

William James Studies

A publication of the William James Society

Volume 3 (2008)

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past President of the William James Society (2006).

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Article 1. <http://williamjamesstudies.org/3.1/lachs.html>

Human Blindness

John Lachs

Abstract: Starting from William James's classic essay, I distinguish ten different sorts of human blindness. I ask which, if any, of these can be eradicated, and conclude that it is neither desirable nor possible to make more than gradual improvements in our moral vision.

In writing about a certain blindness,¹ William James proves himself less than sharp-sighted about the variety of human intellectual-ocular impediments. He thinks he has identified a single disability when in fact he is focused on a broad range of problems. I do not want to be grudging in my praise of James; it is always cause for joy when philosophers tackle issues of moment for daily life. James is superb at this: his essays, such as "What Makes a Life Significant" and "The Moral Equivalent of War," illuminate issues of great personal and social importance. But he is notoriously reluctant to draw distinctions, even when they are vital for clear vision or for the outcome of his argument. In the case of the essay on blindness, failing to see the diversity of phenomena he addresses garbles the message he wants to convey. Human blindness is far more widespread, far more variegated and far more insidious than James represents it, yet overcoming it, even if it were possible, would create as many problems as it would solve.

The primary form of blindness in James' line of sight is the failure to see how others view the world. This actually consists of two disabilities, the first that of not being able to see the world the way others see it, and the second that of closing our eyes to the divergent devotions of other people. James conflates the two through his example of coming across a hideous house and clearing in the woods that the mountaineer sees as his beautiful home. James finds the realization that someone can value something so primitive shocking. But he thinks the woodman's perception of his bit of reality is equally dismaying.

Our view of the world is deeply influenced by our values, but perceptions differ not only as a result of embracing different goods. Color-defective people, for example, cannot even imagine what a world of reds and greens might be like. Similarly, individuals lacking a sense modality, such as hearing, operate in an environment not easily understood or replicated by people without that deficit. And I doubt that any human being can experience in the rich olfactory fashion common to dogs. One's condition or circumstances also serve as perceptual determinants: in a child's world, even short parents appear as towering giants. Social conditioning influences the look of the world no less: South American Indian parents taught their children to see invading Spaniards as creatures, each of whom, with his horse, constituted a single animal.

The influence of values on our view of reality is profound. Love offers a striking example: it can make ugly children and a toothless spouse appear as creatures of magic and light. A similar chemistry renders it difficult to see ourselves as others see us, or others as they see themselves. If we don't share the values of people, we remain strangers to their worlds. Yet embracing what others prize is a rare achievement. For the most part, even a sympathetic grasp of why they hold their values eludes us. Such incomprehension may lead to overt conflict; at the very least, it fuels a quiet antagonism to much that is not ours.

There is also a third form of blindness, that connected with the emotive tone of experience or the way life feels 5
to other people. We encounter this, for example, in the excited activity of the lantern-bearers James describes,
hiding their lights under their coats. The problem is that our view of the excitements of others is always external:
we see the things they do but not how it feels to be doing them. Yet, James correctly avers, much of the joy of life
resides in the rich emotive feel that accompanies our activities. Without it, we are rocks in the meadow or the
burnt out hulls of meteors.

When a new dog joins the pack, it sniffs with delight and its tail wags happily. In a similar fashion, laughter and 6
smiles spread readily from one person to another; it is difficult to escape the contagion of the group. But
existentialists, though dour, are right that each person smiles alone, that the feel of the smile, the smile of the
inner face, is open only to one. So it is with suffering, as well, both in the form of pain and of the anxiety that
casts a shadow over life. We simply don't know what exhilaration and depression feel like in our neighbors; we
view them and deal with them as though we were behaviorists, attentive to their outward movements but
unmindful of their inner life. Distance from others exaggerates this blindness to their pain, yet—paradoxically,
perhaps—close presence does not enhance our access to their joys.

The inevitable corollary of such ignorance is a fourth sort of blindness, namely that to who others are. This 7
does not mean that we fail to remember the names of people or don't know them by their social positions or
their jobs. What we lack is a clear view of what makes them tick, that is, of what we might appropriately call the
constitution of their souls. Ignorant of their motivations, surprised by their purposes and unlettered in their
principles, we live near them the way birds and squirrels share a tree as home, each in its own nest, indifferent to
all the rest. Thus we see spouses of fifty years realize that they are married to a cipher. A trusted partner is not
necessarily a person whose soul is known; loyalty in marriage may give the relation stability, but the routine that
reassures also induces sleep, inviting people to go through life blind in their intimacy.

Our sightlessness is by no means limited to such subjective elements of the world as persons, their views, their 8
feelings and their values. Sometimes we are victims of a fifth kind of blindness, that of operating in ignorance of
objective parts of reality and their meanings. Such undiscerning ways differ from those we have discussed so far
in a variety of ways, among them by being relatively easy to remedy. In subjective matters, there is a wall between
persons that may be scaled only with much trouble; the *facts* we overlook, however, tend to stare us in the face.
The attitudes of people are reflected in their eyes and in their acts; it is not difficult to discern changes in their
moods. Yet many marriage partners feel crushing surprise at infidelity, even though they had ample early signals.
Similarly, we may not notice danger on the road, the missing coffee table or that someone cleaned the house.
Such inattention is fed by routine, falsely suggesting that our corner of the world is adequately explored and can
therefore be disregarded.

This problem of what James calls “the jaded eye” naturally leads to a sixth sort of blindness, one that makes us 9
view the world as old and boring. This is a tragic loss: it colors our days gray and fills life with ennui. We miss a
great source of happiness when we no longer see the world as ever new. The joyous symmetry and asymmetry
that pervade the real, the energy with which each being occupies its slot in the scheme of things and, in the end,
the delightful improbability of everything should be enough to amaze us for the few years we are here. Yet we
meet people who can summon no ideas out of what I just said and see the world as if through dead men's eyes.

A Mozart can love every note and endlessly caress their sequences. A Picasso may be in love with shape and 10
color, and a Frank Lloyd Wright with how walls articulate space. But we don't have to be artists to see the
marvelous riches of the world; attention to details is enough. The swirl of lines in wood and the way water runs
downstream can make children of adults. The construction of insect bodies and the grand complexities of a single
molecule are simply astonishing. The explosive growth of bamboo is as fascinating as the slow deterioration of
wood on the forest floor. There is hardly a thing or a relationship that fails to offer food for reflection or at least
to induce amazement. All we need is eyes for it, that is, a receptive and energetic appreciation of what surrounds
us. Blindness to the beauty of the world is at once blindness to what is best in our earthly lives.

A seventh sort of unseeing is easily confused with failure to connect with the vibrancy of the world. James 11
refers to this blindness only briefly in his essay, though it is a recurrent theme in his other writings. We detect the
beauty of the world by enhancing our sensations, by living—we might say—through the senses. But our
“sensorial life” yields much more than beauty, and if we efface it, we lose more than the eye-opening newness of
existence. When we downplay it, we become crippled by concepts, people who live in their thoughts or fall prey
to ideologies. Like D.H. Lawrence and others, James is a champion of sensory life and an implacable critic of
abstraction. This form of blindness is the failure to notice the concrete, the specific and, on the reading of
empiricists, the *real* in the world. Since concepts are so much easier to deal with than recalcitrant facts, people
gladly turn away from harsh reality to thin and pliable ideas. Our sensations may be “powerful and ineffaceable,”

but they do not command the attention our favorite notions do. They are constantly overruled by being interpreted, so that we end up seeing what we think.

Blindness to our sensations suggests an eighth and altogether different sort of inattention. The desire to be considered a member of “the elite” turns us away from our simpler functions toward a celebration of sophisticated but derivative activities. We enjoy going to dinner parties, for example, but overlook the joys that come of chewing and swallowing. We seek to engage in conversations but forget to savor the delight of pronouncing words or of the togetherness of quiet cuddling. Children take pleasure in the simple functions when they first master them; adult attention turns that way only when we have to relearn them on account of illness or accident. Yet life would be immeasurably richer if candidates for president worried less about what they say in interminable debates and took time to show the electorate that they know the value of silently breathing. 12

There is a ninth, special sort of blindness that besets spectators. One might suppose that the spectatorial stance, devoted to observing everything of moment, is particularly well suited to overcoming sightlessness. Yet its very nature sets obstacles in its way, limiting onlookers to the benefits of perception and denying them knowledge of the feel and of the consequences of action. Dogs in the act of love have access to experiences sadly unavailable to their packmates looking on. The same is true of soldiers whose exploits on the battlefield remain their private possessions and cannot be captured by those who stay at home. This blindness is not a matter of choice or the habit of inattention; it is the inevitable outcome of failing to be in a certain position. Its remedy is not enhanced awareness but shouldering the burden of agency by going to war or plunging into love. 13

This leads me to the tenth and last blindness, which is at once the greatest and most lamentable. We can be so taken with the past and the future that we become unmindful of the present. The young see the failures of the past, the old its victories; in either case, what has been casts a long shadow over the only thing real, which is what exists *now*. Expectations can terrorize life or else charm it; when they do, we live for what is not yet and will perhaps never be. The present always ends up as the victim, seen only as residue or preparation, appreciated only in its passing. What we seem not to understand is that the present never passes, that its riches are inexhaustible and that in spurning it we discard all of life. 14

Objects tend to be of interest to us for their instrumental value. The more we view things, people and relationships as means to ulterior ends, the less we are concerned with their intrinsic properties. We can quickly reach the stage where we hardly notice what is immediately present, reading it only as the sign of things past or yet to come. The firstness, as Peirce would say, of whatever we deal with tends to give way to its secondness and thirdness; the immediacy before us is quickly mediated. The genius of James, Peirce and Dewey is that they did not go down the road of Hegelian mediation, maintaining a keen consciousness of the importance of unmediated presence. Hegel, however, has been more prescient of the common mind than the Americans. Busy people don’t linger over the appearance of things, savoring each marvelous aspect of the world. They turn a blind eye to how things look and feel and thereby lose the most direct contact we can develop with the real. This is the blindness of people who have no trouble finding their way, but haven’t a clue as to where they have been. 15

I have distinguished ten different sorts of blindness, undifferentiated by James, all of which, however, are hinted at in his essay. Some of the blindnesses are connected with each other in a variety of ways, others remain essentially independent. They are different from each other because their objects, causes, organs, processes or remedies differ. But they tend to travel in company so that, for instance, the person who is blind to immediacies is likely also to be nescient of how others see the world. Similarly, persons who take no delight in our simpler functions probably also fail to lead an intense sensory life. 16

Should we be distressed at seeing so much blindness built into the human frame? If blindnesses are deficits of a cognitive, valuational or emotive sort, it would presumably be much better to be without them. James certainly conceives his essay as a call to action: he laments our inattentions and implies, even though he does not state, that we must overcome them and try to see the neglected riches of life. Surprisingly, perhaps, he says nothing about blindness to ourselves in the form of self-deception and the sort of subconscious impulses Freud worked so hard to bring to the light of day, but he clearly considers unseeing a severe human failing. He may not go so far as his colleague, Royce, and say that the willful narrowing of attention is the very definition of sin, but he is convinced that we would be better off if we lived in total conscious possession of our world or at least significantly expanded the range of our sympathies. 17

Can we rid ourselves of what James calls the “great cloud-bank of ancestral blindness”? By the time he writes the next essay in the series, James is ready to declare that we cannot. He avers that it “is vain to hope for this state of things to alter much,”² for practical-minded beings such as ourselves are “necessarily short of sight.” He is clearly right that in considering the demands of animal and social life in a precarious environment, eliminating all our blindnesses is impossible. I don’t mean, of course, the dry logical impossibility of contradiction, but 18

impossibility measured by who we are and what we have to do to secure our existence. Sensitivity to different perceptions slows up response-time and constant empathetic access to the sufferings of others makes action odious. Could we kill animals if we had a vivid perception of their anxiety in the slaughterhouse? Could we compete for mate or promotion if we felt the disappointment of the loser? Could we prefer our own values if we saw justification for everybody else's?

