred to by our moral terms.¹⁰ This is, after all, what one would naturally expect from a "metaphysical" question.

James begins his response to the metaphysical question by providing a series of thought experiments and arguments to elucidate the metaphysical underpinnings of moral terminology. Convinced that value and obligation are realities that depend upon the "conscious sensibility" of existing sentient beings, James seeks to counter the tendency to locate evaluative or normative phenomena in an abstract moral order that ontologically preexists the consciousness of moral agents.¹¹ He begins his thought experiment by imagining a world consisting merely of physical objects, a world containing no God or sentient beings of any kind. Such a world, James argues, would have no moral relations whatsoever; here descriptions of good and evil would have no application. Moral relations, James says, "must be *realized* somewhere in order really to exist; and the first step in ethical philosophy is to see that no merely inorganic 'nature of things' can realize them." The moment that a sentient being comes into existence, however, "there is a chance for goods and evils really to exist."¹² Even so, it remains the case that "beyond the facts of [the sentient being's] subjectivity there is nothing moral in the world."¹³ Thus, values have no deep basis in the ontological structure of the world; their roots are to be found solely in the conscious experience of sentient beings.

Introducing a second sentient being into the world makes matters more complex. The world acquires twice as much of the ethical quality as it had contained before. The previous "moral solitude" becomes a "moral dualism," with the novel potential for conflicting evaluations. Yet, as James emphasizes, because no moral order exists antecedently to the conscious experience of these agents, there is no basis for legitimate adjudication of potential moral disputes. Furthermore, James says, the multiplication of sentient beings into a plurality results in a moral situation similar to that described by the ancient skeptics, namely, that no objective truth can be found, that "man is the measure of all things," and that we must be content with an irreducible and disharmonious multitude of subjective moral evaluations.

"But this is the kind of world," James maintains, "with which the philosopher . . . will not put up. Among the various ideals represented, there must be, he thinks, some which have the more truth or authority."¹⁴ But why think this is so? Why not view this ancient kind of moral skepticism as a genuine possibility for the moral philosopher? The answer is that, on James's view, the aim of the moral philosopher—with whom James crucially identifies *himself*¹⁵—is "to find an account of the moral relations that obtain among things, which will weave them into the unity of a stable system, and make of the world what one may call a genuine universe from the ethical point of view."¹⁶ To renounce the aim of finding a comprehensive and unified account of the moral relations that obtain would be tantamount to rejecting the enterprise of moral philosophy itself. Indeed, James describes this ideal of unity as "a positive contribution which the philosopher himself necessarily makes to the problem."¹⁷ There is, then, a truth of the matter as to how moral conflicts ought to be resolved and as to how certain ideals ought to be subordinated to certain others. Moral judgments are either true or false, and since "[t]ruth supposes a standard outside of the thinker to which he must conform," there is an objective basis for the legitimate adjudication of moral disputes.¹⁸ Given James's rejection of an antecedent moral order, however, he cannot appeal to any abstract, moral "nature of things" to provide that basis.¹⁹ Rather, James has left himself only

one option: the basis for the adjudication of moral disputes can be found only in “the *de facto* constitution of some existing consciousness.”²⁰

Now James introduces the notion of obligation: “[W]e see not only that without a claim actually made by some concrete person there can be no obligation, but that there is some obligation wherever there is a claim.”²¹ James asserts two things here. First, if there is no “claim”—which he treats as interchangeable with “demand” or (expressed) “desire”—then there is no obligation:

(1) If there is no claim, then there is no obligation.

By contraposition, this conditional is equivalent to:

(1') If there is an obligation, then there is a claim.

And this means that a claim is a *necessary* condition for an obligation. Second, James asserts that there is some obligation wherever there is a claim, or:

(2) If there is a claim, then there is an obligation.

This means that a claim is *sufficient* condition for an obligation. So a claim (or demand) is both necessary and sufficient for obligation. And James explicitly concurs with this logical analysis: “Claim and obligation,” he says, “are, in fact, coextensive terms; they cover each other exactly.”²² Indeed, James is not simply making the semantic assertion that “claim” and “obligation” *mean* the same thing. He is saying *not* that the two terms are *cointensive*, but that they are *coextensive*, that is, that the sets of things to which they apply are identical. On James’s view, then, every claim metaphysically constitutes an obligation of some sort.

So every claim constitutes an obligation. But in that case one will have many obligations that conflict with one another. How will one determine *which* obligations one *morally* ought to fulfill, that is, which obligations merit the label of genuinely *moral* obligations? As noted above, James can appeal only to “the *de facto* constitution of some existing consciousness” to resolve this dilemma. Therefore, he asks: “[W]hat particular consciousness in the universe *can* enjoy this prerogative of obliging others to conform to a rule which it lays down? If one of the thinkers were obviously divine, while all the rest were human, there would probably be no practical dispute about the matter. The divine thought would be the model, to which the others should conform.”²³ In this statement James explicitly affirms what he presupposes throughout the essay, namely, that “divine rule[s] . . . la[id] down”—or what are normally called “divine commands”—are sufficient for constituting moral obligations. James’s position, then, meets the first requirement to qualify as a divine command theory of moral obligation.

But even if a divine command (understood as the revealed or expressed will of a divine being) is sufficient for constituting a moral obligation, it might, for all we know, be the case that the mere *unrevealed* or hidden will of that divine being is sufficient to constitute moral obligations as well. Or, for that matter, circumstances that do not involve the divine will in any way whatsoever might suffice for constituting moral obligations. Thus, one could hold that divine commands are sufficient for constituting moral obligation and still not qualify as a divine command theorist in any robust sense. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain that any position worthy of the name “divine command theory of moral obligation” must affirm not just the *sufficiency* but also the *necessity* of divine commands for constituting moral obligations.

And this is just what we find in James's essay. James has said that the moral philosopher is committed to finding a comprehensive and unified account of the moral life. If a divine being exists, then a unified account also exists in that being's consciousness, and as we have seen, James affirms that we are morally obligated to act in accordance with that being's dictates. Thus, James affirms the *sufficiency* of divine commands for constituting moral obligations. But James also affirms their *necessity*. As he says, "[T]he stable and systematic moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible *only* in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands" (emphasis added).²⁴ That is, the "all-enveloping demands" of a "divine thinker" is *necessary* for the systematic moral universe to which James (*qua* moral philosopher) is committed. In other words, divine commands are *necessary* for constituting moral obligations. Thus, James is committed to the two-fold claim that divine commands are both necessary and sufficient for constituting moral obligations.

James's disdain for any reference to an "abstract moral order" leads him to affirm the most concrete possibility. He says that one's respecting the divine will is not abstractly right, but "only *concretely* right—or right after the fact, and *by virtue of the fact*, that they [i.e., divine commands] are actually made" (emphasis added).²⁵ In other words, acting in accordance with the divine demands is obligatory not because it is right in some abstract way, but only because—or (as James says) "by virtue of the fact that"—those demands are actually and concretely laid down by the divine being. This is a remarkable claim. It evokes a version of the infamous Euthyphro dilemma: does God command what is right because it is (antecedently) right, or is what is right right because God commands it? And here James comes down decisively on the side of theological voluntarism: what is right is right *because* God commands it.

It is important to keep in mind what is meant here by "theological voluntarism." By applying this label to James I do not mean to assert the claim, typical of debates in medieval philosophy, that James held the divine will to be superior to, or more fundamental than, the divine intellect in determining what our moral obligations are. Rather, consistent with current discussions in metaethics,²⁶ I mean simply that James held that an obligation to perform some action has whatever *moral* status it possesses in virtue of God's commanding (or failing to command) the relevant action. Hence, this position is completely consistent with (i.e., does not logically exclude) a form of theological *intellectualism* to which James also appears to be committed. Indeed, James held that our obligations are capable of being rationalized, that is, rationally ordered into "the most inclusive realizable whole" by "a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands."²⁷ But the mere *ordering* of obligations into a stable and systematic whole does not itself establish these obligations as *moral* obligations. On James's view, this rational ordering is necessary, but not sufficient, to account for our having moral obligations; the demand, the voluntaristic aspect, is also essential.

Furthermore, speaking of moral obligations, James refers to "that real Thinker in whose actual demand upon us to think as he does our obligation must be ultimately based."²⁸ As these comments make clear, James is committed, not merely to a divine *will* theory of moral obligation, but rather to a full-blooded divine *command* theory of the same. One has moral obligations *only if* there are divine commands.

With respect to the third requirement, James has a place for moral obligations as those considerations which morally override or take deliberative priority over all others, and these moral obligations are constituted by divine commands. "If there be such a [divine] consciousness," James says, "then its demands carry the most of obligation simply because they are the greatest in amount."²⁹ While "greatest in amount" is opaque as a description, James

provides two indications of what this phrase is supposed to connote. First, he maintains that the “ideal universe” of such a divine being will constitute the most inclusive realizable moral whole. Given the moral philosopher’s commitment to the unity of the moral life, then, James makes it clear that the demands of a divine being will provide one with finally-valid, second-order obligations regarding how one should prioritize one’s everyday, first-order obligations.³⁰ Thus, the divine commands take priority. Second, James explicitly links the “amount” of a moral demand to its imperativeness, which he treats as a matter of degree.³¹ Since the demands of a divine being are the “greatest in amount,” then, they are the most imperative moral considerations. Thus, James affirms that moral obligations are indeed *overriding*.

So in James’s essay, he affirms both the necessity and the sufficiency of divine commands for constituting moral obligations, as well as that obligations generated by divine commands are overriding. How about the final requirement, that is, that moral obligations must be *objective*? If moral obligations are constituted merely by the demands of one sentient being among others, one might wonder whether or not they can attain the status of objectivity. As it happens, James himself speaks of the philosopher’s ideal (i.e., the unified account of the moral life) as characterized by objectivity.³² Furthermore, he specifically speaks of divine commands and of the moral obligations that follow from them as objective in character. “When . . . we believe that a God is there, and that he is one of the claimants,” James says, “[t]he more imperative ideals now begin to speak with an altogether new objectivity and significance, and to utter the penetrating, shattering, tragically challenging note of appeal.”³³ So James appears to believe that moral obligations are objective. But can he legitimately hold this position?

The implausibility of James’s claim that moral obligations are objective can be removed by distinguishing two senses of “objective.” Let’s say that something is *weakly* objective if it obtains independently of *human* attitudes. Something that is *strongly* objective, on the other hand, will obtain independently of *both human and divine* attitudes. The “abstract moral order” that James opposes so strenuously would be strongly objective because it is ontologically prior to the attitudes of all sentient beings, whether divine or human. This is not, however, the kind of objectivity that is required for James’s position to qualify as a divine command theory of moral obligation. To be sure, if James were to affirm that moral obligations were strongly objective, this would entail the *denial* of divine command theory. For, in that case, divine commands would not be necessary for constituting moral obligations. Rather, as stated at the beginning of this essay, for James’s position to qualify as a divine command theory, he must hold moral obligations to be objective simply in the sense that human beings could be mistaken about them. And this is precisely what we find in James’s account: one’s moral obligations are weakly objective in that, while they are dependent upon divine attitudes, they obtain independently of human attitudes. As noted above, the “*de facto* constitution” of the divine consciousness provides objective truth-makers with respect to which human moral judgments are true or false. Much the same thing applies to moral obligations, with the result that humans can indeed be mistaken about them.

As I have argued, then, William James in this essay advances a divine command theory of moral obligation. James is committed to the claim that divine commands are both necessary and sufficient to constitute moral obligations, as well as to the claims that these obligations are overriding and (weakly) objective in character.

III. GOD AS THE CONDITION FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF UNIFIED MORAL TRUTH

What we have in James's essay is actually a *transcendental* argument in which James inquires into the necessary conditions of the possibility of a unified system of moral truth. As James says in the introduction, "[t]he aim [of him who seeks an ethical philosophy]³⁴ is to find an account of the moral relations that obtain among things, which will weave them into the unity of a stable system, and make of the world what one may call a genuine universe from the ethical point of view."³⁵ Indeed, the possibility of a unified moral life is James's *a priori* principle. This postulation of the genuine moral universe, James writes, "is a positive contribution which the philosopher himself necessarily makes to the problem."³⁶ It is this *a priori* commitment to the possibility of a unified moral life that leads ultimately to the conclusion that moral obligations are constituted by the demands of a divine being: "It would seem, too—and this is my final conclusion—that the stable and systematic moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible only in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands."³⁷ James continues:

If such a thinker existed, his way of subordinating the demands to one another would be the finally valid casuistic scale; his claims would be the most appealing; his ideal universe would be the most inclusive realizable whole. If he now exist, [*sic*] then actualized in his thought already must be that ethical philosophy which we seek as the pattern which our own must evermore approach.³⁸

That James's argument is transcendental in character is further demonstrated by the footnoted citation James gives at the end of the last sentence of the passage just quoted. In that note, James writes, "All this is set forth with great freshness and force in the work of my colleague, Professor Josiah Royce: 'The Religious Aspect of Philosophy.' Boston, 1885."³⁹ (*The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, of course, is where Royce gives his transcendental argument from the possibility of error for the existence of an Absolute Knower.⁴⁰) Then, immediately following the passage citing to Royce, James continues: "In the interests of *our own ideal of systematically unified moral truth*, therefore, we, as would-be philosophers, must postulate a divine thinker, and pray for the victory of the religious cause" (emphasis added).⁴¹ Whereas Royce's argument from the possibility of error concludes with an Absolute Knower, James's argument from the possibility of systematically unified moral truth concludes with "a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands," that is, we might say, a divine commander.

IV. THE USES AND LIMITS OF JAMES'S DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

But if James is something of a divine command theorist, why has this fact gone unnoticed? I suspect that there are many reasons. It is easy to imagine that many commentators, holding James in high esteem, have not been eager to associate him with anything as unfashionable as divine command theory. But there are other reasons. One is terminological: James himself never uses the term "command," preferring instead to speak of divine "demands," "claims," or (expressed) "desires." Another reason is theological. Speaking of his postulated divine thinker, James says that "[i]n a theistic-ethical philosophy that thinker in question is, of course, the Deity to whom the existence of the universe is due."⁴² Besides this comment, however, James gives no indication that the divine being

he envisions is anything like an ultimate Creator-God. In fact, his thought-experiments would seem to indicate that James is committed to the non-existence of such a being. The creaturely divinity that James seems to presuppose therefore could not be the Christian Creator-God, whom traditional theists have themselves tended to presuppose.

A final reason why James has not been recognized as a divine command theorist is that his theological voluntarism is formulated merely on the metaethical level: James employs it, not as a normative theory to inform people of how to regulate their conduct, but rather as a way to elucidate the necessary referents of our moral terminology. In fact, James goes on later in the essay to articulate normative principles whereby one should regulate one's conduct that have no obvious connection with a theologically-voluntaristic framework. A normative divine command theory fails as a measure of conduct because, as James says, precisely what God wills is "unascertainable and vague," and even if we were sure of God's existence, God's thoughts are hidden from us.⁴³ Ironically, therefore, James ends by recommending to his reader something like a desire-satisfaction form of utilitarianism by which to guide his or her conduct⁴⁴—and this even in apparent tension with misgivings stated earlier in the essay about a related view.⁴⁵

One's postulation of the divine being, James says, serves practically to instill in one what he calls "the strenuous mood," which he describes as characterizing an "ethics of infinite and mysterious obligation from on high" and whereby "[e]very sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life's evils, is set free."⁴⁶ But as we have seen, the theoretical function of this postulate is to ensure the possibility of a unified moral life. "In the interests of our own ideal of systematically unified moral truth," James says, "we, as would-be [moral] philosophers, must postulate a divine thinker, and pray for the victory of the religious cause."⁴⁷ And with that, I rest my case. On the count of committing divine command theory, I maintain, William James is guilty as charged.

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NOTES

¹ A previous draft of this paper was read at the group session of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy at the Eastern Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in December 2008. The author thanks Todd Lekan for his written conference commentary and several audience members for their thoughtful reactions. Thanks are also due to Stuart Rosenbaum and J. Mark Boone for their comments on prior iterations of this paper, as well as to Alexander Pruss, C. Stephen Evans, and J. Todd Buras for engaging with me in conversations related to the topic of this paper.

² By arguing that James espouses a form of "theological voluntarism," I do not mean to assert the claim, typical of studies in medieval philosophy, that James held the divine will to be more fundamental in some way than the divine intellect. Rather, consistent with current discussions in metaethics (and as I explain in more detail below), I mean that James held that an obligation to perform some action has whatever *moral* status it possesses in virtue of God's commanding (or failing to command) the relevant action.

³ Lekan notes James's belief that "strenuous moral living requires a belief in a God, who is a kind of 'divine demander'"; he argues—rightly, I

think—that James’s arguments for this “theological postulate” are inadequate. Cf. his “Strenuous Moral Living,” *William James Studies* 2, no. 1 (Summer 2007).

⁴ I owe this precise way of stating the difficult distinction between normative and metaethical questions to Alexander Miller’s helpful book, *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 1.

⁵ James would thus find quite congenial recent developments in the metaethics of moral obligation, for Robert M. Adams has defended a very similar claim. Cf. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 231-276.

⁶ This is a stipulative (although quite common) use of the term “moral.” To be sure, James sometimes uses “moral” to refer to things that would not be properly so-called under this definition. But nothing of philosophical significance turns on this usage. If one objects to my usage of the term, then I suggest replacing it with “schmoral”—the argument then becomes that James saw a special class of overriding “schmoral” obligations as constituted by divine commands.

⁷ Elsewhere I have defended a metaethical divine command theory of moral obligation. See *Kierkegaard and Modern Moral Philosophy: Conceptual Unintelligibility, Moral Obligations, and Divine Commands*, Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 2009. Among others, C. Stephen Evans holds a similar view. See his recent *God and Moral Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸ William James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, volume 6 of *The Works of William James*, 20 vols. (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1975-1988); citations cross-referenced below (in parentheses) to the pages of *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy and Human Immortality* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956).

⁹ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 142 (185).

¹⁰ This conflation of *metaphysical* and *semantic* questions, or of the *constitution* of a thing with the *meaning* of a term, is common in the writings of early twentieth century philosophers. Cf., e.g., *Principia Ethica*, where G.E. Moore consistently conflates the question of whether “good *means* x” with that of whether “good *is constituted by* x.” See G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹¹ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 145 (190).

¹² James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 145 (190).

¹³ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 146 (191).

¹⁴ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 147 (192).

¹⁵ Cf. James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 161 (214).

¹⁶ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 141 (184-5).

¹⁷ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 142 (185).

¹⁸ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 146 (191).

¹⁹ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 147 (193).

²⁰ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 147 (193).

²¹ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 148 (194).

²² James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 148 (194).

²³ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 147-48 (193); the second sentence begins a new paragraph.

²⁴ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 161 (213-4).

²⁵ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 149 (196).

²⁶ Cf., e.g., Mark C. Murphy, *An Essay on Divine Authority* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002).

²⁷ James, “The Moral Philosopher,” 161 (214).

- ²⁸ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 148 (194).
²⁹ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 149 (196).
³⁰ Cf. James, "The Moral Philosopher," 147, 148, 161 (192, 194, 214).
³¹ Cf. James, "The Moral Philosopher," 149 (195).
³² Cf. James, "The Moral Philosopher," 147, 154 (192, 203).
³³ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 160 (212).
³⁴ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 141 (184).
³⁵ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 141 (184-5).
³⁶ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 142 (185).
³⁷ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 161 (213-4).
³⁸ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 161 (214).
³⁹ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 161n (214n).
⁴⁰ Josiah Royce, *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 384-435. Royce begins with the question, "Since error is plainly possible in some way, we shall have only to inquire: *What are the logical conditions* that make it possible?" (392, emphasis in original). He ultimately concludes: "*Either there is no such thing as error, which statement is a flat self-contradiction, or else there is an infinite unity of conscious thought to which is present all possible truth*" (424, emphasis in original).
⁴¹ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 161 (214).
⁴² James, "The Moral Philosopher," 148 (194-5).
⁴³ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 152; cf. 151, 161 (201; cf. 199, 214).
⁴⁴ Cf. James, "The Moral Philosopher," 153-159 (201-210).
⁴⁵ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 144 (188).
⁴⁶ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 161 (213).
⁴⁷ James, "The Moral Philosopher," 161 (214).

TAKING GOD SERIOUSLY, BUT NOT TOO SERIOUSLY: THE DIVINE COMMAND THEORY AND WILLIAM JAMES'S 'THE MORAL PHILOSOPHER AND THE MORAL LIFE'¹

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ABSTRACT

While some scholars neglect the theological component to William James's ethical views in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," Michael Cantrell reads it as promoting a divine command theory (DCT) of the foundations of moral obligation. While Cantrell's interpretation is to be commended for taking God seriously, he goes a little too far in the right direction. Although James's view amounts to what could be called (and what Cantrell does call) a DCT because on it God's demands are necessary and sufficient for the highest obligations, this is a view with characteristics unusual for a DCT. It only holds for some obligations; on it moral obligation does not derive from God's authority; it is not obvious that James believes the God required by it even exists; we do not know what God's demands are; and, finally, since we do not know them, we cannot act on them.

William James's "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" (hereafter "MPML") is a subtle work, and its interpretation requires subtlety. Scholars tend to focus on the text's relationship to utilitarianism, most taking the view that it does not commit James to any conventional version of utilitarianism.² While this topic is important, a thorough account of James's ethics in "MPML" requires careful analysis of its theological component, which scholars sometimes overlook or even denigrate.³ David E. Schrader thinks James's appeal to religion is "hard to maintain" because religion has often been a force for oppression and prejudice.⁴ In a recent edition of *William James Studies* focusing

on “MPML,” Harvey Cormier, Scott F. Aikin, and Robert B. Talisse seem to agree on little more than that God must not have any significant role in a pragmatic ethic.⁵

Yet there remains a strong theological component in “MPML.” Opposite Schrader’s discomfort with religion, Michael Cantrell has offered an original interpretation, saying “MPML” promotes a kind of divine command theory (hereafter DCT) of the foundations of moral obligation.⁶ Cantrell’s interpretation is a useful corrective to the occasional neglect of the vital role of religion in James’s ethics, for he takes James seriously when James takes God seriously. Yet Cantrell goes a little too far in the right direction, for he overstates God’s role in James’s ethics. While his thesis is largely correct, such DCT as “MPML” uses is heavily restricted in fact, knowledge, and practicality. James promotes a sort of DCT regarding *some* but not all obligations, and DCT is a poor description of James’s theory even where it does hold.

In what follows I shall examine and critique Cantrell’s thesis in order to uncover James’s understanding of divine commands and their relation to moral obligation and cast new light on the religious component of James’s ethics. In Part I, I shall briefly summarize “MPML.” In moral experience we find a multiplicity of demands and moral ideals that only God can integrate. The ideal God promotes is the obligation that overrides all others. As Cantrell says and as I shall explain in Part II, this ensures that the command of God is a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of this highest possible obligation. Although this amounts to a kind of DCT, it is a very unusual one, having several features not traditionally associated with DCT. I shall describe these unique parameters of a Jamesian DCT in Parts III through V. *First*, a Jamesian DCT does not hold for some genuine obligations. *Second*, that God’s moral outlook is binding is the source of God’s moral authority, not vice versa. *Third*, James may not believe that a God who commands these obligations exists yet, so there may be no obligation for which DCT holds. *Fourth*, we have no access to God’s perspective, and so the highest possible obligation is unknown to us. *Fifth*, to obey God’s commands is not the highest obligation we do know and can act on; that obligation is simply to find out what God’s commands are. These five limitations on a Jamesian DCT fall into three categories. The first three limitations are *factual*, and I shall discuss them in Part III; the fourth is a limitation on our *knowledge* of divine commands, and I shall discuss it in Part IV; the fifth is a *practical* limitation of a Jamesian DCT, and I shall discuss it in Part V. These considerations will leave us with a somewhat dubious link between James and DCT. Therefore, in Part VI, I shall attempt to bring things to an orderly conclusion, first by

suggesting a more detailed definition of DCT which excludes James's position and clarifies the differences between it and traditional DCTs; and, second, by remarking on the prospects for Jamesian support for a more traditional DCT.

I. OUR MORAL LIFE

For James morality is grounded in subjectivity. Any person with his own perspective and desires grounds a moral fact; what a person feels is good is, simply because he feels it, good. If that person should desire something of another person, the desiring is a demand which constitutes a moral *obligation* for that other person. The demand of a subject is necessary and sufficient for moral qualities to exist in the universe. It is *necessary* because "no world composed of merely physical facts can possibly be a world to which ethical propositions apply"; moral qualities only exist in "a mind which feels them."⁷ While the world is not limited to mere physical facts,⁸ James resists Platonizing abstractions as well as materialistic reductionism. A lifeless supernatural entity cannot ground morality; even if ultimate obligation is rooted in a divine being, it is that being's *perspective* and *wishes* that give its moral demands their legitimacy. In short, "nothing can be good or right except so far as some consciousness feels it to be good or thinks it to be right."⁹ The demand and wishes of any subject are also *sufficient* to ground a moral obligation: "Take any demand, however slight, which any creature, however weak, may make. Ought it not, for its own sole sake, to be satisfied?"¹⁰ We are obligated to satisfy the demand of any sentient being.

Unfortunately, different people have different wishes, and so there are different ideals. We have different conceptions of the best world. A myriad of demands cry out for satisfaction. Thus there are a plurality of ideals to be realized, and a plurality of *oughts*. This presents a challenge for the moral philosopher, whose goal is to provide "an account of the moral relations that obtain among things, which will weave them into the unity of a stable system, and make of the world what one may call a genuine universe from the ethical point of view."¹¹ The moral philosopher needs to see the moral world as consistent and unified, to behold a coherent moral universe. This seems an insurmountable challenge since our demands are distinct and sometimes conflict. When one politician wants virtually unrestricted access to abortion and another wants abortion all but abolished, it is difficult to imagine a solution mutually palatable. Again, one philosopher may think all human beings should be treated equally as ends in themselves, while another may think educated Greek males superior.

How can we achieve a coherent moral universe when conflicting goals have equal status? A coherent system of moral obligations would make possible a maximum satisfaction of demands. For among all possible ideals there is a set of ideals that is the largest set of mutually consistent, and hence concurrently satisfiable, ideals. The task of the moral philosopher is to identify *that* set of ideals, the set of ideals which the most number of people either do, or could, desire to see satisfied.

Only divine wisdom could know what this set of ideals is; only God is able to know which ideals among all our competing ideals are a part of this moral system; so only God is able to desire this set of ideals; so God is necessary for this set of possible ideals to be actually desired. These are the ideals of God. If God exists, he wants us to satisfy this maximal set of consistent ideals, and our obligation to do what God wants overrides all others. Hence positing the existence of this set of ideals is tantamount to positing the existence of God, who alone can know what the maximal set of mutually satisfiable ideals is. For the present, since this set of ideals is not that which is currently sought by sentient creatures, God desires that we sentient creatures learn to seek them, that our imperfect world may eventually become that best possible world in which this set of ideals is satisfied. Such a world contains the only coherent moral universe, the one which the moral philosopher strives to achieve.

For this reason the moral philosopher must take a keen interest in God and “pray for the victory of the religious cause.”¹² For he must seek a coherent set of moral principles; to seek it he must believe that it exists and can be discovered; he must therefore believe that God exists.

II. A DIVINE COMMAND THEORY?

Cantrell observes that “MPML” promotes a kind of DCT. Cantrell lists four components of a divine command theory: first, that divine commands be sufficient for moral obligation; second, that they be necessary for moral obligation; third, that there be moral obligations which override all others; and, fourth, that they be objective “in the sense that we humans can be mistaken about them.”¹³ It is clear that James’s theory meets the first, third, and fourth conditions. Divine commands are sufficient for the highest obligation because it is *God’s perspective and desire* that make maximal obligation possible; the set of maximally realizable ideals, by definition, overrules all others; and it possible for us to err by seeking to realize lesser ideals.

But divine commands are also necessary for the maximal set of mutually satisfiable ideals. God’s demand that this set of

ideals be satisfied is necessary to make this exact set of ideals an obligation for us; without God, there simply cannot be a set of ideals so comprehensive. So God's perspective is necessary and sufficient for maximal obligation; in this sense, James does have a kind of DCT as regards one component of moral reality, namely maximal obligation, those highest obligations that override all others.

Of course, we are not necessarily talking about explicit commands when we say "commands." We do not have to *know* what God's commands are in order for them to exist.¹⁴ DCT, in its generic form, does not require this, though some versions of DCT may posit explicit commands from God.

Cantrell does well to identify a connection between DCT and James's metaethics, correcting the God-resistant tendency in some scholarship. He has also uncovered a Jamesian reason to believe in God which others have missed. Todd Lekan analyzes three reasons in "MPML" for believing in God, rejecting two as unconvincing and accepting the third only in some cases.¹⁵ Cantrell shows there is another reason: That the moral philosopher as such must believe in God in order to believe in the possibility of a genuine moral universe and work towards understanding it.¹⁶

Cantrell also avoids the subtle misunderstanding of D. Micah Hester, who attributes the highest ethical status to any desire that does not seem to conflict with any other.¹⁷ This is clearly not what James has in mind; the highest ethical status is that of obligations which override all others, not those which merely do not appear to conflict. Such obligations are the demands of God.

In short, Cantrell does well to take God seriously in interpreting James, but perhaps he takes God a little too seriously, for there are significant limitations of the Jamesian DCT. In the next three sections I shall explain these limitations, and in light of them I shall, in the final section, propose a definition of DCT which clarifies the differences between James's view and traditional DCTs.

III. FACTUAL LIMITATIONS ON THE JAMESIAN DCT

Such DCT as James promotes is limited in fact, for the moral facts of the universe, the metaethical realities James describes, are poorly captured by DCT. First, DCT fails to account for the vast majority of genuine obligations. Second, DCT fails to describe the source of obligation, which, even for the highest of obligations, is not God. Third, there is a good chance that these obligations do not yet exist for the reason that a God who demands them does not yet exist! I am not saying that Cantrell's contention

that James has a DCT is *incorrect*. DCT, as Cantrell defines it, is an *accurate* description of a real or possible component of moral reality as described by James. But it is an *inadequate* description.

A. DCT Only Holds for Some Obligations

First, although Cantrell's criteria for DCT properly describe James's view of the conditions for a very important class of moral obligations (the most important, in fact), they make up a tiny minority of moral obligations. God's perspective and wish are necessary and sufficient only for those obligations that override all others; for the demand of *any person* is sufficient for moral, but non-maximal, obligation. Each of these myriad obligations is binding on us. Of course, they often conflict; each moral agent is morally required to both perform and not perform certain actions. To perform one duty is to neglect another; yet each is obligatory, so we neglect our duty either way. The moral philosopher must hope that God can lead us out of this tangle of obligations, and the moral agent may hope to one day learn which obligations are best obeyed and which best flouted. Until then, however, we moral agents are guilty of breaking moral laws which have a lesser, but nevertheless moral, force.

B. DCT Does Not Describe the Source of Even the Highest Obligation

Second, on a typical DCT, the source of moral obligation would be God, but this is not what we find in James. Thus DCT poorly captures James's understanding of the metaethical grounding of obligation, which is the subjective preference of *all* sentient beings, not of God as such.

