



WILLIAM JAMES STUDIES

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NEW INSIGHTS INTO WILLIAM JAMES'S PERSONAL CRISIS IN THE EARLY 1870s: PART I. ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER AND THE ORIGIN & NATURE OF THE CRISIS

DAVID E. LEARY

ABSTRACT

*This article, the first in a two-part sequence, will cast new light on the well-known "crisis of William James" by presenting evidence regarding the previously unrecognized role of Arthur Schopenhauer's thought in shaping and intensifying the way in which James experienced this crisis. It will also relate Schopenhauer's influence to prior issues that had concerned James, and in an appendix it will provide an overview of other areas in which Schopenhauer seems to have influenced James, both during and after his personal crisis. The second article in this sequence will present evidence in support of the strong possibility that John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* played a previously unrecognized role in inspiring James's means of defense against the frightening hallucination and panic fear that characterized his crisis. It will also present an argument regarding the probable influence of his defensive measures upon his subsequent views on the nature and importance of attention and will in human life. Along the way, it will identify James's specific, newly discovered copy of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the specific, newly discovered Bible through which he developed familiarity with the scriptural phrases that helped him get through his ordeal.*

THE STATUS QUO AND RECENT DISCOVERIES

Paul J. Croce (2009) has provided a very thorough review of the extensive literature on "the crisis of William James" as portrayed in James's classic passage on "the worst kind of melancholy" in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985).¹ Croce's carefully articulated contention is that this passage presents a "mannered memory" offered by James as a "teachable moment" within the unfolding argument of his chapter on "The Sick Soul." This is an entirely reasonable conclusion, especially given James's own comments on stylized memory-reports:

The accounts we give to others of our experiences...we almost always make both more simple and more interesting than the truth. We quote what we should have said or done, rather than what we really said or did; and in the first telling we may be fully aware of the distinction. But ere long the fiction expels the reality from memory and reigns in its stead alone. This is one great source of the fallibility of testimony meant to be quite honest. Especially where the marvellous is concerned, the story takes a tilt that way, and the memory follows the story. (James, 1890/1981, Vol. 1, p. 353)

Over the past two decades, scientific research on false testimony has confirmed James's remarkable insight regarding the "narrative demands" placed upon producers of verbal reports. As Jerome Bruner (2002) has illustrated with examples drawn from law, literature, and life, a considerable amount of "smoothing" and "filling" takes place as actual events, with all their edges and

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gaps, are converted into more continuous and coherent accounts. This is now a well-established phenomenon (see, e.g., Loftus et al., 2013, and Schacter, 1995).

Even so, there is good reason – and compelling evidence – to think, as Croce does, that James’s report is generally truthful if not, in fact, the Holy Grail of Truth Entire.² And that could be the end of it, except that there is more to say about James’s crisis and its resolution, prompted in part by the recent discovery of books that were in James’s hands just before, and manifestly on his mind during, his hallucinatory encounter with the greenish-skinned, idiotic youth whose image prompted James’s panic fear that “*That shape am I...if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him*” (James, 1902/1985, p. 134).

Although absolute proof is too much to expect, I believe that a very compelling story can be told (in this article) about how Arthur Schopenhauer’s works shaped and intensified the way that James experienced his frightful vision and, furthermore, that the story can be extended (as it will be in Part II of this two-part sequence) to show how a work of John Bunyan’s – and more particularly, James’s recently discovered personal copy of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678-1684/1869) – could have provided a model that James followed in his time of “quivering fear” and “horrible dread” (James, 1902/1985, p. 134). In telling the first part of this story I will connect the issues raised by Schopenhauer’s works to a larger set of issues that had concerned James for more than a decade, and (in the next installment) I will show how Bunyan’s model of defense against the adversary – or more precisely, the model provided by Christian, Bunyan’s pilgrim – very possibly helped James get through his moment of crisis and thus served as the kernel that he nurtured into his later accounts of attention and will, which were so central to his *Principles of Psychology* (1890/1981) and so important to his mature philosophical views. I will also identify the specific, newly discovered Bible (*The Holy Bible*, 1856) that prepared James to follow Christian’s example.

DISCOVERIES REGARDING JAMES’S READING OF SCHOPENHAUER

That James read here and there in Arthur Schopenhauer’s works has always been known. Though he didn’t write much about this reading, James referred to Schopenhauer from time to time in his letters, lectures, manuscripts, and published works. Yet, probably because these references were typically brief, rarely involved sustained analysis, and almost always conveyed a reaction *against* Schopenhauer – or more precisely, against an idea, approach, or tone for which James used Schopenhauer as a mere representative – and also because James, in later years, expressed disdain for Schopenhauer and his philosophy, no one has ever made much of James’s relation to Schopenhauer or his thought. In fact, even Ralph Barton Perry, who went further than anyone else (so far as I know), devoted only four out of 1,612 pages in his classic *Thought and Character of William James* (1935) to James and Schopenhauer, mostly to quote a long letter from 1883 that clarified what the more mature James *didn’t like* about Schopenhauer and his thought (Vol. 1, pp. 721-724).³

Perry did note in passing, however, that James “credited Schopenhauer with being the first among philosophers to speak ‘the concrete truth about the ills of life’” (p. 721). That comment bears directly upon the important attraction that Schopenhauer exercised over James, which in turn signals the critical debate that James was waging within himself, throughout the 1860s and early 1870s, regarding the nature of the world, its evils, and the possibility that those evils could be ameliorated through willful efforts on his part and that of others. As this article will show, Schopenhauer played a previously unrecognized role in this inner debate, up to and beyond James’s personal crisis.

Before surveying some information that has recently come to light, a review of facts mentioned by Perry (1935) will help to situate the significance of this new information. First, in 1858, a 16-year-old James brandished a copy of “a volume of Schopenhauer” and read “amusing specimens of his delightful pessimism” to his Newport, R.I. friends. Ten years later, in 1868, James bought his own copy of Schopenhauer’s major work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (3d ed., 1859). Subsequently, in the early 1870s, he made notebook entries on empiricism and idealism, echoed later in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890/1981), that suggest he had been reading Schopenhauer’s *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde* (3d ed., 1864). And in 1873 and 1875 respectively, he wrote another notebook entry and a book review that dismissed the kind of “pessimism” for which Schopenhauer was widely known. Finally, in 1877, he was reading *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* as he worked on “The Sentiment of Rationality,” a seminal publication that included several references to Schopenhauer when it appeared in 1879 (James, 1879/1978c). The only then-known fact not mentioned by Perry, at least as regards the period that concerns us, is that James cited Schopenhauer in his diary as one of the authors he read in 1869 and 1870.⁴

So it isn’t that nothing has been known about James’s various contacts with Schopenhauer during his formative years; it’s just that little has been made of those contacts, perhaps because (in addition to the reasons given above) James was reading so many authors on so many topics during those years (especially since late 1868, when he purchased Schopenhauer’s *magnum opus*), despite his continuing physical and psychological problems.

What has prompted another look at James’s relation to Schopenhauer are some facts I discovered while going through the library charging ledgers for both the Harvard College Library and the Boston Athenaeum: James checked out Schopenhauer’s *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1851) and Wilhelm Gwinner’s *Schopenhauer aus persönlichem Umgange dargestellt* (1862) from the Harvard College Library on January 31, 1867; he took out Gwinner’s book again from the same library on December 1, 1869; he withdrew Schopenhauer’s book again, though this time from the Boston Athenaeum, on December 22, 1869; he checked out Schopenhauer’s *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik* (1841) from the Harvard College Library on January 13, 1870; and finally he took out another book by Schopenhauer, probably *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde* (3d ed., 1864), but possibly *Parerga und Paralipomena* or *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik* (the ledger simply indicates Schopenhauer, not the individual volume) from the Harvard College Library on March 7, 1870. Meanwhile he was also reading his own personal copy of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.⁵

Clearly, more was going on between James and Schopenhauer than has been realized by scholars in the past, though there are mitigating circumstances for this oversight: not only the obscure and unfrequented location of the library charging records, but more significantly the silence of James himself regarding his reading of Schopenhauer during this period – a silence that is all the more intriguing since he was typically open and even eager to discuss what he was reading, both in his own letters and in conversations with others, which sometimes led to second-hand reports in *their* letters. And besides the silence in his letters and those of others, there is silence in James’s diary, notebooks, and other documents. True, some pages and other materials from this period have been destroyed, but those that remain contain nothing about James’s *now apparent* extensive reading of Schopenhauer.

It seems reasonable to conjecture that James kept his reading of Schopenhauer to himself because he didn’t want to explain or defend this reading to members of his family or to friends who were concerned about his emotional and intellectual state of mind. (Schopenhauer would not have been

on anyone's list of recommended reading for a depressed, sometimes suicidal young man. As noted in the second installment of this two-part sequence, James tried to shield his mother, in particular, from awareness of his disturbed state of mind – unsuccessfully of course.) But whatever the reason for James's silence, we shall see clear evidence of the impact of his encounter with Schopenhauer when we revisit the report of his personal crisis that he published in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985). That evidence is there for all to see, once the doors of perception are opened. As James himself wrote several decades later, "the only things which we commonly see are those which we preperceive, and the only things which we preperceive are those which have been labeled for us" (James, 1890/1981, Vol. 1, p. 420, italics deleted). Although the signs of Schopenhauer's thought are clearly embedded in James's report, no one has yet labeled their provenance or identified their significance. Before saying more about this, however, I need to say a few words about James's personal crisis.

A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF JAMES'S PERSONAL CRISIS

No one is certain about the exact time that James suffered the frightful apparition and fear reported in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, though the strong consensus, as Croce (2009) has indicated, is sometime in 1870 or thereabouts, most probably in the winter of 1870, but possibly a bit later. In fact, it could well have been associated with that "great dorsal collapse" that James dated "around the 10th or 12th" of January, 1870, especially since this physical collapse was accompanied, he said, by "a moral one" that left him questioning what he called "the moral business" (James, 1868-1873, entry for February 1, 1870).⁶ For although a full accounting of James's personal crisis would involve extended discussions of his ongoing poor health, frequent depression, occasional suicidal impulses, prolonged career indecision, the declining health and then death of his beloved cousin Minny Temple, and other issues, the core of his crisis – as reported explicitly in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* – was a very specific fear: not a fear of continuing depression, or indecisiveness about his career, or the potential or actual loss of a loved one, or anything else other than the fear that if fate so determined – if the impersonal laws of physical and physiological causation just happened to work out that way – he would go insane just as pitifully and unavoidably as the idiotic youth of his frightful vision.⁷

What grabbed James by the throat and shook him to his innermost being was thus a consequence of a more fundamental fear that "we are nature through and through" and, hence, if his time to go insane were to come, there would be absolutely nothing he could do about it. So, while insanity was the immediate object of his fear during his moment of crisis, it was the more general possibility of *being at the complete, passive mercy of causal forces* that lent such shattering force to his experience, making him panic like a non-swimmer in a sinking life raft in the middle of an ocean. His raft until then had been buoyed, if barely, by a desperate patchwork of hopes regarding "the moral business" mentioned above, held together by a cluster of ideas related to a deep longing to believe in free will and a passionate desire to make a difference in the world, both through opposing the evils he perceived and through his collaborative fellowship with others.⁸

James had struggled with these hopes and associated fears as well as with his too-tentative belief in free will for a good many years, but a death spiral of concerns and apprehensions seems to have come to a head in January, 1870. Even after February 1, when he guessed that he had "about touched bottom," he

continued to struggle until, understandably, he seems to have hit a new bottom when he learned, a day after the fact, that Minny Temple had died on March 8. In any case, James's response to his cousin's death, exacerbated by the intimate communications the two had shared in the months before her death, led to the often cited turning-point of April 29, 1870, when James was moved by his reading of Charles Renouvier's second *Essai de critique générale* (1859) to choose to believe in free will: As he famously wrote in his diary, "My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will" (James, 1868-1873). Although this significant moment plays a pivotal role in all of his biographies, it is clear that James wasn't able to follow his intentions as consistently as he had hoped; his willful conviction about free will wavered over the next few years. Even though he moved forward (and upward) in general, the road he trod was rough and uneven.⁹ So, whether or not the incident reported in *Varieties* took place at some point between mid-January and late April, 1870, as seems highly probable (and all the more so in light of what follows in this article), James continued to struggle, most commentators agree, until he reached higher ground and stayed there for the most part, following his marriage to Alice Howe Gibbens on July 10, 1878. By that time he had established himself at Harvard, delivered important lecture series in Baltimore and Boston, and begun writing the first articles that would lead, over a long twelve years, to the publication of his *Principles of Psychology* (1890/1981).

Now it is time to tell the story that emerges from my recent discoveries about the extent and timing of James's reading of Schopenhauer.

JAMES'S CRISIS IN LIGHT OF HIS READING OF SCHOPENHAUER

Here are some selected portions of the classic account that James gave of his personal crisis in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

Whilst in this state of *philosophic pessimism* and general depression of spirits about my prospects...suddenly there fell upon me...*a horrible fear of my own existence*. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient...with greenish skin, entirely idiotic....This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. *That shape am I, I felt, potentially*. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. *There was* such a horror of him, and such *a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him*, that...I became a mass of quivering fear. After this *the universe was changed for me altogether*. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before, and that I have never felt since. *It was like a revelation*; and...*the experience has made me sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others* ever since. (James, 1902/1985, pp. 134-135, none of the bold print and only the italics for "*That shape am I*" are in the original)

The instantly striking thing in this account is that James identifies his preceding state not simply as one of "pessimism" but as one of "*philosophic pessimism*," which is in itself a clear reference to Schopenhauer, whose thought was commonly discussed under this banner. Then comes the jarring "horrible fear of my own existence." Why fear one's own existence? Did James fear what it means to be human – his being subject to the human condition? Or did his fear

perhaps involve a concern for his own existence, at least as he would like to conceive it? The key to interpreting this vaguely articulated fear revolves around the central thought in James's entire report: "*That shape am I*, I felt, potentially." James's fear was that *he* could be the same as *him* – that his "discrepancy" from the idiotic, epileptic patient was "merely momentary," a contingent matter of "fate." And this devastating thought changed not just his perception of himself but his perception of the entire universe. It was "like a revelation," like the kind of life-changing realizations that Tolstoy, Bunyan, and others had, as James had been discussing just prior to his self-report in *Varieties*. And among the fruits of his horrific experience, James said, was a newfound "sympathy" – literally, a feeling at one – with others.

The central key or fulcrum in James's report, as already noted, was his fear that "*That shape am I...potentially*," and this statement – even more than his general reference to "philosophic pessimism" – brings us to Schopenhauer's very specific influence upon the form and intensity of James's frightful experience. For the critical thrust of Schopenhauer's thought – the contention around which his works revolve – is that the *principium individuationis* (the principle of individuation) is false and that individuality is, therefore, an illusion. Or, stated in the terminology Schopenhauer borrowed from ancient Indian thought, the experience of individuality and the associated belief in the indeterminacy of individual will are chimeras resulting from seeing one's self and the world through "the veil of Maya," which is to say, from seeing them as they are represented in the dream-like phenomenal world of mere appearances. True enlightenment – and true freedom – come from ripping that veil asunder and ridding ourselves of the illusions (or more precisely, the delusions) resulting from unexamined human experience. We must get beyond self-encapsulated "egotism" by realizing the wisdom in the *Mahavakya* (the Grand Word or Pronouncement) of the Chandogya Upanishad, "*Tat twam asi*." Schopenhauer never tired of repeating this Sanskrit phrase along with its German translation as "*Dies bist du*" which equates to the English "*This art thou*." In this simple formulation of the fundamental doctrine of Hinduism, shared by some forms of Buddhism and adopted by Schopenhauer as a succinct and accurate expression of the conclusion – and moral foundation – of his own systematic thought, "*This*" stands for Ultimate Reality, Brahman, or, in Schopenhauer's conceptualization, Will, and "*thou*" stands for each and every living creature in the universe. Thus, each and every living creature is understood to be a representation of the very same underlying nature, and their mutual identification with that singular nature renders each identical to every other. Any sense of individuality is simply a trick of phenomenal experience – an "illusion" – on this side of "the veil of Maya."¹⁰

Here is the crucial point: This defining statement – "*Tat twam asi*" or "*This art thou*" – captures precisely what James suddenly felt and expressed in only slightly different words: "*That shape am I*," at least potentially. And all the "dread" and "insecurity" that he felt during his revelatory experience was apparently – from his own description – the result of his being overwhelmed by the thought that *this could be true*, that only contingent considerations had created and preserved his phenomenal sense of "discrepancy" from others: a sense that was crucial for "the moral business" (involving free will, individual effort, and personal contributions) that meant so much to him.

Thus, as indicated, the internal evidence within James's report, by itself, provides *prima facie* reason to accept a Schopenhauerian interpretation of James's personal crisis, but additional weight as well as suggestive evidence regarding the dating of James's personal crisis can be gained through an examination of some of his diary entries between 1870 and 1873 (in James,

1868-1873). As already mentioned, James's entry for February 1, 1870 – the one in which he noted that he had “about touched bottom” – raised the issue of “the moral business.” He had come to perceive, he wrote, “that I must face the choice with open eyes: shall I frankly throw the moral business overboard, as one unsuited to my innate aptitude, or shall I follow it, and it alone, making everything else merely stuff for it? – I will give the latter alternative a fair trial. Who knows but the moral interest may become developed.” Clearly, he was having trouble convincing himself that he could be successful in cultivating what he called his “moral interest,” which ultimately concerned (he said) getting “my moral life to become active,” so that – as he had previously put it – “I might make my *nick*, however small a one in the raw stuff the race has got to shape” (James, 1868/1995b, p. 250). But as relevant as this entry may be for understanding James's general frame of mind, it also reveals that what he was questioning was his *individual* ability to follow through on something that *he* chose to do; in short, he was not (yet) questioning his individuality or even, at the moment, the *potential* efficacy of his will.

But in his next diary entry on March 22, 1870, written two weeks after Minny Temple's death, a very significant shift has taken place. In this heart-wrenching entry, addressed to Minny, James wrote:

By that big part of me that's in the tomb with you, may I realize and believe in the immediacy of death! May I feel that every torment suffered here passes and is as a breath of wind – every pleasure too. Acts & examples stay. Time is long. One human life is an instant....Minny, your death makes me feel the nothingness of all our egotistic fury. The inevitable release is sure; wherefore take our turn kindly whatever it contain. Ascend to some sort of partnership with fate, & since tragedy is at the heart of us, go to meet it, work it to our ends, instead of dodging it all our days, and being run down by it at last. Use your death (or your life, it's all one meaning) *tat twam asi*. (James, 1868-1873)

Note that James started this entry by expressing his identification with Minny.¹¹ A big part of him is in the tomb with her. Their individuality – their seeming difference – even his being alive and her being dead – is no longer relevant. They are one, and all petty egotism, at least for the moment, has come to nothing. We need to submit to fate, he says, recognizing the tragedy of human life and accepting that death and life are ultimately the same. All of this – the very wording as well as the sentiments expressed – smacks loudly of Schopenhauer, but the ultimate corroboration of the Schopenhauerian connection is the “*tat twam asi*” that concludes this diary entry. It provides a clear and evident link between Schopenhauer's thought, this diary entry, and James's later account of his personal crisis in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.¹²

A little over a month later, on April 30, in the diary entry that reports James's decision to follow Renouvier's lead and believe in free will (an entry that thus underscores that he had been *doubting* the existence of free will in a way that he hadn't admitted on February 1), James makes the telling comment that he sees no reason why the belief in free will, which after all was a belief in the efficacy of his own individuality, “need be the definition of an illusion.” In fact, he wrote, “I will assume for the present – until next year – that it is no illusion.” These hedged assertions (that belief in one's ability to act on one's own initiative *need not* be an illusion, and that one can at least provisionally *assume* that it is not) seem clearly to allude to Schopenhauer's argument that belief in individuality and in the indeterminacy of human will is not just wrong,

but is an “illusion” created by the veil (or dream) of Maya. In addition, James’s vow in this entry to “abstain from the mere speculation & contemplative *Grübeleien* [musings] in which my nature takes most delight, and voluntarily [to] cultivate the feeling of moral freedom, *by reading books favorable to it*, as well as by acting” (italics added), is entirely consistent with the contention that James was now *reacting against* the kinds of reflection *and reading* that seem to have precipitated his moment of crisis. ***This suggests that James’s personal crisis, with its apparent Schopenhauer-inspired fears, had already taken place, and that James was now attempting to move beyond it*** by implementing a twofold strategy of (1) believing and acting as if he were in control of his life and (2) avoiding the kinds of ideas and written materials that could cast doubt upon this working premise.¹³

Eventually, James noted in the same entry, he might “return to metaphysic study & skepticism without danger to my powers of action,” but for now, he pledged to avoid such study and skepticism – and by implication, to avoid Schopenhauer. Then, expanding upon his earlier statement, James proclaimed that he would go “a step further” than simply believing in his own individual will; he would “believe in my individual reality and creative power,” precisely the things that Schopenhauer would have prompted him to doubt. (In fact, it is only in the context of Schopenhauer’s thought that it makes sense for James to add this affirmation of “individual reality and creative power” to his already stated affirmation of the efficacy of his will.) Yet even here James offered a qualification: “My belief to be sure *can’t* be optimistic – but I will posit life, (the real, the good) in the self governing *resistance* of the ego to the world.” With this final proposition, James had completed his turn-around: Instead of envisioning the universe pressing down and threatening to absorb him against his will and against any other power at his disposal, as he had, so frighteningly, during his personal crisis, he now took his stand by asserting the reality of his ego and positing that its “self governance” consisted in the ability to push back and resist the way of the world. However tentatively, he was back into “the moral business.”

It is possible that James went on in his diary to comment more explicitly about his rejection of Schopenhauer’s thought, but this is precisely the point at which he (or someone else) ripped some pages out of his diary, including the lower half of the page from which I have been quoting. That truncated entry now ends with a line that has been made out to read “Life shall be built doing & suffering & creating....”

Three years passed before James made another extant diary entry. It is a short entry, written on February 10, 1873, that reported his decision “to stick to biology as a profession” even though he would continue to regard philosophy as his “vocation.” Just over a month later, on March 18, James’s father wrote to his brother Henry that “Willy” was (finally!) going along “swimmingly” and that he, William, had reported that “my mind [is] so cleared up and restored to sanity. It is the difference between death and life.” Death and life were no longer the same! One reason for his recovery, William said, was the positive reading he was doing (the kind of reading he had vowed to do back on April 30, 1870), especially works by Renouvier and Wordsworth. But the primary reason that William gave, his father wrote, was “his having given up the notion that all mental disorder required to have a physical basis,” which was a point that Schopenhauer (along with others) had argued and that James had specifically feared during his moment of crisis (letter quoted in Perry, 1935, Vol. 1, pp. 339-340).¹⁴

That James hadn't entirely escaped Schopenhauer, despite his apparent improvement, was manifest on April 10, 1873, in the second diary entry that he wrote after that three-year gap:

Philosophical activity as a *business* is not normal for most men, and not for me....I fear the constant sense of instability generated by this attitude [i.e., the critical and skeptical attitude appropriate to philosophical inquiry] wd. be more than the voluntary faith I can keep going is sufficient to neutralize – and that the dream-conception, 'Maya,' the abyss of horrors, would 'spite of everything grasp my imagination and imperil my reason.

This passage harkens back to James's encounter with Schopenhauer and the concept of "Maya," which apparently *still* posed a threat to his imagination and sanity. For a budding naturalist and empiricist, the specter that phenomenal experience, including the experience of individual differences, might be illusory was understandably disturbing. Clearly, James had not yet fully exorcised the earlier impact of Schopenhauer.

Two years later, in October 1875, James again looked back on his personal crisis, this time in a more distanced and objective way. He did so in a review of "German Pessimism," which provides virtually conclusive support for the argument I have been making about the significance of Schopenhauer's thought in shaping and intensifying his crisis. In this review, **after admitting that Schopenhauer was "assuredly one of the greatest of writers," James cautioned that "when he [Schopenhauer] morbidly reiterates the mystic Sanskrit motto, *Tat twam asi* – This [maniac or cripple] art thou – as the truth of truths, he will of course exert a spell over persons in the unwholesome sentimental moulting-time of youth"** (James 1875/1987b, p. 312, bold print added). Take special note that the bracketed "maniac or cripple" was inserted into the middle of James's translation of *Tat twam asi* ("This art thou") by *James himself*; it is not a later or editorial emendation. **Read this quotation again!** I don't know how much closer we could ever hope to come (short of an out-and-out admission by James) to proving that in his own "unwholesome sentimental moulting-time" he had fallen under Schopenhauer's spell, thus allowing his memory of an idiotic ("maniacal") and epileptic ("crippled") patient to enter into "a species of combination," as he put it in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, with the fears prompted by Schopenhauer's denial of the reality of individual differences, thus leading to the horrific thought – "*That shape am I...potentially*" – that stood at the center of the experience we have come to know as "the personal crisis of William James."

Although I believe that I have now provided more than sufficient evidence to support the central thesis of this article, there is yet another piece of evidence that I would like to share. It comes from James's posthumously published *Some Problems of Philosophy* (1911/1979c). In this work, the first substantive problem that James addressed, after making some preliminary comments on metaphysics in general, was "The Problem of Being." Not by chance, we might now assume, James began his discussion with a long quotation from Schopenhauer, noting that "Schopenhauer's remarks on this question may be considered classical" (p. 26). And after providing the quotation, which he took from Schopenhauer's chapter "On the Metaphysical Need of Man" (this is James's translation of the chapter's German title, "*Ueber das metaphysische Bedürfniss des Menschen*"), James went on to write that "one need only shut oneself in a closet and begin to think of the fact of one's being there, of one's queer bodily shape in the darkness (a thing to make children scream at, as Stevenson says), of one's fantastic character and all, to have wonder steal over

the detail as much as [over] the general fact of being” (pp. 26-27). A sense of wonder at one’s “queer bodily shape”? while “in a closet”? and “in the darkness”? I assume you have already noted the similarity between “one’s queer bodily shape” and “*That [terrible] shape am I,*” but what about one’s being “in a closet” and “in the darkness”? In quoting from James’s account of his personal crisis in *Varieties*, earlier in this article, I omitted a clause – not needed at the time – that is relevant in the context of this later statement. According to his full account, James’s personal crisis occurred, not only while he was in a “state of philosophic pessimism and general depression of spirits about my prospects,” but also when he “went one evening into a dressing-room in the twilight to procure some article that was there” (James, 1902/1985, p. 134). The parallel between being “in the darkness” and going into an enclosed room at “twilight” is obvious, and the interchangeable use of the words “dressing-room” and “closet” in those days is widely known. (In fact, the term for dressing-room in French, the supposed original language of James’s report, is *cabinet* [closet] *de toilette*.) Although James reported “wonder” rather than “panic fear” as the typical *metaphysical* state of mind, the general parallel between the occasion of his personal crisis and his prescription for getting in touch with the problem of being seems more than coincidental. Indeed, it is relevant to add that Schopenhauer’s comments on the problem of being include the observation that metaphysical “wonder” passes into “unrest” at “the thought [that] the non-existence of the world [and hence of one’s own individual being] is just as possible as its existence,” and that “wonder” then passes beyond “unrest” into “brooding” over the possible “fatality” that could produce a world that is “hostile to our own interests.” Philosophy thus begins, Schopenhauer says, in “a minor chord” (as translated and quoted by James, 1911/1979c, p. 26). Doesn’t this seem more than a mere echo of James’s own journey through a moment of crisis to a life of philosophical reflection?

CONCLUSION

I said earlier that the dating of James’s personal crisis cannot be determined with absolute certainty, but the sequence of events I have surveyed in this article suggests very strongly that his crisis took place between Minny Temple’s death on March 8, 1870, and James’s declaration of free will on April 30 of that same year.¹⁵ But whenever it happened, I think I have shown beyond any reasonable doubt that it assumed its unique form and intensity due to James’s reading of Schopenhauer.

One might nonetheless ask if the account given in this article isn’t perhaps “more simple and more interesting than the truth,” as later accounts tend to be according to James (1890/1981, Vol. 1, p. 353). In response, all I can do is admit that James’s lived experience was inevitably more complicated than any of us – even James himself – could describe. One doesn’t need to be a Freudian to believe that history and individual lives as well as cognitive and emotional processes are all overdetermined. One thing that has been omitted from this account, for instance, is James’s contemporaneous delving into his father’s views on evil and selfhood. Another is James’s earlier reading of the Stoics, especially Marcus Aurelius. Though formulated within very different intellectual frameworks, Henry James, Sr.’s arguments and Marcus Aurelius’s aphorisms were in their own ways as challenging as Schopenhauer’s – and not so different in their implications as one might think. And it is important to note that James’s fear of “fate” took its initial shape from his concern about scientific determinism, which was on his mind before – and after – Schopenhauer’s philosophical determinism and ontological reductionism seem so obviously to

have had their sway.¹⁶ But even though nothing complicated ever happens along simple direct lines alone, that doesn't mean that there aren't some relatively simple, direct lines within the tangle of aspects from which historical and personal events can be viewed. This article has laid out an argument and evidence regarding one such line that has not previously been noted. To the extent that it has been successful, it should have enriched our understanding of the origin and nature of James's personal crisis.¹⁷

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APPENDIX ON SCHOPENHAUER AND JAMES

Every student of philosophy is familiar with Schopenhauer's name, and many know that Schopenhauer influenced Nietzsche. Far fewer realize that Schopenhauer also touched the lives and thought of Wagner, von Hartmann, Turgenev, Renan, Tolstoy, Mahler, Wundt, Durkheim, Hardy, Freud, Vaighinger, Conrad, Proust, Zola, Bergson, Maupassant, Strauss, Mann, Einstein, Jung, Lawrence, Thomas, Beckett, and Borges in significant ways, or that both Wittgenstein and Popper acknowledged being drawn to philosophy by their early contact with Schopenhauer's work. And even the rare student who has a sense of Schopenhauer's significance in the history of Western thought is unlikely to have read more than a snippet of his work, if that. For generations, Schopenhauer seemed formidable, forbidding...and unnecessary to read.

This is changing, slowly but surely, as more attention is directed to Schopenhauer, largely (in the English speaking world) because of the scholarly efforts of Patrick Gardiner (1963), Bryan Magee (1997b), David Cartwright (2010), and others. A recent work by Frederick C. Beiser (2014) should add significantly to this change. (Much that he says is relevant to understanding Schopenhauer's impact on James.) Yet even as this occurs, it will surprise many to learn that James's older and more conservative colleague, Francis Bowen, taught a popular course on Schopenhauer (among other figures) for years and years at Harvard; that Josiah Royce, James's close intellectual colleague, was steeped in Schopenhauer's thought and credited it with launching and guiding important aspects of his own notable work in psychology as well as philosophy; that Charles Renouvier, that great patron of free will, took Schopenhauer very seriously, if also critically; and that Max Horkheimer argued that Schopenhauer was ahead of his time: that in the broken world of post-World War II, Schopenhauer's vision no longer seems so negative or pessimistic, but rather honest, bracing...and necessary.

In this context it won't seem so surprising that James may have taken more than we have realized from this post-Kantian titan, who did philosophy and the world the favor of following his fundamental insight, unblinkingly, as far as it would lead. He may well have been wrong about many things – let's simply assert that he was – but he did precisely what James himself argued a philosopher should do, perhaps with Schopenhauer in mind: He offered an alternative perspective on the world for us to consider (James, 1867/1978a). (James may have come to his perspectivism, at least in this regard, through considering Schopenhauer's claim that “philosophy can never do more than interpret and explain what is present and at hand....It does this, however, in every possible relation and connexion and from every point of view” [Schopenhauer, 1859/1966, Vol. 1, p. 271].) As Magee (1997a) has written, there is real value in a philosopher offering a vision that is “illuminating” even if it does not represent “literal truth.” Advancing the same point that James was

making, though without any apparent awareness of that fact, Magee has argued for the importance of philosophers who “throw light” on issues from a “distinctive angle,” thus enriching “our view of the way things are” (p. 401). This is tantamount to saying that Schopenhauer did what the best artists do, which is doubly apt since he is acknowledged to be one of the finest philosophers of the arts. (On the importance of “perspective” in “the art of human understanding” according to James, see Leary, 1992.)

So, if James *was* in fact influenced by Schopenhauer more than we have realized (and it wouldn’t take much to reach this criterion), let’s not assume that this is somehow unusual or even shocking. Anyone who chooses to investigate the connection between James and Schopenhauer should keep an open mind about the possible outcome, as Schopenhauer himself – yes, and James too – would have done if they were in our place.

This is not the time for an extensive, much less exhaustive treatment of the relationship between Schopenhauer and James. (In any case, I am not capable of providing one at this point in time.) But a few words about James’s relation to Schopenhauer in the years after 1875 and a few hints about possible areas of influence seem in order. Hopefully, they will provide some initial guidance for scholars who may wish to look more closely into the connection between Schopenhauer and James. Whatever “loathing” James may have felt for Schopenhauer’s tone and attitude (see Note #3), he seems to have been inspired by Schopenhauer’s honesty about the evils of the world, by his criticism of the stagnant habits of the philosophical community, by his clear and sprightly writing (including his frequent and effective use of clinching metaphors), and by his careful and unfettered analysis of previous human thought, including Kant’s first Critique, which formed the root of Schopenhauer’s own work. Getting other thinkers *right* was always a concern – a matter of justice as well as utility – for both Schopenhauer and James.

The first tangible example of Schopenhauer’s influence on James became apparent in 1877 as he worked on publications that appeared in 1878 and 1879. I mentioned in the text that James took out Wilhelm Gwinner’s *Schopenhauer aus persönlichem Umgange dargestellt* (1862) several times during the late 1860s. Gwinner’s book focused on Schopenhauer’s life and character as well as his system of thought. James’s repeated return to this book indicates an early interest in the relation between the philosopher’s character or temperament, on the one hand, and his way of thinking, on the other, an interest that was generalized in James’s “The Sentiment of Rationality” (1879/1978c), which made pertinent references to Schopenhauer (1859) and led to James’s later distinction between the philosophical tendencies of “the tender-minded” and those of “the tough-minded” (James, 1907/1975a) and to his claim that “a philosophy is the expression of a man’s intimate character, and all definitions of the universe are but the deliberately adopted reactions of human characters upon it” (James, 1909/1977, p. 14). All three works reflect James’s underlying interest in the psychology of philosophers, or more precisely, “The Psychology of Philosophizing,” which he had tentatively considered as a title for “The Sentiment of Rationality” (James, ca. 1877/1978d, p. 359). His views on this topic, underlying his defense of “the subjective method” (e.g., James, 1878/1978b), were thus almost certainly influenced by his reflections on Schopenhauer – and more than that, they were probably influenced by Schopenhauer’s own reflections “On the Metaphysical Need of Man” (Schopenhauer, 1859, Vol. 2, Ch. 17), which James made a special note of having read in late 1869 (James, 1868-1873). His annotated copy of Schopenhauer’s (1859) masterpiece confirms the care that he took in this reading.

Schopenhauer also seems to have made a deep impression upon James through his discussion of moral principles. This was first apparent in James's initial article (1875/1987a) on the vivisection controversy of the mid-1870s, in which he expressed respect but also some reservation regarding an unbending application of the Buddhist principle *neminem laede* ("injure no one"). This way of stating the principle, in Latin, clearly comes from Schopenhauer, who frequently invoked this formulation in his works (e.g., Schopenhauer, 1841/2009, p. 140). (The full principle, in Latin, is *neminem laede, imo omnes, quantum potes, juva*, i.e., "injure no one; instead, help everyone as much as you can.") The final proof that this is so comes from the fact that, when James (1879-1885/1988) cited this principle in his later lectures, he gave Schopenhauer credit for it (p. 175).

In various ways this principle is deeply consonant with "the moral business" to which James had dedicated his life. In fact, it seems eventually to blend for him, as it did from the start for Schopenhauer, into a far-reaching view of how we should understand and approach one another. Toward the end of the century, James wrote "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" (1899/1983), which he considered his most important essay since it reveals "the perception on which my whole individualistic philosophy is based" (James, 1899/2000, p. 522). In this essay, undercutting later criticisms (based on misunderstanding) of his individualism, he argued that his individualistic philosophy is founded upon the perception that *each and every* individual – not just "I" or a limited group of "we" – is to be treated with the same respect and accorded the same dignity because of the underlying humanity shared by all. This essay, which has been called the first modern manifesto for multiculturalism (Sollors, 1996), is both *pluralistic* in its emphasis on variation and difference, and *monistic* in its emphasis upon equal rights and mutual dependency. In defense of a theme that James expressed in various ways in multiple writings (e.g., that each of us contributes a different syllable to the common message of human experience), James argued that every person enjoys "a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands" (1899/1983, p. 149). He spelled out the implications of this view in subsequent works (e.g., James, 1907/1975b & 1909/1975c), and the same attitude suffused his notion that the community – ultimately the world-wide community – is the operative agent for the advancement of knowledge, ideals, values, and behavior. This is not an exact replication of Schopenhauer's views, but it suggests that James eventually came to see the identification of individuals with each other, which caused him such anxiety in the early 1870s, in a more positive light. By then, sympathy and compassion, Schopenhauer's key moral virtues, had become fundamental to his own ethical and social thought.