Admittedly, ridding ourselves of some of our blindnesses, reducing their scope or increasing our voluntary control over what to be blind to could make for a somewhat better life. If we bathed the values of others in the same warm light as we bathe our own, there would likely be less conflict in the world and more understanding. If we appreciated the immediate presence of things, our lives would be richer and significantly more carefree. And if we focused on the simpler functions of life, we would have a surer source of joy than sophistication or competition can provide. This much is clear and it seems sensible to encourage people to open their eyes a little wider so they may improve their condition. 19

Unfortunately, however, every benefit has a seamy underside. If we saw the world as forever new, we could not develop work-reducing and life-saving habits. If we were party to everyone's grief, we would be tortured and immobilized by the horror. If we attended to the immediacies of life without reference to instrumentalities, we would lose all practical sense and find ourselves gaping at the world. And if we gloried in our simpler functions, we would have little use for the sophisticated activities unique to humans and productive of satisfactions unavailable otherwise. 20

So we should take thought before we recommend the elimination of blindness or, for that matter, any other general measure as a solution to the problems humans face. Opening our eyes a little here and there, selectively resisting sightlessness in certain contexts, can help us move in the right direction, bringing us closer to loved ones or to the vivacity of the real. We should work vigorously to make ourselves more perceptive in our intellectual life and more generous in our responses. But we must not forget our finitude and we must try to remember that much as blindness is, in the abstract, a lamentable condition, in concrete life it protects us from being overwhelmed by reality. 21

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Notes

¹William James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," in John J. McDermott, ed., *The Writings of William James*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1977, pp. 629-645.

²William James, "What Makes a Life Significant," in John J. McDermott, *The Writings of William James*, p. 646.

Blindness, Vision, and the Good Life For All

David E. Leary

Abstract: In response to John Lachs' December 2007 Presidential Address to the William James Society, this article elaborates upon James's concern about vision, identifies some of the roots of his interest in the inner experiences of others, expresses appreciation for the positive contributions of the address, questions a few of its assertions, relates its approach to that of others, and notes the continuing relevance of James's call for clearer and more appreciative insight into the inner lives and aspirations of others. In all, it attempts to underscore the timely nature of Lachs' address, which serves as a useful reminder of the importance of each and every individual and of the close connection between the quality of life for one and all.

1

John Lachs' Presidential Address on "Human Blindness" takes its topic from one of the "Talks to Students on Life's Ideals" that William James delivered in various forms between 1892 and 1898.¹ James subsequently converted this talk into an essay, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," which he published along with other addenda to his *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* in 1899.² This particular essay was, he said, one of his favorite publications:

much more than the mere piece of sentimentalism which it may seem to some readers. It connects itself with a definite view of the world and of our moral relations to the same. . . . I mean the pluralistic or individualistic philosophy. . . . The practical consequence of such a philosophy is the well-known democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality,

which was, he said, "the perception on which my whole individualistic philosophy is based" (*Talks*, 5 & 244). James expressed the views articulated in this essay in various places, both before and after 1899, but this particular exposition held a central place in his heart.

It is worth noting at the start that James's concern about "blindness" was related, obversely, to his preeminent concern about "vision," about perceiving the realities of one's world so that one's emotions, judgments, and actions will be appropriately directed, not just toward what *is* but toward what is *possible*. 2

There is much to say about James's consideration of knowledge and philosophy as "visions" of the way things are, and can be. In *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), he wrote that "no philosophy can ever be anything but. . . a foreshortened bird's-eye view of the perspective of events" (9). Thus, if you want to understand anyone's philosophical system, he said, you should "place yourself. . . at the center of [that person's] philosophical vision." When you do, "you understand at once all the different things it makes him write or say. But keep outside [that vision]. . . and of course you fail" (117). For "philosophy is more a matter of *passionate vision* than of logic. . . . Logic only find[s] reasons for the vision afterwards" (81). Given this conviction, it is not surprising that James believed that "*a man's vision is the great fact about him*" (14).³ Conversely, a man's blindness defines the limits of his being. James was not pleased with those limits, either in himself or in others. 3

James's fundamental concern about vision and the lack thereof can be traced both to his own early experiences 4
as an artist's apprentice (through which he was initiated into his "ocular philosophy") and to his early and perduring
acquaintance with the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson.⁴ I believe that I can prove this claim, as much as such
claims *can* be proven, but here I want simply to provide some illustrative quotations from Emerson's 1870 lectures
on the "Natural History of Intellect," which were delivered at Harvard just as James was working his way through
that institution, ever so slowly, toward his academic career in psychology and philosophy – a career that Emerson
(James's avowed godfather) helped to solidify as a recently elevated Overseer. Quoting Emerson now:

"In *seeing* and in no tradition," the student of philosophy "must find what truth is" (6). "What is life but *the angle of vision*? A man is measured by *the angle at which he looks* at objects" (10). "In my thought I seem to stand on the bank
of a river and *watch the endless flow of the stream*, floating objects of all shapes, colors and natures; nor can I much
detain them as they pass, except by running beside them a little way along the bank" (16). "A man of talent has only
to name any form. . . and *the strong light which he throws on it enhances it to all eyes*. People wonder they never *saw* it
before" (39). "My *seeing* this or that, and that I *see* it so or so [in this or that way], is as much a fact in the natural
history of the world as is the freezing of water at thirty-two degrees of Fahrenheit" (41). "A *perception*. . . is
impatient to. . . lead to. . . new action" (41). "*The true scholar is one who has the power to stand beside his thoughts* or to hold
off his thoughts at arm's length *and give them perspective*" (44). "Affect blends, intellect disjoins subject and object"
(44). "*A blending of these two – the intellectual perception of truth and the moral sentiment of right – is wisdom*. All thought is
practical" (45-46).⁵

Any knowledgeable reader of James will recognize these statements by Emerson as presciently Jamesian, if I may 5
put it that way. The contemporaneous development of James's thought explains his assertion, just three years later,
that "I am sure that an age will come. . . when emerson's philosophy will be in our bones."⁶ And just three years
after that, in his first publication on philosophy, James defined philosophical study as "*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*" akin to the shifting insights that occur to a connoisseur walking
around a three-dimensional statue. "What doctrines students take from their teachers are of little consequence
provided they catch from them *the living, philosophic attitude of mind, the independent, personal look at all the data of life*, and
the eagerness to harmonize them."⁷ It is easy to connect the dots from 1876 to 1899, when James published "On a
Certain Blindness of Human Beings," and from there to 1903, when James acknowledged that he had gotten "ten
times as much" from Emerson as from anyone else and called Emerson his "beloved Master" and, tellingly, "a *real
seer*," whose "*vision*" was "the head-spring of all his outpourings."⁸

With these introductory comments, I now turn to John Lachs' stimulating address on "Human Blindness." 6
John opens his address with an implied criticism of James, saying that "William James proves himself less than
sharpsighted about the variety of human intellectual-ocular impediments." In response, I find myself asking, Really?
Was James unaware of the "varieties of human blindness," or did he simply elect to focus on one particular form of
human blindness – a "certain" form, as he put it – in this one address? James suggested this latter explanation in
"What Makes Life Significant," the essay that follows his piece on human blindness in *Talks to Teachers*:

I am speaking broadly, I know, and omitting to consider certain qualifications in which I myself believe.
But one can only make one point in one lecture, and I shall be well content if I have brought my point
home to you this evening in even a slight degree.⁹

Noting that James felt it appropriate to focus on one point at a time, we might ask ourselves what form of 7
blindness deserved more attention than the one he chose – namely, our blindness to the inner lives
of *others* – especially as it was impacting upon the realities and possibilities of his own time.

Despite my quibble, John's thesis is surely true: "Human blindness *is* far more widespread, far more variegated 8
and far more insidious than James represented it" in this one essay. And John has done us a great favor by
elaborating some of the ways in which this is true.

As I heard and read John's perceptive and wise comments on "the varieties of human blindness," I found myself 9
thinking of Arthur O. Lovejoy's "Thirteen Pragmatisms" and of James's appreciation for Lovejoy's "genius for
distinguishing." Although James expressed occasional impatience when this former student seemed to be engaged
in mere "logic-chopping," I don't find John guilty of this sin.¹⁰ In fact, I'm confident that James, too, would have
loved the array of distinctions and related elaborations that he has provided. Even though John's "varieties of
human blindness" number but ten, rather than thirteen, I am impressed by the suggestive richness as well as

overlap of his types: To me, they are reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges's endlessly generative rather than logically exclusive classifications. Which is fitting, since Borges himself acknowledged a debt to James.

Lovejoy's "Thirteen Pragmatisms" reminded me, in turn, of Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (1917), a poem said to be inspired in part by Lovejoy's article as well as by Stevens's love of James's thought. (Note Stevens's emphasis on *looking* in the title of the poem, in which he deftly shifts the focus to "the eye of the blackbird.") This poem and others by Stevens are relevant in relation to what John has to say about Charles Sanders Peirce – in particular, Peirce's notion of "firstness" or immediate experience *prior* to the mediation of images and words. Stevens, a great fan of Emerson as well as James, had much to say, in essence, about "firstness." For instance, in his poem "On the Road Home" (1942), he wrote:

It was when I said,
"There is no such thing as *the* truth,"
That the grapes seemed fatter. . . .
You said,
"There are *many* truths,
But they are not parts of *a* truth."
Then the tree, at night, began to change,
Smoking through green and smoking blue. . . .
It was when I said. . . .
"In the sum of the parts, there are *only* the parts.
The world must be measured *by eye*". . . .
It was at that time, that silence was largest
And longest, the night was roundest,
The fragrance of the autumn warmest,
Closest and strongest.¹¹

In quoting from this poem by Stevens, I don't mean to suggest that Peirce didn't believe in truth; I want simply to indicate that he felt human life was richest and most complete when experience was most specific and particular rather than general and abstract. And James agreed.