We have seen that this is true of lesser obligations. Yet even the highest obligations do not derive their overriding status from God, but from the fact that they do the best job of reconciling the subjective preferences of all sentient beings. God's desiring certain ideals is a necessary and sufficient condition for their being the highest of obligations; but God desires them because they are good, not vice versa. That they override all other obligations does not derive from God's preferring them, but from their ability to reconcile a maximal amount of these other obligations. Cantrell is, thus, mistaken when he comments on these words of James:

If there be such a [divine] consciousness, then its demands carry the most of obligation simply because they are the greatest in amount. But it is even then not *abstractly* right that we should respect

them. It is only *concretely* right--or right after the fact, and by virtue of the fact, that they are actually made.¹⁸

Cantrell contrasts the two sides of a version of Plato's ancient Euthyphro dilemma: "does God command what is right because it is (antecedently) right, or is what is right right because God commands it?"¹⁹ He concludes that James's view is the latter.²⁰ But this is not so. The Euthyphro dilemma Cantrell has in mind would contrast two conceptions of obligation, the idea that obligations are binding independently of God's authority and the idea that obligations are binding because of God's authority. James is not considering this contrast, but another: between, on the one hand, the idea that divine commands are binding in the abstract, independent of the divine personality; and, on the other hand, that divine commands are binding as a result of their grounding in personal desires. God's wishes carry weight because God is "a living personal God."²¹ Dispensing with the abstract theory of the origins of divine commands does not mean that they are only binding because God wills them. On the contrary: God's demands overrule others "simply because they are the greatest in amount." In other words, that these obligations override all others is a result of the fact that they are the best possible set of binding obligations *independently of God*. God commands them because they are right. His command activates what would otherwise be merely possible obligations, giving them a moral force; however, their ability to override all other obligations is not a result of the divine command, willed by God from above. The ability of the divine commands to override all other obligations is built from the ground up, a result of the myriad obliging wishes that unite in the divine wish.²²

In short, James denies an abstract moral order, saying instead that moral order is essentially personal. In doing so he does not attribute to God the privilege of a moral authority qualitatively different from that of any other person; the difference is quantitative. God is no moral legislator for the universe. God is more like an *executive* for moral legislation. The legislature consisting of all sentient beings below sends to his divine desk a huge, disorganized pile of laws. He proceeds to ratify the most comprehensive moral order than can possibly be made out of them—but he vetoes the handful that cannot be integrated.

Thus, God does not command and create obligation out of his own authority. Rather, God discovers that set of obligations which would, on its own merits, be sublime; through loving it, he wishes into existence the obligation that we work to make the world satisfying it a reality. Indeed, a better word for the divine commands might be "wishes" or "desires," for the word

“command” connotes authority, and on James’s view God simply does not make things right by virtue of his infinite authority.

This, by the way, allows us to return to Schrader’s concern with James’s appeal to religion. Schrader notes that religion has often been mixed with prejudice, saying that “People are notoriously prone to imputing their own blindness and deafness to God as well.”²³ Schrader fails to engage James’s own reason for appealing to God, which specifically precludes any attempt to harness God to the narrow agenda of any single ideal. James’s idea of God is the idea of the God who cares more about *all* our ideals than the most loving of human beings is able.

C. DCT May Not Obtain of Any Actual Obligations

Third, God, who wishes for a world that satisfies maximally consistent obligations, may not exist yet; therefore DCT may not obtain for any existing obligations, but merely for certain possible obligations. In order to explain this, let us consider two plausible interpretations of James’s idea of divinity. On one of these interpretations God does not yet exist, for which reason maximal obligations do not exist and DCT does not hold in the real world. I will not try to give a comprehensive summary of the possible interpretations of James’s view of God, nor to determine which is the correct interpretation. I only aim to show that it matters what sort of God we are talking about.

It is hard to tell what kind of God James believes in—or, rather, which divine realities are worthy of being called “God.” After outlining two such notions of the divine in James’s thought, I will comment on the implications of this ambiguity for DCT in James. For the character of God determines whether God is able to issue divine commands, thus grounding the highest obligations.

So what kind of God might James believe in? On the one hand, there is the idea of a finite God, a God who is the central character in what I like to call Almost Classical Theism (ACT). Despite staying close to classical theism in several respects, ACT is not bound to the specific content of any religious scriptures; it is at best uninterested in the simplicity of God; although God is all-knowing or near enough,²⁴ it concedes that God cannot be both all-knowing and all-powerful at the same time;²⁵ it insists that God interacts closely with the world to achieve his ends;²⁶ and, at this latter point, implicitly gives up the notion of God’s timelessness and impassibility. Still, as concerns the relationship of God and obligation, ACT is pretty traditional: God exists, is entirely good, and currently has the best perspective on the moral universe; he already knows what a unity of ideals looks like, and, in wishing that a world satisfying it come to be, has already created the

coherent set of moral obligations for which the moral philosopher longs. Accordingly, maximal obligation is presently binding on us; we just don't know what it is, and for the time being we have the duty of finding out. God's orders precede our moral activity in order of time and priority: God's requirements are issued before we have a chance to act on them; and our deeds are moral to the degree they measure up to God's standards.

On the other hand, James might endorse what I call Extreme Process Theology (EPT), the belief that God is still in the making. God simply *is* the eventual stability of ideals, or in Dewey's words God is "the union of all ideal ends."²⁷ On EPT, a stability of ideals has yet to be achieved, even in theory. Since we have yet to achieve the unity of ideals a complete God has yet to emerge. In fact, the moral philosopher has a hand in the construction of God.

To further distinguish ACT from EPT, consider James's most dramatic example of the necessity of belief. When I have to jump across a huge chasm to save my life, my belief that I can make the jump will help me to succeed; this belief is a factor in, and condition for, its own truth.²⁸ It interacts with its own object, effecting a new alignment between belief and world by changing the latter to fit the former. What if, as James suggests in "The Will to Believe," religious belief also interacts with its own object?²⁹ On ACT, since God already exists, he has only to shape a world of maximal ideal satisfaction—to realize the happy eschatological state. Belief in God interacts with its eschatological component; the belief that the eschaton is on its way, that God exists and will ultimately triumph, helps to assure that ultimate triumph.³⁰ But on EPT religious belief interacts with its object on a much grander scale; it helps to ensure God's existence and to shape his ultimate character, not merely guaranty his triumph over evil; for the process of achieving the best possible world shapes the ideals that are identified with God. It is not just that we don't yet *know* what the ideals (or God) will look like; our interaction with them helps to determine what they *will* ultimately look like.³¹

Although I think the idea of God at play in "MPML" is probably closer to ACT than to EPT, I will not argue this here. My point is simply that EPT is a plausible reading of James's theology in "MPML"; and, since it is plausible that James holds to EPT, it is possible that the divine commands which constitute maximal obligations do not exist yet.

IV. LIMITATIONS ON OUR KNOWLEDGE OF DIVINE COMMANDS

We must now turn to the epistemic limitations of the Jamesian DCT; following that we will explore the concomitant practical limitations. Cantrell acknowledges the epistemic and the practical limitations, observing that “God’s thoughts are hidden from us” and that a DCT “fails as a measure of conduct.”³² I explore these limitations for two reasons, one of which is simply to be thorough in uncovering the limitations of the Jamesian DCT. The other, more important reason is to let James’s outlook speak for itself. As we shall see when all is said and done, James’s underlying Pragmatism speaks strongly against the propriety of using the language of DCT to describe his view. After explaining the epistemic limitations of the Jamesian DCT in this section, in the next section I shall explain the practical limitations; at the end of the next section I shall explain why Cantrell’s acknowledgement of these limitations does not go far enough.

On the Jamesian DCT, we have no knowledge of the divine commands. Even if there is a God somewhere wishing certain highest obligations on us, we do not know what they are; “exactly what the thought of the infinite thinker may be is hidden from us even were we sure of his existence.”³³ We simply don’t have access to God’s perspective. In time, we can at least approximate knowledge of it; the moral philosopher can hope to eventually approach an understanding of this set of ideals. Understanding what this set of ideals is will take some doing. Since ideals are rooted in subjective perspectives, the largest set of mutually consistent ideals exists in a world containing the largest set of mutually consistent personal demands. As things stand now, too many people have too many irreconcilable demands. Accordingly, the highest obligation which is known to us is not to obey the divine commands, but to discover them.³⁴

It will take a little time to figure out how to satisfy the most number of ideals. It will also take political action. The moral philosopher is also the political philosopher.³⁵ He begins with the ideals that exist in human society (those of Republicans and Democrats, of libertarians and socialists, of Kant, Aristotle, and Mill) and tries to reconcile them *in practice* as much as in theory. The philosopher and his community will have to work together. Since it is unclear how to reconcile some of the distinct ideals that *can* be realized simultaneously, political and philosophical practice will take a great deal of creativity. Also, some ideals will have to be sacrificed in order for the most ideals to be realized. Most importantly, in the process the moral philosopher and the rest of us will have to learn to tolerate and embrace the demands of others as

much as possible, to make the ideals of others our own.³⁶ In this respect our ideals will come to resemble the ideals of God, whose ideal is precisely that the greatest possible harmony of ideals comes to be.³⁷

This, by the way, solves a problem scholars have raised with James's ethics. Aikin and Talisse lament the supposed absence of an ideal of tolerance in James. They fear the consequences of validating contradictory obligations, especially the obligations forged from ideals that are based in the desire to dominate or destroy others.³⁸ Talisse and Aikin fail to see how God brings about the very tolerance they seek. On James's view, God's ideals are precisely those that best tolerate and reconcile the ideals of others.³⁹ The process of reconciling our competing ideals will, as James says,⁴⁰ necessarily involve eliminating some ideals. Every person's ideal is an obligation, but not every obligation is overriding. The ideals of the Nazis, for example, are technically obligations on James's scheme; but they conflict with the ideals of the rest of us, not to mention the ideals of their victims; accordingly, they would be among the very first ideals to go.⁴¹ We need not even wait for clarity from God on this point; that Nazi ideals must be eliminated to form a moral universe should be clear to any moral philosopher worth his salt.

While this may sound like a version of utilitarianism, it is at least not a typical one. James's strategy is to satisfy the greatest possible number of demands, but this is no ordinary utilitarianism: Demands ought to be satisfied only because they ground *ideals*. Classical utilitarianism itself is wedded to a certain ideal, the ideal that happiness or pleasure is the greatest good. Utilitarianism *proper* would sacrifice some desires so that others can be satisfied because that would bring the most pleasure and so maximize its own ideal. James's philosophy would sacrifice some desires on behalf of others in order to *maximize the satisfaction of ideals*. If James's philosophy is utilitarianism, then, I think it is a *utilitarianism of ideals*; it seeks the satisfaction of as many ideals as possible, not the satisfaction of the ideal sought by utilitarianism.⁴²

In sum, divine commands, while necessary and sufficient to ground maximal obligation, are unknown to us even if they do exist. So the Jamesian DCT, though it correctly describes these highest of obligations, fails to describe any obligations we human beings know about. It is a theory of the conditions for sublime, yet unknown, moral principles. In the next section I will explain why this epistemic limitation of the DCT leads to a serious practical limitation.

V. PRACTICAL LIMITATIONS OF A JAMESIAN DCT

We have already seen how DCT is a poor, though an accurate, description of some of the ethical realities James discusses. But what really matters to James is not simply the accuracy of a theory in describing some component of reality. James is a Pragmatist; what matters to him is the difference a moral theory makes in practice. The Jamesian DCT is only a part of James's overall moral theory, a part which is useful as an inspiration, but nevertheless fails to describe anything useful since the moral obligations to which it applies are unknown to us.

According to James's moral theory as a whole, we must mediate between competing ideals in order to achieve a world in which the most ideals can be satisfied. We must learn about divine commands so as to enact them. The process of learning them is no less than the common ethics of an entire society (if not the world); there is enough work to keep moral philosophers and politicians busy for several lifetimes devising and implementing common solutions to diverging ideals. This is all very practical; however, our present ignorance of divine commands ensures that they themselves are useless. In other words, while the Jamesian idea of moral obligation is useful, the portion of it which describes the highest obligations, and which I have been calling a DCT, fails to announce any of these obligations to us, and so these obligations remain useless.

Even the portion of James's moral theory which can be called a DCT is only useful as an inspiration. While DCT is technically true of some real or possible component of moral reality as James understands it, we cannot *act* on the overriding obligations wished by God. We can only work towards understanding them. Those divine commands which shimmer beyond the veil of our ignorance do not give us practical rules for moral practice, but inspire us to *discover* the best rules for moral practice. The obligations explained by the DCT are useless, but not the supremely useful dream of learning what they are. The Jamesian DCT inspires us to find what is good without *telling* us what is good. So the theory itself is useful; but that of which it is a theory, supreme moral obligation, is useless to us. The divine wishes do nothing to guide future experience, solve no concrete problems, and fail to direct the moral philosopher or the politician. The idea of the divine wishes has value in experience as an inspiration that we strive to realize the divine wishes.

This is why James says that "our postulation of him after all serves only to let loose in us the strenuous mood."⁴³ It is not that God is *in fact* only an inspiration to our vigorous pursuit of a

moral universe; Cantrell is quite right that the living God, if there is one, matters to James, as the supporter of the highest obligations.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, our *idea* of God, held in ignorance of the divine fact that may (or may not) presently be out there, is only an inspiration. For James the truth lies somewhere between Cantrell's view and that espoused by Deborah Boyle: "What matters for James is not whether God actually exists, but whether we believe that God exists."⁴⁵ Boyle's is an apt description of God's immediate relevance to known obligation, as long as we remain ignorant of the divine wishes. However, as Cantrell says, the actual existence of God matters a great deal, albeit in the long term.

This amounts to a serious objection to the propriety of using DCT to describe James's views. He is pragmatic to the core. What is useless has no value. The unknown obligations described by the Jamesian DCT are useless to us. The DCT itself is useful, but less so than the overall moral theory of which it is only a part and which does succeed in giving moral rules to guide practice. Pragmatically, then, DCT as Cantrell defines it succeeds in being an accurate description of a portion of James's moral theory, but a inadequate description of that portion and of the moral theory as a whole.

VI. CONCLUSION: THE DIVINE COMMAND THEORY AND WILLIAM JAMES

The proponent of DCT may find James's theory an attenuated version of DCT, hardly worthy of the name. Although DCT and James's metaethics have much in common, the five differences I have articulated hold the two views rather far apart. I shall conclude, first, by suggesting a better definition of DCT which distinguishes the views. Then I shall show how some of James's ideas could support a more traditional DCT. For DCT and James's ideas, if not quite the same, are nonetheless related ideas with significant connections.

James's ideas call for a reexamination of what constitutes DCT. Cantrell suggests that a DCT has four parts: divine commands are necessary for moral obligations, they are sufficient, there are moral obligations which override all others, and these overriding obligations are objective such that we can be mistaken about them. As we have seen, this definition of DCT correctly describes one component of moral reality as James understands it. But as we have also seen, it describes only one small component; it also fails to describe the ultimate source of obligation even in that component, which may exist only in possibility and not in reality, which is unknown to us even if it does exist, and which fails to

give us any practical ethical guidance. The last of these problems is the deepest for the Jamesian, but the second is the deepest for the proponent of a traditional DCT. On a robust DCT God's wish should be the *source* of the highest moral obligation, not just a truth condition for it.

What shall we conclude, then, with respect to William James and the divine command theory? We could, as I have done so far in this article, call James's theory a DCT, albeit an unusual one with theoretical and practical limitations. However, I think it would be better to refine Cantrell's definition of DCT by adding a fifth part to his definition: that divine authority be *the only possible ground of obligations*, that the highest moral obligations have no source of moral authority save the God who commands them. Better yet, we can simply replace the first two parts of Cantrell's definition, for this fifth part entails the first two; for, if divine authority is the only possible source of moral obligation, then it is both necessary and sufficient for moral obligation. So, though Cantrell's definition of DCT describes a component of James's view of moral reality, I think a better definition of DCT will not describe James's view.

However, his theory is a sort of corollary to a more traditional DCT, and shares key elements with it. With this in mind, I shall now suggest a quasi-Jamesian strategy for promoting a more traditional DCT. We must make a distinction between a raw examination of experience and what James calls in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* "over-beliefs," those beliefs that are abstracted from experience.⁴⁶ James prefers his over-beliefs to extrapolate as little as possible from experience.⁴⁷ But a proponent of DCT may have different preferences. He is free to accept James's moral intuition that, all else being equal, the demand of any person "ought . . . , for its own sole sake, to be satisfied" and to agree with James that there is a desperate need for divine help in piecing together a moral universe. But he is also free to insert his own over-beliefs to the effect that God already exists, has already constructed the moral universe, and has subordinated the ideals of some creatures to his own, by his authority making them *non-moral* obligations. Although a theory of this sort goes beyond a mere analysis of James's thought, I see no reason why James's ideas could not be developed in this manner.

I have tried to keep my own views from getting in the way of articulating what I think James is saying and determining how DCT interacts with his thought. I close, however, by stating my opinion on an aspect of James that I think must surely be correct. However James thinks of God, and whatever understanding of God we may wish to bring to James, the impetus of "MPML" is to learn how to, in the phrase attributed to Johannes Kepler, "think God's

thoughts after him.” We must learn to predicate as morally obligatory what God predicates as morally obligatory, desire what God desires, and love what God loves. In short, we must conform our minds to the mind of God. When James recommends this, for what little my view is worth, I believe he is correct.

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NOTES

¹I wish to thank Michael Cantrell for his insightful and provocative essay on "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life"; Stuart Rosenbaum for teaching me so much about William James and for encouraging me to respond to Cantrell's thesis; and my student worker at Berry College, Haley Athens, for reading through an earlier draft of this essay.

²Graham H. Bird says James sees inadequacies in several major ethical theories, including utilitarianism; Ruth Anna Putnam describes James as "a consequentialist," but "not a hedonist, nor any other kind of reductive utilitarian"; David E. Schrader points out that James himself dismisses his connection with utilitarianism as trivial; Scott F. Aikin and Robert B. Talisse say James rejects utilitarianism both for its hedonism and for its thesis that "all goods are commensurable"; and Robert J. O'Connell thinks James's ethics manifest "a deontological streak." On the other hand, Michael R. Slater identifies "MPML" as promoting "a

version of utilitarianism.” Richard Gale analyzes James’s view as a version of desire-satisfaction utilitarianism. Recently, Wesley Cooper objects to Gale, describing James’s view as “an *ideal-maximizing consensualism*.”

Graham H. Bird, “Moral Philosophy and the Development of Morality” in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 261-262. Ruth Anna Putnam, “Some of Life’s Ideals” in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 285. David E. Schrader, “Simonizing James: Taking Demand Seriously,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 34.4 (Fall 1998), 1014. Scott F. Aikin and Robert B. Talisse, “Three Challenges to Jamesian Ethics,” *William James Studies* 6 (2011). O’Connell, *William James on the Courage to Believe* (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 1997) and “‘The Will to Believe’ and James’ ‘Deontological Streak,’” *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 28.4 (Fall 1992), especially pages 816-22. Slater, *William James on Ethics and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70. Gale, *The Divided Selves of William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chapter 2. Cooper, *The Unity of William James’s Thought* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), chapter 12, especially page 225.

³Three studies which do investigate the religious aspect of “MPML” are Todd Lekan, “Strenuous Moral Living,” *William James Studies* 2.1 (2007); Michael R. Slater, “Ethical Naturalism and Religious Belief in ‘The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,’” *William James Studies* 2.1 (2007); and Michael Slater, *William James on Ethics and Faith*, chapter 3. Slater notes that “Very few interpreters . . . have dealt with the *religious* aspect” of “MPML” (*William James on Ethics and Faith*), 70-71.

⁴Schrader, 1025-1026.

⁵Harvey Cormier, “Comment on Talisse and Aikin,” *William James Studies* 6 (2011); Scott F. Aikin and Robert B. Talisse, “Replies to Our Critics,” *William James Studies* 6 (2011).

⁶Michael Cantrell, “William James’s Transcendental Theological Voluntarism: A Reading of ‘The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,’” *William James Studies* 10 (2013).

⁷William James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, vol. 6 of *The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis; 19 volumes (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1975-1988), 145. Hereafter “MPML.”

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 147.

¹⁰Ibid., 149.

¹¹Ibid., 141. Ruth Anna Putnam’s language is slightly misleading when she says that “for James morality *presupposes* that we have” made “the ends of others our own.” The reality of moral standards

requires no more than that one sentient being want something from another; making others' ends our own is a requirement for something grander than mere morality, namely the establishment of a moral universe, a coherent system of morals. Putnam, "Some of Life's Ideals," 284.

¹² "MPML," 161.

¹³ Cantrell, 2.

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵ "Strenuous Moral Living."

¹⁶ On this see Slater, "Ethical Naturalism and Religious Belief," 42-4.

¹⁷ D. Micah Hester, "The Possibility for Tragic Obligations" in *Streams of William James* 1.3 (Winter 2000, 15).

¹⁸ "MPML," 149.

¹⁹ Cantrell, 5.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "MPML," 149.

²² Also consider: "ethics have as genuine and real a foothold in a universe where the highest consciousness is human, as in a universe where there is a God as well" ("MPML," 150). The highest of obligations grow out of these myriad lesser obligations, deriving their overriding character from the fact that they are the best possible integration of them. I think James's later view as Gale describes it—"it is because God's demands and desires are good that we are obligated to comply with them"—is at least implicit in "MPML" (Gale, 44). Also Cooper: "Without roots in human motivation, a theistic moral code would have no moral weight" (235). Also Slater: God's values are not "intrinsically good or right"; God's "ideal moral universe would be the maximally inclusive one" (*William James on Ethics and Faith*, 90).

²³ Schrader, 1025.

²⁴ "MPML" describes God as "the infinite thinker" (161).

²⁵ William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, vol. 4 of *The Works of William James* ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis; 19 volumes (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1975-1988), 141.

²⁶ Ibid., 56.

²⁷ John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), 42.

²⁸ William James, "The Sentiment of Rationality" in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, 80. For a thorough examination of James's understanding of truth, see Hilary Putnam, "James' Theory of Truth" in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Putnam addresses this aspect of James's understanding of truth on pages 167-171.

²⁹ "The Will to Believe" in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, 31-32. On the development of James's idea of comprehending the universe under the analogy of social relationships, those very things said in "The Will to Believe" to be realities which our

beliefs can change, see David C. Lamberth, "Interpreting the Universe after a Social Analogy: Intimacy, Panpsychism, and a Finite God in a Pluralistic Universe" in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁰ This theme also appears in "The Sentiment of Rationality," 84-89, and "Is Life Worth Living?," 53-56, in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*.

³¹ Cooper's comments help to elucidate this aspect of Jamesian religion (6, 20-21, 147-148).

³² Cantrell, 8.

³³ "MPML," 161.

³⁴ Of course, God desires that we find these overriding obligations, so to do so is to obey a divine command; but the command that we find the highest obligations is not *itself* the highest obligations.

³⁵ James: "His function is in fact indistinguishable from that of the best kind of statesman at the present day" ("MPML," 159).

³⁶ Ruth Anna Putnam, "Some of Life's Ideals."

³⁷ Deborah Boyle explains how James's God seeks an inclusiveness of ideals; see her "William James' Ethical Symphony," *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* 34.4 (Fall 1998).

³⁸ "Three Challenges to Jamesian Ethics," 7-9. Telling is their remark that "Jamesian pluralism entails that James's ethics cannot support a muscular commitment to tolerance," 33.

³⁹ Harvey Cormier misunderstands James on this point as well. He correctly points out that tolerance is built right into the process of constructing the largest possible set of consistent ideals, but implies that God has no part in it; to the contrary, James says that God is at the heart of this endeavor; "Comment on Talisse and Aikin," 13-14.

⁴⁰ "MPML," 156.

⁴¹ In fact, they have already gone, as social and political progress have ruled out a number of ideals that are too exclusive of other ideals. Cooper makes this clear in his discussion of sadism (227-231).

⁴² On the question of James's utilitarianism, I favor the language Cooper uses to describe James's ethics; Cantrell seems to side with Gale. See above, footnote 2. Cantrell, 8.

⁴³ "MPML," 161.

⁴⁴ Slater misunderstands James: "if God exists, then any claims that God makes on us are binding only insofar as *we* respond to those claims" ("Ethical Naturalism and Religious Belief," 18; also see *William James on Ethics and Faith*, 77). In the passage to which Slater refers ("MPML," 149), James says that our response to God's demands is a necessary condition, not for making a way of life moral, but for making us walk in it. Gale is helpful in describing Section V of "MPML" as pertaining to the "existential . . . dimension of the ethical life," describing the human motivation to live ethically—not the necessary and sufficient conditions for a way of living being ethical. Gale, 40-4.

⁴⁵ "William James' Ethical Symphony," 985.

⁴⁶ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, vol. 15 of *The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson

Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis; 19 volumes (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1975-1988), Lecture XVIII, 341.

⁴⁷ Cooper, 147.

**WILLIAM JAMES'S PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL
INFLUENCE ON EDWIN BISSELL HOLT:
A STUDENT, COLLEAGUE, DISCIPLE, AND FRIEND**

ERIC PHILLIP CHARLES

ABSTRACT

E. B. Holt provides a valuable perspective on the professional and personal influences James had on those around him. Holt's professional career started with a class from James, and it ended with a paper dedicated to him. Between those times Holt was as a friend and colleague. Personal correspondences confirm that Holt's personal dedication to James was manifested most strongly in a professional loyalty; he dedicated most of his professional output to seeing through the consequences of James's Radical Empiricism. James was, to Holt, the pinnacle example of the 'whole person.'

This paper will attempt to present William James, as viewed from the eyes of his student, colleague, disciple, and friend, Edwin Bissell Holt. I and others have written about the relation between James's and Holt's professional work in philosophy and psychology (e.g., Charles 2011b, Heft, 2001, Kuklick, 1977, Taylor, & Wozniak, 1996) and more work on that will be forthcoming for some time (I hope). However, I would like to take this opportunity to look more closely at the personal relationship between Holt and James. Because of where that evidence lies, most of the focus will be on Holt, but through Holt we can learn something about the character of James.

Edwin Bissell Holt (1873-1946) was at Harvard for more than twenty years, about half of that time in the presence of William James. Holt began as a student in 1892, and remained there almost continuously until his dramatic departure in 1918. He left academia for a time, and then was persuaded to go to Princeton, where he taught from 1926-1936.

Holt's exposure to psychology began with Philosophy 1 at Harvard, taught by James, using *Psychology: A Briefer Course* (James, 1892). Holt's final publication was a chapter titled "William James as a Psychologist" in the volume commemorating the centennial of James's birth (Holt, 1942). Between those events, the majority of Holt's career was dedicated to James, and thereby Holt tried to explain and extend Radical Empiricism.

HOLT AS A STUDENT

What was it like for Holt in James's course? While we cannot know for sure, we can get a good feel of what class was like from contemporary students. Roswell Angier captures the spirit of the class, and its relation to James's personal style, quite well. In so doing he gives us an idea of how James influenced his student's professional style:

'You have read today's chapter,' [James] remarked from his favorite perch on a corner of the platform desk, holding up to the large class a copy of his *Briefer course*; 'I wrote the book, and what *I* think is all there—but perhaps there is a question.' In such sparrings for openings some debatable issue, perhaps self-initiated, usually bobbed up. He would then become animated and fluent, with rising assertiveness, and throw off with apparent unconcern the verbal picturesquenesses to which his writings have accustomed us. These clarifying interludes were our joy, and James' forte. Positive, even vehement in expression, he none the less impressed us as undogmatic and open-minded, as if science and philosophy were a never-ending but serious game (Angier, 1943, p. 132, recounting events circa 1894).

Ralph Barton Perry also had fond memories of the course, and gives us some idea how the professional agendas of James's more dedicated students were determined by these early influences:

I can remember even the stage-setting—the interior of the room in Sever Hall, the desk with which the lecturer took so many liberties, and the gestures with which James animatedly conveyed to us the intuition of common-sense realism. From that day I confess that I have never wavered in the belief that our perceptual experience disclosed a common world, inhabited by our perceiving bodies and our neighbours (Perry, 1930, p. 189, recounting circa 1896).

After receiving his undergraduate degree at Harvard, Holt receives a master's degree from Columbia University, under James McKeen Cattell. Cattell's approach to psychology differed significantly from James's. While there is no record of Holt and Cattell's relationship at the time, Holt's later disdain for Cattell would be quite explicit.

In 1889, Münsterberg writes James that Holt is returning to Harvard, and notes positively that his "soul has been conquered for philosophy." (Münsterberg, 1899). In 1901 Holt completes his dissertation on "visual anesthesia," a phenomenon wherein people are generally unaware of visible changes that happen while their eyes are making a saccade. During this time, James is away, and Münsterberg, Royce, and MacDougall sign Holt's dissertation.

HOLT AS COLLEAGUE

Later in 1901, Münsterberg writes James to happily report that MacDougall was leaving Harvard, and being replaced by Holt (Münsterberg, 1901). During the first few years of this time, James's influence on Holt is unclear. Elliot is President of Harvard, and when he asks James about the younger members of the department, James recalls a discussion in which Holt

said that “for him [Holt] the profession of psychologist means to be able to work with Münsterberg. If he couldn’t do that, he would become a business man, and give up psychology.” (James, 1904b). Thus, despite James’s early influence on Holt, there is little indication that Holt valued James’s work as distinct from the work of others at Harvard – it should be noted that Münsterberg’s relatively recent appointment was clearly an implicit endorsement from James. There is also little indication that Holt has made a positive impression upon James, at least in the 2 years since James’s return.

THE VALUE OF VACATION

All this changed rather abruptly. Later in 1904, Holt accepted an invitation to join the James family at their vacation home in Chocorua. This seems to be the start of a very positive relationship, as evidenced by James’s personal promotion of Holt in several letters later that year. He writes to Mary Tappan stating, “I walked round the Lake with Holt, who is a most original philosopher as well as a charming human being, none the less so for his violent prejudices in various directions.” (James, 1904c). He writes to Woodbridge stating, “Young Holt... was here while I was writing my article, & we talked it over much. He also disbelieves in Consciousness absolutely, and has an extremely vigorous and original, but to me in many points very obscure system on the literary stocks.” (James, 1904d). The article, presumably, is James’s “Does Consciousness Exist?” (James, 1904a), and Holt’s system is the early rumbling of *The Concept of Consciousness* (Holt, 1914). This indicates that Holt’s work in the preceding years *has* been in line with James’s thinking, though the two are not identical. James writes to Miller, “We had a delightful week from Holt who, with all his injustices and prejudices, is a being wonderful for the heart, and gained all our affections. A much more powerful systematic intellect than I had supposed...” (James, 1904e). Similar praises were sent in letters to Perry and Münsterberg.

The relationship between Holt and James seems to blossom quickly from this point on. The following spring they shared a transatlantic boat trip. Writing back to his wife Alice, James states a desire to expand his friendship with Holt, “I shall be very sorry to lose Holt, who is a very noble creature tho’ decidedly depressed in spirits – I hope you will accustom him to come to the house – if he wants to, but I fear he may not.” (James, 1905a). In fact, Holt became a frequent guest at the James family’s house. The warmth of the relationship between Holt and James is well captured in the jovial nature of their few extant correspondences, even while Holt displays his “decidedly depressed” side. After James and Holt have gone their separate ways in Europe, Holt sends James reports, noting for example that:

Perry is married and gone away on the inevitable honeymoon. These trips must be dismal affairs. I should dread nothing more than the moment when I must learn that my wife travelled with fifty queer looking bottles, twenty-five dresses, and packed her hairbrush and tooth-powder underneath the whole mess. And the chivalrous new husband, disguised as a man of means, is instantly involved by his dove-like wife with sixteen porters, whenever he emerges from a train. I’m thankful I shall never be pestered with a honeymoon. Tom and Rachel are serving their time out in Devonshire (Holt, 1905a).

Holt also thanks James for checking in on his mother, indicating that the relation between the colleagues’ families is extending in both directions.

In addition to a growing friendship, there seems to be growing consensus between the two in terms of the direction psychology should go. Holt and James discussed the beginnings of *The Concept of Consciousness* in 1904, but it would not be completed until 1908, and not published until 1914. As Holt writes James in 1905, it is clear that James believes they are working along the same lines:

There is the quandary as to what I shall call the theory.... you have said that I have my ideas from you, as may well be; and if you care to glance over the sheets when finished, and find that my arguments readily subsume under yours, I will gladly erase “empirio-criticism” all through & put [radical empiricism]. I do think I’m more nearly your disciple than anyone’s else in these matters: unless indeed you account it fatal that I can’t accept pragmatism in any form. It will depend on what your pleasure is (Holt, 1905b).

The Concept of Consciousness introduces Holt’s searchlight and cross-section metaphors for consciousness. There Holt demonstrates a bias he will later attribute explicitly to James, surely the bias being referenced in James’s report on their walk around the lake, when he states:

The literature of psych-physical parallelism is one of the most precious farces that modern science presents.... my main purpose has been to show that this mystery concerning the action of the brain is pure buncombe, bequeathed to us by the absurd and in every way impossible representative theory of knowledge.” (Holt, 1914, p. 308-310).