James also came to have a more positive view of Hindu thought and of *Tat twam asi* in particular, as seen in the mysticism chapter of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, where he wrote:

This overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystic achievement. In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition.... 'That art thou!' [*Tat twam asi*] say the Upanishads, and the Vedantists add: 'Not a part, not a mode of That, but identically That, that absolute Spirit of the World.' (James, 1902/1985, p. 332)

That James now saw what had previously *scared* him as a positive thing, as the essential "mystical truth" (p. 333), is demonstrated by the entire context in which he wrote this passage. Like "such self-contradictory phrases as 'dazzling

obscurity,” he now regarded talk about melding many into one as being closer to “music” than “conceptual speech” (p. 333). Schopenhauer, the great advocate of music, would have understood and appreciated this statement, which underscores a point made above, about the artistic rather than literal significance of Schopenhauer’s thought. Such music gives us a way of comprehending our common, shared humanity, warts and all. And that comprehension led James to the implicit poly- or pantheism, mentioned earlier, that held humans responsible for assisting in the creation of a more ideal world (see James, 1882/1997a, p. 195; 1902/1985, p. 413; & 1907/1975b, pp. 131-144). In this way and others, Schopenhauer seems to have provided a stimulus that eventually sensitized James to the claims, rights, and significance of “the other.”

Of course, Schopenhauer also provided ideas that James *pushed against*, which surely constituted as important – sometimes a greater – influence than ideas he *agreed with*. For instance, in understanding and then opposing both naïve *optimism* and rebarbative *pessimism*, the latter being represented by Schopenhauer, James came to his own middle position of *meliorism*, which treats “salvation” as neither inevitable (as optimism does) nor impossible (as pessimism does) but as *possible*; and from early on, *possibility* was a word that opened up for James a vibrant, challenging, and ultimately invigorating world of risk and opportunity (see James, 1875/1987b, p. 313, & 1907/1975b). In a closely related matter, Schopenhauer served as an unacknowledged but apparent interlocutor regarding a question that Schopenhauer was famous for prompting many others to consider, namely, Is life worth living? (On Schopenhauer’s role in “the pessimism controversy” of the late nineteenth century, see Beiser, 2014, Ch. 5.) James addressed this issue squarely in an 1895 address to members of Harvard’s YMCA, which was later included in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (James, 1895/1897b). In this address he spoke of pessimism as “essentially a religious disease” (p. 40) and underscored its “nightmare view of life” (p. 41), specifically relating it to “that metaphysical *tedium vitae* which is peculiar to reflecting men” (39) and to the “suicidal mood” (p. 52) associated with it. In the end, he exhorted his young listeners to “Be not afraid of life. Believe that life *is* worth living, and your belief will help create the fact” (p. 56). This advice foreshadowed not only his subsequent address on “The Will to Believe” (James, 1896/1897a) but also the conclusion of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985), in which he asserted his own strong preference for a life in which the “keynote” is “hope” rather than “resignation” (p. 414). (As in his earlier addresses, he made it clear that the prevalence of “hope” over “resignation” does not depend upon any demonstrable truth about the ultimate character of the universe, since such truth lies outside our human ken; rather, it depends upon one’s temperamental inclination as well as one’s will to believe.) Though James did not refer to him in this context, Schopenhauer’s presence is clearly signaled in James’s use of “resignation,” which was widely known to be Schopenhauer’s recommendation regarding the appropriate attitude to show in the face of reality. (Schopenhauer’s recommendation was accepted explicitly by many, including Sigmund Freud.) For James, uncertainty about the ultimate nature of the universe and the efficacy of individual effort was sufficient to allow him to respond to what “*feels* like a real fight” and real “possibilities” (James, 1895/1897b, p. 55) by asserting his willingness to live on the “chance” that fighting back, resisting the pressures of the world, and being strenuous in standing up for one’s own preferences could make a difference in the world (James, 1902/1985, p. 414).

Much more could be said – for example, about Schopenhauer as the inspiration of James’s understanding of the problem of being, as a stimulant of

his treatment of perception, as a possible source of his beloved concept of the “sting” of certain precious moments of experience, as an interlocutor regarding immortality, and so forth. But it is time to end. In doing so, I want to be clear: More research is needed before it can be said, without qualification, that Schopenhauer was a *major* influence on James, but on the basis of what has been disclosed in this article and noted in this appendix, it seems reasonable to conjecture that Schopenhauer was in fact among the more significant figures in James’s life and work. At minimum, even without further study, it can be said that Schopenhauer was instrumental at an important moment in James’s life and that he remained on the edges of James’s consciousness, prodding and provoking, throughout his career.

It will be interesting to see how the connection between Schopenhauer and James will come to be understood if and as other scholars subject it to closer inspection.

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I dedicate this article to the memory of Eugene Taylor (1946-2013), a distinctive person and dedicated scholar who contributed a great deal to our understanding of William James and to our knowledge of the relation between James, Western psychology, and Eastern thought. (For his own overview of his latter contribution, see Taylor, 2003.) I would like to think that Eugene would be both surprised and pleased to read the evidence and argument presented in this article regarding a connection between James and Eastern thought – at least as mediated through Schopenhauer – decades before James entered into conversations with the Harvard Buddhist scholar Charles Rockwell Lanman, the Hindu Vedantist Vivekananda, and others, as Eugene has documented and elucidated. The fact that Eastern thought as cited and used by Schopenhauer had a *negative* impact on James in the early 1870s might have bothered Eugene, but he surely would have relished rolling up his sleeves to explore the *positive* influences of that early encounter, which seem to have emerged later and to have made a difference in James’s subsequent life and thought, as suggested in the appendix to this article.

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NOTES

¹This passage, which appears on pp. 134-135, is attributed in the text to a French correspondent, whose communication James has allegedly translated "freely" into English. It is now universally accepted, given James's own admission to the translator of *Varieties* into French (!), that the communication was in fact a report of his own case – of his "acute neurasthenic attack with phobia," as he called it – whose "provenance," he said, he had "naturally

disguised” (from a letter reproduced in an appendix to James, 1902/1985, p. 508).

²I am personally satisfied with “generally truthful” as a description of James’s account of his personal crisis. Still, I am going to argue that James’s account is likely to have been *less* “a composite composition” than Croce (2009, p. 57) had reason to suggest, without knowledge of the discoveries I will discuss. And I can see no reason or evidence that bars me from *imagining*, at least, that James, fluent enough in French, *may* actually have written an initial account of his crisis in French, and that he *might* have translated that account later into English, as he claimed to have done in *Varieties* (James, 1902/1985, p. 134). If a written account, either in French or English, still existed when James died, it could have been destroyed by his widow or eldest son, Henry James III, who burned many personal letters and papers in the years after his death. Of course, if James *had* written an account at the time of the incident, he would almost certainly have done so in his private diary – the same diary from which entries between April 30, 1870, and February 10, 1873, have been removed (James, 1868-1873). In fact, given everything else that he was writing down in this diary between 1868 and 1873, including comments on his suicidal inclinations, it would be surprising if he *hadn’t* written a report in his diary. And if he did so, mightn’t he have done so in French, perhaps to disguise its “provenance” in case someone – a parent? – happened to open his diary? Though not typical, there was a precedent for his writing a personal entry in French, surrounded by quotation marks, as if he had copied it from some French clinical source: On July 22, 1868, he wrote what Richardson has called “a conversation with himself” in French, which began (as translated) “So – you want to die?” (James, 1868-1873, discussed by Richardson, 2006, p. 93). Clearly, both instances (this passage and a possible later report of his hallucinatory experience) involved deeply troubling personal incidents in James’s life. If James *did* write a diary account of his frightful experience, one could wonder if it was James himself who later tore it out...and whether he did so to share it with Alice Howe Gibbens, when he determined that she should know *everything* about him before deciding upon his fitness as a potential husband, as illustrated by his sharing of two entries written in his “memorandum pad” during what he identified to her as his “pessimistic crisis” in the earlier 1870s (James, 1877/1995g, p. 572). Or, less dramatically, he could have ripped it out in order to use it in writing *Varieties*. These are all things that I can *imagine*, as I say. While I cannot and will not *argue* for any of these possibilities, they are nonetheless consistent with what is known at the present time.

³Menand (2001) suggests that “there was no philosopher (Schopenhauer was a possible exception) for whom James felt a deeper loathing than Hegel” (p. 358), and Richardson (2006) notes that James “came to loathe Schopenhauer’s pessimism” (p. 14). It’s easy to see how they came to these conclusions, but I would suggest that the loathing had more to do with attitude than substance (granting that attitude overlapped with substance for James), and that it obscures an underlying respect. The ultimate source of Menand’s comment may be the passage in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985) in which James belittled Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, despite their sometimes “ennobling sadness,” for their othertimes “peevisishness” that comes across like “the sick shriekings of two dying rats” (p. 39). Richardson’s conclusion is related to a negative comment made when James refused to serve on a committee working toward the construction of a statue in honor of Schopenhauer – a comment from the same letter that Perry quoted at length. But James’s deep respect for Schopenhauer is also apparent in this letter, though underplayed in his typically playful manner. Noting that “I really *must* decline to stir a finger for the glory of one who studiously lived for no other purpose than to spit upon the lives of

the like of me” (a statement that is directly relevant to the analysis that follows in this article), James wrote that “if there be any kernel of truth in Schopenhauer’s system, (and it seems to me there is a deep one) it ought to be celebrated in silence and in secret, by the inner lives of those to whom it speaks” since “taking some things seriously is incompatible with ‘celebrating’ them” (James, 1883/1997b, p. 456). Despite this hint of a more positive view of Schopenhauer, no biographer or scholar has attended to James’s relationship with this important philosopher. Not even Feinstein (1984), who focused so closely on the details of James’s early development (extending into the 1870s), picked up on the hints elaborated upon in this article.

⁴I am focusing in this paragraph, as was Perry, on the period between 1858 and 1877. There is a good amount of evidence about later contact between James’s thought and Schopenhauer’s, some of which will be reviewed in the appendix to this article. And, of course, there is more evidence *now* about James’s contact with Schopenhauer before 1875, as I will discuss in what follows.

⁵There are now good English translations of the works that I have mentioned: Schopenhauer (1841/2009, 1851/1974, 1859/1966, & 1864/2012). James purchased and signed his own copy of Schopenhauer’s two-volume *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (3d ed., 1859) in Paris in early November 1868. Both volumes, annotated by James, are in Houghton Library at Harvard University. Although he read an earlier (1841) edition of *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik* in 1870, at some subsequent date (1881 or later) he purchased and annotated an (1881) edition that was sold in 1923, according to a list of “William James’s Sources” composed by Ralph Barton Perry and deposited in Harvard’s Houghton Library, catalogued as MS Am 1092.9 (4578). There is also good reason to suppose that James discussed Schopenhauer’s ideas with Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., in the late 1860s. See Holmes (1923/1964, p. 215) for confirmation of his familiarity with Schopenhauer, which almost certainly stemmed from this period (see Howe, 1957, p. 260). And he probably saw and read various articles on Schopenhauer, including three English translations that appeared in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (Schopenhauer, 1867a, 1867b, & 1871). His primary reading of Schopenhauer’s works, however, was in the original German.

⁶It is relevant to note that James’s dual (physical and moral) collapse occurred, by his own reckoning, around the time that, in fact, he checked a book by Schopenhauer out of the Harvard College Library, though the argument in this article doesn’t depend upon this possible conjunction, largely because of James’s propensity for backsliding – for making some progress and then falling back into physical and mental doldrums. The forward-and-backward, sometimes zigzagging nature of James’s development during this period is illustrated by James’s on-and-off acceptance of the conscious automaton theory, as I’ve discussed elsewhere (Leary, 2013) at considerable length. It is also illustrated by the various times at which he seems to have accepted Charles Renouvier’s argument for free will, only to lapse in that acceptance and have to accept it all over again. (This point is related to but not exactly the same as the point made in Note #9.) The issues surrounding James’s vacillating views on the conscious automaton theory and free will go hand-in-hand with his broader wrestling with “the moral business,” as discussed below.

⁷I won’t rehearse all of the issues associated with James’s crisis since Croce (2009) has already discussed most of them. I do want to note, however, that among the possible issues (according to Sander L. Gilman, Kim Townsend, and Donald Capps) are guilt and fear prompted by James’s reading of the medical literature on “sexual abuse” and “insane masturbators” (see Croce,

2009, pp. 43, 44, & 49). I agree with Croce's conclusion that "there is very little evidence to support this reading of the crisis" (p. 45). In addition, Capps' association of "auto-eroticism" with James's mention of his "moral degradation" (touched upon by Croce, 2009, p. 49) seems to me to misconstrue the significance that "the moral business" had for James, as seen throughout his earlier and later letters as well as many entries in his diary.

⁸Even at the age of 16, James felt that "everyone's object in life" should be "to be as much use as possible" and that "the best way to serve God is to serve your fellow men." After all, he asked, "which of us would wish to go through life without leaving a trace behind to mark his passage"? This foreshadowed his later concern about "the moral business" in which "every man can do as much as is in his power and having done so will have fulfilled his mission. We must all lead an active life and live for others, not for ourselves.... We must try to bring about that happy time when everyone will have enough for him self [sic] materially, and will work for the common good" (James, 1858/1995a, pp. 11-13). Ten years later, despite many vicissitudes in other regards, he still held the same opinion: "The thought that with me outlasts all others... is the thought of my having a will, and of my belonging to a brotherhood of men.... And if we have to give up all hope of seeing into the purposes of God... we can by our will make the enjoyment of our brothers stand us in the stead of a final cause and... lead a life so active, and so sustained by a clean-conscience as not to need to fret much.... Contribute your mite in *any* way to the mass of work wh. each generation subtracts fm. the task of the next, and you will come in to *real* relations with your brothers.... *Every thing* [sic] we know & are is through men. We have no revelation but through man" (James, 1868/1995b, pp. 248-250). For all his wavering about whether or not he *had* a free will and thereby *could* fulfill his deepest hope, James never wavered regarding the nature of "the moral business" that would make his life meaningful. Even when he was "swamped in an empirical philosophy" that made him "feel that we are Nature through and through, that we are *wholly* conditioned, that not a wiggle of our will happens save as the result of physical laws," he held out hope that "we are [also, somehow] en rapport with reason." But "how to conceive it? who knows?" (James, 1869/1995c, pp. 370-371). Richardson (2006) nicely summarizes what James meant by "the moral business," namely, "that, after all, we are able to will and to choose our path in life, that we are not powerless pawns in an all-determined universe. It is not what fate does to us that matters; what matters is what we do with what fate does to us" (p. 111). To James, the great question was whether or not we do, indeed, live in "a moral universe" in which our efforts make a difference. Later in life he related his conviction that we do live in such a universe to a virtual poly- or even pantheism that held humans responsible for assisting in the creation of a more ideal world. (See the appendix to this article.)

⁹This is illustrated best, perhaps, by the fact that James had to return to Renouvier's text for periodic booster shots. After *one* of these shots – two and a half years after he reported the positive effect of Renouvier's essay in late April 1870 – he wrote to Renouvier himself to inform him that he was *just then* "beginning to experience a rebirth of the moral life" due to the influence of his philosophy (James, 1872/1995e, p. 430; trans. in Perry, 1935, Vol. 1, p. 662). And this incipient rebirth took place a full five months before his father reported that James was *just then* showing a vast improvement based partly on his reading of Renouvier (quoted in Perry, 1935, Vol. 1, pp. 339-340), an improvement that will be mentioned later in this article. Clearly, recovery from depression, anxiety, physical exhaustion, and other problems is always likely to be a slow and uneven process. I mention all of this simply to caution against any simplistic view that James was converted and transformed once and for all by his reading of Renouvier's text in April 1870.

¹⁰A rapid rise in Western knowledge about Eastern thought, fueled by scholarship as well as translations of ancient texts, was a widespread phenomenon throughout the nineteenth century. Although Schopenhauer reached the basic conclusions of his philosophy in the early decades of the century before he encountered Hinduism and Buddhism, he soon realized that their affinity with his own ideas, coupled with their ancient origins and multitude of adherents, made them a boon to his own purposes. He not only became an advocate of Eastern wisdom but also adopted its moral principles (in particular, its fundamental principle of sympathy and compassion for all living creatures). On these topics, see Cartwright (2010), Droit (2003), and Magee (1997b). Here are some representative statements by Schopenhauer, which James would have read prior to his personal crisis and which are relevant to points I will be making. First, from *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851/1974; loosely translated as “Additions and Omissions”), which James, like most readers outside the German-speaking world, encountered first among Schopenhauer’s publications (in its German version, of course, not in its later English translation): “The readers of my *Ethics* know that with me the foundation of morality rests ultimately on the truth that has its expression in the *Veda* and *Vedanta* in the established mystical formula *tat tvam asi* (This art thou) which is stated with reference to every living thing, whether man or animal, and is then called the *Mahavakya* or Great Word” (Vol. 2, p. 219). Note that this English translation, like all English renderings of this saying (other than James’s!), transliterates the German *w* (in *twam*) into the English *v* (in *tvam*) to preserve the same sound. This will be relevant to my argument. “With the Hindus and Buddhists...the *Mahavakya* (the great word) ‘*tat tvam asi*’ (this art thou) applies and is always to be expressed over every animal in order that we may have before us, as a guide to our conduct, the identity of his inner nature and ours” (p. 373). And now from a later English translation of the third edition of *The World as Will and Representation* (1859/1966), the edition that James purchased and read in German: “*Plurality* in general is necessarily conditioned by time and space, and only in these is conceivable, and in this respect we call them the *principium individuationis*....This thing-in-itself [the underlying nature of all, namely, the will, according to Schopenhauer]...lies outside time and space, and accordingly knows no plurality, and consequently is *one*” (Vol. 1, pp. 127-128). “If we had to convey to the beholder, for reflection and in a word, the explanation and information about their inner nature, it would be best for us to use the Sanskrit formula which occurs so often in the sacred books of the Hindus, and is called *Mahavakya*, i.e., the great word: ‘*Tat tvam asi*,’ which means ‘This living thing are thou’” (p. 220). “Historical philosophy,” concerned with things in time, “stops at what Kant calls the phenomenon in opposition to the thing-in-itself, and what Plato calls the becoming...in opposition to the being..., or finally what is called by the Indians the web of *Maya*” (p. 274). “Birth and death belong only to the phenomenon of the will, and hence to life....Birth and death belong equally to life....The wisest of all mythologies, the Indian, expresses this by giving to the very god who symbolizes destruction and death...the lingam, that symbol of generation....In this way, it is intimated that generation and death...reciprocally neutralize and eliminate each other” (pp. 275-276). “The individual is only the phenomenon, not the thing-in-itself....As soon as we enter into ourselves...and wish for once to know ourselves fully by directing our knowledge inwards, we lose ourselves in the bottomless void; we find ourselves like a hollow glass globe, from the emptiness of which a voice speaks” (p. 278). “The life of every individual, viewed as a whole and in general,...is really a tragedy” (p. 322). “The *Maya* of the Indians, the work and fabric of which are the whole world of illusions, is

paraphrased by *amor*” in that love-making produces what *seem* to be ontologically distinct individuals (p. 330). “The eyes of the uncultured individual are clouded, as the Indians say, by the veil of Maya....He sees not the inner nature of things, which is one, but its phenomena as separated, detached, innumerable, very different, and indeed opposed” (p. 352). “We find the direct presentation in the *Vedas*, the fruit of the highest human knowledge and wisdom, the kernel of which has finally come to us in the *Upanishads* as the greatest gift to the nineteenth century. It is expressed in various ways, but especially by the fact that all beings of the world, living and lifeless,” have “pronounced” over them, “*tat tvam asi*, which means ‘This art thou’” (p. 355). “The veil of Maya envelops the mind” so that an individual “regards his person as absolutely different from every other” and “adheres with all his might” to this illusion “since it alone suits and supports his egoism” (p. 365). “Whoever is still involved in the *principium individuationis*, in egoism, knows only particular things and their relation to his person” (p. 378). These quotations, all taken from the first volume of Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation* (the first edition of which appeared in 1818, though dated 1819), should suffice as background evidence supporting the claims I will make. The second volume, first published in 1844, is composed of supplementary elaborations and commentaries on the sections of the first edition.

¹¹In directly addressing Minny in his diary, James was doing something that was unprecedented in earlier entries and unparalleled in later ones. But then, in addressing her in his Schopenhauerian frame of mind, he was actually addressing himself as – consistent with the argument in this article – he had dropped the veil that separated him and her and had come to realize his fundamental identification with her. He graphically represented this moment in his life by drawing a tombstone in his diary with the inscription “March 9 / M+T / 1870.” Note that Minny Temple died on March 8. March 9 was the date on which James learned about Minny’s death, and died along with her.

¹²This is a good place to address a very reasonable question that might be in the reader’s mind. Weren’t the transcendentalists – and Ralph Waldo Emerson, in particular – interested in Eastern thought? Didn’t they advance translations of the sacred documents of the East, and didn’t Emerson himself publish essays on “Spiritual Laws” (1841/1903a), “The Over-Soul” (1841/1903b), and “Illusions” (1860/1903c) as well as a poem on “Brahma” (1867/1903d) that convey fundamental insights of Eastern thought? Couldn’t these writings, with which James was familiar, have been the source of his thinking during his period of crisis? That’s a sensible conjecture, but in fact the first two essays, appearances aside, were drawn primarily from Emerson’s immersion in Neoplatonic thought, and none of Emerson’s writings includes a reference to the Sanskrit *Tat tvam (or tvam) asi*. Meanwhile, the strongest evidence that James’s use of *Tat tvam asi* and its related cluster of ideas came from Schopenhauer rather than Emerson (or any other transcendentalist) is that single letter – the ‘w’ in *twam* – in James’s spelling of that word each time he cites it. This indicates that James was quoting a *German* source (see Note #10), and hence Schopenhauer, since no other German source with which he was familiar included the same cluster of terms and ideas. James’s interest in Buddhism was clearly piqued, however, and in the latter half of 1870 he read parts, at least, of Alabaster’s *The Modern Buddhist* (1870), the first volume of Köppen’s *Religion des Buddha* (1857), and Taine’s “Le Bouddhisme” (1865), followed by Bastian’s *Die Weltauffassung der Buddhisten* (1870) in early 1871. He also read Sen’s *Brahmo Somaj* (1870) in late 1870, though this work treated a newly Christianized form of Hinduism. (All these texts are listed in James, 1868-1873; Köppen’s was checked out of Harvard College Library on September 13, 1870.) Interestingly, James didn’t mention any of this reading in his extant letters and manuscript notes. More significantly, he had cited *Tat*

twam asi in his diary on March 22, 1870, well before reading these other books, which eliminates them as potential sources of his knowledge of that Sanskrit phrase. Finally, his reading of Taine's article, with its more positive spin on "the cult of nothingness," might have started James thinking in a less negative light about Hindu and Buddhist views. See Droit (2003, especially pp. 133-148), which includes a discussion of Nietzsche's contemporaneous reaction to Buddhism. Droit begins his book discussing the widespread Western reaction against Buddhism in the middle of the nineteenth century, a reaction that depicted Buddhism as "a paradoxical and horrible religion of nothingness," thus reinforcing the then-common belief that Eastern thought is inherently negative or pessimistic (pp. 4-5). He doesn't mention James but James's initial reaction fits within the pattern he describes. Droit's book is devoted to "an analysis of this error" (p. 5).

¹³It is relevant to note that, so far as letters, diary entries, and library records indicate, James followed through on his intention *not* to read Schopenhauer's books for some time, thus confirming (to the extent that a negative can imply a positive) that it was Schopenhauer to whom he was referring.

¹⁴It might seem strange that James was relieved to think that mental disorder didn't require a physical basis – that it could also be due to circumstantial and psychological causes – but the flip side was that one could do something, potentially, about circumstances and psychological phenomena (like misperceptions and phobias) whereas James's great fear was that physical causes could not be thwarted in the same way. In fact, before the conversion reported to his father, he had worried that the James family had some congenital weakness ("s'thing in the blood") that predisposed them to mental and physical troubles, which had led him to swear off marriage for himself and to counsel his brother Robertson to avoid marriage as well (James, 1869/1995d). Note that James's personal crisis revolved around the fear that if nature so decided – if physical processes just happened to work out that way – he would be reduced to the same imbecilic state as the poor epileptic patient he had seen in an asylum. As regards Schopenhauer's views, although he admitted that mental disorder could result from "external, objective occasions" such as unrequited love and the strains of war, he argued that "madness...depends more often on purely somatic causes" (Schopenhauer, 1859/1966, Vol. 2, p. 401). As for Wordsworth, the chief work that James had been reading was Wordsworth's long narrative poem "The Excursion" (1814/1977), which argues, in essence, that nature is the product of both mind and matter – that the mind is not a passive recipient of matter's causal pressures, but rather, that it actively confers order, meaning, and value to matter. This was a message that James needed. Especially the poem's fourth book on "Despondency Corrected" provided "authentic tidings" of "the mind's *excursive* power" (pp. 154-155; James, 1874/1995f, p. 488). Wordsworth himself foresaw the effect of his poem: "To enfeebled Power, / From this communion with uninjured Minds, / What renovation had been brought; and what / Degree of healing to a wounded spirit" (p. 289).

¹⁵It is worth noting that this dating accords with the best estimate of James's son, Henry James III, which was accepted by John E. Smith in his introduction to the definitive edition of James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985, p. xvii).

¹⁶On January 1, 1870, the first two sets of "works" that James resolved (in his diary) to finish reading that year were his father's and Schopenhauer's (James, 1868-1873). According to a list in that same diary, he had already read his father's *Moralism and Christianity* (1850) in the months after receiving his M.D. on June 21, 1869 – in fact, right after he had read Schopenhauer's chapter

on “man’s need for metaphysics” (see this article’s appendix on Schopenhauer and James). Later that year he had read his father’s *Lectures and Miscellanies* (1852). Then, the first book he listed in his diary as read in 1870 was his father’s *Nature of Evil* (1855). Subsequently in 1870, he read two more of his father’s works. His father was, of course, a more than subtle presence in nurturing James’s sensitivity to evil and an indirect influence with regard to Schopenhauer, by making the collection of the Boston Athenaeum available to him. In addition, his father’s own personal crisis (his famous “vastation” experience of 1844) became entangled with James’s recollections of his own crisis to the extent that he drew attention to it (in a footnote) when he reported on his own moment of crisis in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* 1902/1985, p. 135). As for Marcus Aurelius, whom James had read earlier and to whom he returned from time to time, Harvard’s Houghton Library has the annotated copy of *The Thoughts of the Emperor M. Aurelius Antoninus* (1864), inscribed by “Wm. James / Boston Feby 1865.” For information on James’s relation to Aurelius, see Sutton (2009). As regards James’s concern about scientific determinism, see Leary (2013).

¹⁷Just as I was completing this article, I received from John Kaag a photocopy of the title page of the first volume of Julius Frauenstädt’s *Schopenhauer-Lexikon: Ein philosophisches Wörterbuch* (1871). This dictionary of Schopenhauer’s philosophical terms has no annotations in it but the title page bears the following inscription: “W. E. Hocking / from the library of William James / May 1923.” This previously unknown possession of James doesn’t appear in R. B. Perry’s list of volumes sold from James’s library in 1923 after his widow Alice died in 1922 (regarding this list, see Note #5), presumably because Perry included only volumes that were annotated by James, though it is also possible that the volume was given rather than sold to Hocking, who taught at Harvard in the decades following James’s death in 1910. The discovery of this volume, which underscores James’s interest in Schopenhauer’s work, serves as yet another reminder of the ephemeral nature of historical evidence and the resulting gaps in the historical record (a reminder, that is, of something already illustrated by the discoveries related in this article and its sequel). When James purchased this volume and how he may have used it cannot now be determined; but the existence of another bit of Jamesian Schopenhaueriana belies any claims about his lack of interest in Schopenhauer’s thought. John Kaag found this volume when he recently stumbled upon the previously unknown library of (William) Ernest Hocking at the Hocking family’s New Hampshire estate (see Kaag, 2014). It is relevant to add that among the other books once owned by James, also found by Kaag in Hocking’s library, were Henry Clarke Warren’s *Buddhism in Translation* (1896) and Paul Carus’s *Buddhism and Its Christian Critics* (1897). (Warren’s book is included on Perry’s list, mentioned above and in Note #5; Carus’s is not, though his 1898 *Gospel of Buddha* is listed there.) James *did* annotate these books, and his annotations have allowed Kaag (2012) to clarify the significance of Buddhism for some of James’s important analyses and assertions in *Varieties* and other late-life works. Additional sources that offer similar clarification (including the results of archival research by David Scott and Eugene Taylor) are discussed by King (2005).

NEW INSIGHTS INTO WILLIAM JAMES'S PERSONAL CRISIS IN THE EARLY 1870s: PART II. JOHN BUNYAN AND THE RESOLUTION & CONSEQUENCES OF THE CRISIS

DAVID E. LEARY

ABSTRACT

*This article, the second in a two-part sequence, will cast new light on the strong possibility that John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* played a previously unrecognized role in inspiring James's means of defense against the frightening hallucination and panic fear that characterized his well-known personal crisis in the early 1870s. It will also present an argument about the influence of his defensive measures upon his subsequent views on the nature and importance of attention and will in human life. Along the way, it will identify James's specific, newly discovered copy of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the specific, newly discovered Bible through which he developed familiarity with the scriptural phrases that helped him get through his ordeal. The first article in this sequence presented an argument and evidence regarding the previously unrecognized role of Arthur Schopenhauer's thought in shaping and intensifying the way that James experienced his personal crisis. It also related Schopenhauer's influence to prior issues that had concerned James, and in an appendix it provided an overview of other areas in which Schopenhauer seems to have influenced James, both during and after his personal crisis.*

THE DISCOVERY OF JAMES'S COPIES OF THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS AND THE HOLY BIBLE

Over the past decade I have been engaged in a long-term project to trace some of the more significant influences of literature in the life and work of William James.¹ As part of this project, I have consulted the collection of James's books at Harvard University, read copies of works that he is known to have read, and searched for extant but unknown copies of works that he owned and used, hoping (in this latter case) to find additional texts that he had marked and annotated. My rationale has been that, although his family sold and gave away his "professional books" to former students, colleagues, book collectors, and Harvard University, many of what we would consider his "personal books" (including works of literature) probably remained in the family home in Cambridge or at the family's summer home in Chocorua, NH, and would have been dispersed over the years as various family members departed from one or the other of these homes. It turns out that I was right, and I have found a number of books that have supplemented the already detailed picture that can be constructed regarding James's reading and what he took from that reading. In sum, by systematically going through these books as well as through his previously known books, diaries, notebooks, manuscripts, published works, and voluminous letters, it has been possible to trace, in a remarkably detailed manner, the impact of James's reading on his life and work. But more on that later!²

Among the places where sources have been found is a current home of one of the branches of the James family. Understandably, the family does not want strangers – even scholars – showing up without prior notice and permission, so I was fortunate and remain very thankful to have been granted access to the home and what resides therein, including a number of James’s own books, many of which are annotated. This is not the place to discuss what I found other than James’s copy of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678-1684/1869) and one other text, which I will mention later in this section. The discovery of Bunyan’s work was a particularly pleasant surprise since there is no other indication, anywhere else, that James possessed his own copy of this book, nor any mention of the book in the vast literature on his period of depression, even though he alluded to it now and then when he made metaphoric references to being or having been in a “slough of despond” during the 1860s and 1870s. This phrase, drawn from Bunyan’s work, was common parlance at a time (in fact, throughout the nineteenth century) when *The Pilgrim’s Progress* enjoyed a particularly wide readership. Still, I will argue that James’s repeated employment of the phrase after January, 1870, was more than a random or simply habitual use of a currently popular phrase.³

Although James did not annotate this copy of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, it bears several significant markings. First, it is inscribed on the first page (just inside the front cover) to “Willie from his mother Jan. 29th 1870.” Note that January 29 was just two weeks after James’s well-known “great dorsal collapse” and just days before he “about touched bottom,” according to his diary entry of February 1, 1870 (James, 1868-1873). Second, only one corner of one page in this book is folded over, thus bookmarking a single section in the entire work, a section that is unmistakably relevant to James’s personal crisis and its resolution, as recounted in James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985, pp. 134-135).⁴

Among the other books discovered in the James family home was James’s copy of *The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments* (1856). This book was also inscribed on its front flyleaf, this time to “William James / from his affectionate Mother / Christmas 1860.” James indicated his attachment to this particular Bible on September 13, 1868, when he wrote home from Germany, asking that it be brought to him by his aunt, who was coming to Europe.⁵ As we shall see and as some might recall, James’s familiarity with Biblical phrases, presumably enhanced through his reading of this particular copy of the Bible, made a difference when he confronted his frightful apparition and related fear, as described in the first installment of this two-part treatment of James’s personal crisis of the early 1870s (see Leary, 2015).

THE RESOLUTION OF JAMES’S CRISIS IN LIGHT OF HIS APPARENT READING OF BUNYAN

In the preceding article, I quoted at length from James’s account of his personal crisis in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, but there is more to quote from that account. After James noted that the experience was “like a revelation” and that it “has made me sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others ever since,” he went on to say that the “quivering fear” and “horrible dread” that characterized his crisis “gradually faded, but for months I was unable to go out into the dark alone.” In fact, he added, “I dreaded to be left alone” at any time. And then, at the end of his account, he made this significant comment:

I have always thought that this experience of melancholia of mine had a religious bearing....[By this] I mean that **the fear was so invasive and powerful that if I had not clung to scripture-texts like ‘The eternal God is my refuge,’ etc., ‘Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden,’ etc., ‘I am the resurrection and the life,’ etc., I think I should have grown really insane.** (James, 1902/1985, pp. 134-135, bold print added)

James then wrapped up his presentation of documentary evidence regarding “The Sick Soul” (the topic of the chapter in which his personal account appeared) by summarizing the three cases he had covered, namely, Leo Tolstoy’s confession regarding “the vanity of mortal things,” John Bunyan’s account of “the sense of sin,” and finally his own report of “the fear of the universe,” which he had disguised as a communication from a fictitious French correspondent. (It is worth noting that James’s designation of his own case as illustrating *fear of the universe* underscores its connection to his larger Schopenhauerian-inspired concern about the inexorable working-out of the laws of nature that encompassed his more specific *fear of going insane*, as discussed in the previous article.) In all three cases, he concluded, the sufferer’s “original optimism and self-satisfaction get leveled with the dust” (p. 135).⁶

I will return to the question of the “religious bearing” of James’s experience since in my view James’s comment about this “bearing” has been misinterpreted, by some, as an indication of a religious conversion or at least newfound religious belief. I don’t believe that James’s experience led to *this kind* of transformation, though it certainly made him more sympathetic and understanding of religious conversion (the topic of subsequent chapters in *Varieties*), just as it made him more sympathetic and understanding of those who suffered even worse forms of melancholy, “really insane melancholia,” which he had intentionally left out of his survey (p. 135).

So, what can we make of the resolution of James’s personal crisis in light of the discovery of his copy of Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and his admission that clinging to Biblical phrases (from Deuteronomy 33, Matthew 11, John 11, etc., in his case) had helped him get through his terrifying experience, which by his own account lingered on, in somewhat attenuated form, for months after his initial hallucinatory confrontation with the greenish-skinned, epileptic lunatic?⁷

The answer lies – or I should say, it *seems very likely* to lie – on that page with a dog-eared corner: the single page in his entire copy of *Pilgrim’s Progress* that bears any distinctive marking (Bunyan, 1678-1684/1869, p. 95).⁸ That page, appropriately enough, is situated within a chapter entitled “The Fight” in this revised version of Bunyan’s work, a chapter that represents a critical moment in the pilgrim’s journey to Mount Zion. The pilgrim, Christian, was already “full of fear” when he confronted the “foul fiend,” Apollyon, at the start of this chapter (pp. 80-89), and his fear hardly subsided as the chapter went on and he approached the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where he “was worse put to it than in his fight with Apollyon” (p. 90). At this point, he had a dream (interestingly analogous to James’s apparition) in which he came to the edge of the Shadow of Death, where he was warned by others that the valley ahead was

dark as pitch; we saw there ghosts and imps and fiends of the pit; we heard there howls and yells as of men in great pain, who sat bound in woe and chains; and Death broods it with his wings day and night. (p. 92)

Though terrified, Christian proceeded on and

for miles and miles he saw and heard these dread things, and at last, when he thought he heard a band of fiends, who were on their way to meet him, he stood still to think what he had best do (p. 94)

And here – on that dog-eared page – is where Christian's tale touches James's life:

At times he had half a thought he would go back; but then he knew that he might be half way through the vale. He thought, too, of all that he had gone through, and that it might be worse to go back than to go on. So he made up his mind to go on, but the fiends drew near. But when they had come at him, as it were, he cried out with all his might, "I will walk in the strength of the Lord God." (pp. 94-95)

Then, as Christian made his way forward with his mind fixed on the strength of God, he was comforted by a voice saying, "Though I walk through the Valley-of-the-Shadow-of-Death, I will fear no ill, for thou art with me" (p. 96). And with that, shrouded by his protective set of Biblical phrases (from Psalms 71 and 23), Christian "came to the end of the vale" (p. 98).