We may also agree, yet how many of us have nonetheless felt exasperated at having to work our way (e.g.) through all the quotations in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, even though their inclusion was a direct result of James's wish to listen as closely as possible to what *others* have seen and felt regarding religious experience. In relying so heavily upon *their* insights – the insights of those whose experiences differed significantly from his own – James underscored how seriously he took the concerns expressed a few years earlier in "On a Certain Blindness of Human Beings." Not surprisingly, perhaps, Peirce felt that *Varieties* was James's best work, since it penetrated "into the hearts of people" (or as James suggested elsewhere, since it avoided "letting blindness lay down the law to sight").¹²

Toward the end of his conference presentation, John raised a key question: "Would human beings be better off if they could shed all their blindnesses and live in total conscious possession of their world?" I am glad to see that in his subsequent printed version, he acknowledges not only what James *would* have said, but what he *actually did* say. As I summarized James's views at the conference: We don't want and couldn't sustain full and contemporaneous consciousness of everything about us. Selection is a crucial cognitive function, and the establishment of more or less unconscious habits – hopefully good habits – is essential if we are to keep our consciousness free to attend to what is novel or surprising or problematic within the field of our experience.¹³

We encounter these themes of selection and habit in some of James's earliest writings as well as in *The Principles of Psychology*, and they were picked up and developed, famously and to good effect, by John Dewey.¹⁴ And James's – and Dewey's – focus on "the problematic" gives us a criterion for deciding *which* forms of blindness, instead of others, deserve our attention – a decision that John recommends to us.

But, of course, the matter isn't so simple, much less settled: Habit, as James realized, can get us into trouble, as our routinized forms of thought, feeling, and action blind us to unfortunate or no-longer-useful contingencies, to new opportunities, and to undreamt of possibilities. I agree – and James would have agreed – with John's suggestion that "opening our eyes a little here and there, selectively resisting sightlessness in certain contexts can help us move in the right direction." The punchline – "in the right direction" – touches the vital nerve of the matter: the ethical dimension of James's concern and the ethical challenges that we face in our own times. Certainly, pressing issues bearing upon the-rich-and-poor as well as war-and-peace – important concerns to James

as he wrote, delivered, and published his talks to students – are no less pressing today. With a little less blindness to the inner lives, values, and experiences of others we would surely be in a less dangerous and somewhat happier environment in the early twenty-first century.

In the published version of his address, John gives a snippet from James’s companion essay on “What Makes a Life Significant,” in which James referred to our “great cloud-bank of ancestral blindness.” I would like to start moving toward a conclusion by providing a fuller quotation of that passage, since it not only touches on the general limits that James himself acknowledged regarding the alleviation of human blindness to the inner lives of others, but also suggests that we must, nonetheless, push as hard as we can against those limits: 16

We have unquestionably a great cloud-blank of ancestral blindness weighing down upon us, only transiently riven here and there by fitful revelations of the truth. It is vain to hope for this state of things to alter much. Our inner secrets must remain for the most part impenetrable by others, for beings as essentially practical as we are necessarily fall short of sight. But if we cannot gain much positive insight into one another, *cannot we at least use our sense of our own blindness to make us more cautious in going over the dark places? Cannot we escape some of those hideous ancestral intolerances and cruelties, and positive reversals of the truth?* (*Talks*, 151)

John has done an exceptional service by inviting us to consider James’s concerns about “human blindness” and by amplifying what James said about it. And he is no doubt wise to caution against naïve confidence that certain blindnesses can be fully cured, and that their cure, in every case, would be an unmixed blessing. But when he says, in a clause added in the printed version of his opening paragraph, that “overcoming [human blindness], even if it were possible, would create *as many* problems as it would solve” (italics added), I think – and I believe James would think – that he undercuts some of the potential value of his own important address: For even if we cannot and should not erase every aspect of human blindness, the price of not becoming more conscious, critical, and cautious regarding “ancestral intolerances and cruelties,” and the price of not increasing our vigilance regarding “positive reversals of truth,” would be far greater now than it was when James first shared his vision of human blindness. The good life for any one of us, as John’s address invites us to realize, depends to a significant extent – and perhaps even more than it did in James’s time – on the good life for all.¹⁵ 17

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Notes

¹ The following comments have been adapted from a more extensive set of comments made in response to papers by James O. Pawelski and Frederick J. Ruf as well as to John Lachs’ Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting of the William James Society, Baltimore, MD, 28 December 2007. They are here focused entirely on the Presidential Address, which is being published in slightly amended form in this issue of *William James Studies*. I thank Micah Hester for the invitation and John Lachs for the opportunity to provide these comments, and Mark Moller for requesting them for *WJS*. Rather than indicate it each and every time, I note here that I have added italics in quotations from James, Emerson, and Stevens in order to underscore the prominence of visual metaphors throughout their thinking and writing.

² William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology, and to Students on Some of Life’s Ideals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). Originally published in 1899 and referred to as *Talks* in textual citations, this volume contains “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” (132-149).

³ The immediately preceding quotations are all from William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), which was originally published in 1909. What James wanted, of course, was a philosophy that would “lie flat on its belly in the middle of experience” rather than stand above experience, attempting to achieve a single, once-and-for-all, God’s-eye “vision of things” (125). Richard Bernstein remarks in the “Introduction” to *A Pluralistic Universe* that “we must take the metaphor of vision quite seriously, especially that

sense of vision in which we are aware that what we see – what falls within our field of vision – is more than we can articulate or capture in our conceptual schemes” (xiii). It is additionally relevant to note Ignas Skrupskelis’ regret that James’s late-life work on pragmatism served as “the central distraction” that kept him “away from systematic reflection” on “philosophy as vision, a task for which he was better suited by temperament and literary talents.” See Skrupskelis’s “Introduction” to *The Correspondence of William James* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 11: xlvi. (This 12-volume collection of correspondence, published between 1992 and 2004, will hereafter be cited as *CWJ*.) James’s appreciation of the multifarious nature of vision as well as other sensory modalities, and hence the varying experiences of others to which we should be attuned, extended even to animals: “How different,” he noted as early as 1878 and then again in 1890, “must be the worlds in the consciousness of ant, cuttle-fish, or crab!” See *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), I: 277. These different worlds, he suggested, were just as empirically valid and reliable – in other words, just as “real” – as our own.

⁴ On the relations between James’s views on human understanding and his earlier experiences as an artist’s apprentice, see David E. Leary, “William James and the Art of Human Understanding,” *American Psychologist* 47 (February 1992): 152-160. Emerson, of course, famously described himself as “a transparent eye-ball” in his important essay on “Nature” (1837), which is reprinted in his *Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 5-49 (see 10). Besides his experiences in the arts and the related ideas that he absorbed from Emerson, there is evidence to suggest that James’s awareness of the variation of inner sensibilities was enhanced by the different responses of friends and acquaintances to the transformative experiences of their time: the Civil War, violent labor strife, racial discord, professional and international imperialism, new forms of insanity and asylum care, and the like. More personal and familial experiences probably also played a role. I will mention only one such instance, involving his sister (not his wife) Alice: In a letter to Alice, as she lay slowly dying in 1891, James wrote:

How many times I have thought, in the past year, when my days were so full of strong and varied impressions and activities, of the long unchanging hours in bed which those days stood for with you, and wondered how you bore the slow-paced monotony at all, as you did! You can’t tell how I’ve pitied you. (*CWJ* 7: 178)

To which Alice replied:

When I am gone, pray don’t think of me simply as a creature who might have been something else, had neurotic science been born. Notwithstanding the poverty of my outside experience I have always had a significance for myself . . . and what more can a human soul ask for?

In fact, she concluded, “this year has been one of the happiest I have ever known, surrounded by such affection and devotion.” Alice’s reply is calendared in *CWJ* 7: 583 but transcribed in Jean Strouse, *Alice James: A Biography* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 338. This exchange almost certainly had a significant impact on James. He had missed the inner joy in a life that mattered a great deal to him: The strange, as John Lachs reminds us, can be very close at hand, indeed, within our very home.

⁵ The immediately preceding quotations are all from Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Natural History of Intellect” (1870), in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Vol. 12. Natural History of Intellect and Other Papers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1893), 1-110.

⁶ William James, “[Notes on Art and Pessimism]” (1873), in *Manuscript Essays and Notes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 294-296 (see 295).

⁷ William James, “The Teaching of Philosophy in Our Colleges” (1876), in *Essays in Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 3-6 (see 4-5).

⁸ James’s admission of Emerson’s tenfold greater influence upon him was made in a letter to Henry Lee Higginson on 7 February 1903 (*CWJ* 10: 199). The other statements were made in his centennial address on “Emerson” (1903), in *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 109-115 (see 114-115). It may be instructive, especially regarding distinctive aspects of James’s concern about “human blindness,” to note that Friedrich Nietzsche also acknowledged the preeminent influence of Emerson, which led him to emphasize

vision and perspective in his work. (As a sign of his appreciation and debt, Nietzsche frequently carried copies of Emerson's essays with him when he traveled.) First, we should recognize some important parallels: Both Nietzsche and James, as direct intellectual descendants of Emerson, responded on a fundamental level to Emerson's call for individuality, self-reliance, and seeing things afresh; both were persuaded by Emerson that experience is always perspectival and each accepted the consequences of this position; and both believed, as Emerson did, that understanding had to be created largely through the use of metaphorical thinking. As I have sometimes put it, Nietzsche can be seen as "James with an attitude." Nonetheless, the differences between them are crucial, and they revolve around the issues raised in "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings." Emerson was resolutely democratic: He inspired Walt Whitman, the great poet of the common person. Nietzsche, though he would have liked to believe that each person can be a self-reliant thinker and doer, doubted that it was realistic to expect that: so he called for a role model, or "superman," who would inspire new ways of thinking and acting in the masses, as the remains of Christendom decayed all around them. James, however, was (if I may be allowed some latitude in terminology) a radically *pluralistic* individualist. Each and every individual has dignity and responsibility in James's way of thinking, and it is up to each of us to "live and let live": to see that all humans and even non-humans thrive to the fullest extent that they can. As James well knew, his commitment to this ideal was an act of faith that, so far as it was lived out, helped to actualize a truly democratic, libertarian way of life. And it all depended on having an Emersonian "vision" of individuality. It is appropriate, then, that James wanted the inscription on Harvard's newly built Emerson Hall (dedicated in 1904) to read: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). A related comparison of Nietzsche and James can be made regarding the relevance of seeing "something strange" as "something familiar," and vice versa, as Nietzsche espoused, echoing romantic poets like Novalis, Wordsworth, and Coleridge as well as Emerson. James, we might remember in this context, stated that "philosophy. . . is able to fancy everything different from what it is. It sees the familiar as if it were strange, and the strange as if it were familiar." And this is what it should do, James argued, thus opening up new perspectives or viewpoints: new ways of seeing reality. On this point, confer William James's *Some Problems of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 11. This work was first published posthumously in 1911. Nietzsche made these various points in many places, but perhaps most provocatively in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. & ed. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), 437-599. He began developing his views around the same time as James, as indicated by his notebook entry "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (1873), in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, trans. & ed. D. Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1979), 77-97.