THE NEW REALISM

Holt’s work on *The Concept of Consciousness* was part of a larger agenda. Starting around 1910, and ending around 1917, philosophy in America revolved around a movement known as the New Realism (de Wall, 2001). I suspect the origins of the movement are quite a bit earlier, however. In 1904, James writes to Perry saying, “We must start a ‘school’.” (James, September 1904f). Despite his enthusiasm, James also holds some trepidation. In 1905, as his friendship with Holt is just beginning to bloom, he writes Miller to say:

Perry and Holt have some ideas in reserve, but Holt’s prejudices make one mistrust them in advance and Perry is close-lipped.... American philosophers, young and old, seem scratching where the wool is short. Important things are being published; but all of them too technical. The thing will never clear up satisfactorily till someone writes out its resultant in decent English (James, November, 1905b).

Two years later, James’s view is not much better. He writes President Elliot to say:

We have some very competent younger philosophers in America now, and a few of them write clearly. But their competence is critical wholly, and no one shows any strong originality. I fancy that from that point of view Perry and Holt will pan out as well as anyone (James, July 1907).

While James will not live to see the school mature, he does get to see its birth. Perhaps the first word James had of these events is from Holt. In May 1910, Holt reports back two important events to James: First, at a meeting of Edward Titchener's "Experimentalists" at Johns Hopkins (a precursor to the modern Psychonomic Society), Holt and others have failed to secure James's place as the head of the International Congress of Psychology. With Cattell as the likely alternative, their efforts are now directed at scuttling the conference. Second, at the American Philosophical Association meeting, occurring neig-simultaneously, Marvin, Montague, Perry, Pitkin, & Spaulding have agreed on a shared set of philosophical commitments, and are moving forward with a shared vision. Holt has been invited to join them (Holt, 1910a).

Alas, it is unclear how much of the things to come James could have anticipated.

JAMES'S DEATH

James dies in the late summer of 1910. Holt was despondent: socially, professionally, and emotionally. He writes to friend and colleague Robert Yerkes:

Little has happened to me except the death of Professor James. I returned from Long Island in order to attend the funeral, stayed a few weeks in Cambridge, and have now been a week here [Glennere, Maine]... I feel moderately well, but not eager and wish that this might be my last year of official connection with Harvard (Holt, 1910b).

To Ada Yerkes, Robert's wife:

Your kind letter came in time but I did not use the cheque. The James' would have preferred no flowers: many came and in courtesy had to be displayed. They were sent directly after the service to a hospital. I sent none, at their request, and indeed no-one near enough to the Family to know its wishes sent any: so I enclose your cheque herewith. I am sure that Mrs. James will be glad to know of your thought, however, and I shall tell her when I have opportunity.

The services were very simple, as is usual at Appleton, indeed more simple than usual, perhaps. I heard very little, the moment was too full of grief. The greatest and best has gone out of my life, and it interests me less than ever to live.

Of the Family I have seen only Billy who arranged all things; assisted Mrs. James to a carriage, and with the mere eye saw the others for a moment. Aleck could not get home from Wyoming in time even for the funeral. They all left, I think, on Wednesday for Chocorua (Holt, 1910c).

REVISE THE BRIEFER COURSE?

Following James's death, Holt begins to sever his ties with Harvard. However, Lowell, who had become president of Harvard the previous year, intervenes to keep him. The deal is that Holt will teach for one semester a year, with the other semester off for writing. In addition to Holt's work with the new realists, which he sees as an extension of James's later work, Holt is quickly enrolled for a Herculean task: To revise *Psychology: A Briefer Course*, the course that first exposed him to psychology, and that was for many years the

most popular text in the field. Holt was the top choice both of the publisher and of the James family. Completing the task would surely gain Holt enduring prestige, would continue to keep James at the forefront of psychology in the minds of another generation of students, and would net a tidy profit for all involved – but none of that mattered to Holt. All that mattered to Holt was his obligation to James, the man. Negotiations with the publisher (Henry Holt and Company, which hereafter will be called Co. to avoid confusion) were tense, especially as the publisher continued to be concerned with monetary matters. As Holt put it to Harry:

I would not for H. H. & Co. touch the text-book in question nor any other, for the sum which they mention nor for any sum which they could possibly afford to name. As often enough comes about, the motive is incommensurate with the money value. Any commercial arrangement between the Publishers and me is, then, out of question; for whatsoever sum I might accept would commit me formally to the declaration that for that sum I was willing to revise the W.J. Text-Book. ... (The Text-Book in question is strictly speaking no such, but an abridgement of a System. We've got to make it into a t.-b., though, more or less.).... My willingness, and eagerness, to do this work is wholly a matter between your Father and me. So far as I might explain this to anyone now living, it would be to say that 'tis in order that the revised form may be the closest possible to what he would have done if he were here. And assuredly if anyone occurred to me whom I thought more likely to carry out that aim, I should apprise you at once and step out myself. Well then, for reasons of my own, which concern nobody else whomsoever, I undertake to act as mouth-piece, and nothing else (Holt, April 1912).

Harry is instructed to handle all financial matters with Co., "My bargain in regard to this work is with him [James], and not with you nor with the Family nor with H. H. & Co. I trust that this is clear." (Holt, April 1912).

Despite disavowing interest in the financial matters, Holt has several more correspondences complaining that the family is not getting a good enough deal from Co. Harry, meanwhile, attempts to convince Co. to pay Holt more, even offering to take money out of the family's cut, as long as Co. promises not to tell Holt where it came from. Eventually it is revealed that the family owns the copyright to the works, not Co., at which point Holt claims the terms to be fair, and talk of money dies out. The correspondences turn to the form of revision and other more mundane matters (Henry Holt Archives).

HOLT LEAVING HARVARD

In 1918 Holt sends in a short letter of resignation. Multiple people, including President Lowell ask him to stay. Holt declines, but believes Lowell has a right to know his complaints, particularly about the state of the Department and the University. Explaining his early love of the place, Holt singles out that "In those days I had Professor James to look up to." The problem now is that:

I made one observation in the psychological market-place, which has been of interest. Even the professed searcher after truth must of course look out for his own practical interests: but it makes all the difference in the world which of these considerations he puts first. And every man has to choose,

because the day surely comes when these two interests will appear to him to conflict. I discovered that... if a man won't put truth first, then he needn't bother to put it anywhere: for it will not go second, though a slight difference at the outset, soon becomes the great difference between the honest and sober scientist to whom some little truth will surely be vouchsafed, and the full-fledged charlatan.

Anyhow there are some absorbing problems, and I shall go on to devoting my very ordinary powers of mind and body to the work that I have begun here at Harvard or, to speak more exactly, under the late Professor James (Holt, 1918).

The rest of the letter is quite venomous, as Holt is clearly disgusted by what Kuklick (1977) called the "professionalization of philosophy" and the professionalization of academia more generally. This disgust is grounded in his understanding of what James stood for as a philosopher and an academic. Months later, while discussing contemporary psychologists with E. B. Titchener, and labeling them after "great psychologists" of the past, the topic turns to identifying "epigone," which are (roughly) disciples who continue to advance. In this context, James is identified as an observer-systemtizer, and Titchener asserts that Holt is "a James." Holt explains that:

I do not think of Wundt and James as being preeminently observers (strange as it may seem to intimate that James is a systematizer. Yet so I do. And perhaps "theorizer" would be an apter word.)

For me Freud is a mighty observer (but as a theorzier – thought I hate to apply to him such a term – a jackass. I believe that the two gifts are never combined.)... Wundt... is not a genuine thinker – he does not consult facts, he martials then á son gré et comme lui bon semble. A vast difference!

Why don't you call me a little James?

Holt also confesses that he:

Has resolved to no longer "invite discussion"... a philosopher's converse must be altogether in the indicative mood. And every dispute or effort to proseyltize involves implicitly something that is over and above the indicative mood. And I repose peacefully in the assurance that any idea of mine which may be true cannot be impeded by other man's attacks: while any that may be in error I desire to see attacked and overthrown. Since the universe attests all truth. I do not worry lest truth should not prevail (Holt, January 1919).

MORE ATTEMPTS AT REVISION

Retired to Maine, Holt refocuses his efforts on revising the *Briefer Course*. Quickly he runs into conflict with the Co. over all the issues he had made clear to them earlier. The Co. desires a quick update to sell more books, Holt wants to be James's mouthpiece. In that spirit, Holt insists that he must take all reference to consciousness out of the book. In place of that lost material will go James's radical empiricism. The walk around the lake that James spoke so

highly of is still clearly on Holt's mind, as well as James high ideals in placing truth first.

I shall have to do this if I revise the work at all: - firstly, because that will present the only picture of psychology which would be a true one: secondly, because I am convinced that if Mr. James were revising the work himself his first care would also be to make it utterly "radical empirical." Whether I should do this in the way that he would have done it, I cannot know. For he left no directions as to how to take "consciousness" out of psychology: and no hints, beyond the general animus of his later work on Pragmatism and Radical Empiricism (Holt, March 1920a).

To this letter, Holt attaches Chapters I, II, and V to make sure Harry and Co. understand what he is doing. Harry thinks it looks good, and understands the goal. He writes back, with surprise, "What you are doing is going to be a reconciliation of the position occupied by my father at different times." (H. James, 1920a). The publisher is less impressed. In May, Holt receives his chapters back, but states that they look very bad (Holt, 1920b). That is the last correspondence regarding the revision, and no record of the chapters remain. While some ideas of what Holt had in mind can be constructed from his later works, the relationship between Holt's and James's ideas is a story for another time (Charles, 2010).

Also of note during this time is Holt's correspondence with Henry regarding the *Letters of William James* (H. James, 1920b). Holt sends a small collection of letters noting that he considers them his most valuable possessions. When Henry returns them, he apologizes that there was not room to include them in the publication, but unsuccessfully urges Holt to send them to the James Archive at Harvard for preservation (H. James, 1920c).

HOLT'S LATER WORKS

Holt returns to academia, to a post at Princeton, which he held from 1926 to 1936. While there he writes his final book and a handful of articles. The book in particular is worth noting here, as well as Holt's final academic publication, a book chapter published several years after Holt retires to Maine for the final time.

ANIMAL DRIVES

The book is Volume I of *Animal Drives and the Learning Process: An Essay Toward Radical Empiricism* (Holt, 1931). In this work, Holt is clearly still trying to repay his debt to James. Alas, Volume I focuses on issues of physiological psychology, and so the connection to James work seems tenuous at best. Regarding James, Holt tells us that Radical Empiricism is:

a way of thinking which aims to escape, both in philosophy and in psychology, from the absurdities of subjectivism and any form of psych-physical parallelism... 'consciousness,' the metaphysical entity, does *not* exist; that it is merely the last lingering echo of the primitive ghost-soul. Conscious phenomena of course exist, [James] said, and the problem of cognition exists, but not mental *substance*... (p. v)

Volume II will include the relation between *mind* and *reality*. As at the outset we are brought face to face with the question, whether a ‘radically’ empirical and physiological psychology is necessarily ‘materialistic,’ so at a later point we shall need to consider the very categories, ‘mind,’ ‘matter,’ and ‘reality,’ as psychological phenomena.... The study of the conscious process (psychology) and the study of the knowing process (epistemology) cannot be kept apart if both are taken seriously. (p. vii)

Alas, Volume II never appears. Thus, the connection between the physiological material in this book and the agenda of radical empiricism (at least as Holt understood it) remains difficult to discern. While James’s writings included things learned through physiological investigation, it seems odd that a man who claims to be dedicated to continuing James’s legacy would think that the best way to proceed was to write a book-length treatment of the subject.

JAMES AS A PSYCHOLOGIST

In 1942, Holt writes his final professional work. It is for a symposium commemorating the 100th anniversary of James’s birth, published in a volume commemorating the same. Here Holt lays out who William James was professionally, and in so doing Holt lays out the way James’s example has been a guide to him, and an unattainable goal. Perhaps the most important thing to note about James’s professional life is that James-the-professional is in no way a separate entity or personality. Second is that James is not afraid of the world, he is willing to engage all that there is, avoiding nothing. In his writings,

James admits the reader to his workshop; where he, the whole man and untrammelled by academic mannerisms, is examining the facts, all the facts and all appearances that present themselves as facts, and trying to find for them some intelligible arrangement. There is no window dressing. Inconvenient items are not banished into corners to get them out of sight. And where outstanding contradictions exist, there they are, exposed to view (p. 34).

The chapter is rich in its portrayal of James’s overarching ambitions, and without knowing of Holt’s past and his work, it might be easy to miss that it is a rich portrayal of the work he has taken it as his mission to complete. Holt tells us that the one seemingly inescapable contradiction in psychology is that, “The mind seems dependent on the body while the mind seems independent of the body.” (p. 35). James never fully solved this problem (Holt asserts), but he made major inroads, and most importantly, he did not flinch from engaging the apparent contradiction; rather, James worked to expose the contradiction fully, with all consequences laid bare. Whereas psychologists and philosophers at the time, and most to this day, try to artificially cleave the problem – with philosophers handling the non-physical mind, and psychologists handling the physical – James steadfastly felt that any facts about the mind found by the philosopher must be reconcilable with facts discovered by the psychologist, and vice versa. That is, according to James, the fundamental seeming-contradiction in psychology can only be overcome if we accept that: “The problem of knowledge is identical with the problems of physiological psychology.” (Holt, 1942, p. 35). With that statement, it becomes immediately clear why Holt thought his *Animal Drives* was so important in continuing James’s legacy.

The remainder of the essay cobbles together quotes from James's works, with between-quote narration providing additional context. Though clearly altered to fit the context of a memorial volume, it likely gives good format and content Holt planned for the first few chapters of the ill-fated revision to *A Briefer Course*. There is coverage of Radical Empiricism, Pragmatism, and an attempt at back-integrating James's latter thoughts with material from *Principles of Psychology*. Reflecting Holt's disavowal of pragmatism, the discussion of that subject is perhaps more awkward than the rest. That said, it still demonstrates a nuanced understanding of James's work in those regards.

CONCLUSION: WHO WAS JAMES?

The purpose of this paper was to give a sense of who William James was to a close friend, Edwin Bissell Holt. Holt knew James best near the end, and was connected with him both professionally and personally. Who was James to Holt? Personally, James was a mentor and an exemplar, an encourager and a nurturer, a concerned and generous friend. Professionally, James was a Seeker of Truth, a courageous systematizer-theorist, perhaps the last of his kind on such a grand scale. James was the type of person who invoked fierce loyalty. Further, that James lived his personal and professional lives inseparably, made it impossible for those he touched most strongly to live separate personal and professional lives; or at least that was its effect on Holt.

Perhaps most importantly, however, James was painfully unattainable. Holt's inability to deliver what he sees as James's unfinished legacy to philosophy and psychology clearly haunts him to his end. This was not just a practical or professional failure, but a personal one. Holt is not the type of person to become overly frustrated by an inability to write a particular this or that: Neither in the academe, on trips to Europe or California, nor in his idealized forced-isolation of retirement could Holt make himself into *the person* capable of finishing James's contribution.

In these regards, the importance of Holt's assertion that philosophy requires the dedication of the "whole person" cannot be overemphasized. Holt's (1915) *The Freudian Wish and Its Place in Ethics* takes Freudian theory both to the microscopic level of physiology and the expansive level of ethics. Holt builds on the implicit ethics in Freudian psychology, that life is best lived without suppression. The problem with suppression, Holt demonstrates, is that a person cannot fully work towards something, if they also are working against it – a person harboring suppressions is not fully free to pursue any path. This book contextualized Holt's statement that James dedicated his whole person to his work. No greater complement could be given. To be able to dedicate one's whole person to a task requires a purity of intention virtually impossible to obtain. Only people capable of such dedication have free will, and only they have the ability to be fully ethical beings. James was such a person for Holt.

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WILLIAM JAMES SOCIETY: PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

D. MICAH HESTER

This talk is in multiple parts, and it is not entirely clear to me that they hang together as a coherent whole. In trying to develop something for this session I was struck by multiple, maybe even competing, interests. I struggled with trying to reconcile them, but could not. So, rather than pick one interest over the others or creatively weaving those interests together, I simply will speak briefly about each in turn.

I stand before you because I was honored with the election to the Vice Presidency of the William James Society back in 2010. And while I would have eventually become President (per the Society's constitution), I inhabit this role at this time because Ellen Suckiel was unable to complete her term of office for familial reasons. Thus, this presentation should rightfully be Ellen's, and I want to begin by acknowledging this fact. You, as the audience, are the poorer for having to listen to me than to her. But heck, it is not very often (unless you are John McDermott) that a guy gets a chance to give an address like this. I'll take my liberties as I find them.

* * *

So, I said this is in multiple parts: the first part is professionally "biographical," the second, "scholarly," and the third, I shall call "Societal"—for lack of better terms.

Biographically, I was introduced to James while an undergrad at Pomona College but paid little attention (I hate to read—wasn't forced to read—so I didn't read). I took a detour from academia after graduation by going into musical instrument retail and Microsoft technical support. After making the ridiculous decision to leave the potential millionaire lifestyle of Microsoft behind, I went into vast amounts of debt to go to graduate school, and it was there, at Vanderbilt, that I truly became acquainted with William James. Between Michael Hodges's course in American Philosophy and John Lachs's seminar in pragmatism and independent readings course on James, I learned to appreciate James's sensitivity to the "blooming buzzing confusion" that is human existence—a life where experience "grows by its edges"; where relations—not simply discrete impressions—are part-and-parcel of that experience.

However, as it is for many, Dewey's appeal was (initially) greater. Dewey had a more comprehensive story to tell—as dryly as he does, but I liked the thoroughness...and the dryness. Further, I appreciated Dewey's acknowledgement of the socially situated character of individuality; and I appreciated having a "theory of inquiry" available when times get rough. (As an aside, I have always found Peirce too dense for me to read—or, more precisely, I'm too dense to read it.) But when it came time to write as a professional, my thoughts kept turning to James more so than Dewey—in fact, my 2010 book,

End-of-Life Care and Pragmatic Decision Making (Cambridge University Press), relies almost entirely on James for philosophical support.

To be frank, though, I have no right to be as enamored by James as I am. While James waxes eloquent, I have no literary soul. Though James cut his teeth thinking about the mind, I find psychology unexciting. And even though James turns time and again to religious considerations, I detest religion and spirituality on principle. So, what, then, compels me to confront James time and again?

Well, though his account of “pure experience” leads many to confusion, his direction is insightfully on target. *Whatever* we mean by the concept, we cannot get outside *experience*. This insight leads James, rightly I think, to undermine any foundational role for “consciousness” (a truly radical idea), but it goes further—it demands of us that we take all and only experience seriously. This is the essence of James’s *Weltanschauung*—his “radical empiricism,” and I resonate with this...I just do. I’m not saying I consistently follow this in my own personal or professional endeavors, but I’d like to. I think it would make a positive difference in our moral considerations.

* * *

OK, having gotten that off my chest, I am led to the scholarly part of my talk: I first want to take a short aside to note that good work continues to be done in James scholarship—it is coming from philosophy, from religion, from psychology, from American studies, and more. You will, I expect, hear examples of this good work in the panel that follows this address.

My own interests have been in moral philosophy and radical empiricism. I have found James’s work in these areas to be compatible with each other and with the kinds of work I do in medical ethics. Further, I think he gives us important moral insights that do not necessarily fall prey to concerns over a lack of “common moral normativity”—contra those fools, Talisse/Aikin (2008)—an argument for another time. However, *I’m* not foolish enough to argue that James’s work in ethics is without problems. It suffers in several areas—lacks a clear sense of communal interests and an account of moral inquiry, among other things. But the pragmatic review of the place of “sentiment”/“passional nature” in the development of moral obligations out of (not prior to) experience, and, as I said earlier, his concern for the importance of all experience are invaluable to the moral enterprise.

But there is an aspect of James’s sentimentalism and moral thought that I want to talk about. *Nothing* I say here will be earth-shattering—in fact, it is not really novel. However, I want to say it (remember, I’ll take my liberties). What I want to focus on is a tension that makes its way often into his scholarly texts.

James is a fan of setting up contrasts, developing dichotomies, pointing out tensions. And then he will attempt to (depending on whom you talk to) dissolve the tension, eliminate the dichotomy, steer through the resulting crevasse, take the mid-path (and so on). In the case I’m about to discuss, I believe James actually goads us into accepting a tension that he himself *feels* but cannot philosophically *express* (that is, his own account of the tension undermines itself). It is the tension between religiosity itself (in fact, I’d say James’s personal religiosity) and the role that religion can/should play in the moral life. This tension may be characterized in various ways—between promises of religion and the limitations of morality, between the scope of religious experience and that of moral experience, even between spirituality and naturalism. In James’s own words: Religious experience “suggests that our natural experience, our strictly moralistic and prudential experience, may be only a fragment of real human experience” (WJ11 1982 [1905], 128). And that

the religious “makes [our reactions] in large part unlike what they might be on a purely naturalistic scheme of belief” (WJ6 1979 [1896], 32n4).

Recently, John Shook has indirectly suggested resolving this tension by arguing that for James “ethics can only be completed by religion” where “religion deals with ultimate reality and destiny” (2011, 38 & 39). This way of formulating James’s moral project is a mistake. If anything, I will argue, what we mean by the religious simply is morally motivated behavior. I will discuss briefly why...and why it matters.

Nowhere is this tension more evident than at the end of two very important essays about morality and moral beliefs, where James turns to discussions of the role of religious concepts. You all know well, I’m sure, the religious allusions to which I refer, but I will take a moment to remind us. In his 1891 essay, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” James runs through three “questions” of morality: the psychological, the metaphysical, and the casuistic. This essay, I have suggested elsewhere (see Hester 2010), manifests implications of Jamesian radical empiricism on moral matters. The importance of this point will, hopefully, come clear later, but for now what I want to remind the audience of is that after James argues that

- a. desires are the basis of the good,
- b. desires act as demands which create in so far forth corresponding (*pro tanto*) obligations,
- c. that the only possible injunction is to satisfy demand,
- d. in the finite universe demands/claims compete, thus creating competing obligations,
- e. the “path of peace” is paved when you “*invent some manner* of realizing your own ideals which will also satisfy alien demands,—that and that only is the path of peace!” (WJ6 1979 [1891], 155)

He goes on to suggest that the moral “attitude” is one of striving—it comes from the so-called “strenuous mood”—which is motivated by “god.” As James says, “in a merely human world without a God, the appeal to our moral energy falls short of its maximal stimulating power.... When...we believe that a God is there..., the infinite perspective opens out. [However,] our postulation of him...serves only to let loose in us the strenuous mood” (WJ6 1979 [1891], 160 & 161). The concept of “God,” then, looks both useful and necessary—at least, it is if you want maximal moral effort.

A similar turn seems to occur in James’s most famous essay, “The Will to Believe.” As you will recall, in that essay James argues that while some beliefs require strong, “scientific,” even “certain” evidence, there are a host of beliefs that do not. Now, this, you might say, is no problem if those beliefs are simply pointless to begin with, even when those beliefs are truly “live” beliefs. However, James argues that some beliefs that do not lend themselves to the kinds of grounding evidence we so crave are still (in his words) not only *live* but also *forced*, and at times even *momentous*. The kinds of beliefs James has in mind are of two kinds (though there are others): (1) Moral beliefs, and (2) Religious beliefs. James argues that these kinds of beliefs may use “sentiment”/“passion” as evidence in a pragmatic consideration of consequences for holding such beliefs.

In the end, then, he puts his theory to the test by analyzing belief in what he calls the “religious hypothesis”—a hypothesis that, for those who find religion to be a live option, must be taken as both momentous and forced. The religious hypothesis, I remind you, is in two parts:

1. the best things are the more eternal things, and
2. we are better off even now if we believe #1 (WJ6 1979 [1897], 29 & 30)

James in this essay does not speak so much of “God” as of “religion,” but even here he says “The more perfect and more eternal aspect of the universe is represented in our religions as having personal form...no longer a mere *It*..., but a *Thou*” (31). Through our belief in religion, in god, then, “We are supposed to gain, even now...a certain vital good... [And w]e cannot escape the issue by remaining sceptical and waiting for more light, because, although we do avoid error in that way *if religion be untrue*, we lose the good, *if it be true*, just as certainly as if we positively chose to disbelieve” (30).

Surely, James sees something vital in all this, and as such we may be tempted to take James as arguing, per Shook, that “ethics can only be completed by religion.” But here, I argue, James (and Shook) fall prey to their own personal sensibilities contra the philosophy. What do I mean?

First, I should acknowledge that James says through his correspondence and quite directly, “I cannot call myself a Christian, and [am] not...able to tolerate the notion of...God himself as anything ultimate” (Corr 8:122—to Rankin), but he never eschews “God”—even if, as he says, the “God I patronize...is so largely [only] an ideal possibility” (Corr 11:343—to Strong). However, following Linda Simon (cf. 1998, xviii), I believe that James the person wants to believe in “God”—that is, he *wants* a world in which the eternal and infinite perspective truly opens up. I think this was deeply constitutional for him. This desire, though, competes with what James the radically empirical philosopher knows—namely, that he cannot produce an argument for such a “God”—at least, not one that is not “merely” pragmatic. Here’s what I mean:

The other week I decided I wanted to find out what, if any, philosophical works were available through my iPad’s *AudioBooks* app. Lo-and-behold I found a reading of James’s *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. Now, reading philosophy is boring enough, but having it read to you by a monotone voice is positively excruciating. Anyway, I started the recording with the first essay, “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” and within minutes was struck by an interesting insight.

You will recall, I’m sure, that James argues in this essay that consciousness “is the name of a nonentity, and has no right to a place among first principles” (WJ3 1976 [1904], 3). And it is in the second paragraph of the work that he says the following:

During the past year, I have read a number of articles whose authors seemed just on the point of abandoning the notion of consciousness.... But they were not quite radical enough, not quite daring enough in their negations. (WJ3 1976 [1904], 4)

And these sentences became a moment for me as a thought struck me dead on—namely, James’s notions of god and religion are “not quite radical enough, not quite daring enough...”

For example, let’s take a closer look at his use of language in “The Will to Believe” regarding religion and the religious—it is a language that betrays James’s attempt at developing a contrast—he fudges and weasels. Starting with the “religious hypothesis,” we should be struck immediately by his description of “best things” as “*more* eternal.” You and I know, as surely did James, that concept of “eternity” does not admit of degrees (any more than the terms “everlasting” and “infinite” and “perfect” can be qualified). What then could he mean?

One obvious answer is that he simply means “eternal,” full stop. That is, he could be saying that the religious hypothesis is that the best things are eternal things. Best things are infinite, perfect, ongoing, world-without-end, amen. But then why not say that? Why not go the “full monty”? I think it is because he knows that he has no warrant for such an assertion. In fact, as has been argued by others, James holds a *finite* theory of “God” (cf. Robert Vanden Burgt’s book, *The Religious Philosophy of William James* 1981, ch. 4; why the author insists on capitalizing “God,” I cannot fathom). I’ll take this as is, for now, and say that as such, I believe James’s use of a “qualified” eternity is purposeful. That is, the phrase as used in “The Will to Believe” is a term of hyperbole—it is not about the “eternal” at all. It is, in fact, a moral—even ontological claim—about power and longevity: namely, the more powerful and sustainable, the better.

To put a different spin on this, allow me an extended paraphrase of James from the “Consciousness” (1976 [1904]) essay:

I believe that the concept of “god,” when once it has evaporated to this estate of pure diaphaneity, is on the point of disappearing altogether. It is the name of a nonentity, and has no right to a place among first principles.... Let me then immediately explain that I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function. There is, I mean, no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which comes our ultimate reality or makes possible our very being, but there is a function in experience which religiousness/spirituality performs, and for the performance of which this quality of being is invoked. It is the function of connectedness with something larger than ourselves. (paraphrased from page 3)

As I will note below, James himself gives warrant for such an argument, and yet seems incapable of the courage necessary to draw the conclusion.

Now, maybe you are a scholar who is too sensitive and sophisticated to fall prey to casting James in some narrowly religious light. You say that James already resolved this tension in his *Pragmatism* lectures in favor of “meliorism,” and Hester is simply pointing out a problem that James solved long ago. Or maybe you accept a more, shall we say, “traditionally religious” reading of James, and disagreeing with me from the get-go, you see no reason to be troubled by reading James as simply working within, not reconstructing, the American protestant tradition. Those in the former camp, I fear, are overly dismissive, and those in the latter camp are dangerously exclusive.

On the one hand, the risk for the former group is the risk of underestimating the incredibly powerful cultural narrative that is religion, Christian religion (specifically), in America. James is, after all, an *American* philosopher—celebrated not only for his thoughts but his country of origin. It is within this context that his “reconstruction” (if that is what we should call it) occurs. But the concepts of “god” and “religion,” like that of “experience,” carry weighty baggage, and do not easily yield to conceptual pressures. Recall that even Dewey’s starkly anti-religion text, *A Common Faith*, was met with confusions about a possible hidden or latent theism. Thus, even in the throes of philosophical arguments against transcendent gods, any hint of religiosity is met with hope that a transcendent “God” resides therein. James, unlike Dewey, never personally denounces such a god, and thus, all the more reason to take him to be in support of such a god, no?

On the other hand, the latter group is clearly unable to take radical empiricism seriously. Whatever his personal foibles, James *qua* philosopher is nothing if not striving for inclusion. Radical empiricism takes seriously any and all *experience*. But to take James's turn to the religious too narrowly is to exclude the wide range of possibilities for so-called religious experience itself. James the philosopher does not, nor should we. As Wes Cooper has said, James should not be taken as attempting to "homogenise religious belief" (2003, 420).

Of course, you may simply say that I have given a false dichotomy: James is neither an inclusive, a-religionist nor an exclusive theist. To my mind, this is correct. In fact, it is clear that in both his personal life and in his professional writings, James is trying to get at something religiously inclusive. His most famous treatise on the topic is *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (VRE), not *Varieties of Religions*—the language is important. But I am decidedly pushing the point that the philosopher James strays farther from our commonly accepted sense of the "religious" than we may think.

If my take on James is correct, can we accept a "god" and "religion" that are merely *more* powerful and sustainable *functions* of experience? If so, the religious hypothesis becomes the claim that the best things are the *more* powerful and sustainable *functions* of experience, and such a conception of the religious hypothesis lends itself to connections with both natural and supernatural tendencies and beliefs. Again, for those of you who have already taken James as arguing for this kind of "mid-path" religiosity, you may not be moved by my comments at all, but we still need to consider what the implications for morality are. If this *only more* powerful, sustainable—but not eternal, infinite, and perfect—functional experience is to be postulated, then what do we make of James's motivation for the strenuous mood—a motivation he himself purports to follow from the "*infinite perspective*"? Can the strenuous mood be motivated by something less than the infinite but more than ourselves?

At the end of his great, selective survey of religious experiences, James concludes the following in the "Postscript":

The only thing that [religious experience] testifies to is that we can experience union with something larger than ourselves and in that union find our greatest peace.... [Our needs are] met by the belief that beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals. All that the facts require is that the power should be both other and larger than our conscious selves. Anything larger will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next step. It need not be infinite, it need not be solitary. It might conceivable even be only a larger and more godlike self... (WJ15 1985 [1902], 413)

Experience, taken religiously, speaks to something larger than ourselves. Natural, social, transcendental—the source is not always known, just *something larger*.

The religious function of experience, then, speaks only but directly to this "something larger." This insight from James, then, implicates not only the scope of religious experience, but also the meaning of the religious hypothesis, and the motivation for the strenuous mood. His great "discovery" regarding religious experiences allows for resonance with each of us—the polytheist, pantheist, the deist, the theist, and even the atheist. In fact, I think we can flip James's causal account on its head. Whereas James's suggests that it is the positing of "religion" and "god" that motivates the "strenuous mood," instead, we might say more radically, that what we call "religious motivation" simply *is* the function of the "strenuous mood" in moral behavior—that is, it is the

exercise of each us as moral philosophers, striving for complete ethical narrative where none can be garnered until the last person has had his/her say—each of us pursuing something larger than ourselves, and in that, may we find at least the path to our greatest peace.