The comparison to James's experience cannot be missed. Full of fear, James confronted his own nightmarish apparition and his own specter of damnation by reciting Biblical phrases, just as Christian did. Although his fear of impending insanity was different from Christian's fear of punishment by "fiends of the pit" (p. 97), the analogy is easy to see, and James, an astute reader who (prior to his personal crisis) had been engaging his own demons with an indecisiveness similar to Christian's, would have noted the allegorical parallels. Given that his past responses in moments of difficulty had not been couched in religious phraseology, it seems reasonable to conjecture that it was Bunyan's work, read just before he confronted his own "shadow of death," that provided the model that James followed – consciously or not, spontaneously or not – when he found himself on the edge of perdition. Like Christian, he clung to his scripture-texts for protection and comfort. And it worked. By his own report, they got him through and then beyond his vale of debilitating "panic fear" (James, 1902/1985, p. 134).

On May 7, 1870, James wrote to his brother Henry that "I have I think at last begun to rise out of the slough of the past 3 months." In saying this, he was not only describing his crisis through an analogy to Bunyan's "Slough of Despond," he was also indicating, it would seem, that those months of aftereffects – of being afraid to be alone, especially in the dark – were coming to an end. "I mean to try not to fall back again," he continued, asserting that "all a man has to depend on in this world, is in the last resort, mere brute power of resistance" (James, 1870/1992, pp. 158-159). If the argument in this article is correct, he now had a modified sense of what a realistic form of "resistance" to the pressures and evils of the world would entail – not brute *physical force* but the kind of *psychological force* that Christian and he had exhibited in overcoming their personal crises.⁹ In short, it would involve an intensive form of attention (manifested during their crises by focusing on particular Biblical phrases), which would come to constitute the core of James's innovative and unique view of human freedom within the confines of a largely, but not entirely deterministic world – a world in which James could now say with more

confidence that one need not “blink the evil out of sight, and gloss it over” (p. 159). Like Christian spying Zion in the distance, James now saw how he and others could conduct “the moral business” that had been his ultimate concern since his earlier youth (see Leary, 2015).

SOME OF JAMES’S LATER VIEWS IN LIGHT OF HIS PERSONAL CRISIS

Almost exactly twenty years later, on May 17, 1890, the day on which he inserted the very last period into his forthcoming *Principles of Psychology* (1890/1981), James expressed his satisfaction that “this big job is rolled off my shoulders like Christian[']s memorable pack” (James, 1890/1999a, p. 34). He was referring, of course, to the “bag of sin” that had burdened Bunyan’s pilgrim on his way to Zion (see James, 1898/2000, p. 460). The analogy held more meaning than James might have realized in the midst of his relief, for some of the central doctrines of his massive and important work – a major portion of the burden of his experience, study, and reflection over many years – had taken seed, or at least seem to have had their ground prepared, through his reading of the book that his mother had given to him on the eve of his personal crisis. In particular, his doctrines of attention and will, as laid out in long chapters in the *Principles*, bore a striking resemblance to his Bunyanesque behavior in the early 1870s. It was as if he had applied his *later* theories in the conduct of that *earlier* time, but of course it actually worked the other way around: What had occurred in practice in the early 1870s had been elaborated, subsequently, into the fully articulated theories that James published in 1890.

It took many steps for James to get from 1870 to 1890, but the key milestones in what we might call *The Psychologist’s Progress* are obvious enough. As early as 1875, having accepted the logic of Darwin’s work, James (1875/1987a) concluded that consciousness “would not have been added to life” unless it “served some useful purpose,” which led him to wonder if consciousness isn’t, in fact, “an economical *substitute* for mechanism” which allows “my experience” to be “only what I attend to” (pp. 299 & 302). This inference – a foundational premise of the distinctive psychology that James was already constructing – clearly echoed what had transpired when he selectively diverted his attention, during his personal crisis, from the frightening specter of the idiotic youth to the Biblical phrases that pushed that specter out of his mind, or at least to the periphery of his consciousness. Through willfully *clinging* to these phrases, as he put it, James had made them and *their* portents more present and more real to his consciousness than the frightening image and *its* portent. Thus had he transformed his experience from one of almost totally debilitating fear to lesser forms of anxiety as the previously dominant experience gradually faded even from the periphery of his consciousness.

The following year, drawing upon Charles Renouvier’s thought, James (1876/1987b) described the common circumstance in which “a representation arises in a mind, but ere it can discharge itself into a train of action, it is inhibited by another which confronts it...till finally one or the other representation recurs with such a degree of reinforcement that the tumult ceases.” During his personal crisis, of course, it had been the representation of Biblical verses that achieved what he called a “stable survival,” thus effectively banishing the representation that had frightened him. This triumph of one set of ideas over another constituted what he now came to consider and to call “volition” (p. 324).

Two years later, in 1879, James (1879/1983a) expressed his disagreement with Arthur Schopenhauer’s deterministic argument that “with a given fixed

character only one reaction is possible under given circumstances” by denying Schopenhauer’s premise that character is fixed. In fact, he argued, “Schopenhauer forgets that, in these critical ethical moments, what consciously *seems* to be in question is the very complexion of the character,” so that “the problem with the man is less what act he shall now choose to do, than what kind of a being he shall now resolve to become” (p. 51). Once again we see that the crucial issue for James had become *psychological resolve* rather than *physical action*. Physical action, he implied, can and at times *should* follow voluntary resolve rather than predetermined character or habit. As he goes on to say, in a passage duplicated years later in *The Principles of Psychology*,

the mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities. Consciousness consists in the comparison of these with each other, the selection of some, and the suppression of the rest by the reinforcing and inhibiting agency of Attention. (p. 51)

Quite explicitly, in this passage, we see that selective attention, which proved so effective during his personal crisis, had become a fundamental psychological phenomenon for James.

Then, in 1880, James drew disparate aspects of his emerging views together in an important article on “The Feeling of Effort.” It is in this article that he transformed William B. Carpenter’s narrowly defined notion of “ideo-motor *action*” into his own broadly defined “ideo-motor *theory*,” a much more significant and creative move on his part than has typically been recognized.¹⁰ The claim associated with his new theory was that “*every representation of a motion awakens the actual motion which is its object, unless inhibited by some antagonistic representation simultaneously present to the mind*” (James, 1880/1983b, pp. 103-104). The significance of this claim in relation to his earlier personal crisis is apparent: If the representation of the idiotic youth had been allowed to prevail, it would have led to deleterious consequences, whereas the willful shift of attention to Biblical phrases resulted, as a matter of course, in a very different outcome. “Volition,” James wrote, “is a psychic or moral fact pure and simple, and is absolutely completed when the *intention* or *consent* is there. The supervention of motion upon its completion is a supernumerary phenomenon” (p. 107). In sum, the effort that matters is the psychic effort, the attention, what he now called the “*fiat*”: the will to “let it be.” This *fiat*, he said, is simply “a state of mind which consents, agrees, or is willing.” If there are no conflicting ideas or representations presently in the mind, action will occur of its own accord; but if there is a competing idea or representation in consciousness, the *fiat* will require “effort” against “resistance” (pp. 111-112). So, “*to sustain a representation, to think*, is what requires the effort, and is the true moral act” (p. 113). As if to emphasize the point in relation to his earlier experience, James added that “maniacs know their thoughts to be insane, but they are too pressing to be withstood.” When “sober notions come,” they are unable to say, “let these alone represent my realities” (p. 113). It is up to the individual mind, if it is able, to decide what shall become its “Reality” (p. 112). Having come this far, James admitted that “the surviving idea is invested with a sense of reality which cannot at present be further analyzed” (p. 124).¹¹

From here it was a short step to James’s “What the Will Effects” (1888/1983c), a piece that is both a restatement of earlier ideas and an anticipation of James’s subsequent chapters on Attention and Will in *The Principles of Psychology*. Repeating that “what [mental] effort does when it comes to the aid of ideas is...to *hold the ideas fast*, so that *they* may acquire

strength and stability enough to make the machine obey” (p. 226), he went on to say that if sustained, “the moral idea ere long succeeds in calling up its own congenerers and associates, and ends up changing the man’s consciousness altogether. And with his consciousness his actions change” (p. 227). And then he ties all of this back to “the moral business” that he first espoused as a much younger man, asserting (with evidence as well as confidence) that “the men of will...choose their attitude...and hold fast to it in the teeth of the opposite ideas which ever urge them to let go their grasp.” And they not only “find a zest in this difficult clinging to truth” – the exuberance associated with a “strenuous” way of living, as he put it elsewhere (e.g., James, 1891/1979 & 1906/1975); they also become what James, following Ralph Waldo Emerson, called “the masters and the lords of life” (James, 1890/1981, Vol. 1, pp. 233-234).

Elaborating upon this idea in his chapter on the Will in his *Principles*, James (1890/1981) used different terms, regarding “heroes” and “heroic minds,” that came from Thomas Carlyle as well as Emerson: In “the heroic mind,” he wrote, the world finds “its worthy match and mate.” This mind “can stand this Universe” and “can meet it and keep...faith in it in presence of those features which lay...weaker brethren low.” Without “ostrich-like forgetfulness” and through “pure inward willingness,” this mind takes on the world and hence “forms a part of human destiny,” even – and perhaps most notably, as in James’s own experience – “when a dreadful object is presented, or when life as a whole turns up its dark abysses to our view” (Vol. 2, p. 1181).

James says much more than this, of course. He not only goes into much greater detail about the views I have sketched here, he also discusses the possible neurology underlying willful effort. (His speculative neurology, so frequently ridiculed in the past, has recently received corroboration and respect. See Leary, 2014.) And in his chapter on Attention he implicitly answers some questions that a reader of this article might ask. Why, for instance, did he recite various Biblical phrases, not just one or two as Bunyan’s fictional Christian had? Why? For the simple empirically grounded reason that, as James had discovered, “there is no such thing as voluntary attention sustained for more than a few seconds at a time” (James, 1890/1981, Vol. 1, p. 397). “No one,” he asserted, “can possibly attend continuously to an object that does not change” (p. 398). And how about those Biblical verses that he rehearsed over and over? Where did they come from? How did they occur to James in the midst of his distress? Essentially, they came to mind because James had established a habit of thinking about them, presumably as he read the Bible that his mother had given to him, so that multiple paths of association had been established. As he put it, “the things we attend to come to us by their own laws. Attention creates no idea; an idea must already be there before we can attend to it. Attention only fixes and retains what the ordinary laws of association bring ‘before the footlights’ of consciousness” (p. 426).

So what we do in prior times, even in seemingly minor activities, can matter; it can instill a “small voice” that will speak when needed, a voice that can then be “artificially reinforced” by the effort of attention – the essential action of willing, as James now underscored – which can end up making all the difference in the world (James, 1890/1981, Vol. 2, p. 1155). And as we will recall, the hope that humans can make a difference, even just a “nick,” was something James had entertained with emphatic earnestness as far back as his teenage years; it was something Schopenhauer had made him doubt by painting it as a chimera; it was something Bunyan’s book seems to have helped him espouse again by providing a model for free, willful action; and it was something his *Principles of Psychology* ended up validating through its probing exploration of the role of consciousness in the actualization of possible and

novel (as opposed to inevitable and familiar) human achievements. And that probing began, as we have seen, within the context and in the aftermath of his well-known personal crisis in the early 1870s.¹²

Fittingly enough, it was through his *Principles* and other works, dependent in varying degrees upon the foundational insights reviewed in this article, that James was able to fulfill his mission of making a difference in the world. For, as is widely attested and recognized, these works, based in part on evidence provided by his own experience, have instructed, inspired, and motivated untold others, from all around the globe, over the past century.

CONCLUSION

At this point I can hear some readers saying, This sounds very grand and all, but let's get back to specifics. Did Bunyan actually prompt James to make a Christian-like response during his personal crisis, or is there simply an interesting parallel to be made between their two situations and sets of behavior? And further, was James conscious of building his theories of attention and will upon the defensive measures he took to withstand his personal crisis, whether or not those measures were actually prompted by Bunyan's tale? In short, did James knowingly take a lesson from the way he resolved his personal crisis and then intentionally draw a set of theories from that lesson?

There is, in fact, no proof that *The Pilgrim's Progress* had precisely the impact that has been conjectured here, nor any conclusive evidence that James purposefully used the resolution of his personal crisis as a model for his later theories of attention and will. Clearly, the suggestions made in this article lack the kind of corroboration that supports the claims made in the preceding article regarding Schopenhauer's influence on the origin and nature of James's personal crisis. (I have already admitted as much in Note #8.) But James was an unusually reflective person. It would be surprising if he had no inkling, no intuition, not the slightest awareness of the parallel between the way his crisis played out and his later theories of attention and will. So what I have presented in this second of two articles might best be seen as a "likely story," to borrow Plato's apt terminology, and it seems to me that this story has an exceptional degree of "dramatic probability," to shift from Plato's to James's favored vocabulary.¹³ And whether or not others agree – whether or not anyone is persuaded that John Bunyan's chapter on "The Fight" in James's copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678-1684/1869) contributed in some tangible, even if subliminal way to James's reconceptualization of consciousness as "a fighter for ends" (James, 1890/1981, Vol. 1, p. 144) – I would like to think that this article's review of James's personal crisis of the early 1870s in light of his possession of Bunyan's work has, in any case, enhanced our understanding of both the resolution of that crisis and the significance of James's later theories.

With the expression of that hope, we are left with one final bit of unfinished business – the question of the "religious bearing" of James's crisis. James's assertion that his crisis had such a bearing and the context within which he made this assertion, following his discussion of Tolstoy's and Bunyan's crises (each of which led to a religious conversion), has made it easy for many to assume that James was indicating that he himself had experienced something like a religious conversion or at least some kind of religious awakening. But, as Paul Croce reports and Linda Simon has observed, "there is nothing in James's correspondence or journal entries...to reveal any religious conversion or epiphany" (Croce, 2009, p. 50; Simon, 1998, p. 127). They are, of course, correct, and this may have spurred doubt regarding the veracity of James's report. But "having a religious bearing" need not be equivalent to "having a

conversion or epiphany.” Despite the outcomes of Tolstoy’s and Bunyan’s experiences, the chapter in which James reported his crisis was concerned with “The Sick Soul” whose maladies make one *susceptible* to religious conversion; it isn’t about religious conversion *per se*. (As noted earlier, religious conversion is the topic of subsequent chapters in *Varieties*.)

Part of the “manner of memory” that Croce (2009) has attributed to James’s account of his personal crisis has to do with James’s mantra-like recitation of scriptural passages. Croce comments that James “did not ever pray in the style of the French correspondent,” and he points out in addition that James admitted later in life that praying felt “foolish and artificial” to him. Further, Croce notes that James rarely mentioned praying in his youth (pp. 55-56). Even so, there are abundant examples of people who say they never pray (and who don’t believe) but who *do* in fact pray, almost immediately and spontaneously, when confronted with one or another of life’s tragedies (see Tilley, 1991). So even if James’s report was “stylized” in this or that respect, it seems entirely possible that James *did* utter those Biblical phrases, in all sincerity, without undergoing a religious conversion or enjoying any kind of religious epiphany. But what, then, did he mean by the “religious bearing” of his experience? In light of what he wrote later in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890/1981), it may well be that he learned that prayers can be and often are uttered *independent* of any religious belief:

We hear, in these days of scientific enlightenment, a great deal of discussion about the efficacy of prayer; and many reasons are given us why we should not pray, whilst others are given us why we should. But in all this very little is said of the reason we *do* pray, which is simply that we cannot *help* praying. It seems probable that, in spite of all that ‘science’ may do to the contrary, men will continue to pray to the end of time, unless their mental nature changes in a manner which nothing we know should lead us to expect.

To explain what he meant, James continued:

The impulse to pray is a necessary consequence of the fact that whilst the innermost of the empirical selves of a man is a Self of the *social* sort, it yet can find its only adequate *Socius* in an ideal world. (Vol. 1, p. 301)

In times of stress, in particular, people tend to appeal to that idealized Other, that possible “Great Companion,” as James put it. And what prompts us to do so – to pray, if prayer it is – even if we are agnostic or atheistic? To what is prayer or supplication the appropriate response? James gives the answer immediately following his self-report in *Varieties*: It is the deeply human experience of “Help! help!” In this cry for assistance, he says, is “the real core of the religious problem” (James, 1902/1985, p. 135). This may well be the insight, with religious bearing, that James took from his experience. Religion is a response to the experience of helplessness – an insight that Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, among others, shared with James, though James drew different conclusions from it.

James was not explicitly religious, then or later, though he spoke at times of about being vaguely “theistic” and even “polytheistic” (James, 1890/1999b, p. 94, & 1882/1997, p. 195). Still, incomplete and unorthodox as his “overbeliefs” were, he could sense and appreciate the living impulse behind

religion. As he later confessed when speaking about those who give voice to their religious experience, “I have no mystical experience of my own, but just enough of the germ of mysticism in me to recognize the region from which their voice comes when I hear it” (James, 1904/2002, p. 459). And while he reported that he had “no living sense of commerce with a God,” he said he envied those who did, not because he feared damnation of whatever sort any longer, but because he knew that “the addition of such a sense would help me greatly” (James, 1904/1935, p. 350). Indeed, he felt that everyone, sooner or later, is likely to feel the need for help.¹⁴ This was almost certainly the insight, with “religious bearing,” that he took from his personal crisis. Again: “*Here is the real core of the religious problem: Help! help!*” (James, 1902/1985, p. 135, italics added). This realization – indelibly underscored by his need for help during his personal crisis – seems to have made him more sensitive to the experiences, including the religious experiences, of others. So just as Schopenhauer seems to have brought the virtues of sympathy and compassion to James’s attention (see Leary, 2015), so too did James’s turn to simple Biblical phrases seem to expand his virtues of understanding and tolerance. These are virtues that we would all benefit from learning...and making habitual.

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NOTES

¹I have reported on aspects of this research in invited addresses and presentations to the American Psychological Association (2003, 2004, 2005, & 2007), Cheiron: The International Society for the History of Behavioral and Social Sciences (2003 & 2005), and the European Society for the History of the Human Sciences (2004 & 2009) as well as at San José State University (2005), the University of Chicago (2005), the University of New Hampshire (2006), and the University of Richmond (2007).

²By later, I do not mean later in this article, but in the years ahead. (If I may interject a personal note for those who have known about this long-term project as well as the reason that it was interrupted for a number of years, I am pleased to report that the family health issue that interfered with its fruition has been resolved. Hence the project will soon be moving forward once again.)

³The popularity of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* during the nineteenth century is a well attested fact. Not only was it republished a good many times, it also served as a model, provided key allusions, and figured prominently in various minor and major works, including Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Celestial Rail-Road* (1843), William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868). Even Mark Twain, in his humorous way, could assume his audience's understanding when he published *The Innocents Abroad; or, The New Pilgrims' Progress* (1869). As for James's own cohorts, his close friend and colleague Josiah Royce can serve as a stand-in for many others. He recalled that as he grew up in the 1860s "the Bible was always

available, as was John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*," both of which he was reading seriously before he was ten (Hine, 1992, p. 41). In fact, Bunyan's was such an important book for Royce that "he never tired of quoting" it throughout his life (p. 181), and he published a detailed, three-part analysis of "The Case of John Bunyan" in the first issues of the *Psychological Review* (1894), though the analysis in that work was based primarily on Bunyan's autobiographical *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666/1888). The influence of Bunyan, if not *Pilgrim's Progress*, is also apparent in the work of James's student, G. Stanley Hall, who borrowed the concept of "mansoul" from one of Bunyan's other works (see Leary, 2006, p. 209). For general background on Bunyan and *The Pilgrim's Progress* in America and over time, see Greaves (1983) and Smith (1966).

⁴I should note that James's copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678-1684/1869) is not the standard version of this classic work. Rather, it is a vastly simplified version – one that appeared in a series of then-popular texts that had been rendered into "words of one syllable." This particular abbreviated and simplified version was produced by "Mrs. Edward Ashley Walker," or less formally, Katharine Kent Child Walker. One might well wonder why James's mother gave him *this* version, surely intended for much younger and less sophisticated readers, not for someone like James who was reading Arthur Schopenhauer (in the original German) at that time. It is possible that this recently published version simply fell into her hands, but the unusual nature of this selection – and the fact that she gave a gift at all – makes it seem that there was more involved in her choice. Especially in a family (like most at that time) that exchanged relatively few gifts, each present was typically chosen with considerable care. So it seems fair to assume that in late January 1870 James's mother felt that her son needed *this particular* gift, and was less concerned about whether or not he read a classic text in its original form than getting him to attend to the unvarnished and unmistakable core message of the work. Ironically, James notes in *Varieties*, in the same passage that describes his personal crisis, that "my mother in particular, a very cheerful person, seemed to me a perfect paradox in her unconsciousness of danger [including possibly inescapable insanity], which you may well believe I was very careful not to disturb by revelations of my own state of mind" (James, 1902/1985, p. 135). Clearly, her gift belies James's supposition about his mother's ignorance, but then, this would not have been the first time that a child – even an exceptionally bright and sensitive child of almost 28 years of age – had underestimated what his mother knew! Finally, it is worth noting that the autobiographical report of the 1844 "vastation" experience suffered by William's father, Henry James Sr., which did not appear in print until 1879, was clearly structured according to motifs drawn from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (Feinstein, 1984, pp. 68-73). Interestingly, James cites his father's report in *Varieties* as representing "another case of fear equally sudden" (James, 1902/1985, p. 135). Indeed, the similarities between their two cases go much further than that. Particularly relevant to the argument that will be advanced in this article is the fact that Henry Sr. reported that it was only "by an immense effort" that he was able to control his fear and remain "determined not to budge" even as he received "no relief from any truth" other than "a most pale and distant glimmer of the Divine existence" (quoted in James, 1884/1982, p. 31). Henry Sr.'s report is so obviously "mannered," to use Croce's (2009) term, that one wonders if he knew about his son's later experience – perhaps even his son's reliance, as I will argue, on Bunyan's depiction of how Christian, the pilgrim, endured a similarly fearful situation in *Pilgrim's Progress* – before he completed his long-delayed account of his own earlier experience. The circle turns!

⁵The key issue regarding the Bible is that James was familiar enough with it to recite various Biblical phrases during his personal crisis. Even without knowing the specific Bible that he read, it would not be surprising that a person of his time – and more specifically, the son of a Christian theologian, however unorthodox – should be familiar with the Bible. In any case, James's request for his copy of the Bible illustrates not only his inclination to read the Bible from time to time but also his remarkable memory for texts and his delightful and subtle sense of humor. Writing from France, less than a month before he started reading Kant and Renouvier – and purchased Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1859) – he asked his “dear Aunt Kate” to bring “my Bible” to him in Europe, a Bible “which by an ‘unaccountable fatality’ I left behind and have missed ever since” (James, 1868/1995a, p. 336). The allusion, “unaccountable fatality,” is to Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-1766/1979, Vol. 4, Ch. 31, p. 329) and more particularly to an instance in which an eldest son in a family neglected a significant responsibility due to his father's sending him to mainland Europe, hence William was implicitly (in jest) chiding his theologian father (who would have learned about his request) for having played a role in inhibiting his Bible reading!

⁶A *Confession* (Tolstoy, 1879/2010) provided the basis for James's analysis of Tolstoy's “religious melancholy” (James, 1902/1985, pp. 126-131), while *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Bunyan, 1666/1888) formed the basis for James's assessment of Bunyan's “different kind of religious melancholy” (James, 1902/1985, pp. 131-133). Because of James's discussion of Bunyan and his footnoted reference to Bunyan's autobiography in the middle of his own self-report in *Varieties*, some readers of this article will already associate Bunyan with James's account, but it is important to note that it is *Grace Abounding*, not *The Pilgrim's Progress*, that James discusses and cites in *Varieties*. The only reference to *Pilgrim's Progress* in *Varieties* is an allusion to “the immortal Allegory which he [Bunyan] wrote,” which “has brought the very spirit of religious patience home to English hearts” (p. 155). *Grace Abounding* was a significant text for James, who gave a copy of it to his brother Robertson when Robertson was suffering from his own depression and associated ills (see R. James, 1881/1997, p. 168), but it isn't the subject of this article. As for Tolstoy, it might interest some to know that his *Confession* left no doubt that the Russian novelist took Schopenhauer very seriously, especially regarding the *intellectual absurdity* of life, as he searched for his own more *emotionally satisfying answer* to the meaning of it all (as noted by James, 1902/1985, p. 130).

⁷Clearly, James's subsequent fear of being alone, especially in the dark, was not of the same intensity as his fear of going insane, which characterized the encounter with his hallucinatory “other.” Despite the interpolation of comments about his subsequent fears, it seems clear that his report of reciting Biblical phrases refers specifically to his initial confrontation with the image of what he might potentially become.

⁸A lot rides, in this article, on the assumption that it was James himself who folded over the corner of this one page. I must admit that a folder-of-a-page-corner is not as easily identified as a writer-of-an-annotation. James's handwriting and his ways of marking texts are virtually unmistakable, so that it is fairly easy to identify his signature, annotations, symbols, marginal lines, and underscorings. In this case, however, all I can rely upon is the fact that the dog-eared page is *exactly the right page* to fit the argument in this article – or to put this in another way, *it would be remarkable, though not impossible, that the folding of this particular corner was a coincidence*. Also, the assumption that James bent the corner *helps make sense* of what is known and *is consonant* with

important views that James held in later life. The fact that James *did the same thing* that Bunyan's pilgrim, Christian, did in *his* moment of greatest fear, makes the connection both rationally understandable and empirically grounded...*if in fact the alleged connection is true*. (Here I need to admit that not all things that *seem* to be reasonable are so, and not all things that *seem* to have been provoked by something were so provoked.) And to make the situation even more complicated, in 1910 (perhaps after James died in August of that year), his copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was claimed by or given to his son William's future wife, Alice Runnells, as indicated by another inscription on the book's flyleaf: "Alice R. Runnells 1910." All I can say about that is that *other* books kept in this same home, owned by this same Alice, are not marked by similar dog-ears. A final possibility – other than the fact that *anyone* with access to the book over 140+ years *could* have turned the page corner – is that James himself turned the corner *later*, perhaps when he recognized a parallel between what he had done during his own crisis, what the pilgrim Christian had done during a moment *in extremis*, and/or what his own (later) views on attention and will would have suggested as a practical means of coping with such crises. And if this is the case, one could ask, isn't it possible that it happened when James read *The Pilgrim's Progress* to one of his children, decades later, as he did to his son Henry (James, 1887/1998, p. 199)? That's entirely possible, of course, though one would expect James to have *done* something with this new insight, as he typically would have done (e.g., writing something in a letter, diary, or notebook), and there is no record of his having done so. In any case, James was *already* committed, by then, to ideas that seem to have been reinforced, at least, by the experience that I will describe as *highly probable*. That's the best defense I can make regarding the vital fact upon which the stronger version of my argument relies. It is, perhaps, as good a defense or explanation as the best historians – or lawyers or doctors – can provide in many instances. Circumstantial evidence is, after all, evidence, albeit less than apodictic.

⁹As discussed in the preceding article (Leary, 2015), James had already reached this conclusion by April 30, 1870, when he reported in his diary that he had determined to "posit life, (the real, the good) in the self governing *resistance* of the ego to the world" (James, 1868-1873). If his personal crisis occurred at some point in the weeks after Minny Temple's death on March 8, as seems likely based on evidence in this earlier article, James was still feeling the attenuated fears of being alone, especially in the dark, when he wrote this diary entry and – one week later – the letter to his brother. But the end of those fears was apparently in sight.

¹⁰Carpenter, an English physician who did research in zoology and physiology, considered the occasional occurrence of behavior that followed automatically upon the idea of it as one of the "curiosities of our mental life," whereas James argued that it is a universal principle of action: Any idea that has "filled the mind" to the exclusion of any other idea will naturally and necessarily issue into its associated motion. (This assertion is related to James's "teleological" view of the mind and ideas.) On the expansion of Carpenter's notion, see James (1890/1981, Vol. 2, p. 1131) and Leary (2013, especially Note #56).

¹¹The reader shouldn't conclude that James didn't care about human conduct, which in fact was a vital concern for him. He simply believed that conduct results from uncontested ideas, or from willful attention to one among alternative ideas, or from instinct or habit. Precisely because habits can be formed as a result of individual resolve – the willful focusing on a particular idea – he urged his readers (including parents and teachers as well as any individuals who might take his advice) to appreciate the importance of

establishing good habits and avoiding bad habits, both of which eventually become *virtually* determined. Once formed, habits account for a great deal of human conduct. Since they are performed for the most part without explicit decision-making, they allow an individual to reserve consciousness for dealing with problems and novelties rather than the ordinary business of life. See James (1890/1981, Vol. 1, Ch. 4 & 1899/1983d, Ch. 8) and Leary (2013). This leaves much to be said regarding James's view of indeterminacy; his valued concepts of interest and possibility; the role of chance, novelty, and the unexpected, both in the universe and in human life; and the practical equivalency of ideas, thoughts, visions, feelings, and representations in his discussions of mind and consciousness. Visions and feelings are particularly relevant to his discussions of values and ethics (see Leary, 2009).

¹²To be clear, James's assessment of the nature and role of attention, effort, and will, as expressed in his *Principles*, involved more than what he had personally experienced. Besides the work of William B. Carpenter, he used research and observations by Sigmund Exner, Gustav Theodor Fechner, Johann Friedrich Herbart, George Henry Lewes, Henry Maudsley, and Wilhelm Wundt, among others, to develop views that were consonant with the resolution of his personal crisis. This article is focused only on what might be called the living core of his assessment.

¹³In Plato's *Timaeus* (ca. 355 BCE/1965), Socrates accepts Timaeus' statement that "on many matters concerning the gods and the whole world of change we are unable in every respect and on every occasion to render a consistent and accurate account" and therefore we "should not look for anything more than a likely story" (p. 41). James had a similar sensitivity to the imperfect nature of empirical knowledge, and he often referred to the "dramatic" aspects of natural events as well as human experience (e.g., James, 1902/1985, pp. 390-393). These aspects lend themselves to narrative accounts that have more or less "dramatic probability" (e.g., James, 1909/1986, p. 391). More specifically, accounts typically compel at least tentative assent if they accord with our sense of how things ought to have happened, given what James called "the whole drift of [our] education" (James, 1902/1985, p. 408) or, stated otherwise, what "allies itself best with the whole body and drift of all truths in sight" (James, 1906/1975, p. 125). "Dramatic probability" is a useful concept for understanding and assessing much of what counts as human knowledge.

¹⁴James's positions in relation to religion were complicated and nuanced, and they shifted somewhat over time. But all in all, his *general* perspective remained fairly constant. Here are three touchstones: (1) In 1876, he told his future wife that "my attitude toward Religion is one of deference rather than of adoption. I see its place; I feel that there are times when everything else must fail & that, or nothing, remain; and yet **I behave as if I must leave it untouched until such times come, and I am driven to it by sheer stress of weather**" (James, 1876/1995b, p. 547). "Weather" was Chauncey Wright's term for the unexpected, seemingly random events of nature and life – *events like the personal crisis that sparked James's need for help!* (2) In 1882, James wrote to his friend Thomas Davidson that "it is a curious thing, this matter of God! I can sympathize perfectly with the most rabid hater of him and the idea of him....But as an Ideal to attain and make probable, I find myself less and less able to do without him. He need not be an *all*-including 'subjective unity of the universe,' as you suppose. In fact there is nothing I clasp hands with you so heartily in, as in defying the superstition of such a unity....**In saying 'God exists' all I imply is that my purposes are cared for** by a mind so powerful as on the whole to control the drift of the Universe. This is as much polytheism as monotheism. As a matter of fact it is neither, for it is hardly a speculative position at all but a

merely practical and emotional faith which I fancy even your Promethean Gemüth [soul] shares....Once think possible a primordial pluralism of which he may be one member and which may have no single subjective synthesis, and piety forthwith ceases to be incompatible with manliness and religious 'Faith' with intellectual rectitude. In short **the only theism I defend is that of simple unphilosophic mankind**" (James, 1882/1997, pp. 194-195). (3) In the same 1904 questionnaire on his religious views in which James remarked that "I can't pray – I feel foolish and artificial," he also admitted believing that "something exists," though "not powerfully" and only "dimly," and that **"the social appeal for corroboration, consolation, etc."** and for **"a more powerful ally of my own ideals"** were the most significant aspects of his very tentative belief. Asked if he had ever experienced "His presence," James responded with a simple, unambiguous "Never" (reprinted in H. James, 1920, Vol. 2, pp. 212-215). (The bold print throughout is my doing.) All in all, I see James's comments in the foregoing letters and 1904 questionnaire as being consistent with my view that religion, for him, represented some sort of connection with an "other" or "force" or "more" that could potentially *help* him and others, especially by affirming their individual identities, purposes, and ideals.

RECONSTRUCTING JAMES'S EARLY RADICAL EMPIRICISM: THE 1896 PREFACE AND "THE SPIRIT OF INNER TOLERANCE"

ERMINE L. ALGAIER IV

ABSTRACT

*This paper re-contextualizes William James's early radical empiricism based upon a historical and philosophical reading of the 1896 preface of *The Will to Believe*. I suggest that James's "irrational" early radical empiricism, as guided by the "spirit of inner tolerance," is tinged with a fringe sensitivity or awareness of the epistemic outsider. Based upon his critique of the blind monist, this paper argues that when we look toward a wider conception of James's philosophy, it reveals that his early radical empiricism is intimately concerned with social and moral elements with regard to matters of fact and perspective. Utilizing Gavin's manifest-latent hermeneutic, I show how James defends this type of outsider, the epistemic underdog, with the hope of creating a more open, free, and democratic marketplace of ideas and practices that is predicated upon the value of respectful difference.*

When we look toward James's first public announcement of radical empiricism, it becomes clear that we need to be more critical as to how we discuss his ideas. In contrast to Edward Madden's interpretation, I am suggesting that we avoid using James's later formulation (e.g. his 1904-05 technical writings) as a measuring stick for his 1896 articulation.¹ As we inquire into James's *early* radical empiricism,² we ought to *not* assume that he is directly concerned with metaphysics, with pure experience, and the epistemological relations of the subject-object dichotomy.³ A more critical reading, I suggest, is one which draws from the historical, thematic, and philosophical context of James's work in the mid to late 1890's.

According to this interpretation, which focuses on a close textual and contextual reading of the preface of *The Will to Believe*, when we take a wider view of what "philosophy" means to James we see that his early radical empiricism is more pervasive than previously acknowledged. This paper aims to show that not only was James intimately concerned with epistemological matters of fact and perspective, but also their social and moral implications. It suggests an alternative narrative is uncovered if we look toward particular themes, both historical and philosophical, which reveal themselves as focal points of James's work in the mid 1890s, particularly the year 1896. It reveals a counter philosophical history that resituates how we understand the range and scope of James's early radical empiricism, the types of discourse that he entered, and what type of persons were capable of producing knowledge.⁴

In the first section of the paper, I address James's radical empiricist conception of philosophy and suggest that we need to move away from metaphysical interpretations and attend to the social, moral, and epistemic dimensions of his thinking. Building upon this wider view, the next two sections are divided between manifest and latent readings of the text—a

hermeneutic strategy that Gavin utilizes in his most recent work, *William James in Focus*. Section two highlights the manifest characteristics of James's radical empiricist methodology by focusing on his critique of rationality and perspectival limits. Section three offers an experimental reading of the 1896 preface of *The Will to Believe* by focusing on the latent content. It fleshes out what James calls "the spirit of inner tolerance" and his defense of the epistemic outsider. This section closes with the observation that we can find two types of persons emerge from the preface: (1) the blind monist who is incapable of seeing the inner significance of "the other"; and (2) the epistemic underdog, or outcaste, whose belief system locates him/her on the fringe of a dominant epistemological paradigm. In the concluding remarks, I suggest that the "irrationalism" of James's early radical empiricism is guided by the "spirit of inner tolerance." More specifically, that his new philosophy is tinged with a fringe sensitivity or awareness of the epistemological other and aims to defend this type of outsider with the hope of creating a more open, free, and democratic marketplace of ideas and practices that is predicated upon the value of respectful difference.