² William James, "What Makes Life Significant" (1899), in *Talks*, 150-167 (see 167).

¹⁰ Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Thirteen Pragmatisms," *Journal of Philosophy* 5 (2 January 1908): 5-12; (16 January 1908): 29-39; also in *The Thirteen Pragmatisms and Other Essays* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963), 1-29. For James's comments on Lovejoy, see *CWJ* 11: 499 & 522.

¹¹ Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (1917) and "On the Road Home" (1942), in *The Collected Poems* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 92-95 & 203-204 (see 203-204).

¹² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985). This work was originally published in 1902. Peirce's comment can be found in Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), II: 286. James's comment can be found, not in *Varieties*, but in a work leading up to *Varieties*, i.e., "Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine" (1898), in *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 101.

¹³ This message comes through clearly in James's first two substantive publications, "Brute and Human Intellect" (1878), in *Essays in Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1-37, and "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence" (1878), in *Essays on Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 7-22; and it is widespread throughout his 1890 masterpiece, *The Principles of Psychology*, especially I: 109-131, 380-433, & 457-518 and II: 952-993.

¹⁴ See, e.g., John Dewey, *How We Think* (1910), in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), VI: 177-356.

¹⁵ I conclude with a comment on “the good life for all” because that was the major concern that motivated James’s essay “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings.” In this regard, it is relevant to note that only the first five of John Lachs’ ten categories of “human blindness” deal with James’s own central topic: our blindness toward others. And regarding this topic, it is important to note that it wasn’t primarily the consequences of blindness *for the person who does not see* that exercised James, but the consequences *for those who are not seen*. This point underscores the deeply social aspect of James’s essay, and of his thought in general, to which scholars are often blind. Not only is everyone’s sense of self fundamentally social in James’s view (see *The Principles of Psychology*, I: 281-283), but any genuine and thoroughgoing commitment to individualism, he felt, had to extend to *every* individual, not just oneself: A true individualist will realize that every individual is special and deserves to flourish. That is the nub on which his essay revolves: how to appreciate more fully the inner worth of *other* lives, even (or especially) those lives that are committed to different values and replete with unknown experiences. Such appreciation, he felt, is a necessary condition for a world in which *all* may live fulfilling lives. Accordingly, James would not want any elaboration of his essay to distract us from attending to the positive ways in which simple and direct sensitivity to the experiences, concerns, beliefs, aspirations, and possibilities of others can impact upon the dignity and quality of their lives. His own openness to others was such that he has often been described as gullible – as being blind to the foibles, shortcomings, and biases of others – but it is worth noting that his seeming gullibility was typically due to his unique delight in the distinctive viewpoints and potential insights of each and every human being. He truly believed, as he wrote at the end of his essay, that “neither the whole of truth, nor the whole of good, is revealed to any single observer” and that “each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands” (*Talks*, 149). He further believed that this relative superiority of insight, no matter who has it at any given moment, should be allowed appropriate expression, and this expression should receive appropriate attention. He presented another version of this same conclusion a few years later at the end of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* – the work that Peirce considered James’s best. Each of us, James wrote in *Varieties*, “from his peculiar angle of observation, takes in a certain sphere of fact and trouble,” and each of us assumes a distinctive “attitude” toward our own facts and troubles. This unique form of awareness – this very personalized consciousness – constitutes the distinctive “syllable,” as James put it, that we can contribute to “human nature’s total message.” But since no one’s awareness is always superior to that of others, the total message of human existence will take “the whole of us to spell out” (384). So it is, James believed, that whatever truth, goodness, and beauty human beings can create or comprehend depends ultimately upon the shared vision of all. To this significant extent, then, each of us benefits whenever “a certain blindness in human beings” is ameliorated.

The 'Riven' Self as remedy to 'a Certain Blindness'

Frederick J. Ruf

Abstract: In "A Certain Blindness in Human Beings" William James observes that humans are blind to what is strange, most especially to strangers. He both forbids a quick judgment of strange lives and urges "tolerance, respect," and "indulgence." And yet James does more. By modeling a strange self, himself, through the style of his essay, he displays a self that has the capacity "to be grasped" by the strangeness of others. Similarly, of four novels that were written in the wake of 9/11, by Richard Ford, Ian McEwan, Philip Roth, and Don DeLillo, only that by DeLillo is responsive to the event, and he does so by means of the Jamesian remedy: stylistically embodying the "riven self."

Though it might seem odd to make the claim (an oddness that might, however, recommend the comparison, rather than not, according to the logic of James's own essay), Nietzsche would seem to be a valuable key to understanding "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings." In section 355 of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche wonders about knowledge. "What do we want when we want 'knowledge'?" he asks. "Something strange is to be reduced to something familiar," Nietzsche points out. "Look, isn't our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover under everything strange, unusual, and questionable something that no longer disturbs us? Is it not the instinct of fear that bids us to know?"¹

James, too, finds that we are blind to what is strange, and, most especially, to strangers, to those in "prisons and sickrooms," to those with "alien lives."² Not fear for James but the practical life "hardens" us to "everything unlike [us]."³ None of this is news or worth yet another paper on James's superb essay. But I would like to follow the turn that Nietzsche takes in the section from which I've been quoting and then follow it in James ... and then a little ways beyond James into another writer, contemporary to us, Don DeLillo, in order to look at what I take to be a crucial consequence of James's essay, the value of strange selves in a strange world.

First Nietzsche. Since he is most comfortable in the accusatory mode, Nietzsche berates us for reducing the strange to the familiar and then, wonderfully, berates us for thinking that the familiar is *less strange* and, thus, more easily knowable. No, corrects Nietzsche, "What is familiar is what we are used to, and what we are used to is most difficult to 'know'—that is, to see as a problem; that is to see as strange...."⁴ By a characteristic reversal, Nietzsche moves us back from the familiar to the strange and forces us to consider how that which is most familiar, that is, *we*, our own selves, are what is the most difficult to see as strange. It is the self that is the most strange, and knowledge should mean encountering that strangeness.

In the essay he wrote roughly a decade after Nietzsche discussed strangeness, William James seems not to take that final turn, back into the self and its own strangeness. He seems to be focused on others, our blindness of them. "What is the result of all [the] considerations and quotations," James asks. They "[forbid] us to pronounce on the meaninglessness" of strangers.⁵ The strangeness of others consists in their feelings, so much harder to understand than their ideas. And those feelings are a "vital secret," so strange to us locked within our own feelings.⁶ The "havoc" of the North Carolina mountaineer and the incommunicable joy of Stevenson's bull's-eye lantern

“confound” us.⁷ Yes, it is the strangeness of the other that impresses and attracts James. “Hands off” any attempts to render that strangeness familiar, he commands.⁸ But what of James’s self? What of the strangeness of *his* self?

James does not address his own strangeness directly, but that is just because James is more subtle than Nietzsche, that self-described “subtlest of spirits,” when it comes to the nature of the self and its strangeness.

In late Nineteenth Century literary circles, it was a commonplace that the style of a work—or style more generally—presented personality. From the time of the Romantics, the point of writing was not to be the mirror of nature but, as we well know, the expression of the self, and while that aim applied especially to the substance of a work – that the content of a work exists to express the author—by the time of the late 19th Century aesthetes such as Pater and Wilde, it was the mere style, that which had seemed superficial and the mere means, that was of particular value for seeing the self. I know of no one who thinks of James as an aesthete, far from it. But, nonetheless, it is in the *style* of James’s essay, that we see the man ... and his strangeness. James himself praises embodiment, and wants us to “descend to a more profound and primitive level,” to the level of “seeing, smelling, tasting, sleeping, and daring and doing with one’s body.”⁹ James’s self in “Blindness” is embodied in the style of his writing.

The manner of James’s writing can be found to be exasperating (I once told Mark Taylor, the preeminent postmodern theologian, that I was writing on James and he declared that James was simple and superficial!). There is Ralph Barton Perry’s description of the *Principles* as “meanderings, zig-zags, and circles.”¹⁰ But let us look more closely at the style of “Blindness” to see James’s self. We can note three characteristics: First, stylistically his essay is populated. Second, the others in his text have strong voices. And third, the voices in his essay articulate some element that is both attractive and incorrigible.

Remarkably, well over 50% of “On a Certain Blindness” is composed of quotation. Robert Lewis Stevenson, Josiah Royce, William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, Leo Tolstoy, among others. Vast tracts of quotation and not just isolated lines. Long paragraphs, whole pages. These speakers have a chance to get started, to build momentum, and to take over, to own the reader’s attention. We may not forget the context of the essay but, then again, we may, and at the least James’s own voice becomes faint. That is especially true because of the nature of the voices James has chosen. He reminds me (perhaps again oddly) of someone like Henry Miller who selects his friends for the power of their personalities, for their ability to perform the “Ninth Symphony of their travails,” as Miller says of a friend in *The Colossus of Maroussi*.¹¹ Stevenson, Royce, Wordsworth, Whitman, Tolstoy—these are not minor writers or thinkers. They have the intellectual heft and artistic skill to seize a page or an essay, to commandeer a work and steer it. *Moreover* James allows each to speak of that “vital secret,” that “joy,” that “burning, wilful life.”¹² The power of the inner life of these men is what speaks in these voices, such that James likens it to a “revelation,” with qualities of attraction and repulsion, of that which has both value and which defeats our habits of estimation.¹³ I like Charles Winquist’s term “incorrigibility” for the experiences that James arranges to have uttered in his essay: experiences that refuse to be tamed, feelings that defeat our understandings.¹⁴

James both forbids a quick judgment of these strange lives and urges “tolerance, respect,” and indulgence.¹⁵ But he does more. He models a way of being that has, as he says, “responsive sensibilities,” a capacity “to be grasped.”¹⁶ The model lies in the style of his writing. A self composed (not unlike Whitman) of a plurality of strong voices empowered to speak of what is attractive and incorrigible. *That* is the self of this essay, and that, I would suggest, is James’s remedy for blindness, a much more impressive one than tolerance. Only the strange self can be receptive to the stranger.

My observation, then, is a fairly simple one. James argues that we are blind to strangers, and he enacts an adequate (but tacit) remedy to blindness by taking on a style and self that are strange, as well, by being composed (quite literally) of many strong voices uttering visions of the attractive and incorrigible. My suggestion, following James in this essay, is as follows: would we be adequate to the strangeness of others and the world, we must take on strangeness ourselves.

I would like to illustrate my suggestion by looking at four literary responses to 9/11 by four of the preeminent novelists of our time, Richard Ford, Ian McEwan, Philip Roth, and Don DeLillo.¹⁷ Do not fear; I will be brief. Only DeLillo presents us with the Jamesian solution.