* * *

OK, I do not know that I have made a coherent account of my scholarly concerns, but enough of that. As I intimated earlier, this is a Presidential address to the members of WJS and others who have come to sit amongst us. And I want to turn in this last section to issues regarding the Society itself.

The William James Society was officially formed in May of 2001—under the leadership of John J. McDermott as the Society’s first President. Subsequently, many great James scholars have led this Society. I do not include myself among their scholarly successes, but I have been long associated with WJS as the inaugural Secretary-Treasurer, and I am sure that it is that work which made me a pseudo-legitimate choice for President.

I mention this because I have long been in a position with WJS to concern myself with its well-being. I want this Society to exist, to expand, to succeed. And yet, I fear it has not fulfilled even the modest potential that an 11-year-old Society might fulfill. Membership is low, product is minimal, outreach is rare, participation is weak, and identity is nebulous. Of course, all of that is hyperbole to some degree, and yet it is a rhetorical flourish that strikes at some aspects of the truth.

Thus, when I say that membership is low, I mean something like the following: while we do not know how many scholars there are who identify professionally with William James, our current membership “in good standing” is under 100 people. Surely, given the wide range of academic interests that James touches, 100 members is paltry. When I say that our “product” is minimal, what I do *not* mean to do is to disparage the good work of Mark Moller and Linda Simon with the Society’s journal, *William James Studies*. And yet, Linda and Mark will be the first to tell you that there are too few submissions, too low a readership, and too little respect for the journal. And finally, when I say that outreach is rare, participation is weak, and identity is nebulous, I realize that these are the fault of the leaders—the finger points at me.

Thus, though this comes at the end of my term, rather than at the beginning, I want to discuss some of what I would like to see for WJS going forward.

My first (though not my most prized) desire is to see the membership of the Society grow at its core—a “foundation” of members who are committed to the Society. This core might be just over 100 people, I suspect, but it would be persistent, and it would be functional and cooperative.

My second desire is to see the Society begin to provide its members with real and experienced goods. I truly believe that the Society’s journal, *William James Studies*, is such a good, but it is not enough as it stands nor in itself. It needs to develop a unique niche in the publishing landscape—a venue that provides a place for important scholarship on issues related to the thoughts and life of William James, but do so in a way not already covered by the *Transactions* or by the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* or *The Pluralist* or... I think its online character should be taken as a jewel to prized rather than treated with suspicion. I think its technological character should be expanded to take advantage of how to communicate through the Web, rather than just simply making e-prints of traditional journal articles.

Beyond this, however, the Society needs to extend its reach into new ways of providing such “goods.” To that end, the Executive Committee has developed 3 awards to be handed out occasionally in order to stimulate

scholarship and praise the good work of our members. (Details are available today during the business meeting and will be sent to the membership and distributed to philosophy departments in 2013.) Further, we also need to do a better job of sponsoring conferences and conferences sessions across the country and, especially, across academic disciplines.

And lastly, I want the members of the Society to be invested in what the Society is and does. We have at our disposal an incredible resource of people—scholars of all types and stripes—and we have yet to take advantage of this fact. Or maybe I should say that differently: *they* have so far failed to take advantage of the Society...both...really. We, all of us, are busy—we have our priorities; we work as isolated academics with teaching and scholarship all our own. Let us stop this habit—or at least arrest it long enough to work together—for the good of teaching, for the good of scholarship, for the good of WJS, as well.

Professional societies in academia are seemingly a dime-a-dozen. Just look at the APA program to see how many groups—on Jaspers, on “field being,” even on American philosophy—hold sessions here. If they perform a useful function, let them continue, and if not, I say, cut them loose. Which shall we do with WJS? *My* hope for the Society is that it can perform a function—a “religious” and moral function, if you like: that through it we can experience union with ideals, with projects, and with others—that is, a union with something larger than ourselves and in that union find some professional and personal peace.

Thank you for your time today and for allowing me to serve for almost two years in this role as President of the William James Society.

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PROSPECTS FOR A JAMESIAN EXPRESSIVISM¹

JEFF KASSER

In order to take advantage of Michael Slater's presence as commentator, I want to display, as efficiently as I am able, some major similarities and differences between my reading of "The Will to Believe" and his. I will show how things look from the standpoint of my expressivist reading of James and then will look forward to seeing how things look from Slater's somewhat less idiosyncratic perspective on James.² This being James interpretation, we can all expect to leave here with more work to do.

I think that it is one of the great merits of Slater's book that it recognizes the two-part structure of "The Will to Believe." Slater thinks that the first part of the essay is concerned with the psychology of belief and the second part is concerned with the ethics of belief. Slater also uses James's misgivings about the paper's title³ to bring out this structural point. The first several sections concern what Slater calls the will to believe, while the concluding sections concern the right to believe. Though I characterize this structure rather differently, I think that all this is more or less right, and that it might be somewhat "righter" than Slater realizes. I'll start from this important and underappreciated structural point and will try to bring out places where I'm reasonably confident that Slater and I disagree as well as places where I can't tell whether or not we disagree.

As I see things, James spends the first part of "The Will to Believe" talking about what goes on when we discuss our intellectual obligations. Only at the end of the essay does he make a case for an anti-evidentialist ethics of belief. The early sections do not, in my view, concern the ethics of belief at all but rather the metaethics of belief. In calling this section metaethical, I do not mean to dispute Slater's characterization of it as concerning the psychology of belief. I entirely endorse Slater's emphasis on these early sections and the role of our passionate nature in actual believings and decidings. Slater says that "[w]hat James intends to challenge is not merely the view that the only beliefs we are entitled to hold are those supported by objective, neutral evidence, but also the *very idea* that there is or can be objective, neutral evidence either for or against religious beliefs" (p.26). Slater calls this "perhaps the least appreciated and most significant claim at stake in James's will to believe doctrine," and I am inclined to agree, both about James having made such a claim, and about most interpreters having underappreciated the significance of the claim.

The metaethical (or, perhaps better, metaepistemological) framework into which these psychological claims get placed emerges in Section VII. At the beginning of that section, James formulates our "first and great commandments as would-be knowers," namely that we must seek truth and we must avoid error. James rightly insists that these two duties cannot be commensurated into one. He further notes that the way that we balance these two duties against one another "may end by coloring differently our whole intellectual life" (WTB 18). James stresses that one is permitted to strike this balance differently and hence color one's intellectual life differently than evidentialists like Clifford would have one do. The reason for this is that "these feelings of our duty about either truth or error are in any case only expressions of our passionate life" (WTB 18).

Clifford is expressing a passionate fear of error and urging his readers to be moved by that fear. James denies that our intellectual duties require us, as a general matter, to prioritize error-avoidance over truth-seeking.

This passage is striking and seems crucial to those of us who are tempted to see James as an expressivist. James says, not only that our feelings of duty are expressions of our passional nature, but that they are *only* expressions of our passional nature. He clearly seems to be drawing a contrast between the way in which evidence bears on imperative statements like “believe truth!” and “avoid error!” on the one hand, and the way in which it bears on indicative statements like “Lincoln really existed.” When Clifford urges us to avoid error, the first thing to realize is that it is an urging and hence not a candidate for truth. As James has it, Clifford is merely expressing “his own preponderant private horror of becoming a dupe” (WTB 18).

On my reading, then, the first part of “The Will to Believe” concludes with a characterization of the practice of putting forward evidentialist or anti-evidentialist suggestions. Neither Clifford nor James is in the position of trying to state the facts about our intellectual obligations, since there are no such facts. Both should be seen instead as recommending policies for governing our belief-forming practices. This non-cognitivism about epistemic obligations supplements and helps explain James’ earlier claims about our passional nature playing such a crucial role in so many of our beliefs. Someone who places a greater value on gaining the truth than avoiding error about a given matter might well find a given amount of evidence sufficient for belief, while someone pursuing a policy that places more weight on error-avoidance would find that amount of evidence manifestly insufficient.

Expressivism about a given domain (e.g. moral or epistemic obligations) denies that statements in that domain are either true or false. But it need not and typically does not deny that evidence bears on the evaluation of those statements. And it is crucial for understanding the second part of “The Will to Believe” that one understand why James thinks that evidence (though not evidence alone) tells against Clifford’s evidentialist ethics of belief. Starting in Section VIII, James turns to what he calls the main question. He then proceeds to argue that a Cliffordian policy of privileging error-avoidance over truth-seeking is likely to produce disastrous results in many cases. James is no longer describing the practice of assessing intellectual obligations; he is now participating in this practice. And he is expressing and justifying his preference for un-Cliffordian norms of intellectual evaluation. He accuses Clifford of indulging an unhealthy and excessive nervousness about the possibility of error. Excessive concern with the prospect of being mistaken, says James, prevents us from attaining valuable goals, just as an excessive concern with keeping her soldiers safe would interfere with a general’s legitimate goals. James thinks that the members of his audience share with him goals that require a healthier balance between the need to believe truth and the need to avoid error. These goals include making friends and leading a morally and religiously rich life. If you desire, for instance, to lead a strenuous life, then Clifford’s ethic of belief should hold little appeal for you. Desires cannot be true or false, but they can be reasonable to pursue or unreasonable to pursue. James thinks that most people can be convinced of the value (though not, of course, the truth) of such things as living strenuously, and he likewise thinks that most people can be convinced that Clifford’s combination of norms is unhealthy, though not incorrect.

This is all unfortunately rather compressed, but I hope it suffices to allow me to start situating my view with respect to Slater’s. I think that Slater, like most other commentators, somewhat misunderstands James’s objection to Clifford and other intellectualists. According to Slater, James’s “basic criticism is not that intellectualism is false but rather that it is inconsistent. Both the intellectualist and the religious believer are guided by their respective (and

presumably question-begging) ‘faith-tendencies.’ The only salient difference between them lies in the character of these tendencies” (p. 53).⁴ I don’t think that James does or can object to evidentialism or intellectualism as false or as incoherent. When James is discussing the status of our beliefs about intellectual obligations, he insists that the evidentialist is as driven by his passionate nature as is the believer. But this is no objection to evidentialism. Our passionate nature “lawfully may” incline us towards evidentialism just as surely as it may incline us towards a more permissive ethics of belief. I think that James is clear about the fact that he’s not objecting to evidentialism until the end of his essay, and that his objection is that evidentialism is unhealthy and impractical, not incoherent. Both Clifford and Clifford’s opponents might easily and unfortunately forget that evidentialism itself is just the expression of a passion, but there is nothing else for evidentialism to be, and so that’s not an objectionable feature of evidentialism.

A related disagreement concerns the very thesis of “The Will to Believe.” Slater, unlike almost all previous commentators, realizes that it is problematic to identify this famous passage from Section IV as the thesis of the paper.

Our passionate nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say under such circumstances, “Do not decide, but leave the question open,” is itself a passionate decision – just like deciding yes or not – and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth. (WTB, p. 11).

Slater, true to his appreciation of the two-part structure of the paper, thinks that “The Will to Believe” has two thesis statements. The second thesis doesn’t arrive until Section X, the final section of the paper. It says that “*in concreto*, the freedom to believe can only cover living options which the intellect of the individual cannot by itself resolve; and living options never seem absurdities to him who has them to consider” (WTB 32). Slater thinks that the first thesis statement is the conclusion of a general argument about the psychology of belief, while the second is a special conclusion of an argument about the ethics of belief (see p. 23). The first thesis concerns the will to believe and the second concerns the right to believe. It is here that I suspect that Slater might be rightier than he realizes.

I am inclined, perhaps a bit brazenly, to deny that James saw the passage from Section IV as *a* thesis of the paper, much less as *the* thesis of the paper, which is how most commentators treat it. Admittedly, the passage in question is preceded by the words “The thesis I defend, is, briefly stated, this:”. But I think that James is very clear about the structure of his essay, and so I maintain that when James describes the passage above as “the thesis I defend,” he is referring to the question with which Section IV begins, viz. whether, having recognized that our passionate nature often influences our convictions, we should regard this fact as “reprehensible and pathological” or should instead treat it as “a normal element in making up our minds.” Why does this matter? I think that if the passage from Section IV is treated as *a* or *the* thesis of the paper, one will misunderstand the status of the claim that one lawfully may decide an intellectually undecidable genuine option on the basis of one’s passionate nature. It can seem like James is describing a regrettable failure of humans to live up to our own standards of rationality, when in fact he thinks that we can often handle such options as well as their nature permits. And James goes on to argue, as we have seen, that for most people, Clifford’s evidentialism merits being strongly rejected because it would be a disastrous and irrational policy. So, in my view, treating the passage from Section IV as if it were the conclusion of the essay

involves finding a tepid and misleading response to evidentialism. I think that the passage instead signals a robust metaethical conclusion that is an intermediary result on the way to a robust rejection of evidentialism.

I think that Slater sees a lot of this but I think that he doesn't see all of it. Of course, he might see things differently than I do, and if so, I hope to hear more about how he sees the textual evidence. In particular, I'm not entirely clear about how Slater sees the relationship between the two parts of James's essay. He says that James' will to believe doctrine "is distinct from, but nonetheless has important implications for, his ethics of belief" (p. 36). Slater hopes to make James's ethics of belief a live option even for those who don't agree with his psychological views. "James's basic argument for our *right* to believe in religious matters does not directly depend upon" his claims about our passional nature. "This is because while a person's passional nature is surely involved in her *inclination* to hold a given belief, it is not clear how a person's passional nature determines whether or not her belief is *justified*" (p. 34). On the other hand, Slater sometimes emphasizes the implications of the will to believe for the right to believe, rather than the distinctness of the latter from the former. Following William Wainwright, Slater attributes to James a "conception of rationality in which needs, interests and sentiments *both do and should* play a role in the formation of adequate judgements" (p. 37; emphasis mine). This certainly makes it sound as if one's passional nature does play a role in the justification of beliefs, not just in the inclination to hold them. I do not mean to suggest that Slater's interpretation is inconsistent, but only that it's unclear how he resolves the pushes and pulls of James's texts. I hope that my interpretation can help Slater explain and develop his. Slater comes much of the way with me when he agrees that how we rank the obligations James describes is "at bottom an expression of our passional life," but he does not go on to draw the expressivist conclusion from that concession. Though I've touched on the issue, I lack the space here to detail the mechanics of how a noncognitivist reading of James gives a clear role for one's passions in explaining how a belief can be justified, and how it helps explain the perspectival features of epistemic justification that, as Slater rightly emphasizes, loom large in "The Will to Believe." I look forward to seeing how a cognitivist reading (if that's what Slater wants to defend) of James handles these problems. I hope that I've been able to help us take another step in developing sophisticated readings of this fascinating essay. Lots of intriguing terrain has had to remain unexplored, like Slater's suggestion that James's notions of "forced" and "momentous" options play no role in the "right to believe" argument on Section X. Beyond that, of course, James scholars will, I hope, be thinking about the possibilities involved in expressivist readings of such works as "The Sentiment of Rationality" and the *Pragmatism* lectures, with their emphasis on the role of temperament in philosophy.

I conclude by noting that I don't think I've by any means done enough to take cognitivist readings of James off the table. His very insistence on the primacy of our passional nature makes it tricky to attribute to him a sharp contrast between states which are evidence-determined and states which are not, and standard versions of expressivism require some such contrast. James may have anticipated a global expressivism along the lines of the one recently developed by Huw Price⁵, but it will take a lot of doing to reconcile all of the competing strands to be found in James's work.

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NOTES

¹ References are to William James, *The Will to Believe and other essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.,

² Nishi Shah gets credit for the initial idea behind this reading of James. He and I developed our interpretation together (See Kasser and Shah, 2006, “The metaethics of belief: an expressivist reading of *The will to believe*”, *Social Epistemology*, 20: 1–17).. I claim it as mine for purposes of blame; it is ours for purposes of credit.

³ See Slater, p. 19.

⁴ Slater is here discussing a later version of the will to believe doctrine, but the criticism carries over to the earlier discussion and is offered by many commentators on “The Will to Believe.”

⁵ See Price, *Naturalism Without Mirrors*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

RESPONSES TO AIKIN AND KASSER

MICHAEL R. SLATER

RESPONSE TO AIKIN

This was a fascinating paper to read, and it gave me a great deal of food for thought. It is creative, provocative, rigorously argued, and a model of clarity, and James studies needs much more work of this sort. I particularly liked the attention that you draw to friendship, social cooperation, and romantic conquest cases in which James's will to believe doctrine applies, or more specifically the "faith-helping-to-create-a-fact" aspect of the doctrine. Recognizing these features of "The Will to Believe" is important, for it reminds us that James's ethics of belief does not simply concern the justification of religious beliefs.

I must confess, though, that I simply read the text of "The Will to Believe" quite differently than you do in several important respects, and that as a result of these interpretive differences I find myself unable to grant some of the assumptions that underlie your argument in this paper. For the sake of time, I will focus on three points of disagreement between our readings of James.

First, I find no textual support in any of James's writings for the first of your two interpretive desiderata, namely that James's will to believe doctrine only undertakes to justify *orthodox* religious beliefs (pp. 1-2), presumably by which you mean *orthodox Christian beliefs*, or even more specifically, *orthodox Protestant beliefs*. I just don't find any evidence to support this interpretation, and doubt that the view you ascribe to James accurately represents his religious views, which were not exactly "orthodox." Indeed, James was strongly critical of traditional Christian theology, especially the tradition of natural theology. And his defense of religious pluralism, "overbelief" in a finite God, and eventual defense of a pluralistic-panpsychic universe were all partly developed as alternatives to traditional Christian beliefs, which he did not personally regard as live options, and in later works such as *A Pluralistic Universe* even claimed are incredible for philosophically and scientifically educated members of his generation (PU, 18).¹

The sole passage on which you base your interpretation appears in the opening paragraph of the essay (WB, 13), and is almost surely a remark that James directed to his audience at Yale—the "good old orthodox College"—and not his audience at Brown, since the latter was actually more religiously liberal than Harvard and was the only Ivy League school which had never imposed religious tests on faculty or students.² As I read it, in the opening paragraph James is simply making some light-hearted opening remarks—in jest—as a way of communicating to his Yale audience that he will be discussing the subject of religious faith. But he is not interested in discussing—let alone defending—traditional Protestant doctrines such as justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) or the Protestant theological distinction between justification and sanctification. Indeed, when James writes that his is an essay "in justification *of* faith, a defence of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced," it seems fairly

clear (to me at any rate) that he is interested in defending the right to hold religious beliefs in general, and not simply the right to hold Christian (or more narrowly, Protestant) beliefs. In any case, in order to support an interpretation of this sort it seems to me that you would need to find specific and unambiguous textual evidence that James's will to believe doctrine has an "orthodoxy requirement," and all of the evidence I am aware of points in a very different direction. One is even tempted to say that the very idea of such a requirement is positively un-Jamesean.

Second, I am not sure that James ever explicitly claims in the essay that, "a defense of faith *must* concede that there is insufficient evidential backing" (p. 2; emphasis added). James himself had something of an aversion to attempts to specify necessary and sufficient conditions, which of course is not to say that he never did so in spite of himself. While I agree in general with your claim that James's will to believe doctrine aims to justify belief under certain conditions in cases where there is insufficient evidence (where the latter is itself one of the conditions), as well as your view that James frames his account of justified belief in the essay in terms of a distinction between lawful and unlawful beliefs (p. 2), it is not clear to me that his views on religious epistemology consistently assume that religious beliefs always or necessarily have insufficient evidential support. Not only does James call into question the very idea of objective evidence in the essay; he also defends the view in later writings—most notably in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*—that religious and mystical experiences can in principle furnish a justification for holding religious beliefs. This "experientialist" strand of his religious epistemology, if you will, stands in tension with some of his more Kantian-sounding claims in other of his writings, and whether the two strands of his thought are coherent or could be harmonized is, I think, an open question. As is so often the case, James seems to be of two minds (and possibly more) on this important philosophical issue.

For these reasons, then, and especially for the first, I am not convinced by your argument that James faces a dilemma (p. 3). The first horn of the dilemma, that the commitments constituting faith might satisfy the lawfulness requirement insofar as they are doxastically efficacious but fail to satisfy the orthodoxy requirement, is easily broken if one denies that James in fact *has* an orthodoxy requirement—and I find no reason think that he has one. But since dilemmas need at least two horns, I'm not sure there's a dilemma here at all. Regarding the second horn of the putative dilemma, I'm not sure you've actually shown that James thinks that all orthodox religious beliefs (and I'll again assume here that you mean Christian, and specifically Protestant, religious beliefs) are doxastically inefficacious, and hence unlawful. Until this has been shown I find no reason to think that James's will to believe doctrine faces this particular problem, and doing so would require providing much more textual support than you do here. While James's "religious hypothesis" in "The Will to Believe" is admittedly about as theologically general, vague, and thinned down as a religious view can be, if James does not defend an orthodoxy requirement then the only relevant question would appear to be whether the hypothesis is in fact doxastically efficacious on his own terms (which for him means being a *genuine option*, one that is *live*, *forced*, and *momentous*). It seems to be so, although one might still object to the terms in which James frames his account; but that is entirely another matter.

Third, and finally, I am a bit unsure of your suggestion that, despite its failure on its own terms, the essay is nevertheless successful in providing a template for "reconstructions of religious views in line with humanist commitments" (p. 3). If all you mean by this claim is that later pragmatists such as Dewey and Rorty drew inspiration from or were influenced by the essay in developing their own views on religion, then I don't really have any objection. But if you mean to suggest that James's will to believe doctrine *itself* somehow

undertakes or is committed to the “reconstruction” of religious views in the sense in which Dewey or Rorty understood that concept—namely, as entailing or advocating a naturalization of religious faith and a concomitant rejection of supernaturalism in the service of broadly humanistic and democratic values—then I would want to see much more in the way of argument. One of the challenges facing such an interpretation of James, I think, is that it must deal with the many instances in which he defends realist or supernaturalist religious views, particularly in such works as *Varieties*, *Pragmatism*, and *A Pluralistic Universe*. Unlike many other figures in the pragmatist tradition, James did not view the supernatural aspects of traditional religious belief and practice as inherently problematic on either scientific or humanistic grounds, and indeed he framed his own pragmatic account of religion in terms of a larger philosophical commitment to what he called “piecemeal supernaturalism.” While these non-naturalistic aspects of his philosophy of religion are unattractive or objectionable to many contemporary pragmatists, they are there all the same, and need to be taken into account by anyone interested in using James as a resource for doing constructive philosophical work.

RESPONSE TO KASSER

I’d like to begin my response by thanking Jeff for his interest in my work, and for giving my book such a careful and thoughtful reading. I’m grateful for the opportunity to discuss my interpretation of “The Will to Believe” with you tonight, and for the chance to respond to some of the very interesting, insightful, and challenging points that you raise. I agree with you that our readings of the essay are similar in a number of important respects, and I was pleased to learn that someone actually shares my view of its two-part structure (the recognition of which, I think, helps to resolve a number of potential misunderstandings of the essay). I find your expressivist interpretation of James to be fresh, exciting, and capable of shedding new light on his philosophy. What I’d like to do on the present occasion is to clarify my interpretation of James’s will to believe doctrine on some of the issues you raise, and to say a bit about where I think our interpretations of James overlap, and where they diverge.

First, regarding the issue of whether James views evidentialism as an incoherent view, I think it is fairly clear from the essay that one of James’s major objections to Clifford’s defense of evidentialism is that it problematically assumes that in order to be justified, religious beliefs must have a sufficient level of evidential or rational support; and since religious beliefs lack this support, they aren’t justified. What is problematic about this view, as James sees it, is that it assumes that in principle there is objective evidence, or some piece of objective reasoning, that we can use to definitively settle “speculative questions” of a religious, moral, or metaphysical nature, when in fact—or so he thinks—there is no such evidence, or no such arguments, available to beings constituted like ourselves. The textual evidence for this reading can be found in sections V and VI of the essay, where James develops a sustained critique of the “quest for certainty” (to borrow Dewey’s elegant phrase) that he thinks motivates not only Clifford’s views but also that of other absolutists and rationalists in the history of philosophy. But one of the significant features of James’s critique of the twin ideals of objective evidence and objective certainty is that it does not assume that, in giving up these ideals, we thereby give up “the quest or hope of truth itself” (WB, 23). As I read him, in defending our right to believe in speculative matters, James is assuming at least two things: first, that our passional nature “not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds” (WB, 20), and second, that the beliefs in question are not merely expressive of our passional nature, but are also potentially true or false.

This last part of James's will to believe doctrine is absolutely crucial, I think, for in adopting a belief of a speculative nature on religious, moral, or metaphysical issues, James thinks, one is taking a certain kind of *risk*—namely, the risk of being right or wrong in one's beliefs, and more importantly, in how one acts and lives. So, one worry that I have about your expressivist reading of James is that it effectively reduces, in this case, his will to believe doctrine to his views concerning philosophical temperament. As I read him, James defends a kind of hybrid view on these matters (or as he would probably call it, a “mediating” view), one that (a) acknowledges the unavoidable (and on his view, unregrettable) role that our respective temperaments or passionate natures play in the formation and justification of our beliefs, while also (b) acknowledging that our beliefs and the statements that we use to articulate and defend them are either true or false, a fact that has both theoretical as well as practical significance. Whereas the former assumption informs James's defense of religious and metaphysical pluralism (and perhaps even reflects these views), the latter connects with his later religious and metaphysical views, most notably his doctrine of meliorism and his pragmatic account of religion in such works as *Varieties and Pragmatism*.

Second, you've raised some very good questions concerning how I conceive of the relationship between James's will to believe doctrine and his ethics of belief, as well as my view that while a person's passionate nature is involved in her inclination to hold a given belief, it is not clear how a person's passionate nature determines whether or not her belief is justified (Slater, 34).³ Regarding the first issue, what I claimed in my book is that “James's will to believe doctrine is based on an account of human psychology that is distinct from, but nonetheless has important implications for, his ethics of belief” (Slater, 36). What I meant in claiming this is that, on the one hand, James's psychology and his ethics of belief should not be run together, although the former informs the latter; and on the other hand, that James's ethics of belief is not exhausted by his will to believe doctrine, which is something that I try to show in later chapters. Regarding the second issue, you're right to press me for further clarification on how I understand the relationship between James's views on the *will* to believe and the *right* to believe. I certainly could have said more about these matters, and need to say more about them in the future. The explanation that I gave in my book for the claim that you quote from p. 34 goes as follows:

Presumably it is the evidential inconclusiveness of our options which gives us our epistemic warrant, and the liveness or deadness of the options which, according to our passionate nature, guides our decision to believe one option rather than another. I do not mean to suggest that this is how James himself understood the matter; in point of fact, his claims can be interpreted in several different ways. But it is, I think, a defensible interpretation which has the additional advantage of making James's will to believe doctrine available to those who do not agree with all the details of his psychology (Slater, 34).

One of the reasons I prefer this interpretation of James is that it avoids attributing what I see as a strong version of *perspectivism* to him; and my interpretation of James's will to believe doctrine uses the concept of perspectivism rather than the concept of expressivism to interpret his views on how a person's passionate nature influences her beliefs. What I tried to do in my book (especially on pp. 35-47) was to make a case for reading James as a weak or modest perspectivist, one who affirms the view that our passionate nature inevitably influences our beliefs while rejecting the radical view that there are no facts, which is what strong perspectivism entails. Now there are a number of areas in which my perspectivist interpretation of James's will to believe doctrine and your expressivist interpretation overlap, as you correctly point out. Where they differ most, I suspect, is that my interpretation seeks to preserve a

connection between beliefs and facts, and sees the latter as ultimately determining whether or not a given belief is true or justified, while still acknowledging that the passionate and volitional aspects of our psychology influence which beliefs we hold, how firmly we hold them and how willing we are to act on them, and so on. This sort of balancing act is also a feature of James's account of truth, as I understand it, and is reflected in his insistence that having a true belief simultaneously involves having beliefs which are pragmatically useful *and* which correspond to some aspect of reality. To return to James's will to believe doctrine, though, I tend to interpret James as holding that having true beliefs in religious and moral matters is of tremendous importance, and that it is often only by following our passionate natures and risking ourselves on an uncertain possibility that we put ourselves in a proper position to know the truth or to realize certain facts in these domains. If your expressivist reading can allow for these aspects of James's doctrine, then I'd be much more inclined to accept it. But my concern is that these aspects of the doctrine might be left out of account altogether, or minimized in importance, or—worst of all—“reconstructed” in a substantively different fashion on an expressivist interpretation.

It's at this point that I'd like to raise a cautionary flag concerning your use of the term “expressivism” to characterize James's views on moral and epistemic obligations, and perhaps other aspects of James's philosophy as well. Indeed, I'm not quite sure of the scope of your interpretation of James, but my sense is that it extends beyond his will to believe doctrine to other areas of his philosophy, and potentially even to his philosophy as a whole. One assumption that expressivist theories share, as you observe, is the correctness of a distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive meanings or mental states. Indeed, as you state early on in your paper, “expressivism about a given domain (e.g. moral or epistemic obligations) denies that statements in that domain are either true or false” (p. 2). So, in the case of moral statements, expressivism entails *emotivism*, the view that the literal meaning of moral statements is identical with the emotive meaning of those statements, or the non-cognitive attitude being expressed by the person making the statement. And this, of course, amounts to viewing moral statements as the kind of statements that don't (and can't) bear a truth-value. One of the most provocative and original aspects of your work and that of fellow pragmatists such as Huw Price, I think, is that you have taken a theory originally developed in an ethical context by philosophers such as Charles Stevenson and J.L. Mackie and broadened its scope to include other areas of philosophy such as epistemology, the philosophy of language, and the philosophy of religion. This is potentially revolutionary, but it also, I think, runs the risk of perpetuating some questionable philosophical distinctions—most notably, an essential distinction between cognitive versus non-cognitive meanings, or evidence-determined v. non-evidence determined mental states—that classical pragmatists such as James and Dewey sought to “fuzz up” on both psychological and metaphilosophical grounds. On this occasion, though, I won't try to defend the claim that this particular distinction is mistaken, nor will I try to show—as I am inclined to think—that James's psychological and philosophical views problematize the very distinction itself, both of which would require far more time than I have at present. But I will discuss, albeit briefly, some of my reservations about attributing this distinction to James.

Although I did not defend such a position in my book, I would now argue that James views intellectual obligations such as “Believe truth!” or “Shun error!” as necessarily involving certain *doxastic commitments* on our part in the absence of sufficient evidence or justifying reasons; and that these doxastic commitments, in turn (i) have their basis in the passionate and volitional aspects of our psychology, and (ii) are not based upon supporting arguments or evidence. Commitments of this sort seem to have the status of *basic beliefs* for

the person who holds them, insofar as they provide support for other beliefs that that person holds, but which themselves are not accepted on the basis of any other beliefs. This reading, if right, challenges the widespread assumption that James was a straightforward coherentist in his epistemology, and shows that his epistemological views include certain features that are usually associated with foundationalism. Indeed, I suspect that James's epistemological views might better be classed, to borrow a term of art developed by Susan Haack, as entailing a version of *foundherentism*.⁴

One interesting question, I think, concerns whether Jamesian doxastic commitments should be understood as providing *rational* support for a person's beliefs, or whether the "supports" relation he has in mind needs to be conceived in another way. My hunch is that, given both James's psychological and philosophical views, they do—but with the important caveat that *reasons* (which are often thought of by contemporary philosophers as having a *cognitive* status) are not "pure," and are interwoven with other aspects of our psychology such as feelings, emotions, and desires (which are often thought of by contemporary philosophers as having a *non-cognitive* status). But commitments of this sort should not be construed, on James's view, as entailing claims regarding self-evidency, or incorrigibility, or other hallmarks of classical foundationalism in epistemology, much less as entailing the claim to *know* certain truths. This difference sets James's view in sharp contrast with, for example, Alvin Plantinga's well-known, non-foundationalist views on properly basic belief, though both are sometimes read (incorrectly, I think) as defending versions of fideism.