I: REDEFINING PHILOSOPHY ACCORDING TO EARLY RADICAL EMPIRICISM

In order to grasp the moral and social undercurrent of James's early radical empiricism, we need to take a fresh look at his first public description. In December of 1896 James penned the preface to *The Will to Believe & Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. The text itself is comprised of a ten essays written within a seventeen year span between 1879 and 1896. In addition to previously publishing most of these articles in both popular magazines (e.g. *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner's*, etc.) and technical journals (e.g. *Mind*, *International Journal for Ethics*, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, etc.), he also delivered many of these papers as public addresses to a variety of associations, clubs, and societies.⁵

A. THE "IRRATIONALISM" OF THE 1896 PREFACE

In the preface James provides his audience with three different ways of understanding his new philosophy of radical empiricism. First, he describes his position as an attitude, then as a method, and lastly as a worldview. This paper focuses on the latter two themes of James's early radical empiricism, specifically, as a method of epistemological critique and as a worldview that functions as an undefined yet robust, or thick, pluralism—both of which include epistemic, metaphysical, moral, psychological, and social dimensions. Looking toward these aspects of his early description of radical empiricism enables us to see two critical elements. First, that his democratic, pragmatic, and pluralistic tendencies not only focus on individuals, but upon individuals within an environment—that is to say, a social context. And, secondly, it suggests that at this time in his career, James seems to be preoccupied with "fringe facts," or facts that lay outside of the epistemological norm(s).

In the 1896 preface, after having defined and methodologically described his position as "radical empiricism," James redirects his attention to the reception of this new standpoint by his philosophically-minded colleagues:

Many of my professionally trained confrères will smile at the *irrationalism of this view*, and at the artlessness of my essays in point of technical form. But they should be taken as illustrations of the radically empiricist attitude rather than as argumentations for its validity. That admits meanwhile of being argued in as technical a shape as anyone can desire, and

possibly I may be spared to do later a share of that work (emphasis added).⁶

In the 1896 preface James describes himself as a radical empiricist and a pluralist. As noted in the above paragraph, he also assumes that his colleagues will consider his position as “irrational.” It takes little imagination to understand why James might anticipate this claim. Given his tendencies to defend indeterminism, psychical research, religion (or the right to believe religiously), etc., one can easily foresee how his imagined opponent (positivist, realist, etc.) might consider his standpoint to be irrational. That is to say, because James’s arguments seek to democratically defend the “irrational” opinions and experiences of various minority groups that run counter to the epistemological status quo, it goes without saying that he would be considered guilty by mere association. For someone to study, let alone argue for, those subjects that are deemed to be irrational and alogical is to be irrational oneself.

However, when we reconsider the cultural, historical, and philosophical context within which James is working, I find that what at first appears to be a cautionary remark is, in fact, a telling feature. By using this so-called “irrationalism” as a point of departure, I reconstruct an alternative framework for understanding his early radical empiricism.

James maintains that the collected essays depict the radical empiricist attitude, albeit in an untechnical, but dramatic form. According to his remark in the preface, “these essays seem to light up with a certain dramatic reality the attitude itself, and make it visible alongside of the higher and lower dogmatisms between which in the pages of philosophic history it has generally remained eclipsed from sight.”⁷

While it seems that James is trying to provide us with a context for grasping this attitude, it is entirely too open and vague for any definitive interpretation. Much of the secondary literature draws our attention to James’s confrontation with absolute idealism and realism, while also demonstrating his upbringing in the British (and Scottish) empirical tradition and how he overcomes the problems that vexed them. While this literature has refined our understanding of James’s methodological commitments and his philosophical heritage, it often neglects to incorporate his interest in fringe, or subaltern, thought.⁸ In the context of nineteenth century religious and cultural movements, Catherine Albanese, a notable scholar of American religion, defines subaltern as “a person holding a subordinate position.” While much has been written on James’s interest subaltern culture, such as mental hygiene, mental healing, mysticism, psychopathology, and psychical research, his interest in fringe thinking has yet to be systematically explored in connection with his early radical empiricism.

B. PHILOSOPHY AS THE “HABIT OF ALWAYS SEEING AN ALTERNATIVE”

Considering the fact that James describes his new philosophy as lying hidden between the lower and higher philosophical dogmatisms, we need to inquire into the nature and meaning of James’s conception of philosophy and how it is to be regarded as something new. Consulting Baldwin’s *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* reveals four definitions of philosophy. The first three refer to natural, moral, and metaphysical philosophy, whereas the fourth functions as an inter-disciplinary system of thinking that captures the “animating spirit of all.”⁹ While I could make use of Baldwin’s definition as a general measuring stick for nineteenth century thought, doing so would not capture the idiosyncratic distinctions that differentiate James’s conception of philosophy from other contemporary thinkers.

As early as 1876 James offers a definition of philosophy that runs against

the grain. In "The Teaching of Philosophy in Our Colleges" he alludes to the importance of the unconventional point of view and the ability to look beyond our own proclivities. He writes:

If the best use of our college is to give young men a wider openness of mind and a more flexible way of thinking than special technical training can generate, then we hold that philosophy...is the most important of all college studies. However sceptical one may be of the attainment of universal truths....one can never deny that philosophical study means *the habit of always seeing an alternative, of not taking the usual for granted, of making conventionalities fluid again, of imagining foreign states of mind*. In a word, it means the possession of mental perspective (emphasis added).¹⁰

What is significant about this definition is that it breaks from the traditional definition (*philo-sophia*) by offering a different type of wisdom. It captures James's pluralistic tendencies by showcasing the multiplicity of perspective, rather than a singular search for truth. Philosophy, in this sense, is grounded in a perspectival shift whereby the philosopher learns to "imagine foreign states of mind," seeing the usual as unusual, and to always seek an alternative. Our challenge, then, is to see the continuity within James's early philosophical thinking and that this idea of "mental perspective" is one that pervades his democratic, pluralistic, and pragmatic thinking.

Late in his career James once again takes up the task of defining philosophy, this time devoting the first chapter of *Some Problems of Philosophy* to its definition and meaning. While it is certainly not the definitive definition for James, it does reflect a long and illustrious career of thinking things "philosophically." He closes his introduction with the following distinction:

In its original acception, meaning the completest knowledge of the universe, philosophy must include the results of all the sciences, and cannot be contrasted with the latter. It simply aims at making of science what Herbert Spencer calls a system of '*completely-unified* knowledge.' In the more modern sense, of something contrasted with the sciences, philosophy means 'metaphysics.'¹¹

In this passage James provides us with two conceptions of philosophy. The modern distinction is predicated upon an essential division between the roles of science and philosophy; the philosophy of old, however, contains no such distinction. He then proceeds to evaluate the two conceptions:

The older sense is the more worthy sense, and as the results of the sciences get more available for co-ordination, and the conditions for finding truth in different kinds of questions get more methodologically defined, we may hope that the term will revert to its original meaning. Science, metaphysics, and religion may then again form a single body of wisdom, and lend each other mutual support.¹²

From this passage, it is quite clear that James praises the philosophy of old, which he deems as "more worthy," and longs for the day when philosophy functions as the Spencerian system of unified knowledge. When we consider James's ongoing critique of "Science," we can see that what he considered as "science"—which does not carry the dogma and bias of its capitalized

brethren—is extremely sympathetic to what were then, and still now, considered by many as non-scientific, or pseudo-scientific, enterprises.¹³ As is well known, James devoted much of his life to psychical research. Perry observes that it was “not one of his vagaries, but was central and typical.”¹⁴ Additionally, James was also a believer and regular participant in many alternative medical practices.¹⁵ And, as is more popularly known, he was a strong advocate of mysticism and the diversity of religious belief.

When James’s interests in fringe “sciences” are taken into account, it suggests that his mid-1890s conception of philosophy is to be located somewhere between the early and late definitions. As exemplified by the essays in *The Will to Believe*, we get the sense of James’s inter- and intra-disciplinary thinking as a philosophical attempt to bring together the fields of physiology, psychology, psychopathology, psychical research, and religion. At the same time, when we consider the latent content of the essays and their defense of what I am calling the “epistemic underdog,” then the attitudinal component of James’s philosophy “as always seeking an alternative” becomes more readily apparent.

II. EARLY RADICAL EMPIRICISM AND THE 1896 PREFACE: THE MANIFEST CONTENT

In his recent book, William Gavin develops a hermeneutic strategy of reading James’s text as parsed between manifest and latent images.¹⁶ The manifest content tends toward detailed descriptions of James’s radical and innovative ways of looking at the self, the world, and the dynamic relationship between. The latent content, Gavin maintains, is “directive” insofar as it leads back to experience. In this capacity, the latent content is partial, unfinished, and lacks the sense of certainty.¹⁷ Using this strategy, I argue that two images emerge from James’s 1896 preface. On the one hand, we find a manifest image of his early radical empiricism that is overly concerned with methodology and criticism. On the other hand, a latent image of the text reveals a position that is deeply troubled by social and moral issues.

A. THE METHODOLOGICAL COMMITMENT

Turning toward the opening pages of the 1896 preface, James decides to give his new position a nickname for ease of reference. He writes,

Were I obliged to give a short name to the attitude in question, I should call it that of *radical empiricism*, in spite of the fact that such brief nicknames are nowhere more misleading than in philosophy. I say “empiricism,” because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience.

Here we have the classic starting point of a philosophical methodology. James defines his orientation as being that of an empiricist. The traditional narrative is to differentiate this school of thought from rationalism and to point out their respective historical and philosophical differences.¹⁸ James simplifies this division by reducing it to the fallibility of human knowledge, which stakes its position on the idea that knowledge claims are liable to change and modification through experience. The significance of his linguistic adjustment—that is the transformation of “assured conclusions” into “hypotheses liable to modification”—is paramount not only for understanding his early radical empiricism, but also his pragmatism.¹⁹

The next major feature is that he further qualifies his stance as “radical” insofar as it may apply to any particular situation. He explains it as follows:

...and I say “radical,” because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and, unlike so much of the half-way empiricism that is current under the name of positivism or agnosticism or scientific naturalism, it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square.²⁰

James's concern here is for any type of monistic *thinking*, not merely a particular metaphysical doctrine. What is interesting is James's use of the term ‘monism.’ The first instance is presented as the “doctrine of monism” and gives the sense of referring to a singular thesis. The unfortunate consequence of this linguistic designation is that it is all too often identified as a specific type of rationalist metaphysics, as opposed to referring to its broader meaning. According to Baldwin's *Dictionary*, monism is defined as a “name applicable to *any system of thought* which sees in the universe the manifestation or working of a single principle.”²¹ James is fairly clear about capturing the latter sense of the term when he mentions “the doctrine”: he refers to a variety of monistic thought, such as “positivism,” “agnosticism,” and “scientific naturalism”—not just absolute idealism.

At this stage in its development, radical empiricism refers to a methodology that asks uncomfortable questions: it challenges basic practical assumptions and philosophical presuppositions as a way of shaking the foundations of certainty. It does not, however, provide the solution to its criticism: it functions solely at the level of epistemological (or logical) critique.²² Taken together, the above points showcase how James's early radical empiricism methodologically challenges both monistic thought—in any and all forms—and the idea of certainty: *all claims* concerning matters of fact are to be treated as “hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience.”

B. PERSPECTIVAL CRITIQUE

Thus far according to a manifest reading of 1896 preface we have seen that James is intimately concerned with aggressive and over-extended knowledge claims. His radical empiricist position is methodologically rooted in the fallibility of human knowledge and directed toward the rampant dogmatism that permeates nearly all aspects of intellectual pursuit. While its aim is deeply concerned with the nature of truth, this perspective is expressed in a negative fashion. By showcasing rational and perspectival limits, James is directly calling attention to the dogmatic manner that certain parties monopolize their own perspective. The heart of this critique is that the “inward clarity” of a particular point of view is incapable of achieving a public or universal status: it always eclipses some fact or point of view.

In *William James at the Boundaries*, Bordogna astutely observes that one of the features of James's “new epistemological regime” is that his style of argumentation quickly shifts gears between different lines of reasoning.²³ While he may begin with a methodological and epistemological framework, it quickly turns into a discussion of moral and social issues, only to later re-explore their meaning in a new epistemic and/or methodological context. This zigzagging style of argumentation, not unique to James, appears in the preface after he has described the basic meaning of radical empiricism. Unless closely followed, these distinctions can be easily lost, hence the importance of calling attention to how he is attempting to re-orient our perspective to that of an open, democratic, and pluralistic orientation.

James begins his perspectival critique reflecting on the reasoning process: “Postulating more unity than the first experiences yield, we also discover more. But absolute unity, in spite of brilliant dashes in its direction, still remains undiscovered, still remains a *Grenzbegriff*.”²⁴ From an empirical standpoint, we postulate based upon previous experience. As our experience-base broadens, our hypotheses expand reaching further and deeper into the nature of reality and ourselves. Yet, however far we stretch, there is invariably something just out of intellectual reach. James expresses this point in “The Will to Believe” and “The Sentiment of Rationality” by arguing that if confronted with a genuine option that cannot be decided by reason alone, then our “passional nature” decides thusly.²⁵

As we continue to trace his zigzag style we see James transitions to the epistemic dimension and showcases the limitations of reason: “After all that reason can do has been done, there still remains the opacity of the finite facts as merely given, with most of their peculiarities mutually unmediated and unexplained.”²⁶ Elaborating upon this perspectival limitation, he fluidly moves into the practical dimension in order to abstractly apply his critique of reason to the greatest of philosophers. Drawing a parallel between the limitations of reason and our own human perspective, James points out that the “inward clarity” of one perspective is also necessarily limited: “To the very last, there are various ‘points of view’ which the philosopher must distinguish in discussing the world; and what is inwardly clear from one point remains a bare externality and datum to another.”²⁷

The take away message is that James invokes a certain element of relativity into the degree to which something is deemed rational. A more accurate way of asserting this is to follow his language of “*pro tanto* rational,” meaning rational *to such an extent*. The point is subtle, but definitely there: James’s argument addresses the *psychological*, not epistemological, elements of rationality.²⁸ Translated into the epistemology of “inward clarity,” he is calling attention to lack of communication between certain perspectives and the inability to imagine foreign states of mind. When an event takes place, multiple perspectives converge on one point as a means of addressing it: however, what is necessitated in one point of view, may be mere distraction in another.

James draws this discussion to a close by zigzagging once more between the abstract and the practical in order to drive home this idea of limitations:

The negative, the alogical, is never wholly banished. Something—call it “fate, chance, freedom, spontaneity, the devil, what you will”—is still wrong and other and outside and unincluded, from *your* point of view, even though you be the greatest of philosophers. Something is always mere fact and *givenness*; and there may be in the whole universe no one point of view extant from which this would not be found to be the case.²⁹

The brevity of the argument certainly does take away from its effectiveness. However, it is critical to understand that James is not trying to provide his readership with a technical and definitive statement regarding radical empiricism. Instead, all that he is trying to do is illustrate *how* the essays which follow are brought together under a central theme. This sentiment surfaces again and again throughout James’s work in the mid 1890’s. Most pointedly, in the preface to *Talks to Teachers* he reflects upon his recently announced pluralistic philosophy and states that “[a]ccording to that philosophy, the truth is too great for any one actual mind...to know the whole of it.”³⁰

To further illustrate this point, James draws upon the obscure writings of 19th century journalist, poet, and mystic, Benjamin Paul Blood. “‘Ever not quite’ must be the rationalistic philosopher’s last confession concerning it.”³¹ While he

goes on to quote Blood's lathe metaphor to illustrate his point, the meaning of this idea of "ever not quite" is better captured in a later essay. In "A Pluralistic Mystic," James elaborates more fully what he means when he invokes B.P. Blood's famous phrase. He writes:

"Ever not quite!"—this seems to wring to the very last panting word out of rationalistic philosophy's mouth. It is fit to be pluralism's heraldic device. *There is no complete generalization, no total point of view, no all-pervasive unity, but everywhere some residual resistance to verbalization, formulation, and discursification*, some genius of reality that escapes from the pressure of the logical finger, that says, 'hands off,' and claims its privacy, and means to be left to its own life. In every moment of immediate experience is somewhat absolutely original and novel (emphasis added).³²

III. EARLY RADICAL EMPIRICISM AND THE 1896 PREFACE: THE LATENT CONTENT

By rereading James initial description of radical empiricism within the broader context of his work in the mid to late 1890s, I am suggesting that not only is James challenging dogmatic and monist thinking by going after their ideals of objective evidence and certitude, but that we also find a pervasive theme of epistemic, moral, and social sensitivity that directly relates to what he calls "the spirit of inner tolerance." In the remaining pages, I shall tease out this "spirit of inner tolerance" as it correlates to "fringe thinking" and follow it as it becomes more prevalent in James's thought. Not only does James defend the irrational other through the selective engagement of which types of discourse he enters, but he also attempts to legitimize the alogical other as a valid type of knowledge producer by seeking to normalize the non-normal and rationalize the irrational.

A. "THE SPIRIT OF INNER TOLERANCE"

Throughout his mid to late 1890 publications, James is hard-pressed by the issue of (in)tolerance of opinion. In 1896, after a year of attacking the dogmatic and intolerable opinions that monopolized the fields of psychotherapy, religion, and science, he suggests that the utility of his work will be best grasped in the "marketplace" that is governed by a "régime of tolerance."³³ In the 1896 preface James singles out the intolerant scientist—or, read more broadly as all dogmatists and monizers of thought—and his/her dogmatic rejection of religion as the object of criticism: "With all such scientists, as well as with their allies outside of science, my quarrel open lies; and I hope that my book may do something to persuade the reader of their crudity, and range him on my side."³⁴ Here James is defending religious, ethical, poetical, teleological, emotional, and sentimental thinking—what he elsewhere calls the "personal view of life"—from mechanical rationalism, positivism, dogmatism, and monism.³⁵

For James, it is critical that this régime of tolerance moderates the "intolerance of Science" in both speculative and practical endeavors.³⁶ This becomes clearer as we step back and look at the types of discourse that he engaged in during the mid-1890s. In 1894 James pragmatically defends the legitimacy and value of alternative medicine, specifically the mind-cure movement. He argues against the Massachusetts's Medical Registration Act maintaining that mental faith healers are producing results and thus advocates the continued use and study of mind-cure techniques.³⁷ In 1897, shortly after announcing his radical empiricism, James

challenges physiological-psychologists by democratically defending the rational legitimacy of religious belief in regard to the logical possibility of human immortality. More pronounced, however, are James's activities of 1896.³⁸ In the Lowell lectures on "Exceptional Mental States" he argues for the normalcy of degenerative mental health by arguing that we are all cut from the same cloth. In "The Will to Believe" he rationally defends the legitimacy of faith. And, in "The Address of the President before the Society for Psychical Research" he wards off attacks by the narrow views of "Science" by suggesting that we reinstate the "personal view of life" and its "facts of experience."

In short, James argues that we need to be more careful about how we judge one another and how we come to view the truth of our own opinion. In the preface to *The Will to Believe*, when James is talking about why he defends the religious hypothesis he suggests an evaluative approach that is grounded in pragmatic and Darwinian thinking: he says that the "freest competition" and the "openest application to life" are the "most favorable conditions under which the survival of the fittest can proceed."³⁹ James maintains that this idea of unabashedly free competition is rooted in "the spirit of inner tolerance" whereby what is "inwardly clear" to one individual can and should be capable of co-existing in a moral and social framework with others. In "The Will to Believe" he is very explicit about this point:

No one of us ought to issues vetoes to the other, nor should we bandy words of abuse. We ought, on the contrary, delicately and profoundly to respect on another's mental freedom: then only shall we bring about the intellectual republic; then only shall we have that spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism's glory; then only shall we live and let live, in speculative as well as in practical things.⁴⁰

The practical side of this moral, social, and epistemological tolerance is that if a fallibilistic and non-dogmatic interplay of ideas and practices were adopted, then the outsider need not "lie hid each under its bushel, indulged-in quietly with friends." Instead they would be able to "live in publicity, vying with each other...[in] the liveliest possible state of fermentation."⁴¹

This "spirit of inner tolerance" comes to the forefront of James's thought in his essay, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" which is published in *Talks to Teachers*. In the preface he makes reference to the position he advocated in *The Will to Believe*. Recall that in the latter, James first describes radical empiricism as a "definite philosophical attitude," then nicknames it radical empiricism, only to subsequently identify it with pluralism. In *Talks to Teachers*, he laments that he did not make "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" more impressive. In a letter to Elizabeth Glendower Evans, he alludes to its importance for his thought. Having sent her a copy, James recommends that she not bother reading the "Teacher part, which is incarnate boredom." Instead, he explains, "I sent it to you merely that you might read the Essay on a Certain Blindness, which is really the perception on which my whole individualistic philosophy is based."⁴² For readers unfamiliar with this piece, James argues that all too often we fail to perceive the inner significance of the other. The purpose of the essay is to open our eyes to this inner world with the hope of becoming more tolerant and respectful of "alien lives and personalities."

A careful reading of the preface to *Talks to Teachers* reveals a telling portrayal of the heart of James's early radical empiricism. Like his comments in the preface to *The Will to Believe*, he anticipates how his readers and colleagues might view the piece as mere "sentimentalism." However, according to James, it is significantly more insofar as "[i]t connects itself with a definite view of the

world and of our moral relations to the same.” What is striking about this statement is how it parallels the ideas of his early radical empiricism. In both texts he implies that the root cause of immoral and poor epistemic relations stem from the social problem of perspectival blindness. In both texts James democratically defends the outcaste and is deeply concerned with matters of fact and perspective.

On the connection between the two, we can see that James intertwines the perspectives of radical empiricism *qua* critique and an epistemological, moral, and social pluralism:

Those who have done me the honor of reading my volume of philosophic essays will recognize that I mean the pluralistic or individualistic philosophy. According to that philosophy, the truth is too great for any one actual mind, even though that me be dubbed ‘the Absolute,’ to know the whole of it. The facts and worths of life need many cognizers to take them in. There is no point of view absolutely public and universal. Private and uncommunicable perceptions always remain over, and the worst of it is that those who look for them from the outside never know *where*. The practical consequence of such a philosophy is the well-known democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality—is, at any rate, the outward tolerance of whatever is not itself intolerant.... Religiously and philosophically, our ancient national doctrine of live and let live may prove to have a far deeper meaning than our people now seem to imagine it to possess.⁴³

B. AN EPISTEMIC TYPOLOGY: THE BLIND MONIST AND THE EPISTEMIC UNDERDOG

In closing the manifest-latent hermeneutic strategy for interpreting the text, I want to point out an observation that James’s description of radical empiricism focuses on two epistemic types: the blind monist and the epistemic underdog.⁴⁴ The first is the perspective that is blind to the ideals and “vital secret” of the other. It is the universalizing vision by which an individual “presume[s] to decide in an absolute way on the value of other persons’ conditions or ideals.”⁴⁵ Whether consciously or unconsciously, it is the perspective that monopolizes its own point of view by epistemologically monizing the world. A frequent by-product of seeking ever greater unity, this type of singular-mindedness rules out the possibility that other points of view have “gotten it right.” These are the positivists, agnostics, and scientific naturalists that James chastises as having dogmatically affirmed monism “as something with which all experience has got to square.”⁴⁶ For these types of individuals, such things as “fate, chance, freedom, spontaneity, [etc.]” are not *real* possibilities.⁴⁷

The second perspective never directly comes to the surface of the preface, but is one which lies hidden in shadow. It is the “irrational” other that is “wrong and other and outside and unincluded” from the aforementioned universalizing vision. Their plight is relegated to the epistemic fringe, existing as anomalies which function as “bare externalit[ies] and datum” to the monolithic vision. Objectified and overlooked, this perspective is exemplified by an epistemic and social suffering: as an outcaste, these types of beliefs are deemed “irrational,” “alogical,” or simply not normal. Representatives of this type of individual range from practitioners of faith healing to psychical researchers to mystics.

It seems that whenever James exercises the radical empiricist critique—that is to say, when he challenges a blind monist type—there is always an

epistemic underdog lurking at the fringe of the monolithic belief in question. According to this analysis, James's early radical empiricism actively and democratically defends their point of view as one inherently containing "real possibilities, real indeterminations, real beginnings, real ends, real evil, real crises, catastrophes, and escapes, a real God, and a real moral life."⁴⁸

For example, in 1894 James speaks out against the proposed state mandated legislation that would require medical practitioners to register and pass a series of state examinations. The point was to root out quackery and to standardize medical practices.⁴⁹ While there are benefits to this legislation, doing so would further exacerbate the already problematic relations between allopathic medicine and alternative practices and, in James's mind, limit the range of good experimental science. Case in point, James argues that "whatever one may think of the narrowness of the mind-curers, their logical position is impregnable. They are proving by the most brilliant new results that the therapeutic relation may be what we can at present time describe only as a relation of one *person* to another *person*."⁵⁰

IV: CONCLUDING REMARKS: FRINGE SENSITIVITY AND RATIONALIZING THE IRRATIONAL

At the outset of this essay I remarked that James's self-decried "irrationalism" is a guiding theme of his early radical empiricism. As I have argued above and elsewhere, James's mid to late 1890s interest and work in alternative discourse with regard to the types of persons that were capable of producing knowledge provides a fruitful context for exploring the meaning of his 1896 announcement of radical empiricism. By locating James's *early* radical empiricist philosophy somewhere between "an interdisciplinary unifier of knowledge" that is sympathetic to fringe sciences and a "mental perspectivalism" that sees the alternative standpoint of the epistemic underdog, we can see more clearly why James might anticipate that his colleagues would consider his ideas irrational by association. If James takes interest in and is capable of finding puzzlement and astonishment in places that conventional and monopolizing epistemologies rejected, then it is fairly clear that members of the epistemological status quo would indeed consider him and his philosophy as irrational.

When utilizing the "spirit of inner tolerance" as a point of departure for reading the latent content of the 1896 preface, the nature and function of James's description of radical empiricism dramatically changes. In this case it does not strictly function as a methodological position that harps on the rationalist, or only offer an epistemic challenge of the ideals of objective evidence and certainty. Instead, as I have argued above, it demands that we take into account the social and moral implications of its epistemological and methodological critique.

Through the attention drawn by the spirit of inner tolerance I have re-contextualized James's early radical empiricism in light of epistemic, moral, and social concerns for what I am calling "fringe sensitivity." By this I am referring to a type of locative awareness, or consciousness of epistemological place(ment).⁵¹ It functions as an awareness of the epistemic relations within a given paradigm. More specifically, fringe sensitivity is cognizant of the epistemic interactivity which takes place at the borders, or fringe, of a monolithic belief system and how it relates to minority belief.⁵² In James's case this sensitivity translates into an epistemic sympathy for the marginalized point of view, i.e. the epistemic underdog, due to the perceived social and psychological suffering as a result of being deemed an outcaste by the blind monist.⁵³

Through the lens of fringe sensitivity James's methodology can be

displayed in [at least] two manners.⁵⁴ First, it suggests that he is epistemologically concerned with monitoring the discourse of truth and knowledge. For example, in *The Will to Believe* writings and elsewhere, James is directly concerned with the dogmatic manner that blind monists monopolize their own perspective as infallible and universal. In this way, radical empiricism employs a fallibilistic methodology that actively challenges dogmatism and foundationalism, and thus functions as a referee on the pragmatic field of truth and the question of what constitutes “good” science.⁵⁵ While this theme is pervasive throughout his mid to late 1890s writings, it is most prominent in the infamous essay, “The Will to Believe,” where James defends the legitimacy of the faith by providing a rational justification for it.

Secondly, inverting the perspectival critique leads to a robust pluralism and to the possibility of seeing a direct connection between his critique of epistemological monism(s) and ways that dogmatic claims affect individuals socially. Apart from the epistemic fallibility of a particular position, James seems to be intimately aware of the role that an “irrational” or “alogical” perspective plays within the social and cultural arena.⁵⁶ In fact, it becomes increasingly clear that James is also trying to defend the irrationality of the so-called alogical other—that is to say, he is trying to rationalize the irrational, or normalize the non-normal. What is inward clarity to one point of view may easily translate into discrimination and injustice from another. For James, to deem particular facts of experience as inessential datum or as being meaningless and without value is a natural consequence of the plurality of opinion. However, to universalize this perspective and deem it truth is tantamount to immoral and unsound epistemology. As James pointedly remarks in “The Will to Believe”: “[o]bjective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with, but where on this moonlit and dream-visited planet are they found?”⁵⁷

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NOTES

¹ Madden, "Introduction," xi-xii.

² Elsewhere I argue that we need to be more critical with respect to how we differentiate between James's early and mature radical empiricism, see Algaier. It is critical to note that many other scholars, e.g. Wilshire, Wild, McDermott, Edie and Lamberth, have convincingly argued that one can trace the dominant themes of James's mature philosophy of radical empiricism back into *Principles* and other early writings.

³ The earliest of these essays, "The Sentiment of Rationality," was composed seventeen years prior, while the most recent, "The Will to Believe," was written in 1896. Nevertheless, this should not deter readers from seeking out radically empiricist themes in these collected essays. The fact that James chose to compile these essays, not others, into a collection which is self-characterized as radically empiricist is itself a significant factor. The fact that Madden does not find such themes makes sense when it is clear that he was looking for themes that were part and parcel of James's mature standpoint.

⁴ Bordogna, *William James at the Boundaries*, 6. According to Bordogna's "boundary worker" analysis, James devoted much of his career to "transgressing the

boundaries between fields of knowledge, groups of knowledge workers, and realms of discourse.” For Bordogna, both pragmatism and radical empiricism functioned as “new epistemological regimes” that crossed presupposed boundaries with the goals of achieving a fluid “social geography of knowledge” and to introduce new conceptions of how to do philosophy and science (119).

⁵For a list of where James published and/or delivered these essays, see Fredson Bower, “The Text of *The Will to Believe*,” 311-341.

⁶William James, “Preface” in *WB*, 7.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 233.

⁹Baldwin, “Philosophy,” 290.

¹⁰James, “Teaching of Philosophy,” 4.

¹¹James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 20

¹²Ibid. Ironically, the remainder of the text goes on to discuss the nature of philosophy from the point of view of metaphysics.

¹³For a well-rounded examination of the relationship between science and pseudo-science, see Wrobel, *Pseudo-Science and Society*; Lightman, *Victorian Science in Context*; and Clifford, *Repositioning Victorian Sciences*.

¹⁴Perry, *Thought and Character*, Vol. 1, 155.

¹⁵Amongst the biographical texts that explore James’s life and philosophy, Simon’s *Genuine Reality* and Richardson’s *William James* are unsurpassed when it comes to addressing James’s engagement with alternative therapeutics. For a thorough discussion of James’s involvement with the mind-cure movement, see Sutton, “Interpreting ‘Mind-Cure.’”

¹⁶Gavin, *William James in Focus*, xi-xii. Utilizing this strategy, Gavin argues that James’s will to believe “should not be relegated to specific domains” such as the “hard” sciences, as opposed to the “soft” sciences; “rather, it should be employed wherever choices between options are ‘forced, living, and momentous’” (xi).

¹⁷Ibid., xii.

¹⁸Classic examples of this narrative are Perry and Hester. Lamberth adds more depth to this discuss by aligning James’s perspective with the “methodological empiricism of modern science” (11-17); similarly, Bordogna associates this perspective with the practices of “good science and good philosophy” (119).

¹⁹Setting aside the controversial nature of James’s pragmatism, for the purposes of this project, we need only concern ourselves with nature of James’s implicit critique of certainty.

²⁰James, “Preface,” 5.

²¹Pringle-Pattison, “Monism,” 92-93.

²²That is not to say, however, that James does not suggest his own solution. He does, but it must be differentiated from radical empiricism. For example, in his 1897 Ingersoll lecture on Human Immortality, which was written shortly after having announced his radical empiricism, James employs the methodological critique as a means of challenging the certainty of physiological psychologist’s positions regarding the production theory of consciousness. He suggests a pragmatic alternative, e.g. the transmission theory, but is careful to point out that there is no clear-cut solution. In this light, it would seem that the controversial issue of the relationship between radical empiricism and pragmatism is fairly straightforward. However, as he develops both positions it becomes less clear as to their relationship, e.g. compare and contrast his comments in the preface of *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*.

²³Bordogna, *William James at the Boundaries*, 58.

²⁴James, “Preface,” 6.

²⁵In “The Will to Believe” James writes, “The thesis I defend is, briefly stated, this: 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 upon intellectual grounds...” (20).

²⁶James, “Preface,” 6.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to Kyle Bromhall for sharing one of his conference papers that addresses this point. While I was already clear as to the

psychological angle of James's argument, Kyle's work further solidified this point. Bromhall, "More to Rationality."

²⁹ James, "Preface," 6.

³⁰ James, *Talks to Teachers*, 4.

³¹ James, "Preface," 6.

³² James, "A Pluralistic Mystic," 189.

³³ James, "Preface," 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁵ James, "Address of the President," 134.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

³⁷ In a letter to the editor of *Transcript* James writes, "I assuredly hold no brief for any of these healers and must confess that my intellect has been unable to assimilate their theories, so far as I have heard them given. But their *facts* are patent and startling; and anything that interferes with the multiplication of such facts, and with our freest opportunity of observing and studying them, will, I believe be a public calamity." James, *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, 148.

³⁸ As Robert McDermott notes, James was a "weaver of intellectual and experiential threads" who "labored for the removal of those ideas, beliefs, and habits of mind that block insight and imagination" and that, on this account, "[t]he year 1896 is instructive." McDermott, "Introduction," xxvii.

³⁹ James, "Preface," 8.

⁴⁰ James, "The Will to Believe," 33.

⁴¹ James, "Preface," 8.

⁴² See James, *Talks to Teachers*, 244. Also, see James, Correspondence vol. 8, 521-522.

⁴³ James, *Talks to Teachers*, 4.

⁴⁴ This distinction between two types of individuals is perspectival—that is to say, it is conditionally dependent upon both context and content. A contemporary example of this dichotomy is illustrated by the stereotypical conflict between allopathic and naturopathic medicine. What is important to note is that from the perspective of the former, naturopathic medicine is irrational, folkloric, and unscientific; however, when the perspectives are reversed, a similar dichotomy arises insofar as the latter is inwardly blind to the rationality of the former.

⁴⁵ James, *Talks to Teachers*, 132.

⁴⁶ James, "Preface," 5.

⁴⁷ Exemplified by the Brooklynite of James's "On a Certain Blindness."

⁴⁸ James, "Preface," 6.

⁴⁹ James recognizes this point and in fact supports it wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, he felt that punishing those "vampire quacks" could be done more directly and more efficiently. He writes, "I can only reply that I sympathize most heartily with that vindictive purpose, but that a direct way must be invented. It is a poor policy to set fire to one's house to broil mutton chop, or to pour boiling water over one's dog to kill his fleas..." (James, *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, 148).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ It is important to note that any analysis of fringe sensitivity must be relational and context-dependent, as appearing on a sliding scale within the given epistemic framework.

⁵² Throughout his writings, both public and private, James was keenly aware of the reality of relations. Often scholars note the metaphysical or technical epistemic features of this phrase, thereby subverting its social (and/or political) dimension. Recently, however, a growing number of scholars have taken an interest in James's radical empiricism by critically re-examining its political aspects. See Coon, MacGilvray, Segrest, Stob, and Livingston.

⁵³ My suspicion is that this type of awareness arose in James through the combination of physical and cultural contact with various subaltern groups, but also in conjunction with his intellectual developments. See Taylor, Simon, and Knapp.

⁵⁴ Paralleling this view, James's 1896 pluralism functions in two different manners. Manifestly understood, he challenges the idea of *noetic monism*, or the standpoint that subjectivity can achieve complete unity (see Slater, "William James's Pluralism.") A

latent reading suggests that James implicitly advocates a *noetic pluralism* that embraces the multiplicity of various forms of knowledge as well as a reconsideration of the types of knowledge producers. Here we need only recall James's advocacy of the mind-curers, the importance of psychical research, and his defense of mysticism.

⁵⁵ On the latter point, see Bordogna, *William James at the Boundaries*, 119.