Over the past several months, I have found myself interested in literary responses to September 11—that odd apostrophe for an event that re-taught us the meaning of the term, “enormity.” As English teachers instructed us in high school (and as we did not understand), “enormity” does not mean “of great size.” It means “a considerable departure from the expected or normal,” though this definition from Merriam-Webster is too weak, as well.¹⁸ An enormity *defeats* the expected or normal. We are blind to enormity, “the whole scheme of our customary values gets confounded ... our self is riven.”¹⁹ Those last expressions are from James’s essay, of course. My interest, then, is how our most responsive sensibilities are adequate to this enormity. Are they blind? Just what does it take, today, to see?

I heard Richard Ford interviewed on the NPR show, *Studio 360*, in August 2007. The Pen/Faulkner and Pulitzer Prize winning novelist was asked why his latest novel, *The Lay of the Land*, which was written after September of 2001, was placed *before* that event.²⁰ Ford replied, “I didn’t think I had the capacity to write a novel that was set in the aftermath of Sept 11 ... events, even cataclysmic events ... all around me have to settle into the ground around me and then sort of percolate back up into my feet.”²¹ I love the metaphor Ford uses: the cataclysm must have fallen, settled, and been broken completely down into the elements that we can draw up and absorb into our accustomed bodies. We need to be able to walk upon the cataclysmic events and draw them into us as plants draw up water. The affable, gently ironic, chagrined self that inhabits Ford’s novels is *not* confounded.

Another contemporary novelist, Ian McEwan, likewise the recipient of numerous awards, including the Booker Prize, also has a novel that was written after Sept. 11. It is called *Saturday*.²² Terrorism is distantly alluded to, as a character wakes in the night and sees a flaming plane descend into Heathrow. “Everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed.”²³ An atmosphere of ominous threat persists in the novel, but the genuine threat is closer to home, vicious men who take the family hostage, and a neurological disease that is on the edge of killing one of those men. McEwan’s cultured and cultivated prose, skilled and sensitive, erudite beyond any of the others in this group—that self is shaken by personal violence, including his own, but it is unable to encounter the greater strangeness and enormity of that *Tuesday*.

Philip Roth, too, has a post-9/11 novel, *Exit Ghost*, and it, too, has a glancing relation to the “enormity,” a woman who wants to leave Manhattan.²⁴ “I’m scared all the time,” she says.²⁵ But, as with McEwan, there are more immediate threats, namely Nathan Zuckerman’s prostate cancer and his looming death. Postmodern Roth’s self-referential, morally demanding, destabilizing style of writing is still held together by a self-fascination that successfully deflects being confounded by anything other than a mortality that is both terrible enough and not all that strange.

Only Don DeLillo, in *Falling Man* (note the title), has written a novel directly about September 11.²⁶ Only DeLillo is responsive to its great strangeness and to the strangeness of those who lived through it. Only he allows “the whole scheme of [his] customary values [to get] confounded.” How? Stylistically DeLillo presents us with what we might call the “riven self.”

This is a brief paper. I can’t perform the whole analysis of DeLillo’s very, very odd style of writing, let me first quote a passage and then point out a few of his stylistic aspects in that and subsequent paragraphs.

It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was running north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads. They had handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths. They had shoes in their hands, a woman with a shoe in each hand, running past him. They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars.²⁷

DeLillo’s style (I would say his *self*) is made of indefinite pronouns, “It was not a street anymore,” an indefinite way to begin a novel (“Call me Ishmael,” it is not). “It happened everywhere around him.”²⁸ “He watched *it* coming down.”²⁹ His style (and self) is made of the frequent use of the even more vague pronouns “this” and “that.” “*This* was the world now... . The world was *this* as well” without any clear references for those pronouns.³⁰ The style and self is made of truncated conversations, of narrative failure (“There was something critically missing from the things around him. They were unfinished, whatever that means. They were unseen, whatever that means.”³¹) I could multiple the stylistic elements that would indicate poor writing ordinarily. We might compare Ford, McEwan, and Roth who never write in such a way. They are what we consider to be superb stylists, masters of clear, precise prose. To read them is to feel pleasure and satisfaction: events as difficult as neurological diseases and prostate cancer, criminality, and fear have, as Ford says, percolated from the ground and been rendered in well-shaped, articulate sentences; they have been made into a body and a self that is cohesive, coherent, and accomplished. Not so DeLillo. We admire writing that depicts personality and character, a voice that is a human, even a humane voice. DeLillo’s style depicts an oddly dehumanized self, one that is made of words, not thoughts; one de-contextualized, not contextualized; one abstract not concrete. There is an expression that DeLillo uses for Alzheimer’s patients who are in a writing class in the novel: their writings are of “a mind beginning to slide away from the adhesive friction that makes an individual possible.” DeLillo’s voice in the novel lacks “adhesive friction.”³² It has, in another expression he uses (one terribly appropriate to the event of 9/11), “downdraft.”³³

DeLillo’s self is certainly a strange one. I sometimes feel the impulse to condemn him for dehumanizing the self, for losing the cohesive and coherent self that we can see and admire so much in Ford, McEwan, and Roth, and that I sometimes think is identical with being human and humane. But our standard here is one of blindness. Implicit in James’s essay is the notion that being human and humane means having a remedy to blindness. Do Ford, McEwan, and Roth “feel intensely the importance of their own duties,” as James says, and are they, thus far, blind to the “havoc” of the enormity of September 11 and those who most directly experienced it?³⁴ Does DeLillo, alone, have

the “responsive sensibility”? I would say yes. A much more extensive pragmatic analysis is needed, but we can say that, like James, he has loosened the “adhesive friction” of strong authorial control, and there takes place in the self of his style a “downdrift” that values and responds to the other, even if (no, *because*) that response is confounded and riven. There is no absence of coherence and cohesion, of course. But they are noticeably lessened—in James *and* DeLillo—so much so, in fact, that what we have might be different in kind. What we have in DeLillo, as in James, or as in “the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves,” might be too strange for us to appreciate.³⁵

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Notes

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* transl. by Walter Kaufman (New York, Vintage, 1974), pp. 300-301.

² William James, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” in *Talks To Teachers on Psychology and To Students on Some of Life’s Ideals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp., 149, 132.

³Ibid., 138.

⁴ Nietzsche, p. 301.

⁵ James, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” 149.

⁶ Ibid., 132.

⁷ Ibid., 133, 138.

⁸ Ibid., 149.

⁹ Ibid., 146.

¹⁰Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Vol. II (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935), p. 668.

¹¹ Henry Miller, *The Colossus of Maroussi* (New York: New Directions, 1941), 58.

¹² Ibid., p. 138.

¹³ Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁴ Charles Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 17-44.

¹⁵ James, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” 149.

¹⁶ Ibid., 146.

¹⁷ These authors have had other novels published since 2001, but those I will look at seem to be their first to actively reflect (or avoid) the events of September 11.

- ¹⁸ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enormity>
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 138.
- ²⁰ Richard Ford, *The Lay of the Land* (New York, Vantage, 2006).
- ²¹ <http://www.studio360.org/episodes/2007/08/10>
- ²² Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (New York: Anchor, 2005).
- ²³ McEwan, 15.
- ²⁴ Philip Roth, *Exit Ghost* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).
- ²⁵ Roth, 37.
- ²⁶ Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (New York: Scribners, 2007).
- ²⁷ Ibid., 3.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 3.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 4.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 3, 4.
- ³¹ Ibid., 5.
- ³² Ibid., 30.
- ³³ Ibid., 32.
- ³⁴ James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," 132.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 132.

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Flowers in the Desert: F. C. S. Schiller's [Unpublished] Pragmatism Lecture

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Abstract: Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller (1864-1937) was the most prominent of first generation British pragmatists. He remains, however, a peripheral figure in the intellectual history of pragmatism. This unpublished lecture, the planned revisions for a course Schiller taught at the University of Southern California, ranges to cover a series of issues central to his philosophical outlook: (1) the creation and naming of pragmatism; (2) the importance of Protagoras to his particular stance on pragmatism; (3) the necessity of Jamesian psychology; and, finally, (4) the nature of pragmatism as method. These selections provide an indication of Schiller's relevance, then as now, to discussions of pragmatism.

"I'm not expecting to grow flowers in the desert,
but I can live and breathe and see the sun in wintertime."

—Big Country, "In a Big Country."

Introduction

The mid-1920s to early-1930s were, generally speaking, good years for pragmatism. New works on Peirce were produced. Multi-volume sets related to James were in wide circulation. And the 'instrumental' works of Dewey maintained a healthy readership. The works that often constitute the basic introduction to pragmatism, by the men that form the generally accepted triumvirate, had not yet suffered the loss of confidence that was born of WWII. These same years were a mixed blessing for Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller. Denied several chances at a professorship, he gave up his Tutorship at Corpus Christi, Oxford, in 1926. At the same time, Schiller began to teach and spend part of the year at the University of Southern California. During the next decade he split his time between England and the United States, giving guest lectures, teaching periodic seminars at USC, receiving an honorary Professorship, and continuing to publish numerous essays and book reviews in journals such as *Mind* and the USC-based *Personalist*. But by 1935, with his health in decline, Schiller vacated his residence at Corpus Christi, moved full-time to Los Angeles, and resigned from his teaching duties at USC. Two years later, on August 6, 1937, Schiller died.

Schiller's prolific scholarly output is a matter of neglected public record. His works gained renewed attention in the 1950s and 1960s,¹ and then again in the past several years.² But Schiller's teaching at USC, aside from several articles in the *Personalist* around the time of his death, has received even less attention than his scholarly writings. This is, however, an important period in Schiller's life. In the 1920s and 1930s Schiller was finally freed of the strictures of being a Tutor at Corpus Christi. At USC he was able to engage, for the first time, graduate as well as undergraduate students. While there, he taught a variety of classes including one on Pragmatism in 1933 and again in 1934.³ The lecture discussed below appears to be a handwritten revision of the 1934 lecture that was drafted in 1935. It contains both major and minor revisions, in the margins and in the text itself, for a future version of the course that was never to come to fruition.⁴ The message Schiller prepared for those students reflected the particularities of his

philosophical work in England. That is to say, his lecture speaks to the stance he had developed and propagated as a British outlier in what was considered by some, even then, a distinctly American philosophical movement. But it is a message that was never delivered and, to this point, not published.