In any case, I would argue that while the two intellectual obligations James discusses in section VII readily admit of an expressivist interpretation, such an interpretation needs to be qualified in order to be defensible. In one sense, imperative statements such as these are ripe for an expressivist reading because, as imperatives, they don't bear a truth-value in the first place—statements such as "pass the salt" and "stop!" are neither true nor false. They are non-cognitive in a trivial sense, we might say. The really interesting and provocative cases concern indicative statements, which at least *appear* to make claims about matters of fact, though according to expressivists really do not. An expressivist interpretation of a religious statement such as "God loves us" interprets the meaning of this sentence as expressing the attitude of the one who utters it, as opposed to asserting a fact about God. I'll return to examples of this sort later, but for now let's bracket them and return to the former sort. My sense is that James does not conceive of intellectual obligations proper in expressivist terms, which in the present case would make both "ways of looking at our duty in the matter of opinion" (WB, 24) merely expressions of our passional nature. Although facts aren't being picked out by statements such as "Believe truth!" or "Shun error!" (which is unsurprising, given that they are imperative statements), James does think that there are such things as true and false beliefs, and that from a pragmatic and broadly Darwinian perspective it generally pays to have more of the former than the latter. If pressed to clarify his views on this issue, I suspect he would say that the reason why we should seek to hold true beliefs and avoid holding false ones, in general, is because on the whole there are very good practical reasons for doing so. It is at this point that James would likely appeal to the practical consequences of holding a given belief, and also where he would likely insist that on pragmatic grounds it is, as a general rule, highly important to hold true beliefs. And if he happened to be in a Peircean mood at the time (as he sometimes was), he might even appeal to the regulative notion of an ideal of inquiry in explaining what it ultimately means for a belief to be true. Unlike many interpreters, I do not think that James's account of truth can be reduced to mere utility, and have argued that it retains the traditional assumption that having true beliefs in some sense entails having beliefs which accurately

represent reality, even if James gives a non-traditional, pragmatic account of how the notion of correspondence to reality should be understood.

I would readily agree with you, though, that James conceives of how we rank these intellectual obligations relative to one another in what appear to be expressivist terms, for it is on this question that legitimate evaluative differences can be said to exist among different reasonable individuals: Clifford's passional nature and philosophical temperament incline him to prioritize the avoidance of error, whereas James's nature and temperament incline him to prioritize the search for truth; and no simple appeal to objective facts can determine whose view is right, for facts are not at issue here. There is no right or wrong way to rank these *prima facie* obligations, because one's sense of how one should rank them is not liable to being true or false. I think your reading of James is "bang on" in this respect, and that you've made a very insightful observation about James's views on the ethics of belief. On that note, I'll bring my response to a close.

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NOTES

¹ *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1977). All parenthetical references to this work are abbreviated "PU."

² *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1979). All parenthetical references to this work are abbreviated "WB."

³ Michael R. Slater, *William James on Ethics and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴ Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

JAMES AND THE NEUROSCIENCE OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION

JOHN J. HOLDER

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last 25 years, the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, and western scientists have been meeting on a number of occasions to discuss the intersections of Buddhism and science. These meetings have become formalized as the Mind and Life Institutes. At one such meeting in 2004, several prominent neuroscientists, including Richard Davidson from the University of Wisconsin--Madison, reported to the Dalai Lama their remarkable findings that the adept Buddhist meditators they studied showed significantly different brain function as compared to other people. Davidson's studies found strong empirical evidence that rigorous mental training through mindfulness meditation rewires the parts of the brain that play a significant role in positive emotions. To be more specific, the Buddhist monks studied reacted to stimuli with greater activation in the left regions of their prefrontal cortex--the regions associated with positive affect (e.g., joy, contentment, happiness)--and had all but cancelled out the activation in the right regions of the pre-frontal cortex that are associated with negative emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety, and sadness).

This exciting discovery was hailed by everyone at the meeting as a significant advance, and yet the neuroscientists and the Dalai Lama came to quite different conclusions regarding the metaphysical interpretation of the studies. As you might expect, the neuroscientists explained their findings in terms of neuro-anatomy alone. From the neuroscientific point of view, the "mental" training of meditation is nothing more than one type of brain function regulating other brain functions. According to the neuroscientists, the fact that meditative practice has observable neural effects supports the position that the so-called mental phenomena are entirely a matter of brain function--and not the effect of a metaphysically distinct, immaterial, thing called the "mind." In brief, the neuroscientists expressed a form of physicalism roughly along the lines of identity theory.

The Dalai Lama, on the other hand, was not agreeable to this metaphysical interpretation of the scientific studies of the monks' brain functions. Although the Dalai Lama accepted the idea that many mental functions have neural correlates, that is, mental phenomena often arise because of physio-chemical activities in the brain, yet there is no reason, on his view, to say that this rules out the dualist position held by Tibetan Buddhism. The fact that mental training demonstrably changes the brain, the Dalai Lama argued, suggests "downward" causality from mind to brain and this, in turn, is strong evidence that the mind is a distinct entity or substance. The Dalai Lama, given *his* understanding of Buddhist principles, holds that the mind is not reducible to the brain; in fact, he regularly refers to a luminous "pure mind" in his scholarly books. In this way, the discussions at the Mind and Life Institutes had reached a philosophical impasse: the physicalism of neuroscience versus the dualism of Tibetan Buddhism.

But just when the discussants were about to give up, William James walked in muttering something about a squirrel and "going round." Ok, he didn't, since he has been dead for a century. But imagine with me for a few minutes what James might have said at this meeting to help sort out the radically different conclusions drawn from the neuroscientific study of advanced meditators. This is just the sort of philosophical conundrum that James would relish resolving. And, as I will show in my paper, it is where he has an important contribution to make. I will argue that James' concept of "pure experience" provides the best philosophical interpretation of the neuroscientific study of Buddhist meditation--that, in fact, *both sides* in this debate have got it fundamentally wrong. This is precisely the type of problem that James's concept of pure experience was created to solve. Although my main focus is on James's philosophy, I will offer a short appendix to show that there are resources already evident in Buddhism's earliest sources that are consonant with James's cure for the metaphysical mistakes that are dualism, idealism, and physicalism. Contrary to the Dalai Lama's views on the matter, the historical Buddha held a functionalist and emergentist account of experience that originates from a phenomenological (not a metaphysical) starting point-- a position that is remarkably similar to James's approach.

II. FOUNDATIONAL DISCOVERIES IN RECENT NEUROSCIENCE

But before developing James's or the Buddha's ideas, let's back up a bit and put the neuroscientific study of meditation in context.

Great advances have been made in neuroscience in the last two decades. Until recently, conventional neuroscience held that the adult human brain is fixed, its basic structure and circuitry immutable. For most of the 20th century, it was believed that each part of the brain is biologically programmed to perform certain functions—vision, hearing, language, etc.—in certain identifiable areas. No changes in the fundamental structure of the brain were considered possible in adult humans.

But in the last 20 years, neuroscientists have demonstrated the adaptability and flexibility of the human brain--the brain continues to be highly adaptable throughout life (not just in childhood). This is widely referred to--even in TV commercials--as "neuroplasticity."¹ Some readers might know that it was James who first introduced the word "plasticity" to the science of the brain in his *Principles of Psychology*. In simplest terms, neuroplasticity refers to the fact that *experience changes the brain*. The brain can literally rewire its synaptic connections as well as expand and reassign neural regions based on the inputs of sensory experience. Experiments have demonstrated significant neuroplasticity. For example, London cabbies have significantly more neural capacity allotted to spatial cognition as compared with other people; and accomplished violinists have more brain activation in the regions that control the fine motor skills of the fingers than do most other people. These brain changes are developed as a result of a pattern of action coupled with sensory experience. We now know conclusively that the actions we take literally expand or contract different regions of the brain opening up new circuits, amplifying or diminishing existing ones. The implications of these discoveries are nothing short of a revolution in how we consider our human nature--and, of course, when that happens it is a gold mine for philosophy.

These neuroscientific discoveries involve what some philosophers call "upward" causality, because they show that external factors like sensory stimulation can change the brain which in turn causes certain (purported) mental events. But the most recent advances in neuroscience suggest that phenomena that are typically labeled "mental events" (such as thinking, imagining,

choosing, deliberating) *also* cause observable changes in brain structure and function. In several studies it has been shown that mental practice alone can result in a reorganization of the motor cortex--e.g., mental rehearsal of playing a piano has been shown to activate the same motor circuits as actually playing the piano--and, surprisingly, such merely mental practice brought about the same changes in the cortex as bodily actions do. No doubt, neuroscientific evidence for such "downward causality" (from mind to brain) is even more revolutionary than the "upward" variety because it opens up all kinds of questions about the metaphysical status of so-called mental phenomena. Popular books on the subject, such as Sharon Begley's *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*, have argued for a form of mind/body dualism based on the claim that the brain can be changed by "pure mental activity."²

III. NEUROSCIENTIFIC STUDY OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION

The most significant neuroscientific evidence that mental training can have a profound impact on the circuitry of the brain has come from several studies on the brain function of adept Buddhist meditators.³ Richard Davidson has studied more than a dozen Tibetan Buddhist monks who had practiced mindfulness meditation for more than 10,000 hours. For anyone unfamiliar with Buddhist meditation, mindfulness meditation is a kind of hyper-focus of the mind; it is mental attention on steroids, to speak in the popular idiom. Mindfulness meditation is the practice of observing one's inner experiences in a way that is fully aware but nonjudgmental. One mindfully attends to the bare facts of perception and notices the arising and ceasing of thoughts impartially and without reacting to them emotionally.

Davidson's work aimed to discover whether brain states associated with such positive emotions as happiness, compassion, enthusiasm, and joy are trainable. In the 1970s, Davidson discovered striking differences in the patterns of brain activity that characterize people along what he called a "eudaemonic scale"--that is, along a continuum of baseline happiness. He found that positive emotions form a stable *trait*--they have an enduring baseline. This is the happiness "set point." Davidson and his colleagues found that there are specific brain states that correlate with happiness along this scale. Surprisingly, the prefrontal cortex (or PFC)--the part of the brain usually associated with cognitive function--turned out to play an essential role in the regulation of emotion. This discovery overturned the earlier view that the limbic system alone (especially the amygdala) accounted for the emotions. Using an EEG, Davidson found that asymmetric activation in this region corresponds to different "affective styles." When activity in the left PFC is higher than in the right, people report feeling alert, energized, enthusiastic and joyous, a greater sense of well-being. But when the activity is greater in the right PFC, people feel negative emotions: worry, anxiety, sadness, and depression.

In his more recent work, Davidson and his colleagues asked: could "mental practice" such as meditation modify or modulate human experience so as to reduce negative affect and increase positive affect (happiness and contentment) in enduring ways? If so, would such modifications at the level of experience be correlated directly with observable changes in the brain?

Recent studies indicate a firm *yes* to both questions. Buddhist mindfulness meditation is a trainable mental skill that shifts our experience away from negative affect towards positive affect.⁴ In fact, Davidson's research showed that during meditation on compassion, these Buddhist monks activated neural areas for positive feeling and preparedness to act to a degree never seen before.

But more important for our purposes is the answer to the second question: it turns out that for happiness/contentment to be trainable, the emotional circuits of the brain must be plastic--allowing *mentally generated* experience to induce changes in the structure and function of brain regions involved in regulating emotions. The scans measured gamma-wave activity in the monks' brains. During compassion meditation, the monks' brains showed very large increases in gamma-wave activity (as compared to control subjects). In short, meditation, a purportedly *mental* process, has observable neural correlates. Perhaps, then, happiness is something we can deliberately cultivate through mental training that affects the brain.

What is even more surprising is the fact that these neural changes persisted long after meditation had ceased. This suggests that meditative practice had created certain enduring *traits*, that is, long term changes in brain structure and function. Specifically, Buddhist meditation strengthens the connections between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala and it also shifts activity from the right regions of the prefrontal cortex to the left regions, in effect, resetting the happiness set point. Meditation also strengthens the cortical circuitry that modulates the activity of the limbic system, like a thermostat regulating a furnace of emotions. Thus through meditation (or perhaps through any form of intensive mental training, such as cognitive therapy) a person can reduce negative affect, increase positive affect, shift their happiness set point (their baseline) and thereby transform the emotional quality of one's mental life. And, most remarkably, all of these traits have observable neural correlates, which is to say they involve enduring physical changes in the circuitry of the brain.

IV. METAPHYSICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE NEW NEUROSCIENCE OF MEDITATION

From a scientific point of view, these discoveries are revolutionary, and yet they have engendered metaphysical interpretations that are nothing short of a philosophical mess. The problems stem in part from non-philosophers using words like "mind" and "brain" in philosophically naive ways.⁵ Sometimes "mind" refers to brain functions and sometimes to an immaterial substance. And the statement that mental events "cause" bodily events is taken to mean that the mind and the body must be different entities or substances--hence as support for some kind of dualism. Metaphors like "inner world" and "outer world" are often taken as literal descriptions of the relations between the mind and the body.

At the beginning of my paper, I mentioned the two foremost metaphysical interpretations of the neuroscientific study of Buddhist meditation, namely, the reductive physicalism held by most neuroscientists and the dualism espoused by the Dalai Lama as a representative of Tibetan Buddhism. I aim to show that both of these are wrong--they are different positions that derive from a common mistake--the attempt to "entify" mental and bodily phenomena. But let me first present each position in a little more detail.

According to the accepted explanation of recent neuroscience, perception, sensation, and other subjective experiences are nothing more than chemical and electrical changes in the brain. When electrical impulses pass through our visual cortex, we see, and when neurochemicals connect through our limbic system, we feel--that's all there is to it. Even consciousness is just a manifestation of brain activity, and when the brain ceases to function, consciousness vanishes. For most neuroscientists, the mind, if we want to keep that term, is what the brain *does*, and so thoughts and feelings are nothing but complex brain activity. The fact that so-called mental phenomena so closely correlate with precise brain processes implies, according to the neuroscientist, that mental phenomena just *are* those processes. In the current scientific

paradigm, mind and brain are identical; it isn't that neural processes just cause mental processes, they *are* mental processes. Consciousness cannot exist without the brain and the "mental forces" that are causally efficacious are not disembodied supernatural forces independent of the brain mechanism but are inseparably tied to the cerebral structure and its functional organization.

Sometimes neuroscientists confuse the matter by uncritically adopting terms like "upward causality." But when they use such a term, they can't mean a physical thing like the brain having a causal impact on an immaterial mind. According to the physicalist account, there are precise neural correlates for each "mental" process such as thinking, choice or intention. In each case, the purportedly mental phenomenon is really just one part of the brain controlling a different part of the brain. So while we might naively think that a metaphysically distinct mind is causing the brain to change, what is really happening is that the brain state that corresponds to a particular mental phenomenon is affecting another aspect of the brain in a perfectly scientific way--electrochemistry *here* affecting electrochemistry *there*. And that's all you need: brain states giving rise to other brain states. Neuroscience thus dismisses the idea that the mind--as a distinct entity--can change the brain and that consciousness might not be reducible to matter.

To the Dalai Lama, the fact that meditation can bring about changes to the brain makes it clear that "a purely mental process" can have observable effects on physical things. But, if Western science insists that all mental states are actually brain states, then the question becomes how can mental training act back on the brain so the brain is more likely to generate attention and compassion? The Dalai Lama agrees with neuroscientists when they describe upward causation--when brain activity giving rise to mental activity--but he rejects the neuroscientific view that dismisses "downward causation"--when mental activity affects brain activity. According to the Dalai Lama, the mind enjoys a status separate from the material world. In the Dalai Lama's view, "there is something in addition to the brain that gives rise to thoughts, feelings and other cognitive activity that together add up to a mind" and he thinks "there might be aspects of consciousness that cannot be explained as impulses of electrical current and the release and absorption of neurotransmitters in the brain. In these cases, the brain would fall short of explaining mind--something about the mind remains separate and apart from brain."⁶ On the Dalai Lama's view, through meditation one develops "pure thought" in the "luminous mind" and thus "the arrow of causality would point both ways, and pure thought would change the brain's chemistry and electrical activity, its circuits, or even its structure."⁷ From the Dalai Lama's perspective, the problem with the neuroscience of meditation is that it is too materialistic and reductionist.

V. JAMES'S CONCEPT OF "PURE EXPERIENCE" AS THE ANTIDOTE TO IDEALISM, PHYSICALISM, AND DUALISM

Now I am finally ready to bring James (and the Buddha) to the rescue. In his later work, especially in his radical empiricism, James abandoned any hint of substance dualism that might have been lurking in his *Principles of Psychology*. In fact, he specifically referred to dualism as one the "great pitfalls" from which radical empiricism will save us.

In his radical empiricism, James held that matter and mind are but *functional* distinctions--that these are not ontologically fundamental entities. The problem, as James saw it, was to account for the relationship between the world of objects--what is represented--and the world of consciousness--the process of representing--without resorting to a metaphysical dualism of subject and object--

and also without a reduction to either mind or brain. Instead of any of these metaphysical positions, James famously offered a world of "**pure experience**."⁸

Even though the concept of pure experience is central to James's radical empiricism, it remains notoriously ambiguous. This isn't a problem created by scholars alone. James himself was not completely consistent in his development of the concept of pure experience. So I am going to appropriate only one strand of the concept and try to avoid the problem of whether this is the only or even the best interpretation of James's understanding of pure experience.

The first thing to note about pure experience is that is fundamentally a phenomenological concept, a *starting point* for the analysis of experience, a methodology rather than a metaphysical concept. The idea of pure experience is built on *concrete* experience--experience as it is actually lived--not on an idealization of experience. Thus, pure experience refers to experience *before* it is conceptualized or retrospectively analyzed. Pure experience is the name James gives "to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories."⁹ Joel Krueger, eloquently described pure experience in the following terms:

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.¹⁰

James says further that it is "an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet any definite *what*, tho ready to be all sorts of *whats*."¹¹

In an early definition, James called pure experience a kind of *primal stuff*, but seeing as this has the unfortunate effect of making pure experience sound awfully close to a metaphysical substance, he backed off this definition, saying "there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made."¹² Someone might object that if pure experience isn't made of matter or consciousness, then what is it made of? After all, we are inclined to think that it must consist in something! But this is precisely the metaphysical trap that James himself almost fell into--and, ironically, the trap that the concept of pure experience was created to avoid. Pure experience is not a metaphysical stuff or entity or "general element," so the question itself is ill-formed. The concept is a phenomenological starting point that avoids substantialization or "entification." Perhaps James would have more easily avoided a metaphysical interpretation of pure experience if he had consistently held that pure experience answers to questions about "*how*" not "*what*." Thus its primacy and purity are methodological, not metaphysical. It gives us a starting point to tell the story of the unfolding of concrete experience without the need for substance-oriented metaphysical foundations.

What is important for the purposes of my paper is that James used pure experience to avoid all those positions that require a metaphysical foundation: namely, idealism, physicalism, or dualism. James makes this point very clear:

In opposition to this dualistic philosophy, I tried...to show that thoughts and things are absolutely homogeneous as to their material, and that their opposition is only one of relation and of function. There is no thought-stuff different from thing stuff...but the same identical piece of "pure experience" (which was the name I gave to the *materia prima* of

everything) can stand alternately for a "fact of consciousness" or for a physical reality, according as it is taken in one context or another.¹³

As a starting point, "pure experience" *precedes* the realities of thought and thing, of representing and represented, and thus it simply makes no sense to speak of the mental or the physical as fundamentally distinct or ultimate entities, nor to reduce mental phenomena to physical phenomena (or vice versa). For James, "the attributes 'subject' and 'object,' 'represented and representative,' 'thing and thought' mean, then, a practical distinction which is of a FUNCTIONAL order only, and not at all ontological as understood by classical dualism."¹⁴ We divide experience into a subject and an object only because, as experience occurs, control is offered by analyzing experience into "what represents and what is represented." Of course, even this functional distinction is a by-product of analysis (not pure experience), because as James wrote: "no dualism of being represented and representing resides in the experience *per se*. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known. In its pure state, or when isolated, there is no self-splitting of it into consciousness and what consciousness is of."¹⁵ Subjectivity and objectivity mark functional attributes that only emerge when we reflect retrospectively on experience and associate different portions of the evolving experience with various contexts.¹⁶ James argued that this is why it is wrong to think of anger, love, and fear as affections purely of the mind--they are, in fact, simultaneously affections of both the mind and the body. And, similarly, it would be wrong to think of meditative experience as purely mental--it represents a full integration of the mental and the bodily aspects of experience. The distinction between them is only achieved in analysis and in the contexts that analysis utilizes.

In "The Notion of Consciousness," James wrote: "I conclude, then, that--although there be practical dualism--inasmuch as representations are distinguished from objects, stand in their stead and lead us to them, there is no reason to attribute to them an essential difference of nature. Thought and actuality are made of the same stuff, the stuff of experience in general."¹⁷ What I take James to mean is that as experiences unfold, they typically fall into patterns to which we assign classifying terms like mental and physical--but such distinctions should be made without making ontological commitments. This point is further reinforced by remembering that James, even in his *Psychology*, took great pains to show that terms like consciousness and mind do not refer to entities---they are mere functions that relate the process of representing and the represented in experience.¹⁸

Another misguided metaphor for the process of experience that has caused metaphysical mischief is the common distinction between the "inner world" where mental phenomena reside and the "outer world" where the body and other natural phenomena reside. But, of course, there is no literally distinct "inner world" differentiable from and an "outer world."¹⁹ Like the terms "mind" and "body," "inner" and "outer" are just sorting devices; and yet so much of the appeal of dualism seems to rest on the pervasiveness of this metaphorical distinction. It is indeed a strange irony that the dualists appeal to the spatial metaphor of "inner/outer" because the distinction only makes sense in physicalism. Spatial location only applies to physical things, thus one could differentiate between what is inside one's head (namely, a brain) and the rest of the world. But that's a physicalist picture and no help to dualism's differentiation of the mind and body. Perhaps given the concept of pure experience, the metaphors of an "inner world" and an "outer world" should be dropped entirely, because they are misleading in that they reinforce an untenable metaphysical distinction.

Of course, James did not aim to eliminate talk of mental and physical phenomena, but only argued that we contextualize such descriptions so as to avoid the philosophical problems that arise from entifying experience at a foundationally metaphysical level. Whether we treat some aspect of experience as mental or physical depends on the *context* which in turn is determined by how the part of experience we are labeling relates to other parts. As James wrote:

Just so, I maintain, does a given undivided portion of experience, taken in one context of associates, play the part of knower, of a state of mind, of 'consciousness'; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of the thing known, of the objective 'content.' In a word, in one group it figures as thought, in another group as thing. And since it can figure in both groups simultaneously we have every right to speak of it as subjective and objective both at once.²⁰

What follows, then, from such contextualism is that there's nothing wrong with saying that the brain is physical or that thoughts are non-physical. As Joel Krueger wrote: "Pure experience is therefore [the] 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."²¹ In other words, context allows metaphysical analysis but with a small "m." And such classifications by context, of course, depend on our temporary purposes. James's favourite illustration for this difference due to context is paint--it is both saleable matter and possesses an aesthetic function in a given painting. I think that perhaps a finished painting furnishes an even better illustration. A painting is at once an aggregation of molecules suitable for chemical study and yet it is also an *object de art* whose aesthetic meaning is typically subject to the analysis of the art historian rather than the chemist.²² There's nothing metaphysically mysterious about this once context is taken into account. Think about this: no one, except maybe the Platonist, asks what metaphysical substance aesthetic meaning is made of.

Because pure experience is methodologically prior to the bifurcation of experience into mental and physical phenomena, neither metaphysical dualism, idealism, nor physicalism are warranted. Whereas the mind and the body an integrated whole, all three metaphysical positions attempt to "entify" what is in fact only a context-dependent function. Thus, James has shown that idealism, physicalism, and dualism are all in error because they wrongly start their analysis with a metaphysical commitment to either the subject, the object, or both, as distinct entities. In this way, James's concept of pure experience resolves the dispute between the neuroscientists and the Dalai Lama by showing how neither physicalism nor dualism are warranted philosophical interpretations of the results of recent neuroscientific studies of Buddhist meditation. This solution renders the problem of "downward causation" moot because in the end there simply aren't two metaphysically distinct entities in a causal relation. There's no more need to try to explain the mind's effect on the body than there is a need to explain how a painting's aesthetic meaning has a causal effect on the molecules that make up the painting.

VI. A BRIEF APPENDIX: THE EARLY BUDDHIST PHENOMENOLOGY OF EXPERIENCE

In the most ancient of Buddhist scriptures, the Pali Canon, the historical Buddha offered a highly detailed analysis of human experience that is remarkably similar to James's phenomenology of pure experience. Like James, the Buddha offered a psychological functionalism that avoided metaphysical commitments of a foundational or ultimate sort.

The Buddha's account of the human person rejects any consideration of the self or consciousness as an entity. For the Buddha, the person is a dependently arisen, emergent, process; a person is not a thing in the static sense. In the most frequent analysis found in the Pali Canon, the Buddha described a person as comprised of five aggregates or bundles--body, feeling, perception, dispositions to action, and consciousness---none of which is a substance or self-subsistent thing. Thus, a person is a complex integration of psycho-physical unfoldings (*nāmarūpa*). The texts make it clear that the Buddha, like James and *unlike* the Dalai Lama, was not a mind-body dualist. Although the Buddha spoke of the human person as a psycho-physical phenomenon, yet the psychological and the physical aspects of a person were never discussed in isolation, they are an integrated whole that resists metaphysical "entification," in much the same way that James presented his concept of pure experience.

But this analysis of a person left the Buddha with a puzzle regarding how experience arises and functions without reference to a permanent self. Just as James's conception of "pure experience" avoids the bifurcation of experience into distinct subject and object, so the Buddha, in the "Discourse of the Honeyball," for example, showed how experience, including consciousness, should be explained as an emergently integrated set of functions in which there is no distinct subject and object dichotomy. Such a bifurcation can only arise later as the process of experience is analyzed and classified in thought. A short passage from this text reads:

Visual consciousness arises dependent on the eye and visible objects. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on contact, there is feeling. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one reasons about. What one reasons about, that one mentally proliferates. What one mentally proliferates, that is the cause by which mentally proliferated perceptions and (obsessive) notions assail a person in regard to visible objects cognizable by the eye, in the past, future, and present.²⁴

In this and many other passages, consciousness (*viññāna*), and its objects, are not distinct entities, but are emergent functions within an ongoing process. Conscious experience is an organic/integrated process that can be analyzed into a coordination of both a sensory organ and the sensory object. But it is very important to realize that neither the sense organ nor the sensory object is given a metaphysically fundamental status--they are functions delineated within an experience that is integrated as a unitary process. Thus, experience, from which conscious emerges, is phenomenologically an integrated whole in which the parts can only be delineated by later analysis. This pattern of experience holds for all six modes of consciousness (each deriving from one of six sensory modalities). Like James, therefore, the Buddha held a functionalist view of experience together with an emergentist conception of consciousness.

Consciousness, as the Buddha characterized it, is merely the fact that the objects of experience are experienced *as had* by an experiencer. It provides a measure of continuity in experience, but it does so without appealing to a permanent or transcendent *subject* of experience. This is why the Buddha used the metaphor of a "stream of consciousness" (*viññāna-sota*) to illustrate how a changing process can maintain continuity and identity despite ongoing change.

This metaphor obviates the need for a metaphysical commitment regarding either the subject or the object in experience. There is simply no "thing" that is consciousness that can serve as the basis for any metaphysical reduction.²⁵ In his translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, Bhikkhu Bodhi alludes to the Buddha's phenomenological starting point for his analysis of experience when he writes that for the Buddha, feeling is "simultaneously a quality of the object as well as an affective tone of the experience by which it is apprehended"²⁶ I imagine that this statement would be right at home in the writings of William James.

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NOTES

¹Pascual-Leone, A. , Amedi., Fregni.F., and Merabet, L.B., "The Plastic Human Brain Cortex, " *Annual Reviews of Neuroscience* 28, 2005, pp. 377-401.

²Begley, Sharon. *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), p. 9.

³Lutz, Antoine, Greischar, Lawrence L., Rawlings, Nancy B., Ricard, Mathieu and Davidson, Richard J. "Long-term meditators self-induce high-amplitude gamma synchrony during mental practice," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, 101 (2004), 16369-16373. Also, see Lutz, Antoine, Dunne, John D. and Davidson, Richard J. "Meditation and the neuroscience of consciousness: an introduction," in Zelazo, P. D. , Moscovitch, M. and Thompson, E. (eds) .*The Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 499-554.

⁴These neuroscientific studies of mindfulness meditation explain in part the successes seen in the use of mindfulness as a psychological therapy. Experiments have already shown that mindfulness meditation helps patients' Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders and clinical depression. Using mindfulness meditation, OCD and depression patients experience the trigger that normally leads to a spiral of obsessive or depressive experiences but without reacting emotionally--realizing that it is just a brain event--just a wiring defect that has no reality in itself. Patients were taught the meditative mantra: "I can watch this thought come and go without having to respond to it." By monitoring their own thoughts in this way, patients were able to keep the dysfunctional products of their mind from cascading into full-blown problems. With only one week of mindfulness meditation training, some patients reported that the disease no longer controlled them. PET scans have verified the neural changes that have taken place: the OCD and depression patients who improved had much less activation in their right frontal cortex. This is more evidence that mindful effort can alter brain function; and more specifically, that *self-directed* brain change is can be scientifically demonstrated --just as ancient Buddhism has been saying for 2400 years.

⁵Begley's book, for example, is full of inconsistencies and ambiguities in the use of the words "mind" and "brain" and "mental phenomena."

⁶Begley, pp. 131-133.

⁷Begley, pp. 133.

⁸William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976) p. pp. 21-44.. (Henceforth, E.R.E.)

⁹E.R.E., p. 93.

¹⁰Joel W. Krueger, "The Varieties of Pure Experience: William James and Kitaro Nishida on Consciousness and Embodiment," *William James Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1. p. 11.

¹¹ E.R.E., p. 46. It is worth mentioning that certain types of Buddhist meditative experience may well be suggestive of what James was calling "pure experience." Joel Krueger suggested this as regards meditation in east Asian forms of Buddhism. But there is evidence in the earliest traditions as well. For example, in the "Greater Discourse on Cause" (*Mahānidāna Sutta*), the Buddha describes certain levels of meditative attainment as removing discursive or conceptual modes of thought. And the very pinnacle of meditation one achieves a kind of ultimate non-dualistic kind of experience called the plane of "neither perception nor non-perception."

¹² E.R.E., p. 26.

¹³ E.R.E., p. 69.

¹⁴ E.R.E., p. 235.

¹⁵ E.R.E., p. 70.

¹⁶ James wrote: "Only in the later experience that supersedes the present one is this naïf immediacy retrospectively split into two parts, a 'consciousness' and its 'content,' and the content corrected or confirmed." E.R.E., p. 37.

¹⁷ E.R.E., p. 187.

¹⁸ James wrote: "*Experience, I believe, has no such inner duplicity and the separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition--the addition, to a concrete piece of it, of other sets of experiences, in connection with which severally its use of function may be of two different kinds.* (E.R.E., p. 172)

¹⁹ We read so often such statements as in Begley: "the outside world as well as the contents of one's mind."

²⁰ E.R.E., p. 7.

²¹ Joel Krueger, "The Varieties of Pure Experience: William James and Kitaro Nishida on Consciousness and Embodiment," *William James Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1., p. 36.

²² As Tom Alexander writes: "In the undivided, instantaneous unity of a given moment [i.e., pure experience] there is no basis upon which distinctions of 'mental' and 'physical' can be generated. Once the aspect of experience to the future is introduced, the distinctions of 'material' or 'mental' refer to functionally different expectations of consequences and so to different habits. Pure experience is no 'substance' and attains its 'purity' only when considered atemporally." (*A Companion to Pragmatism*, p. 187.)

²⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya*, I. 111-112. See also *Samyutta Nikāya*, IV.86 for an alternate version.

²⁵ As the Buddha famously said: "In this fathom-long living body, along with its apperceptions and thoughts, lies the world, the arising of the world, and the cessation of the world." *Anguttara Nikāya*, II.48.

²⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Kandy, Sri Lanka; Buddhist Publication Society, 1995) p. 1236.