⁵⁶ We can see a strong parallel between James's radical empiricist attitude, with its epistemic sensitivity to the fringe facts and Gavin's analysis of James's reinstatement of the vague. Gavin writes that "When James talks of the need to preserve the vague, he is arguing against certainty, that is, against the usurping of the privileged positions of center stage once and for all by any formulation of the universe..." (Gavin, *Reinstatement of the Vague*, 2).

⁵⁷ James, "The Will to Believe," 22.

ON JAMES'S ARGUMENT AGAINST EPIPHENOMENALISM

JOHN WRIGHT

ABSTRACT

Epiphenomenalism is the doctrine that mental states lack causal efficacy. A common objection against epiphenomenalism is that this makes it mysterious how or why mental states ever evolved. One particularly powerful form of this objection was developed by William James. James argued that epiphenomenalism cannot account for the familiar fact that what we find pleasurable is typically good for us, while what we find painful is typically bad for us. In this paper it is argued that James's objection to epiphenomenalism is sound. But it is further argued that James's argument constitutes a difficulty, not just for epiphenomenalism, but also for the thesis that mental states do possess causal powers. The paper concludes with some suggestions about how the problem to which James has drawn our attention might be solved.

Epiphenomenalism is the doctrine that, although mental events and properties exist, they lack causal efficacy. One objection to this view is that, if the mental is indeed wholly causally inefficacious, there is no apparent reason why creatures with a mental life should ever have been naturally selected. A particularly telling form of this objection to epiphenomenalism was raised by William James. In this paper James's argument against epiphenomenalism is defended. More specifically, in this paper it is argued that James is correct in saying it is *necessary* to attribute causal powers to the mental.

But this paper has an additional aim. It will be argued that although it is *necessary* to say the mental has causal powers, this is not *sufficient* to satisfactorily explain the points James raises. The main aim of the paper is to argue that James's considerations give rise to a puzzle that has hitherto received insufficient attention in the philosophy of mind. It is a puzzle that is not completely removed even if we *do* attribute causal powers to the mental. Attributing causal powers to the mental is, then, necessary to accommodate James's points, but not sufficient. In the final sections of this paper a possible solution to James's problem is briefly sketched.

1. JAMES'S ARGUMENT AGAINST EPIPHENOMENALISM

In his *The Principles of Psychology* and "Are We Automata?", William James argued against the view that mental states and events, specifically: feelings of pleasure and pain, lacked causal efficacy. He called the theory that they do lack such efficacy "The Automaton Theory"; now we more usually refer to it as "epiphenomenalism". James was directing his argument against T. H. Huxley, Herbert Spencer, C. K. Clifford and Shadworth Hodson.¹ The core of James's argument is very simple: the things we like are generally good for us, while the things we dislike are generally bad for us. Here is what James said:

It is a well-known fact that pleasures are generally associated

with beneficial, pains with detrimental, experiences. ...Mr Spencer and others have argued that these co-incidences are due, not to any pre-established harmony, but to the mere action of natural selection which would certainly kill off in the long run any breed of creatures to whom the fundamentally noxious experience seemed enjoyable... But if pleasures and pains have no efficacy, one does not see (without some such *a priori* rational harmony as would be scouted by the “scientific” champions of the automaton-theory) why the most noxious acts, such as burning, might not give thrills of delight, and the most necessary ones, such as breathing, cause agony.²

We will refer to the fact that what we enjoy is generally good for us, and what we find painful generally bad, as the “felicitous alignment”.³

Although James does not fully spell out his argument against epiphenomenalism, it is presumably along the following lines: Why should it be the case that the things that give us pleasure tend to be good for us? Why should this “felicitous alignment” exist? Surely the reason is just this: in the past, organisms that got pleasure from health-producing activities *performed* those health giving activities and so were naturally selected, while those that got pleasure from health-damaging activities performed those health damaging activities, and therefore died out. As James remarked:

An animal that should take pleasure from a feeling of suffocation would, if that pleasure were efficacious enough to make him immerse his head in water, enjoy a longevity of four or five minutes.⁴

Conversely, since we do not find in nature animals that experience agony from breathing, it is natural to suppose that any such animals would have been removed by natural selection. But – James is evidently arguing – natural selection would only remove such organisms if the agony they experience *caused* them to refrain from breathing. Thus, natural selection has brought it about that the only organisms surviving are those that get pleasure from health producing activities, and pain from health damaging activities.

It is an essential feature of this explanation that it apparently attributes *causal powers* to pleasure and pain. It says, for example, that organisms that derive pleasure from health producing activities will perform those activities. And presumably it is *because* they derive pleasure from those activities that they engage in them: the pleasurable nature of the activities is a *cause* of organisms partaking in those activities. But if this is the case, then epiphenomenalism (James’s “Automaton Theory”) is false.

It is worth noting that, as a challenge to epiphenomenalism, James’s argument is powerful. In particular, it raises difficulties not raised by a related, and perhaps better known, argument against epiphenomenalism from evolution. Popper and Eccles, for example, argue against epiphenomenalism on the grounds that it makes it a mystery as to why the mental should ever have evolved.⁵ Briefly, their argument is that if the mental were to be naturally selected it would have to increase an organism’s fitness, and to do this it would have to make a difference to the organism’s behaviour. But, if mental events are to make a difference to an organism’s behaviour, they must surely (and contrary to epiphenomenalism) have causal powers. Thus, Popper and Eccles argue, considerations from the theory of evolution lead us to reject epiphenomenalism.

The epiphenomenalist can, however, reply to the argument of Popper and

Eccles. Their argument assumes that if the mental is to arise as a result of natural selection, it must *contribute* to fitness. But this is simply false. It *may* be naturally selected as a result of contributing to fitness, but it may also become prevalent within a species (without contributing to fitness) by being a causal consequence of some other feature F that does contribute to the fitness. This approach is developed and defended by, for example, Frank Jackson.⁶ Jackson argues that it is presumably the case that the insulating properties of fur contribute to an animal's fitness. And if an animal is covered in fur, that animal will also be soft to the touch: its softness to the touch is a causal *consequence* of it being covered in fur. But the property of being soft to the touch need not itself increase the animal's fitness. Similarly, it is at least possible that the mental life of an organism might, without itself increasing fitness, be a causal consequence of some other feature of the organism that does. And such a possibility is clearly compatible with epiphenomenalism.

Whatever strength Jackson's suggestion may have against the argument of Popper and Eccles, it has rather less strength as a reply to James. Suppose that the feelings of pleasure we usually get from things that are good for us (and pain from things that are bad) were merely a by-product of something else that did contribute to fitness. Then: there would be no evident reason why the things that are good for us should produce feelings of pleasure rather than pain. If the feelings lack all causal efficacy, there would, as James says, be no reason why burning should not give rise to thrills of delight and breathing to agony. But, as matter of fact, the beneficial activities *do* give rise to pleasure and the harmful ones to pain. The fact that it is this felicitous state of affairs that *actually* holds, rather than the infelicitous one in which breathing causes agony etc., is not satisfactorily accounted for merely by saying the mental is a (causally inefficacious) by-product of something else that does increase fitness. It does not explain why we are in the *felicitous* situation we are in. James's argument has a strength not possessed by the argument of Popper and Eccles.

James's argument raises a difficulty that has not been resolved in still more recent discussions. Jack C. Lyons defends a form of epiphenomenalism that is naturally termed "property epiphenomenalism"⁷. On Lyons' view, although pains may be causally efficacious, the property of painfulness is not. Lyons gives a useful parallel: mountains may be causally efficacious while the property of "mountain-ness" might not be. If a plane flies in to a mountain it certainly causes the metal of the plane to crumple and bend, but the concept of "mountain-ness" may play no causal-explanatory role here. All the explaining might be done by properties such as the hardness of the rock, its mass, and so on. Similarly, a given event that is a pain might, on Lyon's view cause Smith to withdraw his hand, but the property of *painfulness* may play no explanatory role in accounting for Smith's behaviour. All the explaining might be done by, for example, properties of neurophysiology.

But Lyon's "property epiphenomenalism" still leaves it unexplained why James's felicitous alignment should hold. The things that are good for us tend to be correlated with the *property of pleasantness*, the things that are bad for us with the *property of painfulness*. And, to foreshadow issues raised in the next section, we seem to be drawn towards certain things *because* they are pleasurable and repelled by others *because* they are painful. We would appear to be left without an explanation of these correlations if the properties of painfulness and pleasurable are held to be causally inefficacious.

One author who has paid particular attention to the challenge James's argument presents for epiphenomenalism is William Robinson⁸. Robinson allows that, initially at least, James's argument might seem powerful, but argues that in fact it fails to refute epiphenomenalism. Robinson's essential point is that

if epiphenomenalism fails to explain the felicitous alignment, then so must the view favoured by James. If this is correct, concludes Robinson, James's argument gives us *no reason to prefer* James's own view to epiphenomenalism.

Let us now consider Robinson's argument. Suppose it to be the case that epiphenomenalism provides us with no explanation of the felicitous alignment, more specifically, suppose epiphenomenalism provides us with no explanation of why those things we find pleasurable tend to be good for us. How might we obtain such an explanation by attributing causal powers to, for example, pleasure "itself"? Presumably, any causal powers we could attribute to the psychological state of pleasure "itself" could also be attributed to a neural correlate of pleasure. For example, perhaps the pleasurableness of eating chocolate increases the chances it will be eaten in the future, but so, surely, could some neural state increase the probability chocolate will be eaten in the future. Conversely, if there are no causal powers we could possibly attribute to any neural state that would explain the alignment, what sort of causal powers might we attribute to pleasure itself that would enable us to explain it? Robinson asserts there are none. We gain no explanatory advantage by rejecting epiphenomenalism, according to Robinson. He concludes that James has not, therefore, given us any reason to reject epiphenomenalism.

It is worth noting that Robinson himself has not given us an explanation of the felicitous alignment. All he has done is argue that the prospects for explaining it seem, on the face of it, to be just as good with epiphenomenalism as without it. It seems to the present author that on this issue Robinson is partially right. It will be argued later in this paper that *merely* attributing causal powers to the mental is not enough to explain the felicitous alignment. More specifically, it will later be argued that while it *is* possible to explain the felicitous alignment, to do so it is necessary, but not sufficient, to attribute causal powers to the mental. On the view to be advocated, epiphenomenalism must be rejected if the felicitous alignment is to be explained, and so James's argument against epiphenomenalism remains good. But in order to account for the felicitous alignment, more work needs to be done than simply rejecting epiphenomenalism. To repeat a claim already made, here it will be argued that to explain the felicitous alignment it is necessary, but not sufficient, to reject epiphenomenalism.

2. THE FELICITOUS ALIGNMENT AND THE FORTUNATE CORRELATION

As we have reconstructed it, James explains the "felicitous alignment" between what is pleasurable and what is good for us by saying that if (for example) a human being finds some activity pleasurable they will tend to engage in that activity, and if they find some activity painful, they will tend to avoid it. There is, we may say, a *fortunate correlation* between the stimuli we subjectively experience as pleasurable, and our *behavioural* tendencies to seek out those stimuli, and between what we find painful, and our behavioural tendency to avoid the painful stimuli. This fortunate correlation between pleasure and seeking out, and between pain and avoidance, is used by James to explain the "felicitous alignment" between pleasure and beneficial qualities, and pain and harmful qualities.

Note that what we are calling the "fortunate correlation" is distinct from James's "felicitous alignment". The "fortunate correlation" is a correlation between our feelings of pleasure and our *behaviour* of seeking out things that produce those feelings (and between pain and our behaviour of avoiding the causes of pain.) It is a correlation between feelings and behaviour. James's "felicitous alignment" is a correlation between feelings of pleasure and that

which is *beneficial for our health or survival* (or between pain and that which is detrimental to our survival).

It is clear that James relies on what we are here calling the “fortunate correlation” (between pleasure and seeking out behaviour) to help *explain* the felicitous alignment (between pleasure and healthfulness). As we have noted, he evidently assumes that if an animal were to find some activity (such as immersing its head in water, or breathing air) pleasurable, *they would engage in that activity*. So natural selection ensures the only animals left surviving will be those that engage in, because they take pleasure in, the healthful activities. *Given* that the fortunate correlation exists, we can explain the felicitous alignment. But, of course, we are now confronted with the question: “Why should the “fortunate correlation” between pleasure and seeking out behaviour (and between pain and avoidance behaviour) exist?” James himself does not address this question, and it will be argued that addressing it leads to puzzles both for epiphenomenalism and for the doctrine that the mental does have causal powers.

3. DOES THE “FORTUNATE CORRELATION” ACTUALLY REQUIRE EXPLANATION?

We tend to move away from things, such as fire, dangerous animals and so on that would cause us subjectively unpleasant pain or distress. Our bodily movements tend to decrease the chances of us experiencing pain and distress. Our movements also tend to *increase* the chances we will experience subjectively pleasant experiences. Generally, there is a much higher chance my hand will move towards the chocolate cake, but not towards the pain-causing flame. *But*: intuitively, things did not have to be that way. We seem to be able to imagine what I will call a “nightmare world”. In this nightmare world, we find ourselves trapped in physical bodies that tend to seek out things that cause us to experience subjectively unpleasant feelings. For example, we seem to be able to imagine a world in which we *behave* exactly as we do in this world – perhaps a world in which we walk in to a shop, buy a bar of chocolate and eat it – but we subjectively experience terrible agonies as we do so. On the outside, we are eating the chocolate and saying: “This is delicious!”, but on the inside we are thinking: “Oh no, not chocolate again!”, and we subjectively experience excruciating pain each time some of the chocolate goes in to our mouth. This nightmare world would be a world in which our physical bodies did not obey our conscious will. We could not even communicate our situation to the outside world, because we could not control the movements of our lips.

Fortunately, however, we do not live in this nightmare world. In the actual world, what we are here calling the fortunate correlation does in fact hold: our bodily movements do in fact tend to increase the chances we will experience subjectively pleasant feelings, and decrease the chances we will experience subjectively unpleasant feelings. But it seems things could have been otherwise. *We might have* lived in the nightmare world. And so, it seems, an explanation is required of why, in the actual world, the fortunate correlation holds.

It should be observed that, on some positions, the fortunate correlation is *not* the type of thing that actually requires an explanation. For example, advocates of analytic functionalism, behaviourism or some verificationist theories of meaning might hold that the nightmare world sketched above is not a genuine conceptual possibility at all. On such views, it is (perhaps) simply not the case that we *might have lived* in the nightmare world. And if it is not the case that we might have lived in the nightmare world then, it is natural to claim, we do not need an explanation of why the fortunate correlation holds.

In this paper it will be *assumed* that the nightmare world is indeed a genuine conceptual possibility. Although it will be assumed to be possible, there are three things that can be said that might at least partly soften the resistance of those who are inclined to deny its possibility.

First, although analytic functionalism, behaviourism and so on are *perhaps* incompatible with the possibility of the nightmare world, the fact that they do appear to exclude even the conceptual possibility of such scenarios is surely one reason why these positions have been found to be less than entirely convincing. I think it is fair to say that a substantial number of philosophers have felt it is at least a conceptual possibility that our private, subjective mental states could have been very different from those *actually* correlated with certain behaviour, or functional organisation. And this is one reason why behaviourism and analytic functionalism have been thought to not tell us the whole of the story about our mental states.

Second, I think it is clear that we can imagine certain situations in which “the nightmare world” holds for at least a limited period of time. Suppose, for example, that a person is hooked up to a device that is capable of “scanning” their preferences and desires. Let us further suppose that the person hates, for example, eating olives. When they eat olives their subjective, conscious gustatory sensations are extremely unpleasant. Under normal circumstances, they would avoid eating olives. The fiendish device, however, is able to detect their aversion to olives, and then sends electrical signals to the muscles, forcing the person to go through the motions of gulping down piles of olives. Further, the device also forces their throat and mouth muscles to say: “These olives are delicious; more please.” But, at the same time, what is going on “inside” is that the subjective experiences of the person are intensely unpleasant. On the inside, the person is perhaps screaming for the thing to stop, even though on the outside they are commenting on the deliciousness of the olives.

I think it is clear we are able to imagine a person being placed in such a device for, say, one hour. This seems to be clearly a conceptual possibility. But if a person could occupy such a device for one hour, it also seems plausible they could occupy it for two hours, or three hours, or indeed their entire lives. And if it is a conceptual possibility that *one* person could spend their entire life imprisoned in such a device, it is not clear why there could not be a community of such people. But if we admit this, then it appears we have, in effect, admitted the conceptual possibility of the “nightmare world”.

Finally, it is worth noting that the nightmare world perhaps is *not necessarily* ruled out by behaviourism or analytic functionalism. Consider a world in which a person is hooked up to the fiendish device described above. A behaviourist, for example need not say that what it means for such a person to hate olives is for them to avoid eating olives. Rather, a behaviourist may say that all it means is that the person has a *disposition* to avoid eating olives. And it may well be maintained that in the above scenario, the person still has within them a state that disposes them to avoid olives, but other factors are preventing that disposition from displaying its normal effects. The same might be said about some part of that person’s functional organisation. So, it seems, both a behaviourist and an analytic functionalist might allow that the nightmare world is a conceptual possibility.

It might be protested that the writings of James himself contain an argument against the possibility of the nightmare world. In his “What is an Emotion?” James argues that the physical accompaniment of an emotion is necessary for us to experience that emotion in all its “colour and warmth”; if, for example, we do not behave in a fearful way in the presence of the spider then our fear of the spider reduces in intensity. However, as Capek notes⁹, even if this

is granted, it does not show there is nothing to be explained. We still need, for example, an explanation of why *initially*, at least, we felt fear at the sight of the spider or pain at the touch of the hot plate. These facts would still require explanation even if the intensity of the emotions were to fade if we refused to act on them.

Of course, the assumption that the nightmare world is a conceptual possibility is controversial. But I hope the considerations of this section have gone at least some way to softening the opposition of those who are inclined to say the nightmare world is uncontroversially or obviously not possible.

4. HOW MIGHT THE FORTUNATE CORRELATION BE EXPLAINED?

In the actual world the “fortunate correlation” holds. But, we are here assuming, it might not have held: we could instead have lived in a “nightmare world”. Since the fortunate correlation *might not have held*, we are confronted with the question: Why does it *actually* hold?

Presumably, subjective, conscious experiences of pleasure and pain only exist in humans and (some) animals. This strongly suggests that any explanation of the fortunate correlation will be at least broadly “evolutionary” in character. However, it will be argued that giving an evolutionary explanation of the fortunate correlation is not as easy as it might at first be thought. Most evolutionary explanations either presuppose the fortunate correlation (or something very similar to it), or else explain something other than the fortunate correlation.

Here is a natural first attempt to explain the fortunate correlation. Suppose a particular species eats berries. The red berries are good for the species, the green berries bad. Can we explain the existence of the fortunate correlation in the species by saying that those members of the species that liked the red berries ate them and so survived, while those that liked the green berries ate them and so died out? The trouble with this suggestion is that it does not explain *the fortunate correlation*. What it explains is why organisms that preferred the red berries survived. It explains the prevalence of the preference for red berries. But in saying “those members of the species that liked the red berries ate them”, the proposed explanation presupposes the fortunate correlation: it assumes that *liking the red berries* will be correlated with the *behaviour* of eating them. What needs to be explained is why preferring the red berries, in the sense of having a pleasant, subjective conscious sensation when eating them, should be associated with the physical behaviour of eating them.

It might perhaps be suggested that those animals that tended to seek out things that gave them subjective, conscious pleasure also tended to survive, while those that did not had a lower rate of survival. Whether or not this is true as an assertion of fact, it is clearly unsatisfactory as an explanation of the fortunate correlation. We are still left with the question: Why did the organisms that sought out things that gave them pleasure have a better chance of survival? It might perhaps be suggested: If organisms liked the things *that were good for them*, and also sought them out, then those organisms would have a better chance of survival. But this suggestion also has problems. One main difficulty is the organisms *liking* of the things that are good for it seems quite otiose in the explanation. All an organism has to do is in fact seek out things that are good for it. Whether this seeking out behaviour is associated with subjectively pleasant conscious sensations, subjectively unpleasant conscious sensations, or no conscious sensations at all, would appear to be superfluous to the explanation. Since the behaviour of seeking out things that are good for the organism is all that is required for survival, the question arises: Why should this behaviour be

associated with pleasant, conscious experiences? The explanation given simply *assumes* that the behaviour of seeking out things that are good for the organism is associated with subjectively pleasant conscious experiences. But this is precisely what we want explained. The proposed explanation therefore leaves us back at square one. Another approach is needed.

What we want is to explain is the existence of a correlation between subjectively pleasant conscious experiences and seeking out behaviour. Frequently, correlations are seen as evidence for, and are typically taken to be explained by, causal laws. So, it might be suggested we simply take it to be a causal law that subjectively pleasant conscious sensations tend to produce seeking out behaviour in organisms. It is this causal law that explains the fortunate correlation.¹⁰

However, it will be argued that this suggestion does not give us a satisfactory explanation of the fortunate correlation. Briefly, the difficulty is that while it perhaps explains the *correlation*, it does not explain its *fortunateness*. We have already noted that it seems to be possible that subjectively *unpleasant* conscious experiences could have been correlated with seeking out behaviour. We described such a possibility as the “nightmare world”. But if the nightmare world is a possibility, it seems there also could have been a world in which there was a lawlike causal link between subjectively *unpleasant* conscious experiences and seeking out behaviour. Our behaviour in such a world could have been exactly the same as in this world. And so the question arises: Why were we lucky enough to live in a world where the lawlike connection that actually obtains is between pleasant conscious experiences and seeking out behaviour, rather than between unpleasant conscious experiences and seeking out behaviour? Postulating a lawlike connection fails to explain why the *fortunate* correlation is the one that obtains in the actual world. In this respect, it reduces us to saying: “Well, we were just lucky.”

The conclusions of the last paragraph have an important consequence: the problems associated with explaining the fortunate correlation persist *even if* we attribute causal powers to mental events: saying the mental has causal powers, by itself, fails to explain why the *fortunate* correlation holds.

It might perhaps be suggested that the whole problem arises from assuming “pan-selectionism”, or the doctrine that if a feature of some class of organisms exists, it must somehow contribute to fitness. But amongst biologists this doctrine is at least to some extent controversial. We have so far simply been assuming that the fortunate correlation has to increase fitness. But perhaps it doesn’t: perhaps it is merely a by-product of other processes, and does not itself help to make organisms fitter.

However, as we have already argued in connection with the Popper-Eccles objection to epiphenomenalism, it is clear this is not satisfactory. It is one thing to say that consciousness itself is, from the point of view of increasing fitness, a kind of epiphenomenal by-product, but it is not at all plausible to claim this about the fortunate correlation. The problem is that the fortunate correlation has certain features which it is very implausible indeed to say are merely an epiphenomenal by-products of other processes.

There are some possible “nightmare worlds” that would be truly horrific. For example, there are nightmare worlds in which everything we did caused us unspeakable agony. But in the actual world there is at least a pretty high correlation between what we do and what gives us pleasure, and what we avoid and what causes us pain. If this is just good luck, then we have been very fortunate indeed.

There is another respect in which we have been very lucky. It is *a priori* highly unlikely that there should be the *degree* of correlation there actually is

between our bodily movements and what gives us pleasure. The number of bodily movements over an individual's life runs in to the hundreds of thousands, if not millions. The *a priori* probability that such a high proportion of these should be linked (directly or indirectly) to the obtaining of what gives us pleasure and the avoidance of what causes pain is surely very low. It does not seem to be plausible to say this is merely due to good luck. The idea that the fortunate correlation is just an accidental or epiphenomenal consequence of other processes must therefore be rejected as unsatisfactory.

In summary, in this section we have considered a number of possible ways in which the fortunate correlation might be given an evolutionary explanation. It has been argued that none of them are satisfactory. Explaining the fortunate correlation is not as easy as it might at first seem.

5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FORTUNATE CORRELATION

In the previous section a range of possible explanations of the fortunate correlation were considered. Problems were found for all of them. In particular, it was argued that aspects of the fortunate correlation remain unaccounted-for even if we *do* attribute causal powers to the mental. The fortunate correlation is, therefore, not merely a problem for epiphenomenalism: it is a problem for *all* the views of the relation between the mental and the physical.¹¹

On the face of it, the issues raised by the fortunate correlation (and the possible existence of a "nightmare world") resemble those raised by the possibility of "inverted spectra". It is a familiar observation that the outward behaviour of persons is compatible with very different hypotheses about their inner, private experiences. Perhaps the most frequently discussed case of this sort is the inverted visual spectrum: It seems to be possible for a speaker's publically observable use of terms such as "red" and "green" to be exactly the same as that of normal speakers, and yet for the private sensations associated with those terms to be exchanged. And, of course, we can also imagine parallel possibilities for other sensory modes: inverted aural sensations, permuted olfactory and gustatory sensations and so on. On the face of it, the possibility of our "nightmare world" might seem to be just another hypothesis of this sort – in the nightmare world a speaker's publically observable use of the terms "pleasure" and "pain" would be the same as that of speakers in the actual world, but the private sensations associated with those terms would be exchanged or "inverted". So: it might be tempting to assume that the issues raised by the possibility of a nightmare world are no different from those raised by the possibility of inverted spectra and similar hypotheses. This, however, is not the case. There is an additional feature raised by the possibility of the nightmare world that is not raised by the other variants on our inner or private experience.

We are, quite plainly, *fortunate* that we do not live in the nightmare world. But there is no sense in which we are fortunate to have a normal rather than inverted spectrum. Having an inverted spectrum would merely be *different* from having a normal spectrum: it would not be horrible or horrific or extremely unfortunate. Similarly, having inverted or permuted aural or olfactory or gustatory sensations need not be obviously horrific or bad. But this means that the fact that the fortunate correlation holds gives rise to the need for *more explanations* than does the fact that we have the spectrum we actually have. We are lucky to live in a world in which the fortunate correlation holds, and ought to be glad we do. A satisfactory explanation of the fortunate correlation would, as we noted in the previous section, therefore need to explain our *fortunateness*. But no such requirement lies on a satisfactory explanation of why we have the visual (or olfactory or gustatory etc.) spectra we actually have.

6. A STRATEGY FOR EXPLAINING THE FORTUNATE CORRELATION

The aim of the following sections is to tentatively suggest a possible explanation of why the fortunate correlation actually exists in humans and (presumably) in other animals. It should be noted that the explanation to be advanced is intended as no more than possible, speculative hypothesis.

It is suggested that one strategy for finding an explanation of the fortunate correlation is to ask the question: How must organisms have been *prior to* the fortunate correlation if organisms in which the fortunate correlation held were to be naturally selected? In this section it will be argued that the fortunate correlation would have arisen if organisms *already possessed the power to freely choose*. The power of free choice was, on this view, evolutionarily prior to the fortunate correlation.

First, let us note that the following conditional seems *prima facie* plausible:

If an organism has the power of free choice, then, *ceteris paribus*, the organism will tend to choose those options that it believes will give it pleasure and avoid those it believes will give it pain ____ (P).

Of course, there are many circumstances in which an organism (in particular, a human being) with the power of free choice will not choose to seek out pleasure and avoid pain. They may do this because of their ethical beliefs, or a sense of duty, or because they believe greater long term pleasure will come from some short term pain, and so on.¹² However, we may include qualifications such as “unless duty, ethics etc. incline them to act otherwise” in the *ceteris paribus* clause.

A perhaps more puzzling case for P is the phenomenon of masochism, or the deriving of pleasure from pain. One possible way of dealing with masochism might be to replace the word “pain” as it appears in P with, perhaps, “displeasure” or “feelings of unpleasantness”. However, this complication will be ignored in what follows.

Subject to the qualifications noted above, there seems to be a sense in which P is not something that requires *further explanation*. Suppose a person freely chose the painful option over the pleasant one. In such a case we would surely look for an explanation of the person’s behaviour. And the explanation might be, for example: a sense of duty, or a belief that the course of action will result in greater good in the future, or masochistic tendencies, etc. But now, let us suppose instead that a person chose the pleasurable option and avoided the painful one. We also confirmed that in this case the *ceteris paribus* clause held: there were no ethical or other factors present that would have constituted a reason for choosing the painful option. In such a case it would be clearly odd to ask: “But *why* did the person freely choose the pleasurable option?” That the person freely chose in this manner does not appear to be something that can be given, or requires, further explanation. There seems to be a sense in which the need for explanation comes to an end at that point.

It should, however, be noted that to say that P does not require explanation does not mean that it is *necessarily* true that, *ceteris paribus*, people will choose the pleasurable option and reject the painful one. If the choice is made freely, then presumably there is a sense in which they could have chosen otherwise, and this is surely incompatible with it being *necessarily* true that they choose the pleasurable option. But if a person chooses the pleasurable option, and the

ceteris paribus conditions hold, it does seem to be unnecessary to seek a *further* explanation of why they chose in the way they did.

7. *WHY PAIN?*

Suppose an organism lives in an environment in which there is something harmful to it. More specifically, assume the organism is a species of animal that lives on grassland, and there are occasional small fires that would harm it if it went too close. Clearly, it will be to the species' advantage to avoid the fires. There are many possible ways in which a disposition to avoid the fires might develop in the species, and be naturally selected for. *One* possible mechanism might be for the organism to experience pain on getting too close to the fire, and so be compelled to withdraw. But, of course, this is only *one* possible mechanism. We can imagine many other possible mechanisms, not involving conscious experience at all, by which an organism (or a robot) might be caused to avoid fires. For example, an organism (or robot) might be equipped with a structure capable of detecting heat. If the heat rises above a certain level, the organism is caused to withdraw. This could, quite easily, occur without any subjective, conscious sensation of heat or pain. Why would *pain*, as a subjectively felt, *nasty feeling* be selected for as the mechanism for fire-avoidance, rather than one of the many other possible mechanisms?

It is suggested that the considerations of the previous section provide a possible answer. If organisms *already* have a power of free choice, then they will tend to avoid that which causes subjectively unpleasant sensations. *What would be the point in pain having its subjective feeling of nastiness or unpleasantness unless the experiencer had the power to freely choose the direction in which it will move?* In organisms or mechanisms *without* a power of free choice, *any* device or internal mechanism that causes the organism to move away from the harmful stimulus will do. But in organisms that have a power of free choice, the mechanisms responsible for getting it to behave in a particular way will be subject to a particular constraint: they seem likely to work more effectively if they get the animal to move in a way that is in accordance with the freely made choices it is disposed to make. Imagine, for example, an organism that had within it a mechanism that gave it a propensity to *avoid* fires; but the organism *also* had the power of free choice and found being dangerously close to fires pleasurable. Given the organism had the power to freely choose its movements, it might find itself "torn in two directions": to move both towards and away from the fire. In an organism with the power of free choice, it is *not* the case that any mechanism that causes it to move away from the fire is as good as any other: mechanisms seem likely to be more effective if they cause the organism to behave in a way consistent with the free choices it would make. But if the organism already has the power of free choice then principle P tells us the peculiar mechanism of a nasty or unpleasant sensation will in itself have the effect of getting the organism to avoid the fire. Only if organisms have the power of free choice would subjectively pleasant and unpleasant feelings appear to "have a point".

We can perhaps make this point more vividly by considering, not the evolutionary development of an organism, but the ways in which it might be rational for the designer of a robot to include in it devices for controlling its behaviour. Suppose a designer is constructing a robot which, it is hoped, will be able to successfully get around in the world. It will, plausibly, need to contain within it mechanisms that cause it to move away from things that are harmful to it, and other mechanisms that cause it to seek out things that are beneficial to it. But the robot does not, we may suppose, have anything that could be called the

power of free choice: all its actions are determined by mechanisms in which nothing that could plausibly be called a power of free choice have any role. Now, let us suppose that the designer discovered that certain of the mechanisms within the robot generated subjective, conscious sensations. The designer discovered that they could produce, say, pleasant sensations in the robot by building certain types of mechanisms in to it, and unpleasant sensations by including others. There is no *a priori* reason why any unpleasant conscious sensations that arose within the robot should cause it to move away from the source of those sensations, and neither is there any *a priori* reason why it would exhibit behaviour that would increase the likelihood of pleasant sensations. The conscious sensations within the robot might be like “a wheel that turned even though nothing else turned with it.” But the designer wants to ensure the robot moves away from things that are harmful to it, and towards the things that are good for it. Under the circumstances imagined, it seems there would be no point in the designer ensuring that that the robot felt unpleasant sensations in the presence of harmful things, and pleasure in the presence of beneficial things. There would be no point in this if these pleasant/unpleasant sensations did not *also* give rise to avoidance and pursuit respectively.

We can contrast this hypothetical robot with an organism or mechanism that *does* have the power of free choice. One way in which the constructor of a mechanism that did already have the power of free choice might get it to avoid harmful stimuli is by designing it in such a way that harmful stimuli produce in the mechanism subjectively unpleasant sensations. If the mechanism has a power of free choice then, by principle P above, the organism *would* tend to avoid harmful stimuli. Consequently, if the mechanism does have the power of free choice, then there would be point to the designer using the peculiar mechanism of subjectively pleasant and unpleasant conscious sensations to control the organism’s behaviour.

As noted above, without the power of free choice, subjective pleasantness and unpleasantness may be a “like a wheel that turned even though nothing turned with it, that is, not a part of the mechanism”. To continue this metaphor, the power of free choice is the cog that links up the wheel of subjective pleasant and unpleasant conscious experience with the wheel of physical behaviour. It is the component that makes subjective experiences a part of the mechanism.

Of course, we can imagine a mechanism being constructed that lacks the power of free choice, but which experiences, say, unpleasant sensations. We can also imagine the designer of the mechanism going on to construct it in such a way that these unpleasant sensations then gave rise to avoidance behaviour. But if the mechanism lacks the power of free choice, then there would seem to be no reason to use the *particular device* of unpleasant sensations, rather than one of many other possible mechanisms, to produce avoidance behaviour. Only if organisms, or mechanisms, *already* have a power of free choice does the subjectively unpleasant or nasty aspect of pain seem to “have a point”. *Only if an organism already has the power of free choice does it become explicable why the peculiar mechanism of a nasty, unpleasant conscious feeling should have developed as the means by which avoidance behaviour is assured.*

Postulating a prior power of free choice in organisms enables us to give a possible explanation of the fortunate correlation. If organisms already possess a power of free choice, then they will *ceteris paribus* tend to seek out those stimuli that bring them pleasure and avoid those that bring them pain. So, provided that the *ceteris paribus* clause holds, if organisms already have a power of free choice, the fortunate correlation will tend to hold. Of course, this at most only provides an explanation of why seeking out/avoidance behaviour should be correlated with pleasure/pain. It does not explain why pleasure should

be correlated with seeking out things that are good for the organism, and pain with avoiding things that are harmful. To explain that correlation, the theory of evolution is presumably also required. And it is easy to see the general form such an explanation might take: Organisms that, by random variation, got pleasure from things that were beneficial to them tended to seek out those things and so had an increased chance of survival. Similarly those that got pain from things that were bad for them avoided them, and so tended to survive. In this way, natural selection ensured that those that survived got pleasure from things that were good for them and pain from things that were bad from them. But note: *this* is *not* the fortunate correlation. The fortunate correlation links feelings of pleasure with seeking out behaviour, and feelings of pain with avoidance behaviour. *That* correlation is not to be (directly) explained by evolution, but by hypothesising that those organisms in which it holds already had, prior to the correlation, a power of free choice.

8. THE NOTION OF FREE CHOICE USED HERE

On the view suggested in this paper, a “power of free choice” is used in explaining the fortunate correlation. But, it is natural to ask: “How is this notion of free choice to be defined?” Here, no definition of this notion will be offered. This does not mean, however, that the meaning of the term cannot be explained. Like many terms that cannot be given an analytic definition, it is possible to ostensibly explain the meaning of “free choice” to which we have here appealed. We are all familiar with instances of the exercise of free choice in this sense: we all experience it when we, for example, voluntarily choose to withdraw our hand from a painful stimulus *because* it is painful. Experiences of this sort give us “knowledge by acquaintance” with free choice in this sense. We can *recognise* that we are exercising this faculty of free choice when we assert that we have voluntarily removed our hand because of the pain. So: the reference of the notion of free choice used here can plausibly be fixed by ostension, even if it cannot be analytically defined. Moreover, if we are able to recognise as such the conditions under which it is appropriate to assert sentences such as “I chose to move my hand away because it was painful” then it seems we have some sort of implicit knowledge of the meaning of the notion. And, of course, in these respects the notion of free choice used here is perhaps no different from many other significant philosophical notions: the notions of truth, knowledge, causation and consciousness, for example, have all been claimed to be primitive and not definable in more fundamental terms. The lack of a definition does not show the term to lack meaning, and neither ought it to prevent us from employing it.