On a mundane level, this lecture is symptomatic of a growing tendency in Schiller's later years: he repeated—again and again, and more and more in reference to his increased interest in eugenics—the basic tenets of his particular version of pragmatism, *Humanism*. Taken as such, one can simply make reference to his last published essays and posthumous book, *Our Human Truths* (edited by his wife, Louise, whom he met in the mid-1920s and married in 1935), and glean the thrust of his approach. This approach is fraught with problems. Most notably, it obfuscates Schiller's active role in the promotion and development of pragmatism. At worst, Schiller's contributions tend to be isolated—by his decidedly curious interests, his lack of proximity to pragmatism's development in America, and his penchant for biting humor—from the strains of pragmatism that developed after his death. At best, his repetition comes to be *mere* repetition. For a philosophical method predicated on flexibility and adaptation, Schiller is brusquely coded as having nothing new to say. 3

My humble estimation is that this lecture is worth more: it is an alternative history of pragmatism written by a person largely written out of pragmatism's history. Schiller is not a simplistic caricature, a literary provocateur who “misread” James.⁵ He was a frustrated pragmatist attempting to defend what he viewed as one of the last truly Jamesian forms of pragmatism. Schiller was not comfortable with the growing canonization of Peirce by scholars such as Paul Weiss and Charles Hartshorne. He argued that Peirce's forays in *pragmaticism* signaled his willingness to give up the method his friend James had charitably assigned to him. Nor was he fully willing to cede pragmatism to the instrumental views of Dewey, a philosopher that Schiller positively reviewed but also actively critiqued in terms of range and style. Most personally, Schiller felt that James was being put to questionable ends. Whether in the realist revisions of Perry or in the disparaging critiques of James by Charles William Morris, Schiller felt that the unique contributions of James were being purged from pragmatism. Read in this way, Schiller's lecture is less repetition and more an urgent plea for views in the shadows of convention, then as now. 4

What follows, then, is a selective snapshot of Schiller's lecture. It ranges to cover Schiller's views on four issues: (1) the creation and naming of pragmatism; (2) the importance of Protagoras to his particular stance on pragmatism; (3) the necessity of Jamesian psychology; and, finally, (4) the nature of pragmatism as method. This lecture pointedly demonstrates Schiller's commitment to a version of pragmatism predicated on, but not merely a facsimile of, the Jamesian psychology that first attracted him to James while he was at Cornell University in the 1890s. Schiller once noted that “the origins of great truths, as of great men, are usually obscure, and by the time that the world has become cognizant of them and interested in their pedigree, they have usually grown old.”⁶ I would argue that any earnest history of pragmatism profits from the inclusion of Schiller's views. 5

A Bad Name from a Good Man

While it is true that Schiller grants the American origins of pragmatism, he is careful to suggest—against then and now current trends—that the innovative genius of pragmatism emanated from James and not Pierce: 6

The history of philosophy is not rich in new ideas. I once set myself to enumerate them, and could not find more than nine that could be called new and important. You will find them in Chapter Eight of Must Philosophers Disagree?⁷ The last among them and the only one to take birth in America, and specifically in California, is that which now usually goes under the name of Pragmatism. Its first appearance as such can be definitely traced to the lecture on Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results given by William James of Harvard at the University of California Berkeley in 1898. In this lecture James professed himself indebted for the name, and [a great part] of the idea to his somewhat older friend Charles Sanders Peirce. The latter had invented the name, and expounded the idea long before in a series of articles on How to Make our Ideas in the Popular Science Monthly in 1877. He had not however used the word Pragmatism. So it was new when James revealed it.

Peirce was something of a preoccupation for Schiller in his later years. The reasons are tied to his insistence that James was being overlooked as the true messenger of pragmatism. On the one hand, he viewed the new focus on Peirce as the *founder* of pragmatism as technically true though theoretically suspect. On the other, he saw this trend as a way of side-stepping the substance that James had brought to pragmatism, a radical empiricism that then-current pragmatism was either moving away from (in the works of Dewey and Mead) or tactfully revising out of the canon (as in the works of Perry). Schiller goes on in the lecture to make a parenthetical reference to another object of his derision: Hartshorne's and Weiss's multi-volume Peirce collection.⁸ The substance of those reviews charts a similar path. Schiller goes so far as to suggest that Peirce was one of the “cranks” that James graciously, if at times unnecessarily, took sympathy upon. He argues that this is but another mistaken attempt to replace James with Peirce in the development of pragmatism. 7

This renewed veneration of Peirce as the founder of pragmatism carried another risk as well. It threatened to further obscure Schiller's pragmatic humanism, itself a more general application of Jamesian pragmatism. So Schiller took pains to link his approach to the more well known historical controversy surrounding the term of art that was to carry forward James's pioneering approach:

The naming of a new idea in philosophy is not however an easy matter. You can't, when you've got hold of an idea which seems to you good and new, simply go ahead and give it the name which seems best to you. You have to get others to adopt it, and particularly your enemies. And if you give your idea too good a name . . . they'll want to use your name themselves for some nefarious . . . purposes of their own. So you find that you can't keep your name in the sense you gave it. Its sense gets blurred and confused and ambiguous by the use of it by those who were really enemies of its original meaning. I'm speaking from painful personal experience. For when in 1903 I tried to turn the word 'Humanism' into a technical term of philosophy and to use it to describe the particular sort of Pragmatism I favored, I soon found that I could not keep it. It was at once snapped up by those who were most antithetical to the sense I had given to Humanism, and the misuse of this . . . word went on until, when last I counted its senses about two years ago, there were no less than six distinct and largely incompatible senses of the word which it was necessary to distinguish. So you see we must not only be aware of giving your dog such a bad name that he is banged for it, but also of giving him such a good one that it is stolen from him.

Clearly then in the baptizing of a new philosophy, not only its friends but also its enemies have a say. In fact, they may have rather more say than its authors. If you try to give it a good and attractive name they will try to appropriate it, and it is only if it is bad obscure and unattractive that they will let you keep it . . .

The history of the term 'Pragmatism' then is merely another case of a very general principle. Pragmatism was a bad term and a heavy handicap to start with; if a philosopher with a good literary sense like William James or Whitehead or Bertrand Russell had had to do the naming, instead of Peirce who had the pedant's foible of loving technical terms for their own sake, they would assuredly have given the poor dog a much better name. But very likely the better names would not have stuck. Pragmatism was at once adopted by its enemies because it was a bad name and therefore a good name for their purposes, while its friends were not allowed to drop it.

But why is 'Pragmatism' a bad name? It is (1) obscure and (2) badly formed. (1) It suggests no clue as to its meaning at first sight, or nothing that it is not misleading, and needs a good deal of explanation. A good half-hour is quite a moderate estimation of the time required for a thorough account of the world 'Pragmatism'; so its choice is truly a very severe handicap.

(2) When I say that 'Pragmatism' is badly formed, I mean that in Peirce's usage it would seem to be intended to hint at a direct connection with practice. It comes from the Greek word 'pragma'; but this too comes from the same root as 'praxis' which means a thing, or a thing done, rather than an act. In this it is like the German word for fact 'Tatsache', literally a 'deed-thing'. 'Fact' we may properly remind ourselves originally meant 'thing made,' so that ordinary language has very distinctly pragmatic implications . . .

Now of course all this soon became clear to James. Nevertheless when I proposed, in 1903, a much better word 'Humanism', which suggests both humaneness and humanness, he would not adopt the change. He said the term 'pragmatism' had already been taken up and become current. Of course it had been taken up most avidly by the opponents of pragmatism, who realized how bad a term it was. According to Mrs. James, James afterwards regretted his action; but I had to content myself with using 'humanism' for my own variety of pragmatism—which points out how close it was to James's own use. Peirce, after awhile disavowed James and called his own sort of pragmatism 'pragmaticism', which was "ugly enough to save it from kidnappers." But he never succeeded in explaining either how his 'pragmaticism' differed from 'pragmatism' nor why he was so displeased with James and the other pragmatists when they proceeded to put his original formula to work. The truth was that over twenty years had elapsed between its original formulations and its popularization by James, and Peirce meanwhile had lost his interest in Scientific Method and got interested in other things, mostly Symbolic Logic. When James got him to give six lectures on Pragmatism at Harvard he talked about anything but his nominal duty, and James could only describe his lectures as "flashes of brilliance lit upon a background of Cimmerian dark."

Some might question this historical timeline. But if the record of Schiller's correspondence with James is correct, he is actually downplaying his role in these developments. Schiller agonized over whether or not James would take to his new term. In the months leading up to the release of *Humanism: Philosophical Essays* (1903), Schiller sent a near constant stream of letters to James asking for his endorsement. The signals from James were not good: silence and then the now-famous comment that they were stuck with the term pragmatism. James had a change of heart though. And he made it clear that he regretted not taking up the cause of humanism sooner.

The cause for the change? James was treated to a dose of medicine by then common to Schiller: scathing criticism. 10 Unkind characterizations of James's *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), by Charles M. Bakewell and John Ellis McTaggart among others, finally convert James to a new view. He fumes that he was "tired of being treated as 1/2 idiot, 1/2 scoundrel . . ." 12 Irritated by the trouble his poorly named method had caused him, he confides to Schiller: "Don't think, my dear Schiller, that I don't see as if in a blaze of light, the all embracing scope of your humanism, and how it sucks my pragmatism up into itself. I doubt I shall trouble myself to write anything more about pragmatism. If anything more about truth, it will be on the wider humanistic lines." 10 This change of heart, born out in some of the content in the *The Meaning of Truth* (1909), was important to Schiller. It provided sanction for Schiller's contention that his understanding of pragmatism, including the in-minor-details-only characterization of Peirce, was privileged by the man who truly "revealed" it to the world. It also provided something more. Having gained assent to the new term of art, Schiller was now free to write the history of his pragmatic humanism.

Man is the Measure

Schiller urged at the beginning of the lecture that pragmatism was truly a new development in the history of philosophy. What follows, then, initially seems counter-intuitive: a history of the origins of humanism, itself an outgrowth of pragmatism, which extends back in time prior to pragmatism. This, however, is a tactical history. As much as humanism was meant to stave off pragmatism's critics, both humanism and pragmatism were part of long established historical tendencies. Such tendencies suggest a long-standing struggle against Idealism and Platonism, a struggle most recently waged by Schiller and James against persons such as Francis Herbert Bradley. More simply put, Schiller conceived pragmatism-as-method and humanism-as-application as active players in the historical battle to topple the theoretical abstractions of accepted philosophy: 11

We should always therefore be willing to study the ancient history of every novelty, and to learn that the idea had often occurred before. But in this study we must not expect to get much help from the standard histories of philosophy which are earlier than the effective appearance of the novelty we are investigating. Even the best of these histories will fail us when we really want to use them. For, like all historians, we shall find that they had to select. And among the things they have omitted will always be the first obscure beginnings of the new idea we are tracing. The historian is not to blame for this. For he knows that he can't dump all his materials on his reader. He must omit what he deems unimportant. And he must justify importance from the standpoint either of the past or the present; he can't foresee what little hints or details will become significant thereafter.

So whenever an important novelty crops up, the whole history has to be rewritten and revalued.

Hence there are good reasons for going a little into those histories of Pragmatism. We shall find that the history of philosophy is full of anticipation of Pragmatism, and that there are . . . a good many more that have not been discovered. For we shall not find them in the old History of Philosophy.