THE METAPHYSICS OF PLURALISTIC MANIFESTATIONS IN JAMES AND EAST ASIAN BUDDHISM

MASATO ISHIDA

*The universe is, as it were, an awaking Mind.*¹

C. S. Peirce

I. INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the approach, it is impossible to discuss the full range of James and East Asian Buddhism in a brief article. Accordingly, I call the reader's attention more to striking similarities between James' metaphysics of experience and East Asian Buddhism—especially represented by Zen Buddhism—rather than overstating obvious and predictable disparities. It should be noted that there is no uniformity across East Asian Buddhism, including Zen, in terms of doctrine or pedagogy. Zen itself is historically, geographically, and culturally diverse, besides the fact that it is one among many forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism in East Asia.

This paper frames itself thematically by first focusing on the fluidity of experience as understood by James and Zen. I proceed to consider the subtle balance between the philosophy of a pluralistic universe—where 'universe' is considered in singular form—and a more straightforward, ontological pluralism. From James' side, my take is that the ordinary pluralism/monism dichotomy does not work. From the East Asian Buddhist side, I consider the 13th century Japanese Zen master Dōgen [道元1200-1253], whose works have been translated extensively into English. Following Xuansha Shibei [玄沙師備 835-908] from Tang Dynasty [唐朝] in China, Dōgen argues that the universe is neither one nor many, hence supporting a view comparable to that of James.

The big picture following from this comparative approach is that phenomenal manifestations are *pluralistic* for both James and Dōgen, which does not necessarily imply ontological pluralism. I endeavor to illuminate the peculiar kind of semantics that underlies James' pluralistic universe and Dōgen's dynamic yet subtle worldview, which may offer one of the most interesting topics when comparing James and East Asian Buddhism. If the reader is familiar with Zen through the works of D. T. Suzuki, who was editorial assistant to Paul Carus (1852-1919) during James' most remarkable period of philosophical development,² we will focus on Sōtō [曹洞] Zen founded by Dōgen, not Rinzai [臨濟] Zen,³ which may provide us with a fresh perspective.

II. FLOWING MOUNTAINS

Let us start with a famous *koan*, a Zen conundrum, that drives us to the heart of Zen, namely the *fluidity of life*, which is nearly where Zen begins and ends. A monk asks the Master, "Does a dog have Buddha nature [仏性]?" The Master replies, "Yes, it does." Another monk asks the Master the same

question. This time the Master replies, “No, it does not.” This *koan*, which records a dialogue between two monks and Master Zhaozhou [趙州 778-897] in the Chan [禪] tradition, where Chan is the original Chinese form of Zen Buddhism, is known as *Zhaozhou Gouzi* [趙州狗子],⁴ which has been used widely in Zen practice, especially in the Rinzai tradition. As one may observe, Master Zhaozhou gives opposite answers to the same question, “Does a dog have Buddha nature?”

Although hundreds of lines can be spent on this *koan* alone—and ideally we must meditate on its meaning in cross-legged posture—there is at least one point shared across virtually all interpretations: The Master should not offer a straightforward answer to the learner because the answer must ultimately issue forth from the learner’s inner flow of life itself, or what would be for James the immediate stream of pure experience. In other words, Zen verbalism deflects the ordinary structure and function of language to fluidize life of the learner from within. The question and answer are *actional verbs*, *gerunds*, or *adverbs* constitutive of the flow of life rather than “adjectives and nouns and prepositions and conjunctions,”⁵ to borrow a familiar expression from James.

Koans operate in dynamic, concrete, fully embodied contexts. The dialogues, stories, and statements are not meant to suggest that verbal contradictions are particularly entertaining,⁶ nor do they intend to say that depending on perspective, a question may simply receive different answers. This matter is worth addressing since Zen is often thought of as praising illogicality; “something illogical, something irrational, something that does not yield itself to an intellectual treatment is to be the special feature of Zen,”⁷ writes D. T. Suzuki, for example. However, Dōgen, founder of Sōtō Zen, suggests the opposite: “How sad that they [Zen monks] do not know about the phrases of logical thought, or penetrating logical thought in the phrases and stories! [...]. Their idea about illogical words is only a distorted view.”⁸ These words appear in Dōgen’s magnum opus *Shōbōgenzō* [正法眼藏], more specifically in a fascicle titled “Mountains and Waters Sutra [*Sansuikyō* 山水經],” which is not only one of Dōgen’s most aesthetic compositions, rich of poetic imagery, but also noticed by scholars for Dōgen’s strong emphasis on the intelligibility of Zen discourses, including *koans*. Hence, Dōgen cites the following saying from Furong Daokai [芙蓉道楷], a restorer and promoter of Sōtō [or Caodong] Zen in the Song Dynasty [宋朝] in China: “The green mountains are always walking; a stone woman gives birth to a child at night.”⁹ Quick as a flash, Dōgen then says to his assembly, “You should examine in detail this quality of the mountains’ walking.”¹⁰

The passage is not too difficult to understand when one listens to Dōgen further. “Mountains’ walking is just like human walking,” he says, continuing, “Accordingly, do not doubt mountains’ walking even though it does not look the same as human walking.”¹¹ If we say that everything in the universe comes and goes, seemingly unchanging mountains no doubt become and perish, though their change is slow on the human timescale. In Dōgen’s view, objects are *events*, with their own course of history, as active and transient as human experience. Viewed from this angle, we may say with John Dewey that “objects are events *with* meanings,”¹² but James also expresses it well when he urges that *activity* is nearly synonymous with *life*: “Bare activity [...] means the bare fact of event or change. [...] . The sense of activity is thus in the broadest and vaguest way synonymous with the sense of ‘life.’”¹³ For Dōgen, the *presencing* of mountains and waters is nothing but the unfolding of life itself.

This leads to the second half of Furong Daokai’s saying: “a stone woman gives birth to a child at night.” Dōgen rephrases “child [*ko* 児]” as “*sanji* [山児]” several paragraphs later in the same fascicle, which literally means

‘mountain-child.’ As long as mountains are dynamic processes here and now, followed by future processes, the child of the mountains—or ‘mountain-child’ in Dōgen’s wording—continues the presencing (and re-presencing) of the mountains into the future. Dōgen writes, “Hence the accumulated virtue of mountains in full dynamic manifestation constitutes its form and name [*gyōmyō* 形名], or its life-stream [*meimyaku* 命脈]. There is walking, there is flowing, and there is a moment when a mountain gives birth to a mountain-child.”¹⁴ Since the phrase ‘stone woman [*sekijo* 石女]’ often refers to sterile or barren women, the meaning of the passage is clear. Lifeless, barren mountains are ongoing life processes in Dōgen’s view.

It is easy to associate this with James’ admiration of the metaphysics of Gustav Fechner (1801-1887), a worldview filled with Earth-Mind and Earth-Consciousness. “Fechner’s imagination,” James writes, “tries to make our picture of the whole earth’s life more concrete. [...]. Think of her beauty—a shining ball, sky-blue and sun-lit over one half, the other bathed in starry night, reflecting the heavens from all her waters, myriads of lights and shadows in the folds of her mountains and windings of her valleys [...].”¹⁵ Dōgen strikes a sympathetic chord in contemplating the living world from a similar perspective: “Mountains and waters have been active since before the Empty Eon, such that they are activities alive at this very moment.”¹⁶

III. MANY OR ONE—IS THIS A GOOD PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION?

“I shall ask,” James however writes, “whether the abstractly monistic turn which Fechner’s speculations took was necessitated by logic.”¹⁷ The point is interesting since there are monistic and pluralistic sides to Dōgen’s metaphysics as well. The monistic side is simple. Plainly put, we are part of a larger cosmic life, and replacing substance ontology with the Buddhist functionalist view of things, we may say that the *working* that gives rise to mountains and waters, *not* the ‘ontological stuff,’ is not a divisible activity. For Dōgen, the world always works as an undivided whole.¹⁸ Particular mountains come and go, but the cosmic working, the ongoing actualization, the *presencing* [*genjō* 現成] of the world in its entirety here and now, does not.

As for the pluralistic side, a quick comparison of Dōgen’s view with Leibniz’s monadology facilitates understanding.¹⁹ We may remind ourselves that for Leibniz, “there is a world of creatures, of living beings, of animals, of entelechies, of souls in the least part of matter,” and that “each portion of matter can be conceived as a garden full of plants, and as a pond full of fish.” Leibniz continues, “But each branch of a plant, each limb of an animal, each drop of its humors, is still another such garden or pond,” such that worlds upon worlds of life unfold as we proceed into the details of the material world. A parallel, ‘nested-world’ philosophy appears in Dōgen’s writings, too. He states:

It is not just that there is water in the world; there are worlds in the realms of water. There are also worlds of sentient beings in clouds, there are worlds of sentient beings in wind, there are worlds of sentient beings in fire, there are worlds of sentient beings in earth, there are worlds of sentient beings in phenomena, there are worlds of sentient beings in a single blade of grass, there are worlds of sentient beings in a single stick.²⁰

As we may observe, Leibniz and Dōgen are philosophical allies here, not only in focusing on the intertwined structures of pluralistic worlds, but also in rejecting the common bifurcation of worlds into those of dead matter and those of living organisms. There are, however, crucial respects in which Dōgen differs from Leibniz. For the Buddhist, finite beings are not created by ‘God,’ nor are there ‘possible worlds’ out of which God selects the best. Further, the Buddhist concept of emptiness marks a fundamental difference from *substance ontology*, including that of Leibniz, such that Dōgen’s view of inter-nested worlds must be distinguished from the more straightforward ontological pluralism of the monadology. In this regard, James stands nearer to Dōgen. As long as *change* is essential to pure experience, as it is for James, fluid phenomenism must take over traditional metaphysics of simple, unchanging substances. This makes James’ radical empiricism interpretable within a broadly Buddhist framework.²¹

Regarding ontological pluralism, we may also recall James’ recommendation that we “equally abjure absolute monism and absolute pluralism.”²² James is, of course, a pluralist in many important ways, but depending on whether we stress ‘a pluralistic universe’ or else “*universes*, each with its own grade of unity,”²³—hence depending on whether we stress a *world* of pure experiences as a whole or a world of *pure experiences* in James—things may look slightly different. We could, for example, ask: In talking about a “comminuted *Identitätsphilosophie*,”²⁴ what is it that is supposed to be ‘comminuted’ in James’ view? A point to remember is that despite the “so many little absolutes”²⁵ James brought forward in his *radical empiricism*, there is always a delicate balance between the ‘many’ and the ‘one’ in his thought.

A similar question arises for Dōgen and his fellow thinkers in East Asian Buddhism. Buddhists in this tradition agree that each detail of the world is nothing but a concrete flux of experience, where conscious agency is not necessarily assumed. In particular, Dōgen regards everything—mountains, oceans, and even pine trees—as *time*.²⁶ Reflecting such a dynamic worldview, Dōgen writes, “Myriad phenomena, numberless grasses exist over the entire earth, while each of the myriad phenomena, each of the myriad grasses exists as entire earth. [...] At every moment of time within a multiplicity of times, the entire world is present, the entire being is present.”²⁷

But is Dōgen saying, *ontologically* speaking, that there are many universes, or is he suggesting one universe that allows for such pluralistic manifestations? Dōgen considers this question through the famous words of Xuansha Shibei, a monk from Tang Dynasty in China remembered for the saying, ‘The entire universe is one bright jewel in all ten directions.’²⁸ Dōgen explores this dictum in the following passage:

A body is present, the mind is present, but they are present only as the one bright jewel. Not as trees and grasses here and there, not as mountains and rivers under heaven and earth, but only as the one bright jewel are they present.²⁹

‘The entire universe is one bright jewel in all ten directions’—we do not say two, or three. The whole body is one true Dharma eye, the whole body is the true body, the whole body is one phrase, the whole body is radiant light, the whole body is the whole heart-mind.³⁰

Drawing a philosophical point from Xuansha Shibei, Dōgen writes:

The important teaching of the above is that the entire universe in all ten directions is not vast or large, not minute or

small; it is neither square nor round; it is not the mean, not straight, not the lively vigor of a leaping fish, neither unobstructed nor distinct all the way round.³¹

Aside from the vivid image and animated rhetoric, what Dōgen says here is simple. First, the universe is ‘one’ in some sense—we do not say two or three—though the world is nothing other than the multifold phenomenal manifestations themselves. Second, the ultimate nature of things—and here ‘things’ are not substances but events—cannot be predicated of size, shape, balance, concepts, animistic notions, conventional norms, etc. There is no ‘ontological stuff’ lurking behind phenomena. Saying this, Dōgen is certainly not trying to make a highly original point, for it belongs to common understanding of Zen (or Chan) that Buddha nature does not reside in things like an ‘essence.’ Buddha nature—and the self and world—cannot be objectified, measured, or predicated, let alone counted. The question *Many or One?* is, therefore, a misguided question for the Buddhist.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although different in perspective, this may remind us of James’ 1906 pragmatism lectures in which he wrote: “Is the world one or many?—fated or free?—material or spiritual?—here are notions either of which may or may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending.”³² To such interminable metaphysical questions, James and East Asian Buddhists may reply similarly that the questions are not formulated properly. However, they are likely to part ways in making the next move. James will propose that it is *pragmatism* that brings about reconciliation if a conflict between opposing views is to be settled, but without downplaying weak views as untenable. A traditional Buddhist can be more stringent and refute views that are judged delusive. A Rinzai Zen master might exclaim *kwatts* [喝]! and strike questioners with a stick. Dōgen is more likely to say that we only need to sit down and meditate, without bothering ourselves with such questions.

Throughout my discussion, I have focused on two themes. First, the fluidity of experience construed broadly, which I discussed through Dōgen’s interpretation of Furong Daokai’s phrase ‘the green mountains are always walking.’ Second, I turned to the question of ‘many or one.’ We have just seen Xuansha Shibe’s words, ‘The entire universe is one bright jewel in all ten directions,’ interpreted from Dōgen’s viewpoint and through his nested-world semantics. On the other hand, James thinks, correctly in my opinion, that from a worldview such as that of Gustav Fechner, *monism* does not necessarily follow. But I also consider that *ontological pluralism*, despite James’ earlier gestures toward it in his *radical empiricism*, does not need to follow from the kind of philosophy James reached in his later writings, including *A Pluralistic Universe*. The insight I wish to draw from this is that the universe is eventually neither one nor many for James and the East Asian Buddhists, which suggests a predication problem rather than a metaphysical problem in formulating the question.

Due to limitation of space, we cannot discuss such topics as *Tiantai* [天台] and *Huayan* [華嚴] Buddhism in this paper, from which Zen or Chan Buddhism is not really separable. Besides, Zen in Japan and Chan in China have their own internal developments that involve considerable complexity for the historian. A similar challenge is found in Dōgen’s philosophical development, which recent scholarship has started to notice. Yet focus on Zen is nearly inevitable when one compares William James’ philosophy and Buddhism. As David Scott points out,³³ Mahāyāna Buddhism became prominent in America “partly through the greater degree of American contact

with Japan” and “subsequent Chinese and Japanese immigration to America,” which stands in contrast to Victorian Britain where Buddhism was associated more with Theravāda Buddhism. To discuss more details lies beyond the scope of this paper, but it is useful to note that classical American philosophy developed at a time when the West was awakening to Buddhism from East Asia.³⁴

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NOTES

¹ Charles S. Peirce, *The New Elements of Mathematics*, ed. by Carolyn Eisele, Mouton Publishers, 1976, Vol. 4, p. xxiv.

² D. T. Suzuki worked for Open Court from 1897 to 1909, after which he returned to Japan. Paul Carus was Suzuki’s supervisor.

³ Including Suzuki, most modern Japanese philosophers—especially those belonging to the ‘Kyoto school’—interpret Zen from the Rinzai perspective, though they often relate themselves to Dōgen in special ways.

⁴ Based on *Congronlu* [従容録], case 18. The *koan* is sometimes referred to as *Zhaozhou Wuzi* [趙州無字] and *Gouzi Foxing* [狗子仏性].

⁵ William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, Introduction by E. K. Suckiel and Preface by R. B. Perry, University of Nebraska Press, 1996, p. 94.

⁶ For example, there are versions of *Zhaozhou Gouzi* in which only one of the two replies—‘No, a dog does *not* have Buddha nature’ in particular—appears, demonstrating that a flat contradiction was not the general intent behind this *koan*.

⁷ D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki*, Three Leaves Press, 2006, p. 180. Suzuki makes similar remarks in other writings as well.

⁸ Dōgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, ed. by Kazuaki Tanashi, North Point Press 1995, p. 101. The original text allows for slightly different readings, but we follow the English translation (for the original text in classical Japanese, see *Dōgen-zenji Zenshū* [道元禪師全集], Shunjūsha [春秋社], 1991, Vol. 1, p. 320).

⁹ Dōgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, p. 97. The original phrase of Furong Daokai 青山常運歩, 石女夜生兒 is found in *Jiatāi Pudenglu* [嘉泰普燈錄], chapter 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Dōgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, pp. 97-98.

¹² John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Dover Publications, 1958, p. 318.

¹³ James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 161.

¹⁴ Dōgen, *Dōgen-zenji Zenshū*, Vol. 1, p. 318; my translation.

¹⁵ William James, *A Pluralistic Universe: Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy*, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909, p. 162.

¹⁶ Dōgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, p. 97.

¹⁷ James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 154.

¹⁸ This is the idea of *zenki* [全機], also a title of another fascicle in Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*.

¹⁹ See sections 66-68 of the *Monadology*. For convenience, I use the following English translation: G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, ed. and tr. by Daniel Garber and Roger Ariew, Hackett Publishing Company, 1991.

²⁰ Dōgen, *Dōgen-zenji Zenshū*, Vol. 1, p. 327; my translation.

²¹ I consider this as part of James' foresight, if not something stated explicitly in his writings.

²² James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, Introduction by A. J. Ayer, Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 76.

²³ James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 45 [emphasis added].

²⁴ James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 135 [original emphasis].

²⁵ James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 134.

²⁶ Discussed in Dōgen's famous fascicle "Being-Time [*Uji* 有時]" (see *Moon in a Dewdrop*, p. 81 and p. 78).

²⁷ Dōgen, *Dōgen-zenji Zenshū*, Vol. 1, p. 241; my translation from the fascicle "Being-Time."

²⁸ 尽十方世界是一顆明珠. The original phrase derives from *Jingde Chuandenglū* [景德伝燈錄], chapter 18.

²⁹ Dōgen, *Dōgen-zenji Zenshū*, Vol. 1, p. 78; my translation from the fascicle "One Bright Jewel [*Ikkamyōju* 一顆明珠]."

³⁰ Dōgen, *Dōgen-zenji Zenshū*, Vol. 1, p. 80; my translation from "One Bright Jewel."

³¹ Dōgen, *Dōgen-zenji Zenshū*, Vol. 1, p. 78; my translation from "One Bright Jewel."

³² James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*, p. 28.

³³ David Scott, "William James and Buddhism: American Pragmatism and the Orient," *Religion*, Vol. 30: 4 (2000), p. 333.

³⁴ I am grateful to Richard Hayes for providing me with insightful feedback on an earlier version of this paper. I thank John Holder, Joseph John, Lee McBride, and the audience at the American Philosophical Association, Central Division meeting, for comments that helped me clarify a few points that called for greater attention.

DAVID KALUPAHANA ON WILLIAM JAMES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY BUDDHISM

JOSEPH JOHN

Throughout his expository work on the history of Buddhism, David Kalupahana makes frequent comparisons to William James. He uses James to help us understand the development of early Buddhism, as a western analogue of both the Buddha and Nāgārjuna. First, he suggests that the Buddha was a sort of radical empiricist and a pragmatist. After the Buddha came theorists, belonging to the Abhidharma schools, who introduced new ideas that violated this radical empiricism. Finally, Nāgārjuna came along and criticized the Abhidharmikas in an attempt to reconstruct the original Jamesian claims of the Buddha. This essay is an examination of these claims. I will argue that although Kalupahana is on to something, he overstates his case. That is, while he was correct to note elements of pragmatism and radical empiricism in Buddhist thought, the Buddha was not explicitly a radical empiricist or a pragmatist. Nevertheless, the comparison of William James to Buddhism is a valuable one, and when we work out more precisely what that relationship is, it helps us to understand both a little better. Finally, if we take the claim that these Buddhist thinkers were pragmatists of a sort, I think it opens up a possibility that Kalupahana did not seem to take seriously—the possibility of doing metaphysics.

1. IS THE BUDDHA A RADICAL EMPIRICIST?

Kalupahana is probably correct that the Buddha was an empiricist. As Richard Hayes pointed out to me at this conference, the Buddha did allow for the fact that we learn from enlightened teachers, as well as from personal experience. I think this is especially significant when considering things like the belief in reincarnation, which seem to have no correlation in experience for most people. Even then, though, I think that the wisdom of those credible teachers is ultimately traceable back to some kind of experience. Even reincarnation is, reportedly, based at least in part on the Buddha's experience of all his past lives. The Buddha encouraged his followers to examine their own experience rather than trust doctrine; a healthy doubt can help speed up spiritual progress. He likened the Vedic tradition to a long line of blind men leading each other, each trusting the next as the source of knowledge about an eternal *ātman* (soul) without ever experiencing it himself. Thus one of the most important Buddhist doctrines, the denial of eternal self (*ātman*) is based in the idea that religious truth must be eventually corroborated in experience.

However, there are many forms of empiricism, and not all are radical. To explore the claim that the Buddha was a radical empiricist, we must first turn to James. James attacks rationalists like Descartes, who attempt to reach important philosophical conclusions without relying on experience. Instead, we learn everything from experience; James agrees on this principle with Locke and Hume. The problem, though, is that Hume proceeded to sneak in some metaphysical presumptions about the nature of experience *before* he sought to

analyze it. Specifically, Hume described our experience as series of discrete sense impressions and ideas. James describes this sort of empiricism:

Starting with ‘simple ideas of sensation,’ and regarding these as so many atoms, they proceed to build up the higher states of mind out of the ‘association,’ integration,’ or ‘fusion,’ as houses are built by the agglutination of bricks...it commits one beforehand to the very questionable theory that our higher states of consciousness are compounds of units; and instead of starting with what the reader directly knows, namely his total concrete states of mind, it starts with a set of supposed ‘simple ideas’ with which he has no immediate acquaintance at all, and concerning whose alleged interactions he is very much at the mercy of any plausible phrase.¹

This discreteness led Hume to acknowledge only a limited portion of our experience. He argued that when we experience one thing “causing” another, we really only experience one discrete sensation and then another in sequence. Because we never experience continuity of one moment moving into another, the continuity of the self is only an idea in the mind.

James, on the other hand, argues that these absolute distinctions between mind and sense experience, and between individual sensations, are metaphysical assumptions that are not immediately given. They are learned. Therefore, James argues that Hume’s empiricism is not radical enough. We have to embrace all of experience as the sources of learning, and when we do that, “The relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relations experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system.”² Relations, just like sensations, are part of our experience; they are things we feel. James writes, “We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of blue or a feeling of cold.”³ So Hume is correct when he argues that that we never experience a completely unchanging, unified self, but incorrect because we do experience continuity. As James argues, we experience ourselves in a stream, and the continuity of that stream is a felt part of our immediate experience. We experience the fading away of the past; we can literally feel the past influencing the present. We can take this experience apart later, but we cannot deny the original experience.

Kalupahana argues that the Buddha’s description of the mental and physical aggregates that make up the self (the *skandhas*) amounts to a form of radical empiricism. Each part of consciousness gives rise to the next, sense impressions giving rise to ideas and so on. This makes each part thoroughly dependent on those that came before it. Thus, Kalupahana explains, even though the Buddha clearly denies a “metaphysical” self (here referring to the eternal *ātman* that exists beyond our experience) we should take the explanation of the aggregates as a description of what a continuous “empirical self” is.⁴ This is further supported by the doctrine of dependent origination, which explains that each phase in a life gives rise to the next, in a repeating cycle. Kalupahana argues that the Buddha did not intend for these stages to be understood as absolutely discrete, and that the series should thus be understood as a process rather than a series of static moments.

However, it is not clear to me that the Buddha clearly took those feelings of relation—the feelings of “and” and “but” that that differentiate radical empiricism from Hume’s empiricism—into account. This is not to say that the Buddha denied them; I simply wish to point out that it is not clear. As a point of contrast, James describes our conscious life as consisting of “substantive” and “transitive parts.”⁵ He compares these to the flights and

perchings of a bird. The perching are those momentary pauses where our experience feels stable, and the flights, the transitive parts, consist of feelings of movement and continuity. James writes, “The attempt at introspective analysis in these cases is in fact like seizing a spinning top to catch its motion, or trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks.”⁶ Although they are difficult to name, they are nonetheless real. In fact, the many elements of our experience are located in this “fringe” of consciousness, which has a character that can never really be pinned down. When we start with the parts of experience, we invariably lose something of that indefinite stream. James writes,

The definite images of traditional psychology form but the very smallest part of our minds as they actually live. The traditional psychology talks like one who should say a river consists of nothing but pailsful, spoonsful, quartspotsful, barrelsful, and other moulded forms of water. Even were the pails and the pots all actually standing in the stream still between them the free water would continue to flow.⁷

This is the aspect of radical empiricism that I do not see clearly articulated (or denied) in original Buddhist doctrine. The listing of aggregates and parts of the self seems to be the very mistake that James seeks to avoid—you cannot explain the self by starting with the parts and building it up. Kalupahana further defends his claim by appealing to the interrelatedness of dispositions, noting that for the Buddha, our sense perceptions are influenced by what we are expecting to see. Our likes and dislikes, preferences, and presuppositions all color our experience. Kalupahana writes, “each of our perceptions is a mixed bag of memories, concepts, and material elements,” and this interdependence results in something like James’s description of consciousness: a “big blooming buzzing confusion.”⁸ But it seems to me that there is a leap between a list of aggregates and a doctrine of dependence, on the one hand, and a radical empiricism that says that we have a direct experience of relation. The Buddha says only that he knows dependent arising by the dependently arisen—this seems like an inductive kind of knowledge rather than the direct experience James argues for.⁹

Kalupahana also makes much of a term *viññāṇasota*, which he translates as “stream of consciousness,”¹⁰ the title of one of James’s most famous essays. Others have translated the term as “unbroken flux of human consciousness.”¹¹ It is used in the context of listing the various aspects of the self that can be discerned, in order of the development of progress. The meditator starts with the sense organs and crude matter of the body, proceeds to the skeleton and internal organs, next to *viññāṇasota*, the “unbroken consciousness” that is “established both in this world and in another world,” and finally to the enlightened consciousness that is established in “neither this world or in another.”¹²

The term *viññāṇasota* could potentially be a reference to the felt continuity as described by James, but more work needs to be done in order to demonstrate this conclusively. One problem is that this term is so rarely used within the text itself. Further, this “unbroken consciousness” is described as a stage altogether different from the others listed; this categorization seems to place an un-Jamesian distinction between knowing lower things—the sense organs—and consciousness itself. While this unbroken consciousness is “discerned,” discernment is a large category that can include not only immediately felt experience but also deduction from that experience. The term *viññāṇasota* could also be interpreted as a sort of metaphysical continuity that the Buddha elsewhere denies, or as one of three lesser states of discernment that

need to be overcome through meditative practice. I cannot conclude one way or the other here. I should just say here that further study seems needed before I take this as proof of radical empiricism.

There are other resources, though, for calling the Buddha a radical empiricist. In other well-known passages, the he discusses how we experience the “arising” and “falling away” of experience. This is some of the strongest evidence; the Buddha does seem to be describing “flights” rather than the “perchings” of mental life. But again, it is not clear that this involves radical empiricism. Even Hume noted that two events could be related in time, and that things happened and then ceased to happen. The question is whether or not those risings and fallings occur in metaphysically discrete units of time. Some later Buddhists thought they could be described in this way; they acknowledge the experience of arising and falling without committing themselves to radical empiricism.

The inference that Kalupana makes, to summarize, is that an understanding of dependent arising, in combination with list of aggregates that arise and fall away, as well as the infrequent description consciousness as “unbroken”, leads logically to radical empiricism. The Buddha, though, does not make explicitly make this inference, and so I think it is too much of a stretch to claim that the Buddha was a radical empiricist. This is not to say that the Buddha’s ideas are incompatible with radical empiricism. I do not think they are. I would even say that Kalupana is right in arguing that the logical implication of dependent arising is radical empiricism. However, I cannot place it in the Buddha, who lived before the problematic discussion of whether or not sense impressions are discrete had even arisen. I do not think that a lack of radical empiricism is necessarily a fault; there was no need to articulate a response to an objection that did not yet exist. In the western context, James could not have been a radical empiricist if there had not been another empiricism that needed to be radicalized.

Kalupana analysis is quite helpful, though, in pointing out showing that the often-made comparison of the Buddha to Hume, on the doctrine of non-self, is a mistaken one. The Buddha may not be analogous to James, but neither is he analogous to Hume. Hume is skeptical of causation, which is a central feature of the world according to Buddhist thought. So, the Buddha did not commit himself either to Hume’s empiricism or James’s radical empiricism. The Buddha only can be said to be a radical empiricist insofar as he did not commit himself to the empiricism of the Abhidharmikas; this is meaningful, but not enough to call him a radical empiricist.

II. IS THE BUDDHA A PRAGMATIST?

I do agree when Kalupana notes the pragmatic character of the Buddha’s thought. Early Buddhists are adamant that concepts and language can never get one to *nirvāṇa*; no doctrine is absolute truth. Theory is worthwhile only when it points us in the direction of salvation. In a famous discourse, the Buddha compares theory and teachings to a dangerous water snake.¹³ If it is grasped correctly, behind the head, one can extract medicine. If grasped incorrectly, you will be harmed or killed. Kalupana mentions another famous metaphor in this same discourse: the comparison theory to a raft. If one needs to cross a river, a raft is a very useful tool. But once you cross the river, you no longer need the raft. Getting too attached to any particular theory is like carrying a raft around even after you have crossed the river.

Nevertheless, the Buddha used the term “truth.” If we take these stories in conjunction, it would seem that something is only true insofar as it helps us achieve our goals. The Buddha famously treated his disciples differently, telling them each what they needed to hear based on their limited understandings. A

problem seems to arise, though, when we consider the possibility that these ideas are equally true. This clashes with our notion of truth. If truth is only what is expedient in getting them to enlightenment, though, which one of those teachings was the true one? If only one of those, what is so special about it? If all of them, why call them all truth?

Here a comparison with James is especially helpful. He was also criticized for using the word “truth” in this “crude” way, as “what works.” But he argued that there were no other options. James made a distinction between the “rationalist” and the pragmatist. While rationalists postulate truth in itself, the pragmatist realizes that only way we can get to such truth is through our own limited experience. Without appeal to experience, ideas are meaningless. James paraphrases C.S. Peirce’s principle of pragmatism:

To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effect of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as the conception has positive significance at all.¹⁴

While we desire to think that some things are true regardless of whether or not anyone knows about them, there is no appealing beyond our own experience. Even if we argue for a sort of mystical experience in which such truths are revealed, that is still a kind of experience.

This pragmatic idea of meaning, when applied to the idea of truth, is unsettling and it prompts criticism. For James, truth is what works, or what is “expedient.” He writes,

Any idea that helps us to deal, whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings, that doesn’t entangle our progress in frustrations, that fits, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality’s whole setting, will agree sufficiently to meet the requirement. It will hold true of that reality.¹⁵

Again, this seems to allow for two people to hold disparate beliefs that are somehow equally true. As James argues, we culturally saturated with the idea of truth that at first the lack of an objective framework leaves us dissatisfied. Buddhists frame this problem in terms of an unhealthy desire for certainty. In fact, throughout its history, a good portion of Buddhist thought is devoted to coming to terms with this very fact. At the end of the path we relinquish even the four noble truths. We think that objects of knowledge exist in a realistic universe not because this epistemology makes the most sense, as we tell ourselves, but because it gives us a false sense of security.

A problem arises, though, when we take all truths as equal. James argues that an individual will accept as true whatever helps to expediently achieve the outcome in which he or she is already invested. As we live and study, our goals change. In order for a belief to be accepted as true at first, though, it has to be compatible with are previously developed store of truths and habits. This may includes not only the monk who renounces worldly possessions, but also the businessman who sets out to earn as much money as possible. So, in this framework, it would seem that the four noble truths are no more or less true than the conviction that the sole goal in life is the pursuit of pleasure.