It is worth observing that the conception of free choice used here can be incorporated within the model of free will developed by James¹³. On James’s model, the exercise of free will is to be seen as a two-stage process.¹⁴ In the first stage, a number of options become available to an agent. These options might be: to walk home one way rather than another, to put their hand near the fire to retrieve an object or to refrain from doing so, and so on. Both courses of action are possible, given the agent’s present circumstances. In the second stage the agent freely chooses one of these options, where the choice made causally follows from the agent’s psychological make-up, particularly their emotions and desires. Clearly, this second stage in James’s model of free will is compatible with the view advocated here. On this view, an agent might, for example, freely choose to not retrieve the object from the fire because of the pain of doing so, and on the view advocated here, the avoidance of the pain involves the exercise of free will. So: on this view, the act is both caused by attributes of the agent’s

psychological make-up, but is also the exercise of free-will: it therefore fits James's account "like a glove".

9. A CONSIDERATION OF SOME OBJECTIONS

On the view advocated here, there is a type of "free choice" or "free will" that is evolutionarily prior to the ability to feel pleasure and pain. So, it seems, this power of free choice must be present in a species *before* it develops the capacity to feel pain. But this, it might be objected, is not very plausible. A worm squirming on a hot rock, for example, presumably feels pain, but we would surely feel wary about attributing to the worm a power of free choice. The attribute of having a power of free choice, is, it might be protested, a higher or more developed cognitive capacity than the mere capacity to feel pain. And, if this is granted, we would surely expect it to come after, not before, the capacity to feel pain.

One reply to this objection is that the notion of free choice used here does not require any highly developed cognitive capacity. The only *explanatory* role played by the notion of free choice used here is that it gives an agent the *tendency* to move away from a painful stimulus because it is painful, and towards a pleasant stimulus because it is pleasant. It does not, for example, require an organism to make a conscious choice between, to deliberate between, or even to have an understanding of, a range of possible behavioural options. It is at least not obvious that such a minimal capacity must be evolutionarily posterior to the feeling of pleasure and pain.

It might be objected that the notion of free choice used here is no more genuinely explanatory than Moliere's "dormative virtue". What we want to explain is why organisms seek out pleasurable situations and avoid painful ones. The "explanation" given is that this is because organisms have a "power of free choice". But – so the objection may be made – the power of free choice used here is nothing more than a power that enables organisms to seek out the pleasurable and avoid the painful. And so the proposed explanation would seem to come to no more than: organisms seek out the pleasurable and avoid the painful because they have a power to do so. But that would hardly seem to be any "explanation" at all!

There are two things that can be said in reply to this objection. First, it is false that on the view offered here the *sole content* of the notion of a "power of free choice" used here is "a power to seek out the pleasurable and avoid the painful". Part of its content is also given ostensively: we refer to this power when we report that we have exercised it in, for example, choosing to move our hand away from a flame or towards a chocolate cake. We are, plausibly, *acquainted* with this type of free choice. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the view offered here also advances a thesis about evolutionary priority. It says that the type of free choice we exercise when moving our hand from the flame is evolutionarily prior to the fortunate correlation.

It might perhaps be objected that the explanation of the fortunate correlation offered here merely replaces one puzzling phenomenon without another: Our initial problem was to explain why the fortunate correlation exists, and, on the view offered here, we do so by postulating a "power of free choice". But this surely gives rise to the question: "Why does this power of free choice exist?" One puzzling phenomena is explained merely by postulating another.

In this paper an explanation of the existence of the power of free choice shall not be offered. However, three points may be noted. First, and most obviously, all explanation must stop somewhere: any explanation must, for example, leave certain laws as (at least for the time being) unexplained "brute

facts". Secondly, the problem of explaining the fortunate correlation has been shifted to the problem of explaining why organisms should have a power of free choice. And if it is accepted that organisms do indeed have this power (and introspection seems to reveal we do have it) its existence is something that we would have needed to explain quite independently of the claims of this paper. It is something we would need to have explained "anyhow". And so, in this respect, shifting the problem to explaining free will reduces the total number of things that require explanation. The third point to be noted is that the prospects for being able to find an evolutionary explanation of a power of free choice seem, at least on the face of it, to be rather better than those for finding an explanation of the fortunate correlation. One reason why the problem of explaining the latter perhaps seemed so intractable was that organisms for which the fortunate correlation held were behaviourally indistinguishable from those that found themselves trapped in a "nightmare world". The fortunate correlation would not seem to confer upon an organism any behavioural tendencies that would give it an increased chance of survival. But an organism's having a power of free choice *would* seem to make a difference to its behaviour. The prospects would seem rather better for finding an evolutionary explanation for organisms having a power of free choice.

Perhaps the objection most likely to be made to the view offered here is that, in asserting organisms have a power of free choice, it is asserting the existence of something that empirical research has revealed to be dubious at best. More specifically, it may be objected, empirical findings due to Benjamin Libet show the view we have free will to be highly questionable.

Libet's findings can be briefly summarised as follows.¹⁵ Libet asked his subjects to do two things: (i) press a button at a time (supposedly freely) chosen by the subject and (ii) record the moment in time when they made the decision to press the button. Libet found that there was in the brain of each subject an electrical event of a particular type that always preceded the *formation of the decision* to press the button. On the face of it, such a discovery suggests both that the decision to press the button was caused by this earlier electrical event, and that the decision was therefore not freely made.

There are, however, two reasons for thinking that Libet's findings need not be decisive against the view adopted in this paper. First, and perhaps most obviously, the correct interpretation of Libet's findings is a matter of some controversy. While some workers in the field do see these empirical findings as showing the notion of free will to be illusory, not all do.¹⁶ Some prominent commentators have argued that Libet's results are just what we ought to expect to be the case if we have free will.¹⁷

Secondly, it is not even clear that Libet's findings cast in to doubt the *specific kind* of "free will" or "free choice", appeal to which has been made in this paper. In Libet's experiments, subjects were asked to freely choose the moment at which they pressed a button. This action was not in response to either pleasure or pain; it was rather more like a wholly arbitrary choice. But the type of free choice that is the concern of this paper *is* exercised in response to pleasure and pain. It manifests itself when organisms move towards something because it is pleasurable or away from it because it is painful. It is free will in this sense that plays the causal role identified in James's argument against epiphenomenalism, and which is also the object of his theory of free will. And so the type of free will which Libet's findings (perhaps) show to be illusory would seem not to be the type of free choice we have utilised here.

10. EPIPHENOMENALISM AGAIN

On the view advocated here, in moving our hand away from the flame, we are exercising our capacity for free choice. We are choosing to avoid the *painful* flame in exercising this capacity. And we make this choice *because* the flame is painful. But in saying that we choose to move away *because* it is painful, we are clearly attributing causal powers to the subjective property of painfulness. And so this position is incompatible with epiphenomenalism.

But although the position advocated here is incompatible with epiphenomenalism, a main theme of the paper has been that to explain the fortunate correlation it is not sufficient to reject epiphenomenalism. Merely attributing causal powers to the mental is not enough: something more is need. In this paper it has been suggested that this “something more” is to say that a power of free choice is evolutionarily prior to the capacity to feel pleasure and pain.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of this paper has been to argue that the “fortunate correlation” is a puzzle in the philosophy of mind, the significance of which has perhaps not yet fully recognised. In particular, it raises problems not raised by apparently similar puzzles such as the inverted spectrum.

In the final section of the paper an explanation of the fortunate correlation was offered. The explanation says that a “power of free choice” is present on organisms that feel pleasure and pain, and this power must be evolutionary prior to the development of pleasure and pain. Only if a power of free choice is already present in organisms would the peculiar mechanism of a subjectively nasty feeling as a means of securing avoidance seem to “have a point”. The suggestion was defended against some likely objections. But, whether or not the suggested explanation is accepted, the fortunate correlation perhaps deserves more attention than it has so far received.

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NOTES

¹ James argument was directed against Shadworth Hodgson, T. H. Huxley, Herbert Spencer and W. K. Clifford.

According to Adela Pinch (Thinking About Other People in the Nineteenth Century, p.68), the thinker who initiated discussion of epiphenomenalism in this period was Shadworth Hodgson. Hodgson’s views were developed in his *Time and Space: A Metaphysical Essay* (London, Longman, 1865). Hodgson saw mental properties as being analogous to the colours on the tiles of a mosaic. It is the shape of the pieces in the mosaic that are causally relevant in holding the mosaic in place: the colours of the pieces are causally irrelevant in doing this. In an analogous way, Hodgson saw mental properties as causally irrelevant.

T. H. Huxley embraced a view according to which animals and humans were “automata”. Huxley famously compared mental phenomena to the steam given off by a steam train. His views were developed in his “On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and Its History” in *Methods and Results: Essays by Thomas H. Huxley*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898.)

W. K. Clifford's *Body and Mind* (*The Fortnightly Review*, 16, December 1874, pp.714-736) contains a number of passages in which Clifford certainly appears to explicitly endorse mind-body parallelism. (Although in the opinion of the present author it is not entirely clear that Clifford actually does subscribe to what we usually regard as parallelism, or to a form of "double-aspect" theory.)

² William James *The Principles of Psychology* (H. Holt, 1890)

³ The expression "felicitous alignment" seems to be originally due to W. S. Robinson in his article "Epiphenomenalism" in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

⁴ James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Chapter V The Automaton Theory, Section: "Reasons against the Theory".

⁵ See Popper, K. and Eccles, J. *The Self and Its Brain* (New York, Springer-Verlag, 1977) pp.72-75.

⁶ See Frank Jackson "Epiphenomenal Qualia" in *Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 32, 1982, pp.127-136, especially p.134.

⁷ See Jack C. Lyons "In Defence of Epiphenomenalism" in *Philosophical Psychology* vol. 19, no. 6, 2006, pp.767-794.

⁸ See William S. Robinson <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~wsrob/EvoEpi.pdf>

⁹ See Milic Capek "James' Early Criticism of the Automaton Theory" in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XV, (April, 1954), pp.260-279, especially p.267.

¹⁰ This is the type of explanation favoured by David Chalmers in his *The Conscious Mind*, esp. p. 158.

¹¹ It is worth noting that in his paper "Evolution and Epiphenomenalism" William Robinson also comes to the conclusion that James' felicitous alignment presents a problem for all views of the mind-body relationship. However, the reasons Robinson gives for this are different from those used here.

¹² Capek (*op cit*) notes that there are numerous counter-examples to the suggestion that what we find pleasurable tends to be good for us, but notes that statistically the tendency is for the pleasurable activities to be healthful. The same can surely be said for the "fortunate correlation" with which we are presently concerned: statistically the tendency is surely for us to tend to seek out the pleasurable and avoid the painful.

¹³ James explains his model of free will in his "The Dilemma of Determinism", *Unitarian Review*, vol XXII (1884), p.193.

¹⁴ A discussion James' two-stage conception of free-will, and of the way it pre-dates similar conceptions, is given in Bob Doyle "Jamesian Free-will, the Two-Stage Model of William James" in *William James Studies*, 2010, vol 5, pp.1-28.

¹⁵ See, for example, Benjamin Libet et al "Subjective referral of the timing for a conscious sensory experience: a functional role for the somatosensory specific projection system in man." *Brain*, **102** (1979) (1): pp.193-224. See also "Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action" in *The Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, vol 8, pp.529-566.

¹⁶ For a defence of the view that Libet's findings do not cast free will in to doubt, see, for example Owen Flanagan "Conscious Inessentialism and the Epiphenomenalist Suspicion" in *The Nature of Consciousness* edited by Ned Block, Owen Flanagan and Guven Guzeldere, MIT Press, A Bradford Book (1997)

¹⁷ See Flanagan *loc cit*.

HABIT AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

JAMES M. HITT

In a curious example of habit in “Talk to Teachers,” James offers praise for “a number of accomplished Hindoo visitors at Cambridge.” He notes that whereas the American body and face express a lack of grace, over-intensity, and anxiety, the Hindu body and face express an imperturbable tranquility. In short, James describes, rightfully or not, an American temperament and one he judges to be causing “national harm.” His example is of a *collective* habit producing a deleterious effect upon a *social institution*. This connection between habit and society is furthered in *The Principles of Psychology*.¹ Habit, at bottom, rests upon a straightforward neurological principle that remains as true today as it was in his day. Neurons lay down new paths to create repeatable behaviors. From this mundane neurological claim, habit will rise up to the summits of society and social institutions. He concludes in the chapter *Habit* that “[h]abit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, it’s most precious conservative agent (Vol. 1, “Habit,” 125).”

In this essay, I’ll show that James in *The Principles* ascends toward these expanded claims from low-level neurology. In the process I will resist a tendency in the literature on *The Principles* to treat James as a physiologist (its about the body) or as a phenomenal physiologist (its about how the body feels for one).² Neither physiology (as natural, automatic, modular happenings) nor phenomenology (as how the experience is for one) is robust enough to capture the striking fact that habit, in the cases that matter, must include institutional facts. In addition, by steering away from facts of neurology and how one’s experience is for one will aid understanding a third of *Habit* that exhorts practical advice on how to overcome moral defects and promote moral advancement. Habit, for James, can raise an individual or nation to heaven or plummet one to hell.

James’s examples help draw out distinctions among a variety of habits. And these differences will be crucial as he builds the chapter toward his concluding maxims as well as elucidating the role of habit in society. He begins with what he labels a simple habit. Such a habit is akin to a folded piece of paper. Once set in a malleable medium, the fold/habit is more readily realized. The metaphor is telling. Eijah Woods of *Lord of the Rings* fame has what James calls a simple habit. Woods is a nail biter. Like all habits, nail biting involves “concatenated discharges in the nerve-centres (Vol. 1, “Habit,” 112).” For simple habits, this is all that is of interest. Two ideas are central. First, it is not that Woods is a nervous person. The habit need not be a sign of further traits of the person, traits we would judge to be appropriate or inappropriate. Second, the “hobbit’s” habit of biting nails need not occur in a well-defined context as the biting of nails occurs in many diverse contexts. That is, the events that bring about a simple habit are so varied they resist classification. Even if one could enumerate classes of precipitating causes, such classification would carry little interest. The behavior alone is sufficient to capture the habit.³ Contrast with the slightly more complex habit of putting on (or failing to put on) a seatbelt. Sitting in a car precipitates the behavior. Sitting in a movie theatre, dinner, seminar, or a wide variety of seated circumstances does not bring about the habit. Nail biting, snuffling, and

James's other example of putting one's hand in their pockets will not entail a link to kinds of causes. The context remains irrelevant. Only the actualized behavior is required to comprehend a simple habit. Consider again that to automatically put on one's seatbelt is potentially beneficial for one and less so for those that do not. A simple habit centers on features within a creature without being bogged down by kinds of causes or whether a habit expresses something of value. Simple habits are like a dump reflex arcs, applicable to biological creatures with a sensory system.

James relates a story by the Father of Modern Magic, Robert Houdin, to illustrate mastery as another form of habit. Houdin practiced to the point that he could juggle four balls while reading a book aloud. To develop proficiency in a skill, one works to eliminate attention. The performance crystalizes when mastered and the need to attend to the step-by-step mechanics dissipates. In short, motor aptitude takes the place of conscious direction. Thirty years latter, with no further practice, Houdin managed the same feat with three balls (Vol. 1, "Habit," 122). The focus on skills, as a kind of habit, gets across the core notion that as a habit entrenches within the nervous system, attention lessens (Vol. 1, "Habit", 121). Proficiency economizes attention. Other cognitive resources become free to either enhance a skill or, as in this case, entertain another activity. Mastery, unlike simple habits, has an important *psychological* character. Should Houdin close his eyes, the balls will fall to the floor. Some amount of attention remains.⁴

James's discussion of skills quietly sidelines a common position of his day: habit is nothing more than complex mechanism in a biological creature. The formal argument against this mechanistic stance is provided in Chapter 5, "The Automaton-Theory." With respect to habits, the automaton theorist would argue that all habits, including their genesis and maintenance, could be accounted for at the level of neurology. Namely, all habits are simple habits and psychological terms would then be extraneous. James's response in "The Automaton-Theory" shows that a nest of complex neural connections must inevitably be explanatorily inadequate. James writes,

The dilemma in regard to the nervous system seems, in short, to be of the following kind. We may construct one which will react infallibly and certainly, but it will then be capable of reacting to very few changes in the environment - it will fail to be adapted to all the rest. We may, on the other hand, construct a nervous system potentially adapted to respond to an infinite variety of minute features in the situation; but its fallibility will then be as great as its elaboration. We can never be sure that its equilibrium will be upset in the appropriate direction. In short, a high brain may do many things, and may do each of them at a very slight hint. But its hair-trigger organization makes of it a happy-go-lucky, hit-or-miss affair. It is as likely to do the crazy as the sane thing at any given moment. A low brain does few things, and in doing them perfectly forfeits all other use. The performances of a high brain are like dice thrown forever on a table. Unless they be loaded, what chance is there that the highest number will turn up oftener than the lowest? (Vol. 1., "The Automaton-Theory," 143)

We must have an ability to edit from vast arrays of sensory information to account for intelligent behavior (Vol. 1, "The Automaton-Theory," 142). The rejection of the Automaton-Theory rests on the idea that some form of selective filtering must take place in order to generate useful habits. For suppose we are nothing but a cobweb of vastly interconnected neurons. How would one account for the variety of intelligent actions a creature may perform in terms of the vast amount information provided to a sensory system? One cannot, James argues,

unless one has a principle of selection to filter out irrelevant information from the vast array. As mastery demonstrates, directed attention is important in the development and realization of certain types of valuable habits. Our ability to select opens the door to forms of habit that are psychological and of value. Note that the value is for the person, as opposed to the species. One learns a habit, whereas instinct requires no first performance for it to be ingrained.

James, however, clearly intends to mark off habit as a distinctive form of psychological phenomena. The term 'consciousness' in *The Principles* is specialized. A passing glance at the index will reveal that under the term 'feeling' one reads "synonym for consciousness in general in this book." And for the term 'thought', the initial entry reads "synonym for consciousness at large." James uses these two terms to indicate something that he is labeling 'consciousness' without thereby supposing two kinds of consciousness (Vol. 1, "The Methods and Snares of Psychology," 185-186). Therefore, the term 'consciousness' does not exclusively or always signal that there is a what it is like or phenomenology. That is, James's use of the term 'consciousness,' and its cognates, will not fit neatly into modern conceptions of consciousness as requiring that there be something it is like to be conscious coupled with a form of immediacy or direct awareness. In addition, our modern conception of consciousness is one form of mentality. Thought, desire, and some even argue sensory quality, may fail to have anything it is like to be in such states and remain part of psychology. Instead, the term 'consciousness' in *The Principles* is a term to cover the topic of psychology. It is "[t]he [p]ursuance of future ends and the choice of means for their attainment [that] are thus the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality in a phenomenon (Vol. 1, "The Scope of Psychology," 21)." James augments this broad account of consciousness with his notion of selection. As James writes, "Accentuation and Emphasis are present in every perception we have. We find it quite impossible to disperse our attention impartially over a number of impressions (Vol. 1, "The Stream of Thought," 273)." And selection is not limited to what is useful for the species.⁵ It is evident in reasoning, aesthetics, and ethics (Vol. 1, "The Stream of Thought," 276). Selection is our keystone.

James describes the form selection within a habit in two apparently contrastive ways. The following quote, "*habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed* (italics in original: Vol. 1, "Habit," 119)", naturally suggests a residual spark of something it is like for one to reside within a habit. Like a dimmed light, an experiential element remains in a habit no matter how faint. This would read into James's term 'consciousness' a contemporary notion involving at minimum a qualitative experience one is aware of.⁶ For example, to learn to juggle, one must work to pay attention to hand position, ball trajectories, when to move the hands, and toss a ball. All of these bodily movements (hands, arms, eyes) are reflectively attended to and directed until mastery economizes on our attention. The prior quote might indicate that one nonetheless remains actively attentive to the experience. James suggests otherwise. Rather than viewing "consciousness" as only active, one views "consciousness" in a dispositional sense as well. For example, the successive movements when a talent such as juggling is mastered are "*sensations to which we are usually inattentive, but which immediately call out attention if they go wrong* (italics in original: Vol. 1, "Habit," 123)." James builds into the notion of sensation a feature beyond neural activation of a motor response (Vol. 1, Habit, 122). The added factor cannot be self-awareness of one's ongoing experience because one is inattentive to, or cannot account for, one's success in the skill. Still, the process remains psychological because one *could* report on the performance when failure occurs. That is, one is poised to

notice, either by thought or feeling, failure. Habit, of the relevant kind, must therefore involve psychological dispositions. Phenomenology falls by the wayside.

To treat James's account of habit dispositionally has a number of advantages. For one, dispositions are all over the place and cut through the physical, neurological, psychological, and societal realms. Volcanoes, bees, presidents, and nations can variably be described in terms of dispositions. James then has continuity of explanation from folded paper, to simple habits, to mastery, and beyond. For two, dispositions center on possible movement or behavior rather than occurrent states. A vase remains fragile even if it has not yet shattered. One remains charming even when asleep. Thirdly, James intends habit to cut across the psychological divide as well. Habit helps to organize such functions as perception, memory, and reasoning.⁸ Lastly, treating habit as a disposition helps to lessen a common criticism of James's treatment of habit as a law of nature. Certainly his description casts habit as robust phenomena.⁹ But the phenomena are not law-like in being insurmountable. Rather, they exhibit an enduring physical property – namely dispositions.

James reprints a tale from Huxley's *Elementary Lessons in Physiology*.

There is a story, which is credible enough, though it may not be true, of a practical joker, who, seeing a discharged veteran carrying home his dinner, suddenly called out, 'Attention!' whereupon the man instantly brought his hands down, and lost his mutton and potatoes in the gutter. The drill had been thorough, and its effects had become embodied in the man's nervous structure (Vol. 1, "Habit," 125).

A number of features are important. First, the habit is firmly established. Second, the habit is sensitive to rather narrow environmental conditions. If "attention!" is appropriately called out, then the veteran will come to attention. Yelling "var uppmärksam!" will have no effect though "attenzione!" might even when the veteran knows nothing of Italian. Similarly, riderless cavalry-horses in battle may come together at the trumpeting of Rally on the Chief (Vol. 1, "Habit," 125). This kind of habit is sensitive to physical features appropriate to one sensory system (i.e., auditory) and fall within narrow and well-specified auditory properties. Namely, having well-defined antecedent conditions is a feature of a different class of habits and a feature that will remain of interest. Furthermore, the two examples show that a class of habit carries with it the notion that the realized behavior may not be suitable in all circumstances. The practical joker as well as our amusement rests on this fact: the conditions of appropriate behavior will be narrower than the conditions that elicit the behavior. What is of interest for these habits is not the genesis, but the underlying perception of the event. Calling a soldier to attention in a dining hall or playing Rally on the Chief in a parade may embarrass the veteran but not the horse. That is, though both man and horse recognize the sound that elicits the behavior, only the man recognizes that one is not now in an appropriate military context. How or what one perceives is important in that the perception of something is of something as something.

James tells us that habit "keeps the fisherman and the deck-hand at seas through the winter." Bears fish through stormy seasons as well. Both bear and deck-hand perceive the catch *as* fish. The physical features within the perception of these two different contexts involve a fishy presence. Nothing in the perception of the physical features, however, will account for why the fisherman can see the fish *as* money and the bear cannot. We, along with the fisherman, recognize fishing as an occupation. The bear does not have an occupation nor does it perceive its fishing behavior as an occupation. The notion of *perception as* is key to understand the role of habit within society. It will help to see that

the same notion, *perception as*, is prominent in James's theory of emotion as well.

Contrary to common sense, James's theory of emotion interchanges two of the three main phases in an emotional experience.¹⁰ Common sense suggests that the perception of the exciting fact leads to the emotional feeling, which then triggers bodily changes. James switches the second and third: each occurrence of emotional feeling corresponds to a unique orchestration of bodily changes, and so, the perception of the exciting fact, rather than the feeling, causes the relevant bodily changes. James states that the feeling of bodily change *is* the emotion. To leave this as a literal identification of his position will have difficulties effectively distinguishing pathological and non-pathological cases as feeling remains in both. As James claims that it's a virtue of his theory that it does (Vol. 2, "The Emotions," 1073) he will need to rely on something other than feeling. In brief, James supposes a conceptual link between the perception of the exciting fact and the feeling of bodily changes in the normal cases. By associating emotion with feeling, James unifies pathological and non-pathological cases as the feeling remains. The pathological cases are just those for which the conceptual link between the perception and feeling is severed. However, one understands the varied emotions according to the normal cases, not the pathological ones. And in the normal cases, for both the courser and subtler emotions, the perception of the exciting fact is seeing an object as exciting.¹¹ The psychic fringe of emotional feeling serves an epistemic function. The felt fringe indicates interest, and may leave silent any other relations. However, the feeling of indignation or of fear is a feeling of *indignation* or of *fear*, not because of its experiential aspect, or simply because it's a feeling of bodily changes. The feeling connects to the perception of the exciting fact. And though the feeling is a feeling of bodily changes, the felt experience serves as a reliable guide that disposes one toward the content of the perception of the exciting fact. With this chain of connections, James can readily claim that his theory can account for pathological and non-pathological cases. When the feeling of fear is simply a feeling of bodily changes,¹² no ground is available to distinguish between the pathological and the non-pathological. When we presuppose perception of something as something in the normal cases, one can then make sense of James's assertion that it's a virtue of his theory that it does distinguish between normal and abnormal emotional feelings.

In "The Physical Basis of Emotion," published four years after *The Principles*, James explicitly asserts the perception of the exciting object isn't simply the perception of an external object.¹³ In the article, James addresses an objection raised by critics David Irons and W.L. Worchester. They claim that it's not seeing the object as such that produces the emotion. For seeing a bear in a zoo, in a circus, in a photograph, from afar, while sufficiently armed, etc., fails to generate an emotion. James is quick to the point: "A reply to these objections is the easiest thing in the world to make ... As soon as the object has become thus familiar and suggestive, its emotional consequences, *on any theory of emotion*, must start rather from the total situation which it suggests than from its own naked presence ("The Physical Basis of Emotion," 206)." The perception of the exciting fact selects some aspect of the total situation as being vitally important.¹⁴ By conceding that the perception isn't simply of an exciting object, it's one perceived as an exciting object, James retains the strength of his position. Accepting this aspect of common sense, that it's the respect in which one perceives something that generates an emotion, doesn't tell against his main thesis: perceiving the object as an exciting object brings about the bodily changes and without those bodily mechanisms, there would be no feeling of bodily changes.

Consider now this explosion of examples from the chapter on habit.

[Habit] alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor. It alone prevents the hardest and most repulsive walks of life from being deserted by those brought up to tread therein. It keeps the fisherman and the deck-hand at seas through the winter; it holds the miner in his darkness, and nails the countryman to his log-cabin and his lonely farm through all the months of snow. (Vol. I, "Habit," 125)

Removed from consideration are creatures that are only bundles of natural, automatic, modular happenings. These examples require social creatures. More importantly, they involve creatures with established social institutions. These habits include money, calendars, economic class, as well as cultural renditions of disgust and hardship. Natural, automatic, modular happenings in a creature cannot capture, nor would one think they could, societal facts. Nor would raw experience of the physical world be sufficient. A creature may spontaneously collect silver discs; to form a custom of collecting coins requires social institutions.

Money has power. A number of complex factors no doubt co-mingle to create and maintain the power associated with a socially created object.¹⁵ At minimum, the ability of money to direct and influence behavior requires a declaration from a social institution, such as the US Treasury, that a certain kind of paper or coin count as currency. Communal activity among citizens is required as well. The people need to think of a certain kind of paper or coin as currency. When Zimbabwe's inflation hit 100,000% in 2008, the citizens, at some point, collectively no longer thought of the Zimbabwean dollar as having the power to purchase goods. The paper lost the function of currency despite the efforts of Zimbabwe's social institutions. The power of collective activity that demotes or sustains an object's social function is of a special sort. Compare money use with the use of tools in animals. A crow can learn to bend wire into a hook to fetch food. Other crows watching can learn the trick as well. The crows may even see the hook as a tool – serving a function. But the hook serves that function in virtue of physical properties. Money serves as currency in virtue of mental acts – our collectively assigning a type of paper as having the function it is assigned to have. Communal activity accounts for why green paper in the United States is used in the way it is used. If asked for a reason one can appeal to the power money has independent of an explicit agreement to assign green paper with such a role. Furthermore, the day-to-day use of currency that maintains the power of money does not require one to be phenomenally alive to the paper as money. Our unreflective dispositional mental acts contribute to the further performance of maintaining the power of money. Scam artists rely on such social facts. With our attention dimmed or misdirected, our day-to-day behavior may too readily treat a poorly constructed counterfeit as real.

Both habit and instinct for James remain at the core unreflective reactions to an environment. Instinct suggests that the reaction cannot be compensated for and habit suggests that the response may be acquired or lost. The difficulty is to explain the formulation of a new habit within a nervous system. Still, to treat habit as nothing but learned instinct leaves much to be desired. For James, we choose our habits. As such, the law of habit (i.e., dispositions) entail ethical implications. The hell a person endures in this world as a result their habits, is a hell they made for themselves (Vol. 1, "Habit," 130). What one lacks is a healthy wariness of how one's innocuous choices today may lead to ethical implications tomorrow. James's plea in "Habit" in both *The Principles* and

Talks to Teachers is that the young be wary of themselves and realize their malleable minds will solidify into being a kind of person.¹⁶

James offers four heuristics in *The Principles* to aid in the cultivation of appropriate habits. Taken together, the maxims point to the need for strenuous effort, conscious attention, and circumspection. In ridding oneself of an unwanted habit, the effort and attention are on doing something else and the circumspection is awareness of what one must do so as not to spring to life the unwanted habit. What one pays attention to is not one's subjectivity. What it is like to have the unwanted habit and how one's present actions are for one will fail to be informative. Rather one needs to suppose or imagine what needs to be the case in the world to foster the genesis of a desirable habit while extinguishing the undesirable one. And one does this by knowing what kind of person one is and that some dispositions may frustrate our endeavors.

In the chapter on habit from *Talks to Teachers*¹⁷, James writes from the summit. Gone are the technical aspects with the central message delivered upfront. He tells the reader right off "our virtues are habits as much as our vices. All our life, so far as it has definite form, is but a mass of habits—practical, emotional, and intellectual—systematically organized for our weal or woe, and bearing us irresistibly toward our destiny, whatever the latter may be." The talk rehearses the maxims present in *The Principles* and adds a new one. James writes, "[d]on't preach too much to your pupils or abound in good talk in the abstract." The acquisition of desirable habits requires work. Having good intentions or gaining factual knowledge will be insufficient to aid students in living better lives. The teacher needs to inculcate worthwhile habits. To do this, James implores teachers to get the student to act. The body, as with emotion, is the sounding board of habit. One must act to induce a habit. One must act with explicit attention to details. The teacher must get the student "to think, to feel, and to do." The additional maxim reinforces the notion that conscious attention, strenuous effort, circumspection advance the development of valuable habits.

The inculcation of worthwhile habits demands a special kind of attention. Though it is attention toward oneself, one observes oneself from a distance. This is not introspective observation where one attends to the immediacy of an experience. Instead, one focuses on how one tends to be. One aims to see how one's dispositions may hinder present good intentions. James relates the following story in *Talks to Teachers*:

I remember long ago reading in an Austrian paper the advertisement of a certain Rudolph Somebody, who promised fifty gulden reward to any one who after that date should find him at the wine-shop of Ambrosius So-and-so. 'This I do,' the advertisement continued, 'in consequence of a promise which I have made my wife.'

For Rudolph, a simple declaration to his wife will be insufficient to insure his behavior will change. The declaration needs to be public. Second, Rudolph must know of himself he will inevitably find himself purchasing alcohol in the wine-shop. Rudolph knows his present resolve will soften. The potential loss of a sizable sum creates an independent safeguard. In short, Rudolph has guarded himself from himself because he knows himself from a distance.

James's advice on how one cultivates worthwhile individual habits extends naturally to collective habits that support social institutions.¹⁸ To illustrate, take the administrative head of an organization, whether it be a department chair, president of a Parent Teacher Organization, or chairperson on the board of directors for a non-profit organization. The chair has power. She has that power in virtue of policies and procedures of an institution and the acceptance of

that assignment by its members. Explicit policies and procedures, however, need not be essential. For example, even when policies require a secret ballot among members to select the chairperson, as long as she declares “I’m the chairperson” and others agree, explicitly or implicitly, she has the power associated with the chair. The tacit agreement is important. One continues as chair not in virtue of all members thinking daily, “Lo, the chair.” Rather, each member has formed dispositions to treat her as such. Agreement in the form of dispositions, that is, habits, maintains the continuation of that societal role as well as the social fact of who is the chair.

Now suppose one wants to dethrone the administrative head.¹⁹ It won’t do to pay attention to one’s experience as such or to extinguish one’s own thoughts that express the idea that this person is the chair. Rather, one cultivates dispositions to behave that would fail to acknowledge the person who is the chair as the chair. James’s advice is of that nature. First, one focuses on establishing new habits to replace the old. Second, one must form a behavioral strategy that would have the effect of circumventing present behavioral tendencies. One needs to take a distant view of themselves, and others, to see what conditions would fail to promote the continued acceptance of the person as the chair. Whether this strikes one as devious will depend in part on whether the reason for acting is simply to satisfy one’s desire that the present chair not be who it is. Others, however, will be responsive to reason. As with moral habits, societal habits are open to reason where the reason expresses what is of value.²⁰ One might note how the chair fails to live up to the institution’s mission statement or goals. As an appeal to reason, the focus is on obligations. The reason also expresses an existing habit of acceptance of the role of the institution of which the role of chair is embedded. Should one convince others of the importance of the goals of the institution— to have a sufficient number of members *to think* — one needs the members to be appropriately motivated, *to feel*. And lastly, one needs the members *to act* in the appropriate manner habitually. Difficult indeed because to undo habits that support societal institutions and processes requires herculean effort beyond what an average person could do. One might do better to wait for the next vote. And so, institutional “[h]abit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, it’s most precious conservative agent (Vol. 1, “Habit,” 125).”

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NOTES

¹ My concern is on the nature of habit within *The Principles*. I lean on other texts only in so far as they help clarify the general position within *The Principles*.

² E.g., in *Reflections on The Principles of Psychology: William James After a Century*, the editors write in the "Introduction" that a common theme emerges from the independent essays: "This theme concerns the tension between the role of experience (or phenomenological data) within a scientific psychology, and the viability of a materialistic (biologically reductive) account of mental life."

³ What will be missing is an understanding of how the simple habit was acquired.

⁴ To treat habit as "just another name for the law of association by contiguity" (See Malone (1990)) fails to capture needed distinctions among habits James is at pains to describe.

⁵ This too helps to differentiate habit and instinct.

⁶ By a contemporary account I mean the claim that consciousness has the following two features: First, consciousness involves qualitative character. Second, the qualitative character is its own evidence – that is, one is aware of the qualitative character non-inferentially.

⁷ James clearly intends to mark the term 'sensation' as something beyond mere neuronal activity that initiates a motor response (Vol. 1., "Habit," 122).

⁸ The initial paragraph of the chapter on habit in *The Briefer Course* makes explicit that the notion of habit is not an additional psychological phenomenon but a fundamental one – present in the "association of ideas, perception, memory, reasoning, education of the will, etc. etc."

⁹ In *Talks to Teachers*, James takes to task the criticism that he made habit impossible to transgress.

¹⁰ His theory of emotion marks a significant departure from the general agreement with common sense *The Principles* exhibits. James writes that he "shall have no hesitation in using the language of common-sense through-out this book (Vol. 1, "The Automaton-Theory," 147)."

¹¹ See Paul Redding's *The Logic of Affect* for a similar claim.

¹² Gerald E. Myers, in "William James's Theory of Emotion," argues for the view that the feeling of fear is nothing more than the feeling of bodily changes. I disagree. Such an interpretation needs to explain James's distinction between pathological and non-pathological cases.

¹³ Matthew Ratcliffe, in "William James on Emotion and Intentionality," claims that James's view is not an object as perceived but simply the external object causing the perception (185). From "What is an Emotion," he offers the following citation as evidence: "... the emotion is nothing but the reflex bodily effects of what we call its 'object', effects due to the connate adaptation of the nervous system to that object." Unfortunately Ratcliffe omits the 'if' proceeding 'the emotion', leaving a different reading of James's view. More importantly, the relevant text fails to appear in *The Principles*.

¹⁴ That every object that excites an instinct excites an emotion (Vol. 2, "The Emotions," 1058) is immaterial. For James, the number of instincts implanted in humans out stretch those implanted in other animals as instinct slides between reflex action and habit (Vol. 2, "Instinct," 1056, ft. 34) and are "implanted for the sake of giving rise to habits (Vol. 2, "Instinct," 1022)."