The earliest . . . traces of Pragmatism do not go quite so far back as Anaximander, but like so many of the brightest and best ideas in Greek Philosophy, they go back before Plato and have been preserved to us by his polemic against them. They go back to Protagoras, an elder contemporary of Socrates born either in 500 or 480 B.C., and dimmed in 411 when he fled from Athens to escape the wrath of the oligarchs and government of the 400 . . . because they recognized the democratic tendencies of his philosophy. According to Plato, an obviously hostile witness, Protagoras was one of the first and most impressive of the Sophists. Now, speaking broadly, Sophists were all humanists or pragmatists, in the sense that they were all practical philosophers concerned with human affairs; their business was to teach the young men who could afford to pay them, i.e., the young men of the well to do, the art of public speaking, in order that they might be able to defend themselves against the informers who preyed upon the rich, the 'sycophants'. Their teaching was practical . . . and they could not prosper unless the knowledge they retailed was useful, humanly valuable and related to the needs of human learning.

So Protagoras united humanism in the conduct of learning and the problems of the individual agent. He proclaimed that 'man was the measure of all things'. What did he mean by this? We can't say exactly because we've no record of the context of his dictum, and of the line of thought which led up to it. Still we can see that this was clearly relativistic + probable individualism. But it was not skepticism as his opponents tried hard to believe. For to say that every man can know and just know by his own standard is no way of denying the possibility of knowing. It only seems so to intolerant bigots who wish to prescribe their own opinions to everyone. 11

Similarly we can extract from another brief saying of Protagoras that ‘concerning all matters there are two sides which can be argued’ a perception that thinking is dependent on . . . probability and is [accompanied] by the slimmest of doubt; a point which has in modern thinking been stressed by John Dewey and Alfred Sidgwick. Indeed there is no more direct way to the heart of pragmatism than the perception that men think only when they have to, that their judgments are always answers to questions, and that their precise meaning depends on the context in which they arise.

The importance of recapturing Protagoras as the forefather of Pragmatism does not lie merely in his antiquity. True, he gives Pragmatism a respectable pedigree. But . . . still more importantly he enables us to go behind Plato and to clear our eyes of the distortions and sophistry which that great master has introduced into our mental vision, and to see philosophic problems as they would be if we could take them naturally and without bias. Let there be no mistake about this. It is not the Sophists who have been the sophisticators of mankind, but the philosophers who’ve followed in the Platonic teaching.

Schiller’s historical tour is, as he well notes, as selective as the past histories he seeks to correct. But, again, it is strategic. Protagoras serves as a historical stand-in for Schiller. And having gained James’s assent, Protagoras’ “respectable pedigree” provides Schiller with the starting point for his particular humanist strain of pragmatism. It is, in no small way, an attempt to dismantle the superstructure of Idealism under which he studied and against which pragmatism struggled for legitimacy. As Schiller noted, “Our only hope of understanding knowledge, our only chance of keeping philosophy alive . . . lies in going back from Plato to Protagoras, and ceasing to misunderstand the great teacher who discovered the Measure of man’s Universe.”¹²

The Right to Believe

But Protagoras’ pedigree served another role as well. For Schiller, the sophist and his dictum captured the *volitional* nature of pragmatism and represented the plurality of pragmatism(s) that were its strength. This embracing viewpoint—moving from James and Papini to Schiller and Dewey—was again tied to Schiller’s argument that James held the key to pragmatism’s merits. For Schiller, pragmatism found strength in its emphasis on a diversity of interests, a multitude of measures, all tending towards the human points of entry in the world. And Jamesian psychology supplied the *radical* impetus for this approach. It also supplied the retort to critics who would reduce philosophy to abstraction and render answers too mathematical to matter:

If we take psychology as the descriptive science of mental or psychic life we soon find that there are many ways of describing psychic life and of arranging its manifestations in a scientific and symbolic order. Likewise there are many aims we can get ourselves in describing mental life, and these aims will affect the descriptions we prefer. Hence there are, and will probably continue to be, a large number of psychologies, each of them representing the facts in its own way. They are comparable to the different languages we can use to express our ideas.

But whatever psychology we prefer, to some psychology we must have recourse. Whenever we try to describe how we act and think, and to form symbols of logic and ethics there is a psychological side to ethics and action which we need to know and accounts of these activities which ignore this are merely abstractions, and dangerous and false abstractions at that.

Moreover for both reasons the living organism must react upon stimulation as a whole. It can’t let its heart run away with, while its head remains unmoved. It can’t really be broken up into a number of ‘faculties’ which function independently. It must use them all and use them together in order to survive in the struggle for existence.

Hence all the ‘analytic’ psychologies, convenient as their descriptive psychologies may be, are biologically built on fictions. We are entitled to look with suspicion upon theories which interpret human thinking in terms of pure reason, disinterested, dispassionate, and depersonalized; we should refuse to exclude from our accounts even of the knowing process the influence of aims, emotions, desires and ideals, and shall admit they always actuate our thinking. We shall grow skeptical of the intellectualist [rationalizations] which rule out consideration of any thinking . . . Instead we shall trace the influence of various purposes, perceptions, prejudices, emotions and desires . . . It will therefore become hard to believe that pure theory has any relation to practice, that what we do and how we live has no effect on what we think and what we believe. Rather we shall hold that our theories spring out of our life and are intended to bear upon them; while our life invariably and properly reacts upon our beliefs. Thus the attempt to separate ethics and action, theory and practice, absolutely is a fabrication which is sure to fail in the end.

Previous commentators on Schiller, notably Allan Shields and Reuben Abel, have made much of his lifelong devotion—by turns biting, prescient, and obsessive—to overturning the practices of Formal Logic. In books such as *Formal Logic: A Scientific and Social Problem* (1912), *Problems of Belief* (1924), and *Logic for Use: An Introduction to the Voluntarist Theory of Knowledge* (1929), and numerous journal essays, Schiller railed against some sort of “pure” realm of thought divorced from actual practice. In this he was not alone. Others, such as Alfred Sidgwick and Henry Sturt, raised similar claims. But he was unique in tying this attack to principles he gleaned from James:

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The moment however we get ourselves to uphold the final unity of mind and to champion the integrity of mental life against the absolutism of intellectualism on psychological grounds, we get into conflict with inveterate traditions of philosophy. These are all intellectualistic; they offer explanations of our actions and our knowledge only in terms of intellect or cognitive processes, and they ignore all the other factors in our mental outfit. The traditional philosopher has prided himself for over 2000 years on having a monopoly on pure reason So far the psychologist has not succeeded in breaking him of this habit. It still seems almost sacrilegious to him to suggest that the motives and procedures of philosophers are not that different from those of other folk and that their reasonings also are subject to human frailties when their passions are aroused or their prejudices flouted. Nothing has made Pragmatism more unpopular among the ordinary run of philosophy . . . than the implication that philosophers are really like other people.

Yet no better proof of this contention could be found than the way the pragmatic philosophy was taken by the philosophers of the intellectualistic tradition. They did not discover it so long as it was labeled psychology. James's Principles of Psychology were welcomed as an epoch-making work. But its philosophic doctrines were overlooked. It wasn't until James called them philosophy and pragmatism that the uproar began. Yet the champions of Pure Reason did not use it [this wonderful faculty] to [comprehend] Pragmatism. They just shouted and booed. Perhaps they realized that when there is an unanswerable case against you the worst thing you can do is to try to answer it. That policy only draws attention to the badness of your case. What they did was to denounce the pragmatists as low vulgar fellows . . . or as irrational idiots who believed in whatever they wanted. In short they acted in the panic of the barrister who found his brief marked 'No case, abuse the plaintiff's attorney!'

This sort of attack paid dividends. It provided a clear platform from which to launch the merits of the pragmatic method. Yet it also drew the ire of those inside and outside the pragmatist camp. Pragmatists such as Dewey would complain that Schiller's destructive approach to Formal Logic remained just that, destructive.¹³ Fine as far as it went, Schiller was not able to build up a substantial enough substitute. Others, such as logician Lizzie Susan Stebbing, didn't take Schiller at his word. They hounded him to provide any clue as to what method would be used to determine what constituted a valid belief.¹⁴ Schiller insisted against these critics that they failed to comprehend the implications of a psychological approach:

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As a matter of fact, even abstractly, the pragmatic philosophy was just as feasible and legitimate as the rationalist. It is just as easy to represent the human mind as action, as seeking the achievement of ends, as postulating, as choosing, selecting and rejecting . . . as it is to represent it as passive, as merely receptive of 'impressions', and as [fissured] by insuperable chasms between its various 'faculties'. And as soon as you took into account the functions the mind was required to perform, you could see at once how much better the active . . . description of the mind was to the intellectualist. . . . For it is only an active mind which is stimulated by the needs of living, and is willing to use its body to operate on the [world] in order to improve the conditions of living, that can either have been served in the struggle for existence or can serve us now. It is also manifestly the sort of mind all of us have. The purely theoretical mind, that is truly . . . not interested in personal affairs at all, is a figment. Something resembling it can only arise in rather abnormal mediums when a society finds a use for it and makes it worthwhile for a few professors of pure [method] to cultivate a peculiar sort of mind. Similarly, a well-established and endowed religion alone can afford to grow theology and monks that lead purely 'contemplative' lives. It is only a large and well endowed mind which can afford to appoint proponents of pure mathematics and the like, to pursue researches which seem at first sight utterly useless. But those institutions would not appoint them if they believed this. They may indeed admit that for ordinary purposes their uses are remote, but they will flatter themselves that their work is of a higher order; moreover they will take an interest in it which is often intense.

Interest in short is the psychological stimulus which all must evoke if it is to seem valuable, and to be persisted in, alike by the individual and by society. It's the great common measure for the activities of the human soul, and without it nothing can be done or thought or felt. But interest is not itself an intellectual process. It belongs to the active and personal side of mind, according to the traditional classification. May we not conclude that the intellectualist psychologies are false and that a psychology is needed which brings out the role of interest and purpose in mental life? In short it is no accident that the beginnings of modern Pragmatism are closely connected with James's epoch making Principles of Psychology (1890), and that

the last chapter of that great work already contained James's contribution to Pragmatism in substantially completed form. It was the source also of John Dewey's instrumentalism.