Nevertheless, the Buddhist or the pragmatist does not need to claim that all ideas held by everyone everywhere are equally true. While everyone has a working set of truths, some ideas are better than others because they work better. If the hedonist is perfectly happy with his or her own “truth,” there is nothing to which we can appeal. But we hope that, upon encountering better truths that lead to happier lives, one might be tempted to change. The Buddhist conviction is that the pursuit of pleasure will grow old, in this life or the next. Until then, there will be no converting the hedonist to Buddhism. There seems to exist some thing, some nature of the world, that makes some “truths” work better than others.

James clarifies this by differentiating the working truths we all live by from the “absolutely” true:

The ‘absolutely’ true, meaning what no farther experience will ever alter, is that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge...Meanwhile we have to live to-day by what truth we can get to-day, and be ready to-morrow to call it falsehood.¹⁶

As knowledge develops, our ideas work better and better, although James never thought we would achieve the absolute truth. The idea of the absolute truth, though, provides us with a guiding light. It may be more appropriate then to compare the Buddhist ideal with Peirce, who argued that pragmatism was only a theory of meaning—not truth—and who saved the word “truth” for that ideal. Just exactly what this truth is, though, can only be meaningful to us insofar as it influences our experience.

Subsequently, one important difference is that Buddhists see the absolute as an achievable ideal. Pragmatists do not make room for this. While James is very charitable towards religious thinking, he never allows one person’s religious experience to trump someone else’s. Buddhists have a very specific goal—the cessation of desire in order to achieve *nirvāṇa*, release from the suffering caused by desire. Once that is achieved, some Buddhist schools argue that you gain a personal experience of an absolute truth. It is worth noting, though, that the explanation of what that truth is varies quite a bit. Some schools claim that the Buddha obtains God-like omniscience. Others simply regard enlightenment as a psychological transformation that frees one from suffering; the Buddha knows all that there is to be known. The commonality between these, though, is that each describes enlightenment in terms of experience. For that reason, I think it is fair to say that the Buddha was pragmatic in the sense that he thought teachings were true only insofar as they help one towards the reduction of suffering and the attaining of enlightenment, and absolute truth was outside the realm of ordinary experience.

III. NĀGĀRJUNA AS RADICAL EMPIRICIST

Kalupahana uses this understanding of the Buddha as a radical empiricist to characterize Nāgārjuna. Many scholars have categorized Nāgārjuna as a radical innovator who not only corrected the mistakes of the Abhidharma thinkers, but also followed out the logical implications of the Buddha’s own teachings—implications that the Buddha either did not see or chose to hide because of the limitations of his disciples. In contrast, Kalupahana argues that Nāgārjuna was not trying to create brand new theories, but trying to restore the Buddha’s radical empiricism.¹⁷

Regardless of whether or not the Buddha was a radical empiricist, we must note that theorists like the Sautrāntikas added something to Buddhist

thought that created quite a bit of problems. They divided sense experience into discrete finite units (*dharmas*) that did have independent existence (*svabhāva*), introducing a Hume-like assumption that our experience is composed of discrete building blocks. The self could be reduced to descriptions of those building blocks. However, the postulation of discrete *dharmas* caused a problem in the explanation of dependent origination. The Abhidharmikas described independent things that existed momentarily and then disappeared. If moments in time are discrete, then how is it that one could ever give rise to another? This problem propelled other Buddhist schools like the Sarvāstivādins to suggest increasingly un-Buddhist alternatives, arguing that past, present, and future all exist. The debates got further and further away from the original topic.

This is when Nāgārjuna appeared on the scene. Nāgārjuna realized that all these debates stemmed from the assumption of the discreteness of units with *svabhāva* (self-being). As Kalupahana argues, Nāgārjuna's work is "an attempt to destroy the weeds that had grown around the Buddha's teachings."¹⁸ The project of his major work, *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā* (hereafter abbreviated as the *MMK*) is to show that if we take *dharmas* to be radically distinct, we would be unable to describe experience. Nāgārjuna analyzes many types of phenomena, and argues that none can be explained by appealing to the interplay of discrete entities. Take for example his examination of fire and fuel: "If fire were to be fuel, then there would be identity of agent and action. If fire were to be different from fuel, then it would exist even without the fuel."¹⁹ To explain that fuel is a cause of fire, they can be two distinct things. The conclusion is that fire can be neither completely distinct from nor completely identical with fuel, as is the case with all *dharmas*.

Because Nāgārjuna explicitly attacked the idea of discrete ideas, though, I think it is reasonable for Kalupahana to call him a radical empiricist. Since this was not clear in the Buddha's teachings, though, I think that Nāgārjuna ought to be seen as an innovator, and someone who made a massive contribution to Buddhist thought. He was defending the original doctrines, no doubt, but to do so he had to clarify new terms and engage in a novel form of argumentation.

IV. NĀGĀRJUNA AS PRAGMATIST

Historically, though, Nāgārjuna's work was taken not as expounding a thesis of how things exist as interrelated, but simply as the rejection of *all* views. He would not be a radical empiricist, then, because radical empiricism is also a view. This reading of Nāgārjuna was championed by Candrakīrti, who emphasized those aspects of Nāgārjuna that utilized the *reductio ad absurdum* method.²⁰ Nāgārjuna's purpose, some have argued, was to show how assuming any view leads automatically to some contradiction. Thus the proper position, if you can call it that, is to hold no views. Kalupahana argues convincingly, though, that Candrakīrti was more interested in putting forth his own ideas than reading Nāgārjuna correctly. Kalupahana notes that in the first two-line verse of the *MMK*, alone, for example, Candrakīrti writes 65 pages of commentary.²¹ Most scholarship on Nāgārjuna has failed to consider the text in itself.

When we examine that text, Kalupahana argues that we should see Nāgārjuna not as avoiding all views, but as putting forward a positive thesis about how emptiness and dependent origination works.²² Where Candrakīrti argues that all views lead to contradiction, Nāgārjuna does not clearly do this. His criticism of views is not exhaustive; that leaves other alternatives open. Further, I think that Nāgārjuna is much more direct than a simple *reductio ad absurdum*—he appeals to experience. If objects were so completely discrete, he argues, you could not explain our experience. But we have experience, so this theory must be wrong. This is technically a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, but

it is also just a simple appeal to experience. This would not make him a skeptic who denies all views, but an empiricist who thinks experience ought to trump theory.

This does not mean that all theory is worthless. Nāgārjuna refers to the parable of the snake as a warning to treat theory with respect—one in which, we must remember, the snake was dangerous but useful.²³ Nāgārjuna mentions two kinds of truth: Truth relating to worldly convention and truth in terms of ultimate fruit. The word fruit is telling here, hinting that ultimate truth is known only in terms of the successful cessation of suffering. That ultimate truth cannot be captured in words, but conventional truth is how we get around in the world. While they are different, they are not absolutely discrete. Conventional truth is necessary—not something to be thrown out altogether. He writes, “Without relying upon convention, the ultimate fruit is not taught.”²⁴ This does not mean that all conventional truths are equal. Conventional truth differs from conventional falsity—some theories are better than others. This understanding of conventional truth as useful but not ultimate runs parallel to James’s differentiation of working truth from absolute truth. Ultimate truth is that ideal ‘vanishing point’ towards which we strive, and only buddhas know.

V. METAPHYSICS

Before I close, I want to consider another aspect of Kalupahana’s work: his use of the term metaphysics. He argues that in Buddhism, metaphysics is impossible. As he uses the term, metaphysical theories refer to things beyond the world of experience—things that can never be verified. Some western philosophers do use the term in this way, but for many others, it is simply the area of philosophy in which we ask questions and make claims about what kinds of things exist in the world, how they exist, and what it means to exist. That includes ordinary things that we do experience. So, in the interest of promoting cross-cultural dialogue of this type, I think it is appropriate to say that the Buddhist claims of *anātman* and dependent origination are just as “metaphysical” as Vedic claims of *atman* and *Brahman*, at least in the kinds of things they talk about. To his credit, Kalupahana does distinguish it from the way western philosophers use the term.²⁵ I think, however, that it can be misleading.

Kalupahana’s reluctance to call Buddhist theory metaphysical seems to stem from two main assumptions. The first is that metaphysics requires some kind of *a priori* certainty, but this need not be the case. Many who consider themselves metaphysicians are also perfectly happy to agree that all metaphysical claims are potentially subject to doubt. Second, metaphysics is sometimes taken to be dependent on a correspondence theory of truth. That is, we cannot do metaphysics without postulating the existence of some kind of real things, things that must have *svabhāva* or intrinsic essence, from which a term or expression can get its meaning. However, many metaphysicians eschew this as well. In particular, process metaphysicians, such as Alfred North Whitehead, reject both of these claims. For that reason, I think we should use the term metaphysics in a wider sense, in order to promote cross-cultural philosophy.

VI. CONCLUSION

While I am criticizing David Kalupahana here, I do not want to give the impression that I think the comparison is pointless. In fact, I have learned quite a lot from his work. The problem is not the comparison, but the over-identification of William James with the Buddha. During our panel discussion, Professor Holder, who studied Kalupahana, pointed out that part of Kalupahana’s project was to promote the legitimacy of Buddhist thought by

grounding it in western thought. In other words, this would give western philosophers a point of entry. At the time many scholars did not (indeed, many still do not) take an Asian idea seriously until they locate a western analogue to that idea. Kalupahana's comparative work introduced and legitimized Buddhism to many thinkers.

To restate what I have learned from Kalupahana: The Buddha was not a radical empiricist, but nor was he an empiricist. Nāgārjuna is much closer to being a radical empiricist, because, as James did, he explicitly attacked the idea that experience is composed of discrete units. Both the Buddha and Nāgārjuna seem to endorse forms of pragmatism, but one in which the ideal end, which pragmatists struggle to formulate, is explicitly attainable in the ideal of enlightenment.

Professor Hayes, commenting on this set of papers, asked each of us to explain why the comparison between William James and Buddhist thought was a useful one. Why not try to just explain each thinker in his own context? I think that, as western students of Buddhism, we cannot separate ourselves out from our western context and study Buddhism completely on its own terms. We will always bring our own assumptions to the table. As someone who studied James and Hume before Buddhism, I naturally try to see where they fit in. Thus when we consider them explicitly, we can describe Buddhist thought with a more precise hand. Noting where Nāgārjuna and the Buddha find similarity with William James, and where they do not, allows us to understand each side of the comparison more clearly. The process is a messy one, but at the end we are left with a more accurate understanding.

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NOTES

¹ William James, "The Stream of Consciousness; from Psychology: Briefer Course (1892)," in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn, 169-190 (New York: Penguin, 2000), 171; hereafter cited as "Stream of Consciousness."

² William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longman, Green, and Co., 1912), 64.; hereafter cited as *Radical Empiricism*.

³ "Stream of Consciousness," 180.

⁴ David Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 72; Kalupahana uses the term "metaphysics" in a way I think is problematic, but this much is correct.

⁵ "Stream of Consciousness," 178.

⁶ "Stream of Consciousness," 179

⁷ "Stream of Consciousness," 183.

⁸ Kalupahana 1992, 72, citing William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, ed. F. Burkhardt (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 32.

⁹ Kalupahana 1992, 52-54

¹⁰ David Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 24.

¹¹ T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, ed., *Dīgha-nikāya* trans. Pali Text Society, Vols. 1-3 (London: Pali Text Society, 1890-1911), 100; hereafter cited as *Dīgha-nikāya*

¹² *Dīgha-nikāya*, 100.

¹³ Holder, John J., trans. "Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake," in *Early Buddhist Discourses*, 101-116 (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing, 2006).

¹⁴ William James, "Pragmatism (1907)," in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn, 1-132 (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 25; hereafter cited as "Pragmatism."

¹⁵ "Pragmatism," 94.

¹⁶ "Pragmatism," 98

¹⁷ David Kalupahana, trans., *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, trans. David Kalupahana (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1986);, 5; hereafter cited as *MMK*.

¹⁸ *MMK*, 5.

¹⁹ *MMK*, 197.

²⁰ *MMK*, 25.

²¹ *MMK*, 105

²² *MMK*, 101

²³ *MMK*, 335

²⁴ *MMK*, 333

²⁵ David Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976), 153-163; (Appendix I: "Metaphysics and the Buddha.")

COMMENTS

RICHARD HAYS

1. GENERAL QUESTION OF ALL PANELISTS

What exactly is one doing when looking at the Buddhist tradition through the lens of William James or any other modern Western philosopher? Is there a way that placing the label “pragmatist” on the Buddha or Nāgārjuna or Dōgen enables us to understand better what those thinkers were saying than if we did not apply the label? What kinds of possible misinterpretations might we be avoiding by correctly applying the label “radical empiricist” or “Pragmatist” to these figures from the past who lived in a world that would in many ways feel unrecognizable to us if we were suddenly to be transported there in a time machine?

I feel confident that each of today’s panelists has an answer to that question, and to some extent I can anticipate what their answers would be, but I would like to hear each of them state what they think they are doing when they offer the kinds of comparisons they have offered in their paper.

2. HOLDER’S “JAMES AND THE NEUROSCIENCE OF BUDDHIST MEDITATION”

The initial question that John Holder begins his paper with is an intriguing real-life example of how exactly the same set of experimental results not only can be but actually are interpreted in radically different ways by two camps. The experimental observation that contemplative exercises, when carried on consistently and repeatedly for a long time, are attended by apparent changes in how the brain functions is seen by a neurophysiologist as evidence that the “wiring” and “rewiring” of the brain causes changes in temperament. The Dalai Lama sees the very same experimental observation as evidence that a mental exercise can cause changes in the structure of the brain. This situation seems like an excellent example of William James’s famous observation that people have a strong conservative tendency whereby they see things from within approximately the same framework for all their lives, and that when new observations come along, people tend to interpret them from within the framework that has always worked for them. So James would have predicted that Richard Davidson would interpret the experimental results in question within his essentially physicalist framework, and the Dalai Lama would interpret those same results within the standard Buddhist framework of mind and body being genetically discrete, neither being reducible to the other. In other words, the experiments in question did not yield results that produced enough heat to make “experience boil over” for either Davidson or the Dalai Lama.

Holder, I think, is right on target when he playfully envisions James coming onto the scene and recounting his famous story about the people on a picnic arguing about whether a man going around a tree also goes around a squirrel on that tree when the squirrel always scurries to be on the opposite side of the tree from the man. If James were to happen onto the scene when Davidson

and the Dalai Lama were disagreeing about whether mental events cause physical events or so-called mental events just are physical events under a convenient description, I can imagine that James would congratulate both Davidson and the Dalai Lama for doing their respective jobs very well. After all, the job of a neurophysiologist is to gain insights into how the various components of the brain interact, and that job may very well be easier to carry out if one does not introduce rather poorly defined and immeasurable notions such as mental states, emotions, affects and so forth. The Dalai Lama, on the other hand, has a different job, which is to inspire people to realize that they can play a role in their own happiness and well-being—that they do not have to see themselves as hapless victims of an unsympathetic and uncooperative world but can take at least some measure of control over their own lives and thought processes. The Dalai Lama’s job is probably somewhat easier to carry out if he does not have to speak about mental events in a way that suggests that what we call mental states are entirely dependent on electrochemical and mechanical processes over which no one can claim to have any control.

Rather than applying the squirrel-around-the-tree story to the Donaldson-Dalai Lama conversation, Holder takes us in a rather different direction, which is to make and then defend the claim that James’s discussion of pure experience “provides the best philosophical interpretation of the neuroscientific study of Buddhist meditation.” So whereas I imagine James coming on the scene and congratulating each party for doing his job well, Holder pictures James coming on the scene and showing “that, in fact, both sides in this debate have got it fundamentally wrong.”

Now at this point we might benefit by having William James saunter into the room after taking a stroll along the Riverwalk and congratulate both Holder and me for doing our jobs very well before pointing out that we are both fundamentally wrong. Just in case that does not happen, let me anticipate a few ways that James might congratulate Holder for doing his job very well. First, I think Holder does an excellent job of explaining for the purposes of this discussion what sort of task James hoped the doctrine of pure experience would be able to do, and what sorts of blind alleys it might help us avoid going down. I find it very helpful to note that James’s pure experience “is fundamentally a phenomenological concept, a starting point for the analysis of experience, a methodology rather than a metaphysical concept.” I think this is helpful in the context of talking about early Buddhism in that it serves as a useful reminder that the Buddha as portrayed in Theravāda literature was not in the business of being an academic philosopher specializing in metaphysics but rather was offering a set of methods by which people would look at their own thought processes, study how certain patterns of thinking seem to be regularly followed by others and bring about changes in one’s habitual way of looking at things that would be followed by a generally happier outlook. Even that task, however, was only a step on the way to what the character known as the Buddha in Theravādin literature keeps saying is the ultimate goal, which is to stop generating a craving for continued existence that fuels the engine of rebirth. To take anything said by almost any Buddhist (with the possible exception of Stephen Batchelor) out of this essentially soteriological framework is to run the serious risk of distorting its meaning. I think Holder has done a fine job of helping to remind all of us of that risk, and I think his invocation of James is a good way of reinforcing that reminder.

3. JOHN’S “DAVID KALUPAHANA ON WILLIAM JAMES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY BUDDHISM”

Because Joseph John’s paper, like Holder’s, deals with early Buddhism, let me turn next to it. The lens through which John looks at early

Buddhism, and then Nāgārjuna, is William James as understood by David Kalupahana. Perhaps more accurately we could say that John is looking at the Buddha as understood by Kalupahana through the lens of William James as understood by Kalupahana. As John says in his opening sentence, “David Kalupahana argues that an understanding of William James can help to understand the development of early Buddhism.” John offers us a critical look at that claim by Kalupahana. As I understand Kalupahana’s argument—and I stand to be corrected by Joseph John and other Kalupahanologists—the claim is that the Buddha eschewed metaphysical claims in favor of pragmatic attitudes, where a metaphysical claim is a claim about something that has not been or cannot be experienced. Nāgārjuna also eschewed metaphysical claims and was therefore in line with the Buddha. The Sarvāstivādins and Sautrāntikas did make metaphysical claims and in so doing distorted the teachings of the Buddha. In showing the pitfalls of Sarvāstivādin and Sautrāntika metaphysical thinking, Nāgārjuna restored the teachings of the Buddha to their pristine Theravādin condition. Something along those lines is what it seems to me Kalupahana was arguing, although in a more elegant way than my overly brief summary suggests. Incidentally, in a longer version of John’s paper, he does an excellent job of problematizing Kalupahana’s rather narrow understanding of what metaphysics is. He cut that section out in the version of the paper he gave today, but I do wish to commend him for dealing with that clearly. It is a matter than might be pursued in the Q&A.

John states that “Kalupahana is undoubtedly correct that the Buddha was an empiricist.” It is not a good idea to say “undoubtedly” in my presence, since it invariably causes me to be doubting. Now it is true that the Buddha invited people to trust their own experiences rather than believing things simply because they were spoken by people who were skilled in speculation or people who were what we might call charismatic. But in the very same sutta, which in modern discussions has come to be called the Kalāma Sutta, the Buddha goes on to say that when one studies one’s own experience one should remember what kinds of things are approved by the wise. All things considered, the so-called Kalāma Sutta is not so much an invitation to be an empiricist as it was an invitation to eschew what we might call sophistry in favor of genuine wisdom—and to follow the guidance of truly wise people in the search for genuine wisdom. The advice to the Kalāmas, of course, leaves unanswered the non-trivial question of how it is that one goes about deciding who the truly wise are and how one tells a genuine sage from a convincing charlatan.

While I am not as convinced as John seems to be that the Buddha of Theravādin literature should be called an empiricist, I think he does an excellent job of showing that even if the Buddha was an empiricist, he was not necessarily a radical empiricist in the sense that James talks about radical empiricism. In particular, I think John hits the nail squarely on the head when he writes: “This is the aspect of radical empiricism that I do not see clearly articulated (or denied) in original Buddhist doctrine. The listing of aggregates and parts of the self seems to be the very fallacy that James seeks to avoid: you cannot explain the self by looking at the parts and building it up” and when he goes on to say a bit further “there is a leap between a list of aggregates and a doctrine of dependence, on the one hand, and a radical empiricism that says that we have a direct experience of relation.”

Later in his paper, John rightly observes that the Buddha, unlike Hume, was not skeptical of causation. If anything, that is a dramatic understatement. The Buddha is reported to have said that whoever sees dependent origination sees the Buddha. Dependent origination is the very backbone of Buddhist doctrine; it is said to be the main content of his liberative awakening experience. It is what he taught in virtually everything he reportedly said. What is not clear, however, is whether the Buddha would say that causal relations are given as

primitive and irreducible items of experience, or whether a notion of causal connection is a matter of inference. The logical structure of the general formulation of the doctrine of dependent origination is exactly the same as the formal structure of a well-formed inference. One observes that X occurs with Y. One observes that Y does not occur in the absence of X. One concludes that a way to eliminate Y would be to eliminate X. A shorthand way of way all this is that one knows that X is a cause of Y. But does one see this as a radically empirical James would insist, or does one infer the causal relation it or even construct the fiction of a causal relation as an empirical Hume might insist? I do not think this question has an obvious answer. Moreover, I am not entirely sure this question even needs an answer. That is to say that I am not sure that answering the question one way would lead to living one's life much differently than if one answered it the other way.

John's analysis of Nāgārjuna is interesting in itself, although I remain unconvinced that comparing either the Theravādin portrayal of the Buddha or anyone's portrayal of the ever-mysterious Nāgārjuna with James will shed much light on the evolution of Buddhist doctrine. For a purely historical point of view, I think the actual history is impossible to determine on the basis of available evidence, and I see no non-dogmatic way of speculating on what the relation of Nāgārjuna's thinking was to the thinking of the historical Buddha (if there was such a person). That notwithstanding, I would call attention to a famous James quotation that John cites in his paper:

The definite images of traditional psychology form but the very smallest part of our minds as they actually live. The traditional psychology talks like one who should say a river consists of nothing but pailsful, spoonsful, quartspotsful, barrelsful, and other moulded forms of water. Even were the pails and the pots all actually standing in the stream still between them the free water would continue to flow.

I can think of no other passage in the writings of William James that better illustrates the insight that seems to me to lie at the heart of everything Nāgārjuna writes in the MMK. When we take fluid processes and analysis them into a set of putatively related parts, we deprive them of their fluidity. If we think of a river as having currents that a kayaker must take seriously but that cannot be delimited or bounded, we experience a river as a river. If we try to determine where one current ends and another begins and try to separate the currents from the river itself, we end up with no currents and no river. Similarly, if we analyse a continuous flowing process such as an ant walking across a table into an agent doing an action in a locus and try to treat agent, action and locus as entities that somehow exist outside or independently of the process, then we make the process impossible. All the reasoning in the world won't put the process back together again. Good Buddhist practice, we might say, is to make use of the concepts of agents, actions, instruments, purposes and loci as heuristics by which one develops a keener sensitivity to processes, but to be ever mindful of the hazards of forgetting that these concepts are never more than heuristic.

4. ISHIDA'S "THE METAPHYSICS OF PLURALISTIC MANIFESTATIONS IN JAMES AND EAST ASIAN BUDDHISM"

Let me turn now from James's river to Dōgen's mountain and to Masato Ishida's stimulating discussion of Furong Daokai's saying "The green mountains are always walking; a stone woman give birth to a child at night." As Ishida points out in his elegant treatment of how Dōgen understands this saying, the point is that everything in the universe is flowing. As Ishida puts the matter toward the beginning of his paper, the heart of Zen is the fluidity of life—"this is almost here Zen begins and ends." Rivers flow in ways that are obvious to

human beings. We can, as Bob Dylan reminded us, “sit down on this bank of sand and watch the river flow.” It is much less easy to catch a mountain in the act of flowing, unless we happen to be on hand to witness a volcano or an earthquake or a rockslide. And yet, if we make use of seismological equipment or other instruments that supplement the data we can get from our sense faculties, mountains are constantly changing. Sayings such as “The green mountains are always walking; a stone woman give birth to a child at night” are invitations to consider that what is obvious to the senses and obvious to a mind that always thinks within the framework of its habitual ways of understanding is not the full extent of reality, and that there are always ways of expanding one’s horizons. Ishida’s paper does a wonderful job of showing how that spirit of Zen is congruent with the spirit of openness and appreciation of fluidity that abound in the many writings of William James.

That congruence having been acknowledged, I would like to raise the question of whether James’s recommendation that we “equally abjure absolute monism and absolute pluralism” is grounded in the same considerations as a Dōgen’s shying away from seeing the world of phenomena as one or many. Ishida’s take on Dōgen is that the Chan and Zen tradition holds that buddha-nature “does not reside in things like an essence. Buddha nature cannot be counted, measure, let alone objectified. The question Many or One? is, therefore, itself a misguided question.”

First, I would like to point out that in the wider Buddhist literature it is not only Buddha-nature that resists being described as one or many. In the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, which was one of the most influential sources of Chan, one finds that everything resists being so characterized. Everything we experience, says this sutra, is like a phantom, a magical illusion, a city in the clouds, a rabbit’s antlers or a barren woman’s son. Predicates can only be pinned onto existing subjects, but if every apparent subject is purely a fiction delivered up by a deluded mind, then there are no things on which to pin such predicates as “one”, “many”, “large”, “small”, “same” or “different”. The question of Many or One? is ill-formed because of a massive failure of there to be bare particulars to cloth in predicates. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* offers little to defend this view; rather, it offers up an incessant flow of poetic imagery apparently meant to help the reader get the idea that the mind is not a passive receptacle into which data about an extramental reality pours in and gets interpreted, but rather the mind itself actively creates the things of which it is aware. The Huayan, Tiantai and Chan traditions ran with these images (which occur in a good many Mahāyāna sutras and not merely the *Laṅkāvatāra*) in one way, often by heaping poetry upon poetry, and various Indian philosophers ran with those images in a somewhat different way, often by heaping arguments upon poetry. What is not clear to me is that William James was abjuring absolute monism or absolute pluralism in the same way that Buddhists were desisting from predicating unity or plurality of things. James seems to have been keenly and persistently aware that there are a good many ways of seeing things and that there is a certain kind of legitimacy in all these many ways of seeing. There is a sense in which they are all legitimate for James, and none can be seen as legitimate to the exclusion of all the others. The claims of some of the Buddhists we have been discussing, on the other hand, appears to have been that under analysis there turns out to be no legitimacy to any act of predication.

CONCLUDING REMARK

I would like to thank all three of tonight’s authors—Holder, John and Ishida—for their insightful and thought-provoking papers. Each of them was

admirably clear, and I hope my comments have introduced enough confusion into the topic to help provoke some discussion.

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William James and the Art of Popular Statement. By Paul Stob. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013. 370 pp. \$42.95

Paul Stob's *William James and the Art of Popular Statement* is an exceptionally insightful addition to the ever-growing list of Jamesian studies. Drawing from a 1903 letter to F.C.S. Schiller in which James writes, "I believe popular statement to be the highest form of art," this diligent and penetrating book explores the role of popular statement in James's life and work. Stob argues that "[t]he art of popular statement was far more than an aside in James's career. It was integral to the way he carried himself, to his interactions with colleagues, to his choice of venues for speaking and publishing, to the discursive style he adopted, to the conversations he influenced, and to the intellectual bonds he fostered with his fellow citizens" (xv). *William James and the Art of Popular Statement* masterfully blends historical and contemporary secondary literature (rhetorical, sociological, and philosophical) in order to present a careful and contextualized reading of James's correspondence, lecture notes, and published articles and texts. The result is a novel rhetorical and sociological analysis of how and why James's civic-minded philosophy captivated the American public. In short, Stob presents James as an "intellectual populist," a "reconciler of epistemological differences," and ultimately an "intellectual champion of the people" who confronted the "aristocrats of the mind" and argued that "intellectual power should be returned to the people" (xvi).

The book begins by situating James within the transitioning intellectual cultures of eloquence and professionalism of his day, documenting the shift from civic to specialized (scholastic and professional) modes of inquiry, production, and transmission of knowledge (introduction and chapter one). Stob then proceeds to argue that James's evolving rhetorical practices of popular statement serves as "a kind of corrective" (xvi) which attempts to mediate the specialists' monopolization of knowledge by reconfiguring intellectual discourse within a more pluralistic and egalitarian framework (chapters two through six). The work concludes by highlighting the rhetorical elements of James's art of popular statement: "oral style," "topical breadth," "professional ethos," "intellectual collaboration," "intellectual participation," and "personal empowerment." Stob's central claim throughout is that "James's commitment to popular statement ultimately led him to a different kind of thought, a different epistemology, a view of science, religion, and philosophy that revolved around ordinary people and their experiences and perceptions" (xv-xvi). For James "[t]he art of popular statement was a threat to specialization, expertise, and the in-group language of academic inquiry. It was, at the same time, a way of creating a vibrant public sphere by inviting people to participate in civil society." (xxvii-xxviii).

Chapter One locates James within the changing intellectual culture of the nineteenth century. Caught between the decline of a "culture of eloquence" and the rise of a "culture of professionalism," James grew up amidst "competing systems of knowledge, which carried (and still carry) very different consequences for intellectual accessibility, participation, power relationships, and discourse" (xvii). In his youth James witnessed (and later studied) the civic-minded rhetorical prowess of his father Henry James, Sr., and family friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, both of whom were "giants of the culture of eloquence, modeling for him an artistic, oratorical, visionary, and civically minded form of engagement" (3). Equally important, however, were the figures of Benjamin Peirce (Charles Sanders's father), Asa Gray, Jeffries Wyman, Louis Agassiz, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., all of whom James studied with at Harvard. Under the influence of the latter group, James had access to "resources for surviving—and, indeed, thriving—in an era of acute scientism" (23) and its ethos of

expertise. Stob characterizes the gulf between eloquence and professionalism as a source of “productive tension” from which James actively confronted the challenges of modern intellectual discourse with the hope of “keep[ing] alive the spirit of inquiry that defined his youth” (xxv).

Chapter Two draws from James’s fifty anonymous book reviews published between 1865 and 1878, and challenges the standard scholarly view of them as “largely insignificant when compared to his later work” (xxv). In Stob’s deft hands, these early reviews become “sites of intellectual invention that allowed James to develop many of the ideas, arguments, and strategies of his subsequent work” (xxv). Through a careful analysis of selective themes, Stob depicts James as an “intellectual mediator” (51) and “reconciler of epistemological differences” (67) that straddled the growing linguistic, professional, and epistemic divide between specialists (academic and professional) and the general public. Experimenting with various rhetorical strategies for addressing the burgeoning tensions between modern science and public culture, the young James learned the importance of rhetorical style as a means of determining the character of the relationships between writer, readers and ideas (94). These early efforts of mediation and style were brought to a head in James’s 1878 lectures at John Hopkins University and the Lowell Institute: in them, James emerged from anonymity and put into practice the strategies he developed as a book reviewer to work through the escalating social tensions between professional inquiry and public culture.

Chapter Three, which focuses on the various permutations of “Talks to Teachers on Psychology,” argues that James’s opinions regarding public lectures are best revealed by his practices rather than the fickle commentary expressed in his personal correspondence. Working the lecture circuit of the 1890s, James delivered his “Talks” twelve times. Stob suggests that the lecture series/text is best viewed as a distinct work whereby James collaborated with specific groups of teachers across the country, honing his rhetorical skills to such a point that he transformed his popular statement into a “practical art” (71). Mindful of the growing rift between science and society, James’s “Talks” went beyond the mere application of psychology to pedagogy; these carefully crafted lectures “worked with [teachers] on bettering themselves, their professional predicament, and their place in a democratic society” (xxvi).

Chapter Four, “Speaking up for Spirits,” depicts the social and epistemic aspects of James’s ongoing engagement with psychical research. Focusing on James’s public defense of psychical research in the 1890’s, Stob notes that the rhetorical and epistemic arguments James developed with the hope of legitimizing psychical research can be understood as the “turning point in James’s development as a public intellectual” (xxvi). Stob’s analysis suggests that James’s failure to legitimize psychical research aided his overall trajectory as a public intellectual. Negatively, this failure “resulted in the popular-professional divide that shaped the remainder of his career” (xxvi). More positively, however, Stob maintains that this professional failure provided him with the necessary rhetorical tools to develop a “populist epistemology.”