¹⁵ I am indebted to John Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality* and *Making the Social World* in framing how James's notion of habit as the most conservative agent in society connects to social ontology. James's position as outlined is consistent with Searle's independently of whether James would endorse it.

¹⁶ James's examples in "Habit" are not of the traditional vices and virtues. A virtue no doubt if one thinks there are no virtues or vices (See, for example, Harman (2000) or Ross & Nisbett (1991).

¹⁷ This chapter on habit, like the *Briefer Course* chapter, condenses Chapter 4 of *The Principles*. Unlike the *Briefer Course*, much of the chapter in *Talks to Teachers* is original.

¹⁸ I do not address whether James's latter work expands upon the notions of habit and institutions. It is worth noting an 1890 letter to Giulio Ferrari, translator of the Italian edition of *The Principles*. James writes, "I have become exclusively occupied with metaphysics, and to some extent with sociology" (Vol. III, "The Text of *The Principles of Psychology*," 1579).

¹⁹ An administrative head is unlike an alpha wolf. She need not be wary of daily *physical* challenges to her dominance by members.

²⁰ One might say that positive moral habits (virtues) express what ought to be of value and negative moral habits (vices) express what ought not to be of value.

IN PRAISE OF HABIT: MAKING A CASE FOR A RELATION BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND WILLIAM JAMES'S CONCEPTION OF HABIT

PHILIP T. L. MACK

I. INTRODUCTION

Bertrand Russell argued in his essay "In Praise of Idleness" that happiness can be derived from leisure. It can be claimed on Russell's view that leisure is a causally sufficient condition¹ to the achievement of happiness. Roughly, then, Russell's view is that if human beings have more leisure time, we will be happier.

An alternative to Russell's view—and a stronger alternative, as I will argue—can be found in James's account of habit in *The Principles of Psychology*². Therein James writes,

There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work are subjects of express volitional deliberation. Full [*sic*] half the time of such a man goes to the deciding or regretting of matters which ought to be so ingrained in him as practically not to exist for his consciousness at all. If there be such daily duties not yet ingrained in any one of my hearers, let him begin this very hour to set the matter right.³

My aim in this paper is to make a positive case in the Jamesian spirit that there is a relation between the cultivation and exercise of useful habits⁴, and happiness. James does not explicitly argue for such a relation, but it can be established through an analysis of some of his writings about habit, and this is what I will set out to do in this paper. Additionally, I will argue that James's conception of habit and its relation to happiness stands as a stronger alternative to Russell's account. James is, of course, not responding to Russell's account; the purpose of including Russell in this paper is merely to use his account as a foil to the Jamesian account offered herein.

My thesis is that the Jamesian conception of habit can be construed as one of the necessary and sufficient conditions to achieving happiness, where happiness is understood in a pre-philosophical way as a state of feeling pleasure or contentment.⁵ I will argue for this claim on the basis of an analysis of James's writings on habit from his *Principles*, and in particular from his remarks concerning both the "practical applications of [habit] to human life"⁶ and the "ethical implications of [habit]."⁷ If we interpret James's conception of habit as at least one of the necessary and sufficient conditions to achieving happiness, then it follows that human beings can achieve happier lives through the cultivation and exercise of (useful) habits, as James understands them. I will then argue that this is confirmed by James's example of the "miserable human being...in whom nothing is habitual but indecision," and by others of his observations on habit. I will, furthermore, show that Russell's alternative claim that leisure produces happiness is not as strong a hypothesis as the Jamesian one I will defend.

II. RUSSELL ON THE LEISURE-HAPPINESS RELATION

The primary impetus of Russell's essay is his opinion that working, and its alleged status as a virtue, are stressed far too much.⁸ He argues that a decrease in working hours, and the mitigation of the "belief in the virtuousness of work"⁹ will increase our leisure time, which will in turn make us happier. Russell believes that the advent of modern technology in industry, with all its efficiencies, should make it possible that working hours be decreased and leisure time increased.¹⁰ On this score, Russell argues that the workday should be reduced to four hours.¹¹ If this were the case, Russell argues, then our needs would be sufficiently met, there would be no unemployment, and our leisure time would greatly increase.¹² According to Russell, less work and more leisure will generate opportunities for humans to pursue and cultivate our interests and pleasures, whatever they may be.¹³ We will, then, live happier lives, because we would be afforded the time to pursue and cultivate our interests and pleasures.¹⁴

The primary desideratum for happiness on Russell's account is that leisure is sufficient, but not necessary, to achieving happiness. Russell would not claim that happiness depends on leisure, seeing as there is nothing explicit in his account that would commit him to such a relation. Indeed, the most telling remark he makes about the relation between leisure and happiness is that "it is from leisure that [humans] derive whatever happiness they may enjoy."¹⁵ Moreover, that happiness does not depend on leisure, on Russell's account, can be confirmed by examples showing that such a relation does not necessarily hold. For instance, we can easily imagine a human who has no leisure time, but is nevertheless happy. We may conclude from this simple example that on Russell's account of the leisure-happiness relation, leisure is not a necessary condition to achieving happiness, though it is plausible that leisure is a sufficient condition to achieving happiness.

So, although in some cases leisure can be plausibly said to produce happiness, it does not follow, according to Russell's view, that happiness depends on leisure. As I will argue, the cultivation and exercise of habits, as articulated by James, contributes more to our achieving happiness than does leisure. Moreover, our having habits constitutes a stronger desideratum for the achievement of happiness than does leisure.

III. JAMES AND THE HABIT-HAPPINESS RELATION

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, I offer my argument for the relation between happiness and the Jamesian conception of habit not as a refutation of Russell's view, but as an alternative, stronger view of how happiness can be achieved. It should also be reiterated that James does not explicitly argue for a necessary and sufficient relation between habit and happiness, but such a relation can be demonstrated by what he writes about habit in the *Principles*.

After explaining the physiological nature of habit, James calls attention to the "practical applications of [habit] to human life"¹⁶ as well as its "ethical implications."¹⁷ He begins his discussion of the practical applications of habit to our lives by noting that "*habit simplifies the movements required to achieve a given result, makes them more accurate and diminishes fatigue.*"¹⁸ Part of the practicality of habit for human life, then, is located in the way in which habits make our lives and actions more efficient. We all have a limited economy of time and energy in our lives. So, if we have to constantly think through every single action we undertake, we would not accomplish very much, and we would inevitably become very tired, which in turn would contribute to our accomplishing even less. As James writes, "[i]f practice did not make perfect,

nor habit economize the expense of nervous and muscular energy, [we] would therefore be in a sorry plight.”¹⁹ This is confirmed by imagining if we did not have any habits. For example, if a musician has not cultivated the habit of playing through the various musical scales on her instrument, she would probably not have much of a productive career. We can imagine many examples of this sort, but by simply imagining our lives without our various habits validates James’s claim. Most would agree that life without habits would be tiresome and unproductive.

James identifies yet another practical application of habit. He writes, “*habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed.*”²⁰ Imagine, again, a life without habits. Imagine having to think through every action you undertake from the most mundane to the most complicated. Again, it is plausible that most would agree that our lives would lack efficiency if we had to think through each and every step we must take towards carrying out our actions. But habits, according to James, reduce this step-by-step mental process. James provides an elucidation of this:

If an act require for its execution a chain, *A, B, C, D, E, F, G*, etc., of successive nervous events, then in the first performances of the action the conscious will must choose each of these events from a number of wrong alternatives...but habit soon brings it about that each event calls up its own appropriate successor without any alternative offering itself, and without any reference to the conscious will, until the whole chain, *A, B, C, D, E, F, G*, rattles itself off as soon as *A* occurs, just as if *A* and the rest of the chain were fused into a continuous stream.²¹

When we are first learning to perform some activity—for example, playing a musical instrument—we are consciously aware of the steps necessary towards carrying out that activity. But, as James notes, once we have performed those steps enough times, they become habituated, and we are able to perform the activity without having to be consciously aware of the necessary steps. Thus, habits produce in us a physical and mental efficiency and energy.

After discussing the practicality of habit, James moves on to a discussion of what he sees as the ethical implications of habit. James argues that the cultivation of habits is a crucial component to our living better lives. This is confirmed, again, by the practical implications of habit, which were described in the foregoing. Our having habits will increase both our mental and physical efficiency, which will enable us to live more productive lives. To this effect, James writes, “[h]abit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent.”²²

James elaborates on this by noting that it is advantageous for us to develop as many useful actions in to habits as we can.²³ He argues that such development will engender our being able to commit “our higher powers of mind...[to] their own proper work.”²⁴ It is worth quoting again the passage I cited at the outset of this paper, as it is the most telling and elucidatory passage from this discussion.

There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work are subjects of express volitional deliberation. Full [*sic*] half the time of such a man goes to the deciding or regretting of matters which ought to be so ingrained in him as practically not to exist for his consciousness at all. If there be

such daily duties not yet ingrained in any one of my hearers, let him begin this very hour to set the matter right.²⁵

With this passage in mind, along with the foregoing presentation of James's view on habit, we can begin to make a case for the relation between habit and happiness.

As James teaches us, if we live without habits, we will not only be physically and mentally drained, but we will also be almost entirely unproductive. Committing our physical and mental energy to the carrying out of every task, without having habits to expedite the process, will, on James's view, make us miserable. But which habits are we to cultivate and exercise? The answer is *useful* habits. By 'useful habits' I mean, in accord with the foregoing analysis, those habits that enable us to live and act more efficiently both mentally and physically. Such habits make it possible for us to commit "our higher powers of mind...[to] their own proper work."²⁶ So, the habit of not practicing one's musical instrument would not count as a useful habit, because it does not contribute to the musician's acting more efficiently, and ultimately impinges on her mental and physical efficiency. However, the habit of practicing one's musical instrument does count as a useful habit, because it allows the musician to become more mentally and physically efficient when it comes to playing her musical instrument. The musician can, as a result, pursue her interest in and desire for performing more complicated and rewarding music.

Cultivating and exercising useful habits affords us the possibility of pursuing our interests and pleasures, because we will not have to spend nearly all our time thinking through each and every action we undertake. This in turn provides us with a basis upon which we can achieve a happy life, since we are, in a manner of speaking, freed up to pursue our interests and desires. It is in this sense that the Jamesian conception of habit can be construed as one of the necessary and sufficient conditions to achieving happiness. So, at least one desideratum for achieving happiness is cultivating and exercising useful habits.

It may be reasonably objected that the claim that useful habits contribute to our happiness depends on a not unproblematic assumption, namely, that if we are not miserable, then we are happy. Indeed, drawing from James's passage, it seems more likely that useful habits are sufficient for making a person *not* miserable, which is admittedly a different and weaker claim than the one being setting forth here. That one is not miserable does not necessarily entail that one is happy.

Despite this objection, James's claim, given his account of habit, can be interpreted in a stronger way than that habits contribute to our not being miserable. This can be confirmed, once again, by imagining life without useful habits. It is not likely that we would be able to achieve happiness if we did not have such habits, because most of our time and energy would be spent on the minutia of each and every one of the actions we undertake, so much so that we would have little time to pursue the interests or activities that make us happy. Thus, it can be plausibly claimed that happiness depends on our cultivating and exercising useful habits. In other words, useful habits are a necessary condition to achieving happiness. Moreover, because having useful habits, under the Jamesian conception, significantly decreases the time and energy we must spend on carrying out actions, it follows that we will have more time and energy to pursue the interests and activities that make us happy. Thus, it can, furthermore, be plausibly claimed that cultivating and exercising useful habits can contribute to our achieving happiness. In other words, useful habits are a sufficient condition to achieving happiness. To summarize, on the Jamesian account of habits' practical and ethical implications for human life, useful habits can be understood as both necessary and sufficient towards achieving happiness. That

is to say, if one has a great deal of useful habits, then one will be happier, and if one is happy, one will no doubt have lots of useful habits.

IV. CONCLUSION

If the preceding argument regarding the relation between the Jamesian conception of habit and happiness is correct, then it can also be claimed that James's conception of habit stands as a stronger desideratum for achieving happiness than does leisure on Russell's account. As was argued in the abovementioned, Russell articulates the claim that leisure is a sufficient condition to achieving happiness. However, there is good reason to call this conception of happiness in to doubt, because it can be imagined that one has all the leisure time in the world, yet has a life which is stricken with pain or strife. It is, therefore, not very plausible that leisure, in all cases, will produce happiness. Even if we grant the truth of Russell's claim, it still does not constitute a very strong desideratum for achieving happiness, because it can only demonstrate that happiness can be achieved through leisure, and leaves it open about what happiness depends on.

Where Russell's account fails, James's succeeds. We can interpret James's account of habit as providing something upon which happiness can depend, namely, useful habits. Moreover, we can regard useful habits as standing as a sufficient condition for achieving happiness. Thus, because we can interpret James's conception of habit as constituting one of the necessary and sufficient conditions to achieving happiness, it stands as a stronger and thereby more satisfactory account of the way in which we can achieve happiness than Russell's conception of leisure.

Ultimately, then, the following has been demonstrated in this paper: first, that the Jamesian conception of habit can be interpreted as constituting a way in which we can achieve happiness; second, that the Jamesian account does so more satisfactorily than the Russelian approach; and, third, that at least one desideratum for achieving happiness can be found in James's account of habit.

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NOTES

¹ For the purpose of succinctness, I will simply use the phrase 'sufficient

² Hereafter referred to as the *Principles*.

³ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1890), 122.

⁴ I will elaborate on what I mean by 'useful habits' in the penultimate section of this paper.

⁵ This is admittedly a pre-critical conception of happiness, which is not entirely philosophically satisfactory. A more developed conception that might pair well with the argument I set forth in this paper could plausibly take as its intellectual predecessor Aristotle and his conception of eudaimonia, and a life of virtuous activity. Given time restrictions I will not develop such an account here.

⁶ James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 112.

⁷ Ibid., 120.

⁸ Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays* (Oxford: Routledge, 2004), 1.

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹¹ Ibid., 8.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 112.

¹⁷ Ibid., 120.

¹⁸ Ibid., 112; James's emphasis.

¹⁹ Ibid., 113.

²⁰ Ibid., 114; James's emphasis.

²¹ Ibid.; James's emphasis.

²² Ibid., 121.

²³ Ibid., 122.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

UNFAMILIAR HABITS: JAMES AND THE ETHICS AND POLITICS OF SELF-EXPERIMENTATION

SARIN MARCHETTI

The notion of habit is pervasive in William James's entire intellectual biography, and plays a central role in his writings on psychology as well as in his ethical-political essays. While commentators have noticed this widespread presence, still scarce attention has been given to a generative tension internal to the very notion of Jamesian habit: if habit, as pictured in *The Principles of Psychology* and corollary psychological writings, is what carries us through the day and makes the accomplishment of the various activities in which we engage possible in the first place, in the moral and political domain habit might represent a serious impediment for one's personal and social flourishing because of its tendency to dry the very sources of our ethical wells.

In this paper I aim at exploring this tension by showing how, rather than a gross inconsistency, this double soul of habit (habit as advantage and habit as hindrance) represents the core of James's ethical project of putting self-experimentation back at the center of our reflective lives. If in fact the cultivation of habit is the key, vital activity through which we constitute ourselves as purposeful and effective subjects, their crystallization and stiffening results in the very mortification and deadening of the self, and especially of its moral and political ambitions. Through the education of habit we spin our characters and chances, and yet James invites us to keep this very effort alive in an ongoing exercise of self-criticism as once a certain habit is taken for granted we dissipate our energies and jeopardize our potentialities altogether.

Thus, according to James, not habits *simpliciter*, but rather *unfamiliar habits*, should lie at the very center of our psychological and practical life: that is, those habits unsettling us but still characterizing us, habits which we are always on the verge of losing grasp of despite inspiring our conducts and defining our biographies. This understanding of habit lies at the center of James's distinctive ethical vision of human beings as progressive and perfectible beings engaged in an unbroken and unfinished transformative work of the self on itself. This I take to be the underlying lesson informing James's earlier writings on psychology and his later ones on moral and political conduct alike.

HORTATORY ETHICS AND THE CULTIVATION OF THE SELF

The reading of James's conception of habit here defended is part of a wider, radical interpretation of his moral thought (and of his work *as* a moral philosopher)¹. As against the mainstream reading according to which in his writings James would have advanced a prescriptive moral theory (of which various accounts have been offered), I claim how it is possible to locate in his writings a pragmatic version of the classical² conception of self-cultivation and self-experimentation as the proper subject-matter and goal of ethics. Such heterodox project and line of inquiry is opposed to the orthodoxy of rule-based and action-guiding morality systems currently dominating the philosophical scene.

Two sets of texts can be brought as evidence of this revisionist reconstruction:³ the earlier psychological ones (*The Principles of Psychology*, *Psychology: Briefer Course*) and the later ethical-political ones (*The Will to Believe*, *Essays in Religion and Morality*). In his writings on psychology James elaborates a picture of the edification and care of the self as an activity of ethical significance: the moral life is described by James as a field for self-fashioning in which we challenge our styles of reasoning and ways of reactions, while moral investigation is understood as a critical inquiry into the postures and stances that we might take toward ourselves and the world. By painting a rich phenomenology of the various ways in which we might (and might not) take care of the various aspects of our life of the mind, James displays those techniques of the self that we can use, or misuse, in order to constitute as individual selves, and which for this precise reason are activities of moral relevance.

In his ethical-political writings James focuses instead on the most practical dynamics and outcomes of the unleashing of our moral energies in conduct. Heroism and individualism are depicted as chief ethical practices in which we have a chance to express our subjectivity in always-novel directions, thus resisting the widespread de-moralization caused by conformism and conservatism. In these texts what is at stake is a conceptual reconsideration of our reflective experiencing as an activity of moral significance in which we shape and take care of our selfhood in an unbroken re-negotiation of our biographies and of their boundaries.

In both these psychological and ethical-political writings the notion of habit seems thus to be playing a central role. Yet, at a first sight that of habit does not seem to be a very promising notion to work with when practicing ethics in a Jamesian mood. Habit (and habitual responses and thought) would in fact figure by its own definition as an impediment for moral self-realization understood in terms of creative self-fashioning. James himself seems very suspicious and critical of habit and customs because of their conservative inertia. There are plenty of evidences for this concern. In “The Energies of Men” James notices for example how

[m]ost of us feel as if we lived habitually with a sort of cloud weighing on us, below our highest notch of clearness in discernment, sureness in reasoning, or firmness in deciding. Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked. We are making use of only a small part of our possible mental and physical resources.⁴

James sensibly argues that such condition is at least partially due to the inhibition of excitements, ideals and efforts, which are precisely what according to James “carry us over the dam” of our ordinary existences. The distress caused by such condition originates in suffocating conventions and habits grew too stiff around our subjectivity, thus alienating and disciplining us to lead lives of quiet desperation.

As against this picture, James praises novelty and improvisation as morally refreshing attitudes, praising heroic figures for their capacity to break the spell of custom thus opening up new fields of possibility and meaning. It is in fact those exceptional individuals who, by forcing the barriers grew around their subjectivity with “physical work, intellectual work, moral work, or spiritual work” serve as exemplars to imitate and as provocations challenging our deepest personal convictions. We all have been there.⁵ In “The Importance of Individuals” James states that

[t]here is thus a zone of insecurity in human affairs in which all the dramatic interest lies; the rest belongs to the dead machinery of the stage. This is the formative zone, the part not yet ingrained into the race's average, not yet a typical, hereditary, and constant factor of the social community in which it occurs.⁶

For James such generative moments are of the utmost importance as by shaking us from our certainties they help us to plunge again into experiencing and create importance in our life and in that of the community we partake to –not to mention the crucial possibility of opening up novel paths of dialogue with alien outlooks and politics. According to James we should always be willing to re-negotiate the truths we live by in order to keep their meaning alive, our mindset plastic, and our selfhood mobile. This willingness to live courageously in the absence of certitudes and assurance is for James the signature mark of the pragmatic temperament, which he encourages us to explore in conduct.⁷

At the same time James reportedly praises habit for its usefulness in facilitating our worldly dealings as well as for its importance in securing our own narrative sense of identity necessary for their flourishing. According to James the very notion of rationality as cashed out in our everyday practices would be nothing but a mustering of settled habits whose reputation we trust and honor.⁸ Having given up any non-conversational, external foundation for our practices of knowledge and action alike, the only pragmatic viable alternative seems to be exactly that of indulging in conventions and simmering in customs. Habits are thus not only practically important for the successfulness of our ordinary commerce with the world, but the acknowledgment of their pervasive character is also philosophically crucial to contrast those metaphysical accounts of norms and normativity pretending to explain the rightness (and rightfulness) of our practices from outside of their habitual exercise.

A quick survey of the texts would thus suggest how for James habit is both the key to unleash our moral energies in conduct, and their foremost threat and source of alienation. In what follows I shall argue that, rather than at an inconsistency, this active tension best exemplifies James's conception of the experimental work of the self on the self as the chief ethical-political activity. In particular, an attentive reading of the peculiar characterization of habit in *The Principles of Psychology* and corollary works would allow us to appreciate how James endows habit the philosophical resources to make it the centerpiece of his ethical-political thought. Before selectively comment James's discussion of habit as it appears in his psychological writings, I shall briefly offer some context for reading *The Principles of Psychology* as a resourceful work *for* and *in* ethics. This is in fact a necessary passage to appreciate the richness and productive character of habit as James understood it and put it to work in his later writings as well.

THE MORAL LIFE OF THE MIND

The presence of moral considerations in *The Principles of Psychology* has been variously documented, and yet it is difficult to characterize in detail. There have been offered diverse reconstructions of such presence, and while only in some cases such considerations have been thematized in the wider context of James's variegated moral production, very seldom they have been inscribed in the wider discourse of the hortatory character of ethics, which I take to be the central dimension of James's moral thought.⁹ According to the reading I advocate, rather than presenting the single *constitutive elements* of the moral

life¹⁰, in *The Principles of Psychology* James would have rather explored the *reflective work on them* necessary for its flourishing.¹¹ This feature makes the text a gold mine for ethics understood as the critical inquiry into our postures and conducts from the point of view of the transformative work on the self necessary for their cultivation and guidance.

Despite its well-known self-proclaimed positivistic intents, according to which he “[has] kept close to the point of view of natural science throughout the book”, *The Principles of Psychology* represents James’s most elaborate attempt to waive together an impressive number of psychological, philosophical and personal “descriptive details” about what could be broadly characterized as our life of the mind. In it we can find the seeds as well as some of the most elegant deployments of that pragmatic method that James kept elaborating and polishing in the course of his entire intellectual biography, in which critical descriptions, tactical provocations, and original insights are blended together to fashion a unique prose and style.¹² In *The Principles of Psychology* James looks at the various aspects and functions of our life of the mind from the point of view of their *use*, and exhorts us to notice the variety of moral considerations at play when we look at them in this way. James in fact claims that the analysis of our mindedness and its various traits would be conducted from the point of view of their *activity*, because a good description of our interiority as a bundle of functions and forces could not but consider its *practical exercise* as its proper dimension and achievement.

James individuates in this way the contribution of psychology to ethics in its characterization of the dynamic nature of the relationship that human beings might entertain with their own subjectivity: the pragmatic illustrations of the various aspects and functions of our life of the mind disseminated in *The Principles of Psychology* would show the moral importance of the *engaged attitude* we might entertain with ourselves. This way of presenting psychology as an inquiry directly relevant for ethics brings to light a picture of moral reflection whose object is what human beings might make of those features of their own interiority that bring them in a certain relationship with themselves and the world.

By giving up a detached, third-personal description of the various facets of our selfhood in favor of an engaged, first-personal one, James makes room for a different picture of the way in which psychological considerations might be relevant for ethics. In fact, from this perspective the various threads of our subjectivity are presented from the point of view of their use rather than as neutral and ready-made data on which an ethical theory should build a prescriptive morality system. Rather than one of *foundation*, the relationship between ethics and psychology would thus be for James one of *emergence*. Instead of conceiving morality as kept pure from any human involvements or shaping it after a metaphysical picture of human beings and their worldliness, a pragmatist approach to moral reflection envisions a radical alternative. James invites us to think ethical reflection as informed by a peculiar kind of pragmatic anthropological description portraying human beings neither as they *are* nor as they *should be*, but rather from the point of view of what they *might make of themselves*.¹³

In this perspective ethics acquires the form of the analysis of these forms and techniques of self-cultivation: moral reflection, by inviting us to refine and take care of the various dimensions of our subjectivity, reconfigures itself as the critical survey of the kind of self-experimentations we can undertake in ordinary conducts through a work of the self on the self. This process involves a revolution of the self in which we awaken those aspects of our subjectivity from the torpid state in which they tend to fall when not exercised through a daily training, and use them to face experience and its challenges in original, rewarding, and enriching ways.

HABIT BETWEEN EXPRESSION AND EXHAUSTION

The discussion of habit in the fourth chapter of *The Principles of Psychology* can be read as a chief instance of such pragmatic anthropology.¹⁴ James presents habit as one of the most powerful law and pervasive phenomenon of our mindedness and worldliness: without it our lives could hardly be lived, and yet its excesses might be equally lethal for their flourishing, since they would suffocate their constitutive and most important venues of expression and growth. In particular, an excess of habit, says James, would hinder and alienate us from ourselves, thus depriving us from those very energies and resources constituting the best part of our selfhood: the higher or further self we might have been or become if only we would have dared to think and conduct ourselves differently from how we habitually do.¹⁵

James presents in the first place what he calls the physiological bases of habit, writing that “the *phenomena of habit in living beings are due to the plasticity of the organic materials of which their bodies are composed*”¹⁶. Habit in fact refers to the capacity for *movement* of our central nervous system. However, even at this basic physical level of analysis, James refutes a mechanistic characterization of the very nature and working of habit. He in fact subscribes the anti-reductionist perspective of the reflex arch and of the electro-chemical discharge, which portray habit as the fixation of the nervous discharge trajectories in our nervous system in perennial tension. At this level of explanation habit is still described as a somewhat passive device, since it merely indicates those privileged paths of inertia. However, this passivity is in its turn characterized as a condition for activity, since it suggests and facilitates the nervous discharge (and thus, at the practical level, the performance of actions). Further, and most importantly, for James “our nervous system grows to the modes in which it has been exercised”¹⁷: once such paths of inertia and discharge are chosen and reinforced *in conduct* they grow thicker and acquire strength and influence, thus shaping our very dispositions and reactions.

James is particularly interested in presenting two psychological features of habits that would have great relevance from the point of view of their philosophical description and ethical consequences. He writes,

The first result of it is that *habit simplifies the movements required to achieve a given result, makes theme more accurate and diminishes the fatigue*.¹⁸

The next result is that *habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed*.¹⁹

For James, thus, a subject endowed with the appropriate habits is likely to be more accurate in the achievement of its ends, and its conscious attention less solicited in the exercise of her actions. These two features of habit are of the utmost importance from an ethical point of view. In fact, if on the one hand habits make us more accurate and effective, on the other their blind and uncritical deployment have the opposite effect of render us inattentive and passive. If thus for James it is essential to nurture one’s habits, even more is to challenge them by asking oneself *which* habits to cultivate, and especially *how* to cultivate them.

James presents habits as our “second nature”, since they craft human beings in every aspect of their mental life hence their thoughts and deeds. Rather than

the mechanical repetition of our responses through the comparison and association with our past experiences, James depicts habit as the distinctive feature of our active attitude toward our interiority and engaged stance toward reality. Habit becomes thus the chief device to storage, organize and control our mental energy releasing in this way our conscious attention, which is continuously solicited by the great amount of information involved in our experiencing. Once we internalize some aspects of reality to which we pay selective attention, our consciousness of them and the effort to entertain them in our mind is alleviated, so that we are free to concentrate on other aspects of reality that are of interest for us.

For James our very ability to have meaningful experiences and invest them with value as contrasted with registering their sheer factual happening (that is, the breaking of the order of immediate perceptive presence presenting us the world as an indistinct complexity in order to generate meaning) requires us to develop all kinds of habits. In the essay "Reflex Action and Theism" James writes,

We have to break [the perceptual order] altogether, and by picking out from it the items that concerns us...we are able to...enjoy simplicity and harmony in the place of what was chaos...It is an order with which we have nothing to do but to get away from it as fast as possible. As I said, we break it: we break it into histories, and we break it into the arts, and we break it into sciences; and then we begin to feel at home.²⁰

Through our inclusion and omission we trace the path of habit and thus of our experiencing and agency altogether. The aim of habit is to make us "feel at home" in the world by breaking our experiences and connecting the elements that interest us with other that we find as much appropriate and worth entertaining in our lives. Habit thus contributes to our very activity of making sense of the world and of our place in it: through habit we craft the world giving it a human shape in which to inscribe our conducts and their deepest significances.

The ethical stakes of such a characterization are of the outmost importance. James claims in fact that habit is the "engine of society" and its "precious preserver". However, James adds, the primary object of habit is the *character* of human beings, representing its "invisible law" in the similar manner as the "universal gravitation" represents the law of celestial bodies. Habit has to do with the education of one's character as it represents the mark of one's personal point of view that we shape through a discipline of the self. Habits are thus morally relevant because they pervade our lives and guide our encounters with the world, thus making the latter a place hospitable for the expression of our interiority in conduct. In the chapter on "The Laws of Habit" of *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideas* James writes that

[o]ur virtues are habits as much as our vices. All our life, so far as it has definite form, is but a mass of habits,—practical, emotional, and intellectual,—systematically organized for our weal or woe, and bearing us irresistibly toward our destiny, whatever the latter may be.²¹

A similar formulation can be found in *The Principles of Psychology*, where James concludes that

[t]he great thing, then, in all education, is to *make our nervous system*

our ally instead of our enemy. It is to fund and capitalize our acquisitions, and live at ease upon the interest of the fund. *For this we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can,* and guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us, as we should guard against the plague.²²

For James habits should be our closest allies, and yet we should also remain vigilant in their handling as they could reveal to be our worse enemies. According to this view, in fact, habits are not virtuous or evil *per se*, but rather it is *what we make of them* and *how do we nurture them* that makes them advantageous or rather harmful, and thus relevant from a moral point of view. If from the one hand habits give voice to our deepest needs, cravings and interests, on the other hand their misuse might cause the very suppression of our subjectivity.

James lists five practical maxims involving the exercise of habit, in which what is at stake is our very attitude we might assume in their respect. These maxims have a clear and pronounced moral salience in their dealing with the ways in which our habits might be expressive of our subjectivity or rather contribute to its capitulation. The last maxim best catches the spirit of the exhortative moral register informing James's dialectics of habits (and wider moral agenda). He writes,

As a final practical maxim, relative to these habits of the will, we may, then, offer something like this: *Keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day.* That is, be systematically ascetic or heroic in little unnecessary points, do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it, so that when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test...So with the man who has daily inured himself to habits of concentrated attention, energetic volition, and self-denial in unnecessary things. He will stand like a tower when everything rocks around him, and when his softer fellow-mortals are winnowed like chaff in the blast.²³

This practical maxim thematizes the dynamic relationship that runs between the habits we live *by* and the life we might have *with* them. James is here interested in marking an internal connection between ethics and psychology by showing how our posture toward those habits that we welcome or rather challenge is the mark of our moral destiny, thus depicting human beings as the makers of themselves and responsible for their own faiths. The price we have to pay for the metaphysical comfort of habit, representing the shield we use in order to be successful in our dealings with the world, is the constant thread of an impoverishment of such commerce. That is to say, the price to be thriving inhabitants of the world is that of being desolate strangers to ourselves. Only by acknowledging the habits we live by as *our* habits we might keep in place their significance without either subjugating our subjectivity or making knowledge an impossible task to accomplish.

Quoting Mill's definition of character as a "completed fashioned will" James stresses the relationship between the sensation of effort/activity necessary to manage a certain habit and its moral character: by representing a habit as a yoke imposed from the outside, as for example from evidences and associations on which we have no intentional grip nor active control, we distort both the way in which we arrive at forming an habit in the first place as well as jeopardize its very significance. We develop habits in response to our more genuine practical

need so to cope in more effective ways with the world; however, when we represent habit as a given with which to deal, we shall find ourselves incapable to satisfy those very practical needs which gave life to them in the first place. What was crafted to facilitate the successfulness of our practices suddenly becomes an impediment to the full flourishing of our interiority, a cage for its expression. James writes,

The physiological study of mental conditions is thus the most powerful ally of hortatory ethics. The hell to be endured hereafter, of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way. Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never so little scar.²⁴

Moral reflection, in its hortatory dimension, aims at showing the practical advantages of the nurture and the development of certain habits, and the dangerousness in which we incur when we alienate our subjectivity to their blind dictates.

According to this characterization the subject matter of ethics would thus consist in a certain kind of work on the self, while its contents in the descriptions of the strategies that such formative activity might take. James claims that this work on the self involves in the first place the monitoring of, and the experimentation with, our habits and their ability to express our subjectivity or rather mortify it. James invites us to take a vigilant attitude on our habits so to prevent those “contractions of the self” typical of their deformation. Such critical activity of self-monitoring and self-transformation lies at the very heart of James’s ethical-political writings, where he launches a fierce campaign against various forms of acquiescence in our private and public lives. The latter has been James’s signature intellectual fight, and its roots are to be found in the notion of unfamiliar habit at the heart of his pragmatic anthropology. Such notion in fact pivotal to understand James’s investigation of the crucial issue of the possibility of conducting ourselves in ways which are at the same time expressive of our subjectivity and mindful and respectful of how our fellow individuals lead theirs. His writings on human blindness and on the moral equivalent of war can be read as variations on this theme, and his painstaking work to carve out a space of personal freedom within natural and social boundaries represents yet another example of his insistence on the cultivation and transformation of the habitual self as the key ethical-political activity.²⁵

CONCLUSION

The notion of habit is pervasive throughout James’s writings, informing his pluralism, transitionalism and perspectivism alike. Rather than confining the discussion and use of such concept to the psychological writings, James makes habit the centerpiece of our very agential nature as it gets expressed in its various activities of self-edification and world-making. There would in fact be an overall shift in philosophical emphasis from mere sensitivities to an enriched conception of agency underlying James’s characterization of habit. This idea gets articulated in various contexts throughout James’s work,²⁶ but affects directly the way James understood the dynamic interplay between the urge to familiarity and the strive for estrangement, between the necessity of stability and the importance of uncertainty – a tension lying at the very heart of the moral life

as a pragmatist sees it. The work on the self is thus itself a moral task, where “moral” acquires the meaning of the critical concern, inquiry and transformation of conduct and activity from within one’s practices.

Habit would impoverish our lives if understood as passively operating on our beliefs and desires, but by intertwining habit with agency and activity James shifted the focus from the acquisition and stabilization of habits to their education and practical experimentation. What is of primary moral importance for James is in fact our life with our habits: what we make of them and how we put them to work. In discussing habits James is not describing the working of an allegedly impersonal principle; rather, he is exhorting us to *do* something with ourselves in an imaginative exercise whose moral relevance lies in the liveliness and transformative character of its process rather than in its capacity to fulfill some prefixed aims.

Contrary to other philosophical treatments of habit, for James the validity and evaluation of habitual conduct should not be measured against the yardstick of some already established norm or principle –whether brute or transcendental–, but is rather to be re-negotiated in practice at every instance of its deployment.²⁷ If there is a teleological dimension in this ethical picture, it is not imposed from the outside of our practices (because of some sort of finalism) but rather can only be gained from the within of our efforts (as an expression of genuine experimentalism). Unfamiliar habits are thus important because they force us to constantly question and unsettle ourselves, and thus cultivate and take care of ourselves in an ongoing negotiation of the boundaries and background of our selfhood. For James personal growth and collective flourishing are in fact dependent on habitual dishabituating, an exercise in possibility and melioristic attitude at the heart of our best ethical and political efforts of tuning the self with itself.²⁸

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NOTES

¹ Marchetti 2015.

² Virtue ethics, both in its ancient (Aristotelian) and modern (Humean) variations, being the obvious reference, the concern for the care of the self as the chief ethical task is also argued (although along slightly different lines) by the philosophical tradition of spiritual exercises (Hadot 1995, Foucault 2005), as well as by moral perfectionism (Cavell 2004).

³ In my wider study of James's moral thought I examine and assess the whole corpus of his writings, offering a synoptic view of his (work on) ethics and its grounding in a distinctive pragmatist metaphilosophical agenda, while

here I shall only touch on those works which are functional to address the topic of Jamesian habit.

⁴ ERE, 131.