Chapter Five focuses on the maturing quality of James’s rhetorical abilities, showing the evolution of his public intellectual personae and the transition from engaging intellectual that lectured to the public to an active collaborator working with the public. Stob reads “The Varieties of Religious Experience” as a “carefully constructed public performance” (xxvii) that functioned as “an alternative to the exclusionary tendencies of Science, Philosophy, and Theology” (152). He argues that “for the purposes of the Gifford lecture, [James] deployed a populist discourse to question the world of academic professionalism so prominent at the time and to affirm the widely

participatory, eminently pluralistic intellectual culture he envisioned” (153). In response to professionalism’s “unnecessary antagonism in the pursuit of knowledge,” James’s “populist” epistemology matured insofar as it went beyond his former work by building his thought *around* the beliefs, feelings, and perceptions of ordinary people (xxvii).

The book’s last chapter attends to James’s most important contribution to creating a new intellectual culture. Stob’s analysis centers on the “oratorical birth” of *Pragmatism* and “the difference that James’s commitment to public lecturing made in the tone, texture, appeals, and character of the [democratic] philosophy” (192). He claims that “[p]ragmatism became America’s intellectual creed in large part because of the rhetorical choices James made on the lecture circuit from 1898 to 1907” (192). Through a careful sociological analysis of the text’s oral and rhetorical character, Stob persuasively argues that “*Pragmatism* was the culmination of James’s intellectual populism and his pursuit of popular statement because it not only commanded the nation’s attention but fostered an intellectual community in which ordinary people could gather together, craft the ideas that would serve their lives, and overthrow the philosophical aristocracy of the day” (193).

William James and the Art of Popular Statement has many notable qualities, and space permits this reviewer to mention only three of its contributions to Jamesian studies. First, Stob’s work adds to a growing body of literature (e.g. Joshua I. Miller, Kenneth Ferguson, Francesca Bordogna, and Colin Koopman, to name but a few) that moves away from viewing James as a “rugged individualist...blind to the social problems of his time” (xxviii) and takes seriously the social and political dimensions of James’s work. As Stob writes, “to insist that [James’s] emphasis on the individual came at the expense of communal and social concerns misses the point of his work on the lecture circuit and in popular periodicals. James entered the forums and venues he did to build *a new type of community* and to push society into new directions...The art of the popular statement was about creating a *community* of individuals” (236, emphases added). Second, alongside the work of Eugene Taylor, G. William Barnard, Ann Taves, and Francesca Bordogna, Stob’s rhetorical and sociological treatment of James’s work in psychical research provides a fresh reading of an important yet often neglected aspect of James’s thinking. One can only hope that this endeavor to sincerely engage with James’s psychical research constitutes a new trend in the scholastic treatment of James’s pluralistic thinking. And lastly, Stob’s book enriches our historical and factual understanding of James. For example, thanks to recently published material, Stob has verified that James did in fact present a version of “Talks to Teachers” at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences in 1894; previous scholarship has been uncertain as to the actuality of the lecture.

At the same time, however, *William James and the Art of Popular Statement* has its limits, a fact that Stob regularly acknowledges in his text. Rather than offer a synoptic view, it focuses on “turning points in his development and in his relationship with intellectual culture,” and these snapshots, Stob argues, are “enough to reveal the contours and substance of his eloquent vision” (xxv-xxiv). Given the text’s relatively short length, it is reasonable that Stob restricts his focus to particular lectures and texts that best illustrate James’s rhetorical and social concerns, yet he nonetheless leaves the reader desiring more comprehensive commentary: sustained treatments of the Hibbert lectures (published as *A Pluralistic Universe*), the Ingersoll lecture on Human Immortality, and the “Talks to Students” could richly add to the text, for example, yet they are all absent.

Most problematic for this reviewer is the absence of a rhetorical and sociological reading of James's radical empiricism. Stob's justification for the absence of "The Will to Believe" lectures is as follows: "while it would certainly be possible to place an analysis of the text in the overall development of James's art, the fact was that James accomplished more by delivering *The Varieties of Religious Experience*" (xxiv-xxv). Two points need to be considered here, one which concerns form and the other addresses content. In regard to content, James's preface to *The Will to Believe* provides us with an entryway into the epistemic and public dimensions of radical empiricism—despite the fact that he does not explicitly express these sentiments. In this manner, the lectures and addresses that comprise *The Will to Believe* significantly differ in content from *Varieties* insofar as they serve as "illustrations of the radical empiricist attitude" and that James's concern focused on the utility of these ideas in the market-place (*The Will to Believe* [1979], preface 7-8). Thus, while it might not be as "accomplished" as *Varieties*, it certainly provides solid ground for future exploration. With respect to form, the lectures and addresses that comprise James's *Will to Believe* are largely directed toward a collegiate student body. Along these lines, an analysis of the lectures/text could provide Stob with an added public dimension insofar as we see how James engaged the younger generation of scholars and professionals. Accordingly, an engagement with *Will to Believe* would raise a variety of questions: what impact did James's rhetorical or oratory techniques have on the younger generation?; how did these public engagements shape the trajectory of James's popular statement?; how does his early radical empiricism fit into the picture?, etc.

These slight concerns notwithstanding, *William James and the Art of Popular Statement* is a masterful presentation of James's engagement with public audiences. It comes highly recommended and is appropriate for a wide range of audiences. The text will easily enrich courses in communication studies, philosophy, and sociology: graduate students will appreciate Stob's solid scholarship and undergraduates will be grateful for his elegant prose. *William James and the Art of Popular Statement* is a significant contribution to the field of Jamesian studies and a most welcomed edition to any personal library.

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William James in Focus: Willing to Believe. By William J. Gavin
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. 111 pp. \$25.00 (pbk).

To pick up William James for the first time can be daunting. James asks much of his reader—not because he is unclear, but because his philosophy itself remains wild and untamed. His is a philosophy of experience, one that can never be made systematic. As a student, I recall this invitation to a radical sort of freedom to be at once invigorating and confusing: it is no small task to take pluralism seriously. William J. Gavin makes this task a bit easier in his *William James in Focus: Willing to Believe*. Gavin argues that much of the difficulty of reading James comes from the difficulty of drawing out a “latent” image of a wild universe in which we are risk-taking participants from the “manifest” words on James’s page. This latent message, as Gavin’s title suggests, is that we must will our beliefs and stake out our own path without assurances and live heroically. Gavin’s call for a heroic or strenuous life, and a heroic or strenuous reading of James’s corpus, is a continual theme of his work.

Gavin’s prologue takes on what he calls James’s most “infamous” claim: that we must will ourselves to believe. Instead of a traditional philosophical theory promising certainty, James demands that we rely on our “passional nature” for our most vital and important beliefs. Gavin reminds us that this is “not a onetime affair but must be continually reaffirmed in life” (xi). Gavin’s distinction between latent and manifest images requires the reader to draw out a rich but unconventional philosophy wherein any actor must become passionately involved in his or her own unfolding universe. Gavin writes:

[James’s] texts turn out to be “directive” rather than “descriptive” in nature, pointing beyond themselves back into experience. His texts are partial and unfinished interpretations rather than neutral observations. The latent image they present hold that no complete description is possible and, further, even if offered, would be rejected. (xii)

Writing an introduction to a philosophy which requires one to find such a latent image is no small undertaking. Gavin’s work meets this challenge and takes up the James’s various “manifest images,” showing the latent qualities to which readers should attend.

In the first chapter, “James’s Life: Will to Believe as Affirmation,” the importance of James’s personal decision to will belief in his own freedom and power during a dark personal crisis is emphasized. In a few pages, Gavin sums up the significance of James’s own willing to believe that life is meaningful and freedom exists as the catalyst to bring James out of his depression. This biographic chapter dove-tails well with the second, “‘The Will to Believe’: Policing versus Free-Roaming,” wherein Gavin discusses James’s early essay “The Sentiment of Rationality” and the later “The Will to Believe.” Gavin emphasizes the common theme of these two essays as clear demonstrations of James’s “latent” message that we must act in a world without guarantee. Thus, in “The Sentiment of Rationality,” James holds that we cannot “logically ‘solve’ which conceptualization of the universe is correct” and thus, because we *must* act, we must choose a philosophy that allows us to act (11). Similarly, the “Will to Believe” is a defense of an impassioned choosing of our beliefs. Here the theme of the book is clearest: whatever affirmations we choose to live are “to be viewed as a stance or posture toward the universe, an admission and affirmation that the universe is ‘wild, game flavored as a hawk’s wing’” (15). This

admission and affirmation is latent, but very real, Jamesian insight from which Gavin continues his interpretation.

In the third chapter, “*The Principles of Psychology: Consciousness as a Constitutive Stream*,” Gavin discusses the latent and manifest images in the *Principles of Psychology*. Gavin emphasizes that the “functional dualism” James adopts in this work for the specific domain of psychology breaks down and thus demonstrates the latent image of James’s thought in a rather explicit matter—that the stream of consciousness breaks its banks and floods into “metaphysics itself” (17). In emphasizing the stream of consciousness, Gavin argues that we discover the richness of our relationship with the universe. Consciousness is

much more than substantive parts, existing atomistically and awaiting the unifying idea of an outside agent. Rather are the relating transitions in consciousness to be taken into account; these are of both a disjunctive and conjunctive nature. Furthermore, consciousness is temporal, and the situational aspect of all thoughts, the fact that we can never have the same thought twice, can no longer be ignored. (24)

Thus James, on Gavin’s reading, pushes himself beyond the functional dualism where our understanding of the world can be philosophically neutral and pushes us past the manifest image into the latent wild world.

Chapter four, “*The Varieties of Religious Experience: Mysticism as a Vague ‘Exemplar,’*” picks up on this wildness and emphasizes the central importance of this work to understanding James. For Gavin, in arguing that “religious experience is pervasive,” James avoids any dogmatic statements that “would have been diametrically opposed to his unfinished universe” (27). Gavin sees the *Varieties* as an important work exactly because James points to the latent image—the unsayable—in this work. James uses “language to disclose, not describe, the inability of language to catch the ineffable” (34). The mystic is an exemplar because she can get into experience, into the wildness of the universe. Religious experience, especially that of mysticism, is important because, as Gavin will argue, it shows the depth and import of “pure experience,” a topic Gavin takes up later in the work (35).

In chapter five, “*Pragmatism: Corridor as ‘Latent’ and ‘The Will to Believe,’*” Gavin investigates how the manifest image of *Pragmatism* as a book on methodology guides the reader to a latent image emphasizing pluralism. James’s lectures give his take on how the pragmatist inquires and how this philosophy dissolves many traditional philosophical problems. Gavin takes pains to demonstrate, perhaps importantly for the Jamesian novice, that James’s use of terms like “workability” and “cash-value” are not mere concessions to mere expedience but that pragmatism is instead a legitimate method to achieve truth given the “plastic” nature of experience (39). The latent content of *Pragmatism* is James’s rich and well-known metaphor of the corridor in the pragmatic hotel—where various “rooms” house experiments and research in various field yet have the common connection of access through a shared methodology. Each room is separate with a different view, but the corridor is shared (41). James, Gavin argues, uses metaphors as means to give an interpretation “rather than a description”; thus, the corridor metaphor is one that *interprets* a pluralistic universe (43). The latent image to be drawn from pragmatism is exactly the metaphysical pluralism that underlies the methodology presented. The work shows us how the philosopher might put together a “thick” picture of the universe, “rather than allowing any single abstract account to achieve final closure” (ibid.). Gavin thus argues that

Pragmatism is not ontologically neutral; its latent image requires examination of metaphysics, the topic of his sixth chapter, “Metaphysics: Radical Empiricism and Pure Experience.” In both *Essays in Radical Empiricism* and *A Pluralistic Universe*, Gavin explains, James confronts language’s limitations in describing a universe where “reality is broader than the know-able” (53). James must then “espouse a relational metaphysics” in which “each moment of experience is related” (ibid.). Thus, Gavin concludes that James points us (but cannot by definition describe) a process metaphysics that

cannot be completely grasped by language, concepts, or thought itself. Each passing moment is more complex than we have realized, more vague and multidimensional than our concepts can pick up. Not only the absolute but also every pulse of experience possesses this common complexity, this vagueness. (ibid.)

Gavin argues that James must remain dedicated to the use of language as a means of communication to point to the latent image of his philosophy, even though language always remains problematic. For this reason, James cannot make the linguistic turn of later philosophy and remains dedicated to the ultimate basis of meaning in pure experience.

Chapters seven and eight, “‘Pure’ Versus ‘Impure’ Experience: Examples of Pure Experience” and “Challenges to ‘The Will to Believe,’” delve into James’s attempts to describe pure experience and the criticisms that might be made of a Jamesian account. Gavin gives examples from both the *Principles* and *Varieties* to show how language remains problematic but necessary for James. Language must point to something else, but can never say that something else which remains in pure experience. The potential criticisms of James in the eighth chapter rehearse the criticisms of Jamesian thought from the “right” of A. J. Ayer and Positivists who reject the “ineffability” of pure experience and the “left” represented by Dostoevsky and Kafka, who challenge James’s characterization of the self. James’s individualism results in neither the “shameful self left at the end of *The Trial* nor the spiteful self flailing away at the end of *Notes from the Underground*” because the Jamesian self remains strong in his or her will to believe (74). This will to believe allows for the possibility of activity and development even in a world of ambiguity and potential disaster. Gavin dismisses these criticisms, showing how James’s philosophy does not fail because of these problems. Rather, Gavin’s criticisms are given, it would seem, as rehearsals of what might be said about James in order to situate his work within a broader philosophic discussion: it is clear that Gavin does not endorse these critiques. For all of its strengths, it is in this chapter, I believe, that the book could benefit from more thoroughgoing challenges to James from other classical pragmatists, especially Peirce. Doing so would only strengthen the value of this book to those who wish to see how James is situated within the philosophic discourse. Those new to pragmatism would benefit from a discussion of how James’s pragmatism diverged and took on questions of a personal dimension that Peirce largely avoided. Furthermore, a criticism of James from within the pragmatist camp would demonstrate not only the diversity of pragmatists, but also where James might be moving away from the pragmatism Peirce suggests to use as a manner to guide scientific investigation. Furthermore, challenges from language-centered approaches in pragmatism, such as those forwarded by the neopragmatists, are also criticisms which deserve rehearsal. While there are some comments distinguishing James from Dewey, a discussion would doubtlessly be helpful for the novice who is

working to navigate the nuances of the many thinkers in pragmatism. Contemporary pragmatists such as Richard Rorty have little time for discussions of pure experience. Again, a criticism of James posited from this perspective would likely allow the reader to better situate criticism and understanding of James.

In the conclusion, “Pragmatism, Death, and ‘The Will to Believe,’” Gavin takes up more latent content of *Pragmatism* and discusses how James comports himself with the problem of death. It is in with the comportment to the real risk of a wild universe where we must participate and also die where James’s claim that we must, at times strenuously and heroically, will ourselves to have believes becomes most palpable. This comes full circle with the beginning of the work where James’s own biography provides a great deal of the motivation for his philosophy. Thus, in the discussion of how we come to deal with the reality of death, Gavin demonstrates that what is latent in James is a philosophy of how we go about living with the vagueness and complexity of pure experience. It is a strenuous life that James demands, one that requires that we act out our belief that there is meaning.

This volume’s audience is explicitly those who are new to James, yet those who wish to return to his work and even those with some expertise will nonetheless find it edifying. Given the digestibility of the book, which is short and divided into very quick reads, one could easily use it as a reference while reading the important works of James with students. However, “brief” ought not fool one into thinking this work is without intellectual demands. Quite the contrary: it is no small feat to survey so much of James’s writings in such a coherent and evocative manner. This praiseworthy volume presents a viewpoint on James that brings the novice reader into conversation and reminds the more experienced reader of the big-picture of James, of the zest and novelty of his vision. Understanding James requires some commitment and work—and this volume is a good and workable guide. Gavin is clear that “James’s texts are meant as a ‘spur’ for us, in the same way that R. W. Emerson said that books ‘are for nothing but to inspire.’ Successful texts point beyond themselves” (91). If measured by this goal, the volume is a success as it spurs us to consider James’s work as demanding a new interpretation for each reader. Gavin, in his discussion of James, retains the zest and freshness of a philosopher who rewards the reader with her own view of a thick pluralistic universe.

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Revisiting Pragmatism: William James in the New Millennium. Eds. Susanne Rohr and Miriam Strube. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, 2012. 233 pgs. \$50.00.

In the introduction to *Revisiting Pragmatism: William James in the New Millennium*, editors Susanne Rohr and Miriam Strube indicate that this volume is not meant to present a careful exegesis of James's work, nor a unified reinterpretation of James's brand of pragmatism, but is rather meant to suggest how aspects of James's work may be used to solve current philosophical or political issues. This focus acts as both this volume's greatest strength and greatest weakness. It is its strength in that a wide variety of topics are covered from a variety of viewpoints, with many papers coming from Europeans and from women. It is its weakness in that the volume does not have a particular audience, and very few will find the entire volume appealing. Even so, this does mean that everyone should be able to find something worthwhile amongst the fifteen papers written by fourteen authors, organized thematically into four sections.

The first section contains three traditional papers on the theme of "Foundations". The first paper is a thought-provoking reflection by Joseph Margolis on the promise that pragmatism offers to philosophy. Margolis argues that Jamesian pragmatism carries on the same line of argumentation that Hegel brought against Kant, but with naturalist and Darwinist aspects that were unavailable to Hegel. Pragmatism offers a naturalistic alternative to idealist absolutism with a method that while introspective manages to surpass mere phenomenology. The other two papers examine how James's introspective method influenced his later viewpoints. Joan Richardson examines its influence on James's views on religion, while Herwig Friedl examines its influence on James's ontology. Heinz Ickstadt notes in his commentaries on these papers that while they are interesting and provocative, both papers take aspects of James's work out of context, resulting in a number of misinterpretations. For example, in "Pragmatism...*She Widens the Field of Search for God*", Richardson claims that James held a strong position regarding the effect that language has on our behaviour and beliefs based on James's recognition that words play a central role in magic. As Ickstadt rightly points out, the very passage that Richardson uses to support her position explicitly casts doubt on the position that Richardson describes James as holding.

The second section deals with the relationship between truth, conduct, and understanding within James's thought with the goal of making James's pragmatism more palatable to European philosophers, who traditionally have rejected it on the basis of its account of truth. Helmut Pape argues in favor of James's insistence that small, situational truths are considered more important to an individual's mental development than the capital-T Truths that other philosophical systems chase due to the force that they have in everyday life. Kai-Michael Hingst argues that James's view of the human condition implies that it is up to individuals to decide what makes their life worth living on the basis of what has concrete import to their life rather than relying on abstract conceptual frameworks. This viewpoint allows James to advocate a melioristic

view of ethics that avoids both ethical nihilism and moralistic dogmatism. Lastly, Ulf Schulenberg points to the worldliness of James's pragmatism and James's role as a public philosopher as a possible explanation for the pragmatic turn in recent philosophy.

Most of the papers in the first half of this volume exhibit the same problem in varying degrees. While many authors emphasize the importance of context to James's thought, they fail to adequately take into account James's context in their interpretations of James's thought. For example, Pape discusses the psychodynamic effects of situational truths in the mental lives of individuals but does not refer to James's discussions of this subject in any of James's more psychologically-oriented texts. This is a shame, as his paper would have been greatly benefitted from even a brief examination how James's psychology led to the formation of his ethical system. There does not seem to be a particular reason why this is so evident in the first half of the volume, although Margolis does hint at a possible cause; namely, that Continental European philosophy has traditionally been hostile to naturalism and the incorporation of science into philosophy. It is possible that the authors have omitted this aspect of James's thought in order to make it more palatable to European philosophers, but in so doing have deprived James's thought of its strongest support. This is not to say that what the authors present is incorrect; rather, it is incomplete. The second half of the book fares much stronger than the first in this regard. In many cases, the authors took great pains in ensuring that James's context was acknowledged and deviations from his paradigm were accounted for. As a result, the papers found in the second half of the volume are generally much stronger than those in the first.

In the third section, four authors apply James's pragmatism to cultural politics. This section contains some of the most compelling and thought-provoking papers in this volume. The strongest paper in this chapter is Miriam Strube's "Negating Domination: Pragmatism, Pluralism, Power". In this essay, Strube considers the role that James's philosophy has played in the development of several African-American thinkers. Starting with Alain Locke, Strube follows the Jamesian thread through W. E. B. Du Bois, Cornel West, and up to Paula Moya. Strube argues that by incorporating the considerations of interest, power, and domination into their philosophical systems, these African-American thinkers have overcome the overly epistemological and individualistic pragmatism of James's own pragmatism by articulating a version of James's pragmatism that is equipped to deal with cultural and social issues. Patricia Rae's and George Schiller's respective papers are also interesting. Rae argues that a version of James's procedure of verification can be found in Europe through the work of George Orwell. Schiller argues that many of the tenets of Native American religion fits with what James describes in the *Varieties*, and thus could serve as a framework under which non-Native Americans may be able to understand Native American religious practices without engaging in cultural appropriation.

The final section of the volume showcases four ways in which James's philosophy may help to solve current debates in politics, ethics and the sciences. Trygve Throntveit examines the use of the term "pragmatist" in American

politics and argues that Obama ought to be considered an imperfect member of the pragmatist fold. While intriguing, it would be interesting to know if Throntveit still maintains his position in light of events in American politics which have occurred since the time of writing. Andrew Flescher's and Robert Main's respective papers follow a similar model: they each take a somewhat obscure aspect of James's philosophy and show how it would resolve a specific social issue. Flescher shows how overbeliefs could be beneficial in medical settings, wherein a patient's hope of recovery often affects her chance of recovery. Main argues that James's pragmatism overcomes the traditional natural/artificial dichotomy, leading to a "pragmatic naturalism" that serves as a middle ground between preservation- and use-based valuations of the world. In the final paper of the volume, Michael Anacker presents a compelling reinterpretation of the role of concepts in our scientific practices. Anacker argues that a pragmatist account of science would view underdetermination of scientific concepts as a result of successful research and a crucial step in the scientific process rather than being a shortcoming of that same process. This recognition gives a pragmatic account of science an advantage over competing theories.

Taken as a whole, *Revisiting Pragmatism* accomplishes exactly what its editors says that it will accomplish: it presents a diverse collection of authors examining James from their viewpoint in order to address a particular problem in their own realm of expertise. Although not without its faults, the volume is worthwhile and interesting. That said, it is difficult to recommend it for any particular use or audience. Since the volume is explicitly not meant to provide a unified view of James or a systematic interpretation of his work, one may come away confused if one isn't already at least familiar with James's work. A mix of Continental European and Anglo-American methodologies may limit the number of papers that one may find useful. If one can overlook the first half of the volume's tendency to remove James from his historical context, one is treated to some compelling and useful papers in the second half.

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Rethinking Pragmatism: From William James to Contemporary Philosophy. By Robert Schwartz. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. 184 pgs. \$96.95.

Upon reading the title of *Rethinking Pragmatism: From William James to Contemporary Philosophy*, I hoped Robert Schwartz would reconstruct the vitality of classical pragmatism within the context of contemporary philosophy, yet feared his book might be another "eclipse narrative" that laments the decline of pragmatism after the death of John Dewey.¹ I was pleased to discover that Schwartz avoided the latter by creating an insightful work of modest scope. While he references the work of early pragmatists like C.S. Peirce and John Dewey, Schwartz focuses on the *Pragmatism* lectures of William James, and provides a masterful set of commentaries that relate each lecture to James's contemporaries, his other works, and to contemporary debates. Unfortunately, he does so by apologizing for the novelty that makes classical pragmatism and specifically James's *Pragmatism* lectures engaging.

Schwartz orients his project with a quick history of the decline of pragmatism in the twentieth century due to the insistence of the early pragmatists on "the close examination of the 'context of discovery' as well as the 'context of justification'" with regard to scientific inquiry and to their stylistic concern that "excessive logical rigor was replacing serious critical analysis of the very ideas their critics were attempting to formalize" (3). Schwartz hopes that "when the Pragmatists' views are put in modern dress their ideas can be better explained and evaluated" and "when so understood... many of their positions do not look as peculiar and problematic as they are frequently taken to be" (3). Schwartz sees the scholarship of Willard V.O. Quine and Nelson Goodman as the most useful for translating the insights of the classical pragmatists to the contemporary scene.

Rather than rethinking pragmatism as a philosophical movement, Schwartz narrows his focus to James's 1907 *Pragmatism* lectures. He selects James as the "spokesperson" for the movement because of his function as an "intellectual pivot looking back to Peirce and pointing ahead to Dewey," but also because James's particular accounts of belief, religion, truth, inquiry, and pluralism are taken as the canonical statement of these positions," are the "most criticized," and because James is a "most engaging writer and a real joy to read" (4). He admits the difficulty of selecting a single authoritative text by James because his views "changed over time" and "are not always clear and consistent" (4). Therefore, despite their broad target audience, Schwartz chooses James's 1907 lectures as the best medium for rethinking pragmatism since they were composed late in James's career and were intended to be a "summary statement of his core pragmatic convictions and positions" (4). This focus allows Schwartz to rethink pragmatism by way of a lecture by lecture commentary, and he hopes this approach will illuminate not only James's relevance to contemporary issues, but provide further detail and explanation of James's ideas and orient them within the context of turn of the century philosophy and science alike (5). He also cautions that James's pragmatic philosophy can be understood separate from both James's general thesis of radical empiricism and his "deepest and constant concerns" in the *Pragmatism* lectures "to find an account of our place in the natural world that would engage his own spiritual sentiments and needs" (6).

Schwartz follows this introduction with masterful commentaries on each of James's lectures by providing concise but insightful historical contextualizations, cross-references to James's other works, and translations of James's arguments into contemporary terminology. He lays the groundwork for

the project in Chapter 1, "The Place of Values in Inquiry," by explicating and defending James's contention that "temperament is a legitimate and non-eliminable influence on the evaluation of hypothesis" (23). In Chapter 2, "The Pragmatic Maxim and Pragmatic Instrumentalism," Schwartz excels at comparing and contrasting James's articulation of pragmatism with the versions developed by Peirce and Dewey, enabling him to tease out the themes experimentalism, fallibilism, holism, and pluralism that unite classical pragmatists without minimizing their respective variations and divergences. Schwartz engages James's metaphysical concerns in Chapter 3, "Substance and Other Metaphysical Claims," and explains how James applies the pragmatic maxim to religious claims. He tentatively defines James's concept of faith as a "religious hypothesis" requiring openness to the idea that "future inquiry may undercut their faith" (57). Schwartz also admits to finding James's "handling of all these 'meaning of life' questions problematic in places" and submits a promissory note to discuss these concerns more fully in Chapter 8 (62). Chapter 4 contains a concise explanation of why pragmatists following James avoid metaphysical dualisms as unproductive and Chapter 5 places this evasion of dualism within the context of contemporary disputes about realism.

I found the most valuable chapter of *Rethinking Pragmatism* to be Chapter 6, "Pragmatic Semantics and Pragmatic Truth," in which Schwartz rebuts the most common criticisms of James's pragmatic theory of truth and its implications. Against Alfred Tarski's criterion of adequacy, the claim that truth is merely "what works," that pragmatism cannot account for historical truths, or that truth is "mutable," etc. (92-99), Schwartz contends that "pragmatic semantics seeks to capture the diachronic or ambulatory nature of meaning and reference"; thus, while "assuming fixity when describing the assumptions that underlie the functions of a language for a time being" is permissible, pragmatists recognize that "this immutability assumption is a transitory idealization that has no metaphysical or epistemic prescriptive force on past or future users." As such, common misunderstandings of pragmatism stem from "semantic realists' failure to take into account the ambulatory nature of language" (107). Schwartz effectively dramatizes the distinctions between realist and pragmatic semantics by concluding the chapter through reference to several dialogues from *The Meaning of Truth* where James presents these common criticisms and their pragmatic rebuttals (110-115). Even if these dialogues strike any reader sympathetic to pragmatism like déjà vu, by allowing James to address his critics, old and new, Schwartz reveals the epistemic humility and fallibilism of pragmatic semantics behind the more familiar caricatures. In similar fashion, Schwartz uses Chapter 7, "Worldmaking," to relate pragmatic semantics to the work of late twentieth century pragmatists like Quine and Goodman, as well as to Thomas Kuhn's work on scientific revolutions.

Although Schwartz attempts to honor James's personal sentiments in Chapter 8, "Belief, Hope, and Conjecture," through a careful examination of faith as a religious hypothesis, the results are mixed. Undoubtedly, his careful and thorough references to "The Sentiment of Rationality" and "The Will to Believe" clarify James's pluralistic philosophy of religion and rebut the common criticism that James endorses "willing our beliefs to suit our subjective preferences independent of the empirical evidence" as "incompatible with a pragmatic account of belief and the fixation of belief" (142). However, Schwartz's clarification of James's positions through contrast with Dewey, while helpful, reveals the remarkable absence of reference to Josiah Royce not only from this chapter, but also from nearly the entire book.² The *Pragmatism* lectures reference Royce more often than either Dewey or Peirce, and Royce was James's most frequent professional as well as personal interlocutor on

religious topics, specifically on the question of the One and the Many. Schwartz clearly feels that the sooner we disaggregate these concerns from the larger implications of James's work the better, yet some attention to how James was summarizing his personal conversations with Royce would help explain why he "focused on the absolute and last things" even though he "urged others not to focus on the Absolute and last truths" (155).

Most readers will probably respect Schwartz's desire to keep James's professional insights separate from his personal sentiments, but I myself marvel at how well James blurs the distinction between professional and personal inquiry, especially in the *Pragmatism* lectures. While I cringe when James shamelessly appeals to his own confirmation bias declaring in his opening lecture that "You want a system that will combine both things, the scientific loyalty to facts and the willingness to take account of them... but also the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity," I cheer when James asserts that we desire a "philosophy that will not only exercise [our] powers of intellectual abstraction, but that will make some positive connexion with this actual world of finite human lives."³ This second concern remains a legitimate need to many of philosophical temperament and one that contemporary professional philosophy often fails to acknowledge. Thus, when Schwartz concludes that James's "constant mingling of these concerns with his straightforward philosophical theses has colored the reading of his work in ways that have hindered and continue to hinder appreciation of his forward-looking ideas on inquiry, truth, and language" (154) his claims are descriptively true, but they apologize for the novelty of these lectures that continues to make them engaging. He correctly describes James's religious and metaphysical concerns (like the One and the Many) as "cosmic," rather than "local," especially in comparisons to the immediate concerns that vexed social pragmatists like Dewey and Jane Addams, yet these concerns were very local to James's experience as well. Perhaps James's depression could have been ameliorated through less preoccupation with these ultimate concerns and his lectures could have been clearer without including his idiosyncratic experiences, but those concerns and experiences motivated *his* inquiry and formed the values *he* used to judge the pragmatic worth of ideas.

In conclusion, *Rethinking Pragmatism* provides a succinct commentary on the *Pragmatism* lectures that helps the reader to connect to the broader work of William James, dispels unfair caricatures of pragmatism, highlights James's contributions to the emergence of Classical Pragmatism, and establishes his continuing relevance. Schwartz sufficiently warrants the need to separate of James's professional and personal concerns for greater clarity, but he does so at the expense of the idiosyncrasies that make the *Pragmatism* lectures engaging. Perhaps rather than re-thinking *Pragmatism* for clarity we should re-read *Pragmatism* for inspiration, however, allowing it to remain one of "those dried human heads" that fascinates as it informs, despite its oddity and imperfections, rather than transforming his lectures into a "crystal globe" prepared for exhibition by polishing unsightly blemishes.⁴

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NOTES

¹ Robert B. Talisse and Scott F. Aiken, eds. *The Pragmatism Reader: From Peirce Through the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 5-9.

² Schwartz references Royce only once and in passing on page 5.

³ William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 20.

⁴ William James, "A World of Pure Experience." *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method*. Vol. 1, No. 20 (*The Journal of Philosophy*, Inc: Sep. 29th, 1904) 535.