⁵ It should be noticed how for James those of heroism and individualism are *ethical practices* (rather than metaphysical assumptions) constantly informing our most ordinary activities as long as we are concerned with the genuine character of our selfhood, challenging the identities supplied by those models we too-often unwittingly accept. The charges of elitism often raised against such perfectionist approaches –beside James, and limiting to the short time-span of one century, one might think of figures as different as John Stuart Mill, T. H. Green, Emerson, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein– should thus be at least substantially reconsidered (if not dropped altogether), as those very resources and materials for ethical transformation are constantly under our nose and thus up for us to grab rather than available only to the elites. If there surely are wider psychological, social, environmental, and cultural obstacles to such experimentations, they constitute the very background against which enacting such efforts in self-transformation: the former might well frustrate the *factual outcomes* of such practices of freedom, but in no way they can undermine their *strategic value*. Furthermore, for some versions of perfectionism such transformative exercises can only be enacted in conversation with others, and contribute to the overall well-being of one’s community –if only in making one more self-conscious of her own implicit assumptions, concealed expectations, and hidden regulations.

⁶ WB, 192.

⁷ See e.g. P: 31; MT: 124.

⁸ See e.g. WB: 67.

⁹ Even the most authoritative commentators (e.g. Royce 1891, Perry 1935, Myers 1981) only registered the most superficial and evident moral features of the text by making reference to those parts where the canonical moral language of duties, rights and commitments makes its day view, without however either characterizing in depth the dialectic in which such notions occur or noticing the multiple references to the other writings in which similar considerations surface as well.

¹⁰ See e.g. Roth 1965; Franzese 2008. Contrary to the authors mentioned in the previous note, both Roth and Franzese have an articulated and interesting story about the moral dimension of *The Principles of Psychology* as well as of the wider picture of James’s ethical reflections as spelled out in his other writings –although a different story from the one here defended.

¹¹ The first account of *The Principles of Psychology* in which this practical register has been acknowledged is Seigfried 1978. For an articulated defense, see Koopman forthcoming.

¹² The best characterization of James’s distinctive methodological blend of “divination and perception” is Seigfried 1990 (esp. part II).

¹³ I shall here pass over silence the Kantian resonances of this way of portraying the nature and point of a pragmatic anthropology so understood –at least, in the way Kant depicts pragmatic anthropology in his *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* [1798] as well as in his Königsberg lectures on anthropology [1772-1798], which is in tension with the “official” story narrated in his major Critical works. I have tackled the issue at some depth elsewhere (Marchetti, forthcoming).

¹⁴ As an aside, one might say that for James habit is a sort of ethical *Überkonzept*, as according to this reconstruction it represents at once one of the

features of our interiority in need of reflexive working and the device through which all other facets would get transformed. I owe this observation to a conversation with Mathias Girel on an ancestor of this paper.

¹⁵ An in-depth comparative study of the Jamesian and the Deweyan conceptions of habit is still lacking, and unfortunately so. Dewey (most notably in Dewey 1922) in fact borrowed, reworked, and expanded the Jamesian philosophy of habit along promising lines, adding some historical edge to James's conceptual analyses and reconstruction. Differences between their respective accounts still mattering, I read in both authors a congenial insistence on the "good of activity" as the chief theme at the heart of the (pragmatist) ethical project.

¹⁶ PP: 110.

¹⁷ PP: 117.

¹⁸ PP: 117.

¹⁹ PP: 119.

²⁰ WB: 96.

²¹ TT: 47.

²² PP: 126.

²³ PP: 130.

²⁴ PP: 130-1.

²⁵ Following Koopman one might claim how James was interested in "the philosophical and political idea of a *personal* action which is reducible to neither *individual* power nor *social* relations" (Koopman 2005: 175).

²⁶ See e.g. PP: ch. xxvi; WB: 197-8; P: 98-9. For a comment, compare Parker 1999, Uffelman 2004, Koopman forthcoming.

²⁷ For a survey of James's conception on similar lines, see Tursi 1999. A brief intellectual history of the rise and fall of philosophical accounts of habit in relation to James's can be found in Thomas 1993.

²⁸ I am grateful to Lee A. Bride for having accepted the original paper for its presentation at the 2014 William James Society meeting held within the 111th APA Central Division annual convention in Chicago. I am also thankful to Tadd Ruetenik for his valuable comments during the conference, to appear in this symposium. I have here not attempted at replying to his critical remarks, hence change my paper accordingly, as that would have rendered their publication superfluous, but will take them into consideration in my future work on James's ethics. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the Irish Research Council for a New Foundations Award (2013), which made my trip to Chicago possible.

COMMENTS

TADD RUETENIK

William James says that habit is the flywheel of society, and this metaphor comes up either explicitly or implicitly in each of the papers. A flywheel conserves energy through its circular motion. It spins continuously when an energy source is provided intermittently and will continue to spin when energy is withdrawn. Operating a potter's wheel, for example, does not require pushing the pedal continuously; the flywheel keeps the clay spinning for a while when the leg is resting. Recently, engineering student Max von Stein created a bicycle with a flywheel in the center, which presumably makes riding the bike an easier and happier experience.

James chooses his metaphors carefully. In this case, societal practices are preserved even when people are not putting energy into thinking about them. Few would argue that it is bad for people to bike and make pottery more easily, but when it comes to the maintenance of societal practices, easier is not always better. We want conserved motion, but we do not necessarily want conservative politics. The presence of useful habits, as Philip Mack argues, might indeed be a necessary and sufficient condition for personal happiness, but it is neither necessary nor sufficient for social well being. Flywheel social practices can preserve useful habits, but it also can preserve bad habits.

One example is the American war culture. In his famous "Resistance to Civil Government" essay, Henry David Thoreau refers to arguments against a standing army. But a standing army does not merely stand; it is impelled to move, and part of its movement comes from the flywheel of social practices. The public's push for war is intermittent; the potential energy of the army is continual. The social habits we call holidays preserve this. Memorial Day, Independence Day, Armed Forces Day, Pearl Harbor Day, Patriot Day, and Patriot's Day all serve to do two things. One, they promote a not entirely inappropriate valorization of noble sacrifice for the greater good; two, they conserve the war energy. The cliché expressed something like "Thank you to the brave men and women who sacrifice to preserve America's freedoms" is the sign of a social flywheel, spinning out words that have a force of their own, irrespective of the particular war being fought. While the continual valorization of sacrifice for the greater good might not be a bad social habit, the use of the vague word "freedom" as a justification for all wars is.

Thoreau also chose his metaphors well. He says a government tries to preserve itself through social habit, "to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity" through "some complicated machinery." But machinery has friction, and Thoreau notes that the existence of slavery and the invasion of Mexico are frictions so significant that we should break the machine. If the machine is still strong enough, and flywheels can help it continue, it might be necessary to break the flywheel. Civil disobedience does such a thing. It breaks the social habits.

As James Hitt explains, there are two types of habits. Simple habits are automatic and occur in different situations. For example, a nail biter will bite when stressed and when calm, when alone and in public. A more complex habit is something like putting on a seat belt. The hip-to-hip arm movement that one does when sitting down in a car would not occur in other contexts, such as sitting in a movie theater or sitting down to dinner. The habit exists, Hitt argues,

only in a social context that supports it. We buckle up in a car because we have been taught that that is a valuable activity because it preserves life.

Another example that illustrates the difference between simple and complex habit is that of a bird who has a habit of picking up shiny objects and a human who collects coins. The complex habit of the human is different from the simple habit of the bird in that the human's habit is conditioned by a social agreement to regard certain shiny things as especially valuable. It is not the shininess that compels us anymore, but the system of value that establishes coins – both shiny and dull – as objects to collect.

This social agreement is essential for the existence, for example, of the role of departmental chair. As Hitt notes,

The tacit agreement is important. One continues as chair not in virtue of all members thinking daily, “Lo, the chair.” Rather, each member has formed dispositions to treat her as such. Agreement in the form of dispositions, that is, habits, maintains the continuation of that societal role as well as the social fact of who is the chair.

The agreements are tacit, and subtle. For example, one can often identify a boss at an off-hours party of co workers simply by the way that that person is treated. The deference and awkwardness identify what is a social custom and not a simple habit. They are accustomed to relating to a boss while sober at work; in the context of drinking and leisure their social habits are disturbed

Complex habits are difficult to break. One person cannot delegitimize a boss. What's more, one person cannot easily break even a personal habit that has strong societal conditioning. A source of insight here is William James' father, Henry. In an interesting 1851 essay called “Intemperance,” Henry James gets especially personal. It was no secret that the elder James was a poor university student, and this seems to be in large part due to his drinking habits. “Like all habits,” Henry James says in reference to what is now called alcoholism, “its strength lies in a diseased will.” Henry James would take the view that alcoholism is indeed an *ism*, that is, a thinking habit. Alcoholics are uncreative thinkers. All *isms* – be they environmentalism, conservatism, lutheranism, etc. – are worn pathways of thought that recommend themselves to all new travelers. The more developed the habit, the more difficult it is to think in any other direction. Henry James claims to have overcome the drinking problem by choosing to forge his way off the path, and thus will himself out of the bad habit. The current belief, however, is that such willing might be a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. Not only are biological determinants affecting the habit, but so are societal habits that make drinking in college almost as automatic as putting on a seat belt.

Biographer Alfred Habegger comments that although Henry James “insisted that the drunkard's only remedy lies within himself, he also argued that society merely confirms him in his vice when it views him with disgust or reprobation” (93). As Henry James himself says, “Teach a man to believe himself at heart a sinner, and he will be sure to ‘play hell’, as the phrase goes, with his teachers.” Habegger's biographical summary is that “if his strong beliefs in the power of will helped him overcome his self-destructive addiction, this strategy also kept him from recognizing the circumstantial causes of his trouble” (93). It is here that we see some indication of the dual aspects of habit, much like what Hitt is identifying in his paper. It would be too simplistic to say that an alcoholic is merely involved in a mechanical habit like nail biting. It is likewise too simplistic to say that alcoholism is simply a social phenomenon. Yet Henry James believed the latter. He regarded everything, including habits, as being social problems. He disdained selfhood, espoused socialism, and thus regarded individual vices simply as signs of social malady. The individual

represents dysfunction in society the same way that a recurrent rattling in one's engine is a sign of trouble within the car's general mechanical system. William James, especially as Hitt describes him, corrects this naive view. Alcoholism is both a mechanical and genetic habit, as well as a larger conglomeration of social values. Drinking as social acceptance, drinking as a consumer practice, drinking to assert autonomy (paradoxically, by losing a degree of rational autonomy): all of these are social values that condition the alcoholic's condition. To modify Hitt's example, we can say that the alcoholic is both like a bird who collects shiny discs without consciousness of their value in a social system, and a human who collects coins that have been assigned value based on the habits of many individuals. You need to address not only the mechanical – with medications, detox – but also the social, with therapy designed to change the system of values in which the alcoholic has operated. A necessary condition for stopping the habit of alcoholism is the stopping of social habits. Consumerism and hedonism are the prominent *isms* here. Of course William James' 'pragmatism' is also an *ism*, which means it is, or at least can be, seen as a habit. According to Henry James all habit is bad, since he valued, perhaps naively, the supreme value of the kind of creativity that foregoes all imitation. For him, creativity was a God-like power, and even if God does not create *ex nihilo*, creating out of substance, God is nonetheless creatively *ex nihilo*, in that creation takes place without precedent. Henry James believes habits make us miserable. William James disagreed.

Philip Mack takes this rebellion from the son to its extreme, and argues that for William James, the presence of habits is not only a good thing but is the essence of happiness. Indeed one must acknowledge James' words about the "miserable human being ... in whom nothing is habitual but indecision." A professor who grades essays without using so much as an implicit rubric ends up dreading grading. Each essay involves a cognitive effort *ex nihilo*. The task is indeed miserable until, after a number of essays have been evaluated, the mind, in self defense, develops a habit of making the same comments on different essays. Yet we could grant that not having habits makes one miserable without agreeing that habits are all it takes to make one happy. Mack disagrees with Russell that leisure is required for happiness, and writes,

We can easily imagine a human who has no leisure time, but is nevertheless happy. Thus, we may conclude that on Russell's account of the leisure-happiness relation, leisure is not a necessary condition to achieving happiness, though it is plausible that leisure is a sufficient condition to achieving happiness.

This might not be completely right, though. Sisyphus, for one, had no leisure time. In his thoughtful reading of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus says that we must imagine Sisyphus happy. This is not the easy act of imagination that Mack suggests. Sisyphus' work is to push the rock up the hill, only to have it repeatedly roll back down. The closest he comes to leisure is at the top, when he must wait for the rock to finish its descent. The point is that we must *imagine* Sisyphus happy, and this is an act of defiance that takes work. Normally, we would not find happiness in perpetual work.

Camus famously said that the order of life is shaped by death. I might say also that the order of habit is shaped by exhaustion. James notes that "habit simplifies the movements required to achieve a given result, makes them more accurate and diminishes fatigue," which Mack summarizes as saying:

We all have limited economy of time and energy in our lives. So if we have to constantly think through every single action we undertake, we would not accomplish very much, and we would inevitably become very tired, which in turn would contribute to our accomplishing even less.

The argument is fine here, although the premise is questionable. How much do we really need to accomplish? Perhaps it is not as much as we think, especially if there is an external force compelling us to work. In the case of Sisyphus it was the gods; with the contemporary proletariat, it is The Man. Indeed, this is what defines work: the task comes from someone outside ourselves. Self work is just a vigorous hobby. We are worked by someone else, and create habits in order to meet the demand less strenuously. Mack could be right to say that someone working continually could be happy, but if they were working continually for The Man, we might say that his happiness is only apparent. He is just imagining himself happy.

James did not want habit to take over life. In fact, he allowed for moral holidays, which are times in which we resign the meliorative obligations to a greater benevolence. These are times of leisure, but the idea of "holiday" suggests that there is also something habitual about them. Holidays can refer to vacations, but they also can refer to social habits. They are, in effect, something like the paradoxical idea of habitual leisure.

A similar paradox is suggested by Sarin Marchetti, who does good work in outlining the social and individual aspects of habit. Habits are both common and uncommon. Marchetti says that although habits are helpful to the individual as an individual, "in the moral and political domain habits might represent a serious impediment for one's social and personal flourishing." This is indeed worth noting. I think it is satisfying to arrive at a moral or political opinion, and uncomfortable to be confronted with an opinion that challenges it. People select news sources that confirm their biases, and look at contrary news sources only for purposes of refutation. Selective interest, though a descriptively accurate statement of individual psychology, is prescriptively suspect when considering individual thought or political deliberation.

This is why it is appropriate to introduce the idea of unfamiliar habits into James' philosophy. Marchetti says that habits whose "crystallization brings us to the very mortification of the self," can "dissipate our moral energies altogether." He has James "praise novelty and improvisation as morally refreshing stances and ideals," and also says that we should be "worshipping heroic figures for their capacity to break the spell of custom and open new fields of possibility and meaning." Exceptional individuals are ones who break out of habits. In "Great Men and their Environment," James describes the great person by way of contrast:

It is one of the tritest of truisms that human intelligences of a simple order are very literal. They are slaves of habit, doing what they have been taught without variation; dry, prosaic, and matter-of-fact in their remarks; devoid of humor, except of the coarse physical kind which rejoices in a practical joke; taking the world for granted; and possessing in their faithfulness and honesty the single gift by which they are sometimes able to warm us into admiration. But even this faithfulness seems to have a sort of inorganic ring, and to remind us more of the immutable properties of a piece of inanimate matter than of the steadfastness of a human will capable of alternative choice. (*Other Essays* 247-248)

In this last line, we see support for Marchetti's claim that James "refutes a

mechanistic characterization of the conditions of the functioning of habit.” James agrees with the common sense idea that to be completely habitual is to be mechanical. We do not know whether James thinks the simpleton he describes here is unhappy. Mack argues that he will be happy, since his habits are useful, and provide him with a convenient form of social interaction. If everything is literal, then there is no departure from the obvious. For all we can tell, he is happy, although ultimately not admirable. The great-souled person in this case is one who transcends the lifeless reactions of inorganic matter. This person exercises free will, and risks being misunderstood, while the slaves of habit remain safe from danger.

In sum, I am not sure whether we should be talking about unfamiliar habits, or the habit of looking for the unfamiliar. In the case of unfamiliar habits, we are just talking about a case of a more refined predictability, an elite set of habits; in the case of the habit of looking for the unfamiliar, we have something anarchistic. The only predictability would be in the fact that convention would be disregarded, and this kind of predictability is simply the contrast class to all that is habitual. Could a person with a well developed habit of looking for the unfamiliar be considered happy? Could a healthy social institution develop the habit of looking for the unfamiliar? My answer is, unfortunately, the common one. I would have to say that, in the case of both the individual and the society, the habit of looking for the unfamiliar can only be undertaken to a limited degree. Routine is required so that we maintain happiness, if not sanity, and yet routine can make us automatons rather than humans.

My best response to these papers on habit is to suggest that habit is good to a limited degree. We should flywheel the things that make us happy, while breaking the mechanism from time to time to ensure that we are not covering banality, if not immorality, with the comfort of the familiar. To say that habits are the essence of happiness is overreaching, and yet to say, as James’ father did, that habits are the symptom of a diseased will, is also an exaggeration. What we can take from these papers on habit is the appreciation for the utility of resorting to a mechanism in actions that have limited moral implications. Let’s economize our bicycles, and even, perhaps, rubric our essay exams. We should not, however, allow external forces to flywheel us into being exploited or immoral, that is, into being personally overworked or socially caught up in a war machine whose inertia leads to unjustified wars.

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Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God. By Sami Pihlström. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012. 264 pp. \$60

Generally speaking, pragmatic philosophers have not attended to the religious implications of their methodological frameworks as thoroughly as thinkers in the analytic and phenomenological traditions. Nevertheless, religion has always been an important topic for the classical pragmatists. For this reason, Sami Pihlström's *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God* is particularly valuable, for it attempts to show how the pragmatic methodological hypothesis can be fruitfully applied to the traditional problems in the philosophy of religion. Although Pihlström acknowledges the impossibility of a unified pragmatist's religious *Weltanschauung*, he applies the pragmatic method in order to build a metaphysics capable of going beyond the contradictions that undermine traditional or contemporary philosophical approaches to the problem of religion. His book's five chapters deal with the main problems of the field: the problem of evidentialism against fideism, of realism versus antirealism, the conflict between science and religion, the problem of evil and of the nature of God, and the relation of religion to metaphysics and ethics. For Pihlström, James's pluralistic approach is a better instrument to work out these problems than the monistic approach shared by most contemporary philosophers of religion. At the same time, the author admits that his aims are relatively modest: he is more concerned with trying to apply pragmatism to the challenges of the philosophy of religion rather than to take a historical and comprehensive approach to all one could say about the topic. That said, his book is full of historical information. The lengthy notes, moreover, are especially valuable for readers interested in delving deeper into the subject. In short, Pihlström's books how pragmatism at work as a mediator between extremes, and it not only does so by expanding the reflections of James and Dewey but also by putting them in dialogue with other philosophical approaches phenomenology and analytic thought.

A "JAMESIAN CUM KANTIAN" APPROACH

Pihlström's main hypothesis is that we can construct a pragmatist metaphysic of religion according to what he calls a "Jamesian-cum-Kantian" approach. The principle claim of this approach is that our metaphysical commitments regarding the reality and the existence of God should be more rooted in practical considerations than are done in traditional philosophy of religion. This is the case both because, for Kant, "practical reason" is "ethical" reason, and because Pihlström's reconstruction of a transcendental argument for a theistic metaphysics is grounded on ethical considerations.

The first and fourth chapters deal mainly with the Jamesian approach to the philosophy of religion and present most of the central arguments of the book on controversies such as theism/atheism, evidentialism/fideism, or realism/constructivism. Although the author's reflections demonstrate a deep knowledge of the secondary literature, his reflections are Jamesian, rather than a scholarly attempt to understand what James himself wrote on religious matters: for example, Pihlström considers neither James's religious psychology nor his epochal concept of religious experience. His Kantian reading of James, furthermore, seems to presuppose a clear cut separation between Jamesian philosophy and Jamesian psychology of religion. Although he notes that Jamesian approach is more empirical and psychological than the *a priori* method of Kant, he nevertheless maintains that, on his synthetic account of both, we can construct a transcendental argument for a theistic metaphysics as if our human interests and

needs were of a transcendental nature (p 33, p113). It is indeed true that James' philosophical anthropology, as Sergio Franzese has shown (2008: 55), is indebted to its reading of Kant's anthropology. Pihlström argues that the traditional issues in the philosophy of religion such as theism-atheism or evidentialism-fideism are partly misguided because they overlook the anthropological and ethical aspect of the question. Regarding atheism, the author thinks that the practical and ethical dimensions which are inherently attached to the question of God's existence are of such a high importance that any atheistic views can be rejected as unethical (this theological turn in William James's ethic is to be found in the last part of *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*, where it is argued that a Godless world doesn't give enough justification for the highest intensities of moral life). At the same time, for Pihlström, viewing the existence of God as something more than a hypothesis is also unethical, because it leads to intolerance. In the same manner, the author rejects evidentialism for being too narrowly intellectual (p21) and argues that the rational justifications of theism should be based on vital human needs and interests, as it is in Kant and James. Therefore, the traditional conflicts between science and religion need not be so radical: "the religious believer's faith in God need not be made scientifically acceptable, or warranted in terms of religiously natural criteria of reason (...); the important thing is to make it ethically acceptable in the face of evil and suffering that we, believers and unbelievers, experience in the world we live in (...)." (p 22). Pihlström does not see James's main work in the philosophy of religion as trying to make the idea of God's existence scientifically acceptable but as trying to turn the issue into an ethically relevant thesis. According to the author, every kind of evidentialist and fideist argument downplays this claim. Evidentialism is wrong because it discusses religious belief rationally and fideism is wrong because it does not consider religious belief capable of being discussed at all.

At the same time, the author shows that these fundamentally ethical considerations should not minimize the metaphysical implications of such questions, as is done in neo-pragmatist readings of James or in Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion (p67). On the contrary, Pihlström sees this pragmatist ethical approach to theism as an attempt to rethink the very relationship between ethics and metaphysics. This means that the ethical argument for the reality of God doesn't imply that we are just entitled to act "as if" there were a God. Rather, our ethical commitments and our metaphysical commitments to the existence of God are closely tied: God, on the basis of the practical postulates in Kant and James, is not simply a "useful fiction," but is metaphysically real.

Pihlström shows, furthermore, that the problem of theism is, in James's thought, connected with his pluralism, the metaphysical and ethical commitment to respect other individuals' conceptions of the good. It is rooted in an ethical need to acknowledge the otherness of others and is therefore meta-philosophical since it is also a need to acknowledge the otherness of other philosophies (106). Pihlström here agrees with Sergio Franzese when he tries to show that James does not provide an ethical theory *per se*, but instead offers a critical examination of the very project of theorizing about morality. In like fashion, James's theory of relation, the author argues, should be read as an emphasis on human relations.

THE METAPHYSICAL ASPECTS OF A PRAGMATIST PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Chapters two, three, and five broadly deal with the indispensability a pragmatist metaphysic to any theory that aims to give a meaning to our religious

and ethical life. In chapter two, Pihlström focuses on Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics. Chapter three deals with what the author sees as the lack of proper metaphysical commitment in the neo-pragmatism of Rorty and Putnam. Chapter five, finally, deals with the problem of evil.

In chapter two, Pihlström provides a summary of the Dewey's book on religious naturalism. The author thinks that the fact that *A Common Faith* has been read in two different ways -- theistic or secular -- can be accounted for by a tension in Dewey's naturalism between realism and constructivism. In order to avoid inaccurate readings, we should generally address the question of knowing if the general object of human inquiry is either "constructed" or "found". This question amounts to the following one: is the pragmatist God only kind of human construction? According to the author, although there are some anti-realist dimensions in Dewey's instrumentalism, it is not to be read broadly as a kind of anti-realism. On the contrary, the practice of inquiry, and the theories that results are themselves real. The contextualism of practices on which Dewey's constructivism is grounded does not allow anti-realistic conclusions since it deals with an external environment that can never be entirely constructed. Finally, Pihlström suggests that even if Dewey's God is indeed partly constructed, there is creativity in men's activity and in religious experience that transcends men's own creativity. Indeed, humanity is continuous with nature, which contains forces beyond our power of manipulation. Hence, the passive as well as the active elements of religious experience can be accounted for. The author extends his analysis by exploring the various forms of religious naturalisms that have explicit ties with Dewey's but which are developing an anti-metaphysical view of religious experience, denying that religious statements refer to anything objective. However, there is no need to understand religious language as simply an expression of values since we can never split values from our ontological inquiries. In summary, through a subtle and fine reading of Dewey, and an impressive knowledge of the history of its commentators, the author argues for a pragmatist realism in Dewey's religious thoughts, showing that its metaphysic is committed to a recognition of our human capacities *and* limitations, not to mention our ultimate indebtedness to nature.

In chapter three, Pihlström aims to show that, in neopragmatists approaches to religion, religious assertion suffers from a lack of metaphysical background to support them. After reassessing Rorty's neopragmatism, the author shows how Rorty's hope is different from Jamesian hope. The latter is entitled to some metaphysical pursuits about how the world is, while Rorty famously disconnects hope and knowledge about the metaphysical structure of the universe. The author underlies how every Rortyan assertions about religion are, according to the classical pragmatists, non-pragmatist. The opposition Rorty makes between hope and knowledge, or the assertion according to which religion should always be considered as a private matter, are clearly aloof from the tradition instigated by James and Dewey. Comparatively, for Pihlström, Putnam's views are more genuinely pragmatist, although they are combined with some Kantian and Wittgensteinian insights. Indeed, Putnam's defense of internal realism is in agreement with the classical pragmatists, that scientific and religious perspectives must be evaluated pragmatically, in terms of how well they satisfy human purposes. Nevertheless, Pihlström shows that in Putnam's approach the fideistic idea according to which religious belief is a personal commitment prevails. We therefore cannot really see how religious beliefs could be publicly evaluated and criticized. Perhaps under the influence of Wittgenstein, Putnam seems to reduce religious belief to an attitude of the believer, rejecting any metaphysical theories to justify it (89). Pihlström suggests

that Putnam should not be afraid of any metaphysical statements that could justify his own religious beliefs, for otherwise religion would be entirely private.

In chapter 5, Pihlström addresses the problem of evil in light of his general claim that metaphysical and religious ideas have to be evaluated from an ethical perspective. This is also the chapter where the author's thinking is the most original, going far beyond James's concerns. Pihlström's main concern here is to dwell on the ethical limitations of our capacity to speak and theorize about evil. The problem is as follows: considering the impossibility of offering a philosophical justification of evil (which amounts to the impossibility of theodicy), how should we speak about evil? For the author, a pragmatist line of speaking about evil is similar to the pragmatist line of speaking about God: we are not able to give a rational meaning to it, but we also can't escape all forms of discourse about it. At the very least, we must give meaning to this absence of meaning, and this meaning could be "among the key potential source of meaning in our lives" (143), as with Albert Camus notion of "human revolt". A pragmatist's middle ground position regarding evil is understood by Pihlström as a "nonreligious form of anti-theodicism" (132). It should be nonreligious because the reasons for rejecting theodicism are mainly ethical and not religious. While theodicism comes from monistic conceptions of God and of the Universe, religious non-theodicism (like in Dostoyevsky's thought) runs the risk of mystifying evil. Therefore explaining why evil should not be explained is an ethical attitude towards evil and its victim.

Although the pragmatic anti-theodictist view is not religious, it also cannot escape being metaphysical. On this point, Pihlström claims that a pragmatist theory of evil, while not being based on religious grounds, is in a better position than many of its contemporary proposals. For example, the lack of a metaphysical or theological background in Rorty's neopragmatism makes it difficult to have a reason to fight or condemn evil. In that perspective, "the totalitarian practices (...) are simply among the many practices and "vocabulary" we may engage in or employ, none of which is objectively correct from a super-perspective beyond those practices and vocabularies" (149). Comparatively, a genuine pragmatist metaphysic should offer a ground on which one could live ethically. In a Jamesian spirit, we are not only entitled to have such a metaphysic, but we have a moral duty to commit ourselves to such a metaphysic, however minimalistic, that allow us to condemn totalitarian practices, for example. As Pihlström argues throughout the book, metaphysical inquiries should be governed by ethical norms, but ethics itself cannot be founded on any prior metaphysical concepts such as the concept of nature. We therefore cannot explain normativity as emerging from a purely naturalistic base. Pihlström agrees that this is a kind of a criticism of the form of emergentism that he has defended elsewhere (see Pihlström 2010, 323-352). Since he also seems to reject supernaturalism, however, it is not clear what kind of metaphysical engagement this entails. But such an inquiry goes beyond the scope of this book, whose more modest aims are clearly attained.

CONCLUSION

In sum, *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God* offers an excellent and deep analysis of how pragmatism remains so vital in our times. It calls upon many voices to support and expand the religious views of the classical pragmatists. It clearly demonstrates that religion is not just an application of their methods but is essentially connected with their ethical, epistemological and metaphysical arguments. However, the enrollment of Kant's practical reason to reinforce pragmatist philosophy of religion is not entirely unproblematic for

reasons that we can only briefly mention. After saying that God is a necessary postulate for morality, can we still distinguish between morality and religion? Aren't we missing all the emotionality that distinguishes the two for James? It is surely not the aim of Pihlström's book to inquire into the psychological dimensions of religious experience but the very idea of religious experience. As Wayne Proudfoot has argued, (Proudfoot 1985: 5), this entails the idea of a non-categorized immediate experience and is thus impossible to be accounted for in a Kantian epistemology. It could also be objected to Pihlström's approach that the epistemological conflict between science and religion was much more acute in James's consciousness than the author appreciates and that this conflict directed much of his later work on religion. Reconstructing James's philosophy of religion as a whole ultimately must confront serious dilemmas and even contradictions in his thought. While James's emphasis in *The Will to Believe* is on religious belief as a necessary condition of religious experience, for example, he suggests in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that such experiences need not presuppose any previous religious belief – an aspect of James's thought on which Pihlström remains silent. Indeed, focusing solely on James's claim that belief in God is necessary for there to be moral objectivity risks downplaying James's metaphysics of experience – a metaphysics incompatible with the transcendental bases of Kant's own practical project. For better or worse, Pihlström's work is not concerned with such historical issues. It aims, rather, to reconstruct and strengthen pragmatist arguments in the contemporary philosophy of religion, and in this regard it succeeds admirably. .

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William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic. By Trygve Throntveit. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 244 pp. \$90.00

William James is sometimes criticized for focusing on the individual at the expense of the social and political. Perhaps because this characterization is commonplace, relatively few scholars have considered James's impact on social ethics and political thought. *William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic* by Trygve Throntveit is an innovative and persuasive look at the Jamesian social and political legacy in the United States. Throntveit attends to the moral quest he sees underlying all of James's works and challenges the judgment that James is apolitical by situating James amidst his family, contemporary public intellectuals, and religious inquiries (cf. Banks, 2015).

Throntveit examines how James's thought developed in the context of his family life by leveraging the archives of the James family, including those of his brother, novelist Henry James, Jr., and father, theologian Henry James, Sr., to illustrate how William's unfocused educational program affected his vocation and intellectual commitments. Throntveit presents a perceptive study of the James family pedagogy. In light of Henry James Sr.'s incessant pursuit of the ideal education for his eldest sons, William and Henry, and his chronic rejection of William's vocational aspirations, Throntveit observes that "...in encouraging experimentation, the father discouraged choice, in the sense of conscious decision to commit to something concrete and define one's personal and social character.... Meanwhile, paradoxically, their philosopher father gave the impression of unstinting devotion to a cause...." (p. 14). According to Throntveit, William could not adopt his father's theological anthropology, which called for the dissolution of the self (see pp. 17-26), but the son took to heart the sincerity of his father's religious quest that in turn animated the family's character. This tension not only shapes William's personality; it motivates his lifelong consideration of the varieties of selves and their mutual obligations (cf. Throntveit, 2003). The

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historical counterpoint to Henry Sr.'s mysticism was the Darwinian revolution and the emerging triumph of experimental, empirical science. William's dialectical integration of these views resulted in a new ethical appreciation of the uncertainty of one's own positions and openness to the positions of others.

Throntveit traces James's intellectual development by reading his work chronologically and relationally, drawing attention to the public intellectuals with whom he corresponded and was personally acquainted. Throntveit's innovation lies in tracing the ways in which others applied, and sometimes modified, Jamesian moral ideas during the Progressive Era. For instance, although James did not involve himself directly in politics, he taught, corresponded with, and debated many of the most influential policy shapers of the period, including W.E.B. DuBois, John Dewey, Jane Addams, Louis Brandeis, Theodore Roosevelt (his former student), and many others. These public figures directly responded to James through their intellectual leadership, policymaking authority, and access to the highest levels of elected leaders in Washington. Throntveit imagines a continuum of Progressivism and tethers William James at one end, Woodrow Wilson at the other. Between these poles is the celebrated society of progressive public intellectuals. Throntveit's careful step-by-step tracking of the thought of these leaders lends further support to his theses that James promulgated a political ethic of American public life and that this ethic was vibrantly applied in the Progressive Era.

Throntveit also links James's writing about religion with his pragmatism and ethics. Given that James defines religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider the divine" (1985, p. 34), why take religion into consideration as a matter of public concern? In Throntveit's reading of James, "religion *is like* the countless informal social contracts made by men and women daily" (57, emphasis added). Throntveit contends that James used religion and the option of belief as a sort of middle-ground term between philosophy and

ethics, between the individual and the collective; it is by analogy a social unit that is always unfinished and contingent upon the choices of actors within it. By committing to a pragmatic ethic that could accommodate varieties of religious experience, James envisioned how a democratic society should regard the individual. Instead of arguing that a religious believer should be a virtuous person, James turns that idea around and says that an enlightened *society* should make room for those individuals who claim a variety of religious beliefs and experiences. The category of personal experience, which Throntveit believes is what James means by “religion,” becomes a field for testing ethics. After examining the biographical sources, Throntveit makes the case that James’ insistence on the unfinished character of the universe creates a field for ethical action in the public sphere at its broadest. This is “The Ethical Republic.”

For each of the above three perspectives—James’s family, public intellectual, and religious lives—there are parallel puzzling omissions. They do not affect the overall argument, however. In the area of James’s family life, there is the puzzling omission of William’s three siblings—Alice, Robertson (“Bob”), and Garth Wilkinson (“Wilky”)—because their inclusion would have strengthened the author’s thesis. The same idiosyncrasy reemerges when the author analyzes William’s 1897 speech at the dedication of the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial (pp. 136-137). William James himself does not mention in his speech that his brother Wilky fought under Shaw’s command (1982, pp. 64-74) but Wilky could not have been far from mind for William or for those in the audience who knew the James family. His brother Bob also served in and was damaged by the Civil War and his sister Alice, a young teenager at the time, sewed bandages for the Newport Women’s Aid Society. Through his three youngest siblings, at least in part, William viscerally knew the ethical cost and obligation of protecting the republic.

Regarding James as a public intellectual, Throntveit declares that *Pragmatism* is James’ “most famous work” (p. 9). That honor, however, belongs to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

(McDermott, 2013; Snarey, 2003). In fairness, Throntveit likely meant that most philosophers would identify *Pragmatism* as his most famous work, just as most psychologists would likely identify *Principles* as his most famous work. Nevertheless, an important omission remains. William James studies are maximally useful when we follow the advice of John J. McDermott (1967, 2011) to rise above our disciplinary boundaries, reach beyond ourselves, and remain open to experiencing the full breadth of James's intellectual life across philosophy, psychology, and religion.

Throntveit concludes his analysis of James's use of religion by asking the question, "Did James believe in God?" Throntveit answers, "No. He believed in the human capacity to combine audacity and humility in the face of uncertainty" (p. 81). First, of course, Throntveit is answering a somewhat *different* question from the one he asked. Second, although James *was* more sure of human ways than of those of the Divine, he often, and never unambiguously, articulated what he called an "over-belief" or hypothesis of "the Reality of the Unseen," the "More," "supreme reality," and a plurality of other appellations for God (e.g., 1985, pp. 405-407). If he lived today, James would find satisfying discussants among many existential, process, and liberation theologians who hold to similar theism hypotheses (Snarey & Bridgers, 2011). So readers might puzzle whether the "God question" is as settled as Throntveit thinks.

These minor caveats aside, this is a strong and compelling book. Throntveit successfully challenges the biased judgment of James as apolitical, primarily by lifting up James's social history and political legacy. Page after page, the text is packed with insights and food for thought. The final fruit of *William James and the Quest for an Ethical Republic* is that it enriches the fields of William James studies, American studies, ethics, and even political science.

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