For Schiller, it is clear, James is the template. A 'tough-minded' approach does not devolve into formulaic pronouncements, does not reduce to abstraction. It obtains clarity via complexity but also revision. The alternative is a skeptical delusion. Philosophers such as Bradley propped up an overly theoretical view of the world. Their abstractions were "the nightmares of a mind distraught."¹⁵ So pragmatists must choose the optimistic path first laid out in the psychology of James. 16

The irony is not lost on the present author. A philosophy supposedly built on forward thinking appeals to the fragmentary historical persona of Protagoras. A method bent on revision is constructed on a psychology that was then nearly a half-century old.¹⁶ But Schiller, like James, took pragmatism to be a method predicated on testing its validity against challenges at which other philosophers balked. 17

For Schiller, this novelty was displayed in James's approach to religion. Not merely a curious spectator, James, like Schiller, maintained a robust interest in psychical research throughout his life. Unpalatable to many pragmatic thinkers then and now, the Jamesian approach to religion and the afterlife led both James and Schiller to be active members of the British Society for Psychical Research. This interest led both men to versions of Idealism quite distinct from the Absolute sort proffered by Bradley or Schiller's family friend McTaggart. As James remarked to Schiller early in their friendship: "The idealistic hypothesis can stand on its own legs, and need not be that of an absolute thought in any case."¹⁷ And it is this mystical, or spiritual, aspect of James's early work—found also in *The Principles of Psychology*—that attracted the young British upstart and author of *Riddles of the Sphinx: A Study in the Philosophy of Evolution* (1891) when he arrived in America to study at Cornell in the mid-1890s. With religion, as with anything else, Schiller urged that the James's Will to Believe excluded nothing in so far as one was willing to test its veracity: 18

Into religious controversy Pragmatism, in this case represented primarily by William James, has imported two important novelties. (1) It has introduced the study of religious psychology and raised the psychology of religion almost to the dignity of a new science. The first and greatest textbook of this science is James's Gifford Lectures, The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902). (2) It has drawn the attention of writers, not only on religious but also on logic and all social topics, to the existence of the Will to Believe. Both these novelties were of first class importance.

The psychology of religion made it clear that an appeal to faith underlay the principles of science as well as religion, and that faith must everywhere be justified by working. It thereby shifted the field of debate in religious matters from logic-chopping about theological dogmas to a consideration of the basic human needs that render man a religious animal. This broadening of the religious issue was an enormous help both in humanizing religion and in rendering it intelligible and rational.

Not that, of course, it means an end to all disputes and a settling of all questions. It still remained possible to differ upon the psychological facts . . . It still remained possible to differ about the true value of the admitted psychological facts. This comes out very clearly in the modern discussion of e.g. mysticism. There is no longer any dispute practically about the reality of the mystical experience. It is admitted to be a psychological fact. But what does it prove? Does it prove that the human mind can rise to contact with something more and diviner, or does it only prove that it can cherish this delusion? Or, perhaps, that it sometimes does one thing and sometimes the other? All these views of mysticism have been taken, and the question is still under discussion. It is clear therefore that the psychology of religion doesn't provide a short cut to religious truth; but it's equally clear that a new way of discussing such questions has been provided. For we can now test all these theories by their consequence, i.e. pragmatically. And in due course we may hope to settle in this way not only the theories . . . but also the disputes about what consequences of a theory shall be considered to be relevant to its truth-value.

The doctrine of the Will to believe by James and its selection as the title of his volume of essays is 1896 was one of the great steps in the development of Pragmatism, and caused enormous controversy. James himself often regretted that he had called his doctrine the Will to Believe, originally in order to render its essential character to the theological audience he was to address. He thought he should have called it the Right to Believe and that he would then have escaped misconstruction. In this he was too sanguine. For no one who launches such a soul stirring novelty upon a somnolent world has a right to hope to escape misconstruction. Besides the Right to Believe was not the right title either. James meant more than could be compressed into a short title. His religious message portended a revolution not only in theology and religion, but in psychology, logic, and philosophy of knowledge, a revolution that was bound to affect all human relations. More fully stated James's Will to Believe meant (1) that there was to be found in all, as a psychological fact, a disposition to accept, or to reject, any given belief . . .

Thus no mind was ever a tabula rasa, amiably indifferent to the beliefs it encountered. No study of mind therefore could be adequate which overlooked this bias and failed to ascertain it. Psychologists therefore were summoned to allow for the psychological Will to or [not to] believe, in their accounts of the workings of the mind.

(2) James held that in certain cases it was possible to argue from this psychological fact of bias, not merely de facto, but also de jure. Under certain conditions and with proper precautions the psychological Will to believe could acquire logical value. There could be based on it a Right to believe. And James set himself to lay down the conditions under which a Will to believe could be held to acquire a logical nature and to create a Right to believe. The conditions which he stipulated were that a belief which appealed to the Will to believe should be acted on, should admit of alternatives . . . and above all that the empirical consequences of acting on the belief should be allowed to react on the truth-claim of the belief, in its claim for acceptance. In other words, the original Will to believe was to be tested pragmatically by working.

It was a sad revelation of the prevalence of prejudice among philosophers, though at the same time a proof of the correctness of James's contention about the nature of bias that hardly any attention was paid to the restrictions which James had imposed on the Will to believe before extracting a Right to believe from the active character of human belief. Some of his best [followers] like Charles Augustus Strong and Dickinson S. Miller misunderstood him; while the contrary herd of critics shouted, all with one voice, that James had granted to everyone an unlimited right to believe whatever he pleased, and to call truth anything that made him feel good.

This complaint traces back to Stebbing and even as it touches upon some of the critiques of pragmatism still being 19 bandied about. For Schiller, however, these comments reflect back on a particularly important stage in his life. Having only recently been befriended by James while at Cornell, Schiller received letters from James complaining about Miller's characterizations of his 1898 Berkeley lectures, *Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results*.¹⁸ Schiller took it upon himself to respond to those characterizations in what came to be "Axioms as Postulates" (1902). There is a trace of exasperation in his suggestion that people still misunderstood what James had offered:

Dogmatic philosophers seem to believe with the Duchess in Alice in Wonderland that truth can be created by representation, so these [misconceptions] are still largely current. But . . . James had made it clear from the first that he distrusted believing the psychological facts which generated a belief and the logical consequences which established it. In the establishment of any belief the Will to believe is only the first step. It means only the willingness to consider it Until James this first and [easiest] step in the growth of beliefs had been completely overlooked. In fact logicians had always talked as if beliefs grew up automatically in a soil of pure indifference, and without aid and the intervention of a mind; they had never gone into the question of how in the sciences subjects of investigation are selected, or why a scientist interested himself in one more than another. Pure Reason was supposed to need no will, scientific method was supposed to need no purpose. . . .

In short the right meaning of the doctrine of the Will to believe was simply empiricism, the molding by experience of all our beliefs. It was however a new, and as James pointed out, a more radical empiricism, tied to no dogmas and free from the unwarranted assumption that the mind must be represented as purely passive in its dealings with experience, as merely receptive of impressions, without any will or aim of its own.

Pragmatism as Method

But Schiller also feels that some of pragmatism's defenders have lost sight of its essentially methodological nature. 20 This is a loaded complaint. For Schiller, the path of a healthy and pluralistic pragmatism is a Jamesian and Protagorean path. It is concerned with the flowering of options that historical Platonism and contemporary Absolute Idealism banish in a fog of abstraction. And failure to note—more so, to agree—with this lineage amounts to ceding pragmatism's merits. In so doing, the different approaches to pragmatism run the risk of failing to answer objections to the same:

When you hear that Pragmatism claims to be primarily a method and find that this method can apparently conduct different parts to a considerable variety of doctrines you may be disposed to regard this as a serious drawback to the value of Pragmatism. But methods are in reality very important things, much more important than people think. In the long run they are more important than doctrines. For doctrines are . . . constantly changing. The more rapidly they change the more progressive the science in which they occur can claim to be. Methods are enduring, they're not changing so long as they work and yield results of value. Also they are widely applicable and may be used upon a variety of objects. In fact it is becoming more and more probable that the ways by which they are reached are truly valuable and lasting elements in scientific truths, and that

science is essentially method, while the actual doctrines of the sciences and the entities they concern may be merely concessions to our human weakness for attaching our knowledge to imaginary propositions.

Viewed as a method then, Pragmatism declares that the truth of any doctrine depends on its consequences. That seems a very surprising statement; but there is a good deal of meaning wrapped up in it. It means in the first place 1) a denial that its truth is prior to experience or a priori in most of its senses; it means empiricism. 2) It means that truth is not self-proving; so getting rid of the tricky notion of self-evidence. The self-evidential has long been one of the scandals of logic. It proclaims its truth but gives no reasons. Why then should it be accepted? Self-evidence primarily appears to be a fact of individual psychology. It is self-evident to someone, in some context. But need it therefore be self-evident to others or in another context? There is no reason to think so. Even if something were self-evident to all, it might yet be a universal delusion. In short, before self-evidence can be used logically, logical self-evidence must somehow be distinguished from psychology. For the latter may always prove illusory. It means 3) an initial claim to truth must be carefully kept distinct from its status when it has been adequately verified. Logically the truth claim and the verified truth are not the same, though both may use the same form of words. 4) It is to be admitted that every proposition claims truth, that every bonafide judgment in psychology is believed to be true by its maker when he makes it. But this is not reason enough for treating it as final truth. For the maker of the judgment may have been mistaken, and its verification may have been insufficient. Hence 5) every assertion has to be tested further if required, by the consequence said to follow from it. 6) How far this is to be carried is not specified; it is left to the guiding sense of judgment of each inquirer. In theory verification may go on forever; in practice we stop whenever we feel we've had enough and are satisfied. 7) Hence a sort of satisfaction is in a way made a test of truth; but we are not explicitly told what sort. The difference appears to be left open how far the consequences used to test a truth-claim are logical or incapable of being distinguished from individual caprice. This solution undoubtedly gives color to the charge that pragmatists are enabled to call truth whatever they please, but they incur this charge because they are so scrupulous not to slur over the transition from psychology to logic, from what in fact men do to what in philosophy they claim they do. Now here it is a fact that truth seeking must and does hold out prospects of satisfaction as a motive for embarking on it; it is psychologically quite untrue that truth must be compulsory and that the mind has to be coerced to seek it [as logicians have so long maintained].

But a search for Jamesian pragmatism of the Schillerian sort was near its end. Most American pragmatists had taken to the instrumentalism of Dewey or the logical bent of Peirce. Those, like Perry, who still clung to James did so in ways that removed the radical and religious and crafted a harder realism in their place. And a whole slew of other potential European candidates for Jamesian pragmatism of the sort Schiller envisioned faded from view. Schiller's lifelong friend Howard Vincenté Knox, the author of *The Philosophy of William James* (1914), had all but retired. Independent philosopher David Leslie Murray, for whose *Pragmatism* (1912) Schiller had written the introduction, also failed to produce additional works. The Italian pragmatists Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini, who were behind the journal *Leonardo* and praised by both James and Schiller, veered away from pragmatism altogether. The Austrian Wilhelm Jerusalem, who had translated James's *Pragmatism* in 1908, died in 1923. Rudolph Eisler, the German philosopher and sociologist who had published selections from Schiller's *Humanism* and *Studies in Humanism as Humanismus: Beiträge zu einer pragmatischen Philosophie* (1911), died in 1926. Fellow German philosopher Julius Goldstein, a man who James thought capable of leading the pragmatic and humanistic charge alongside Schiller, died in 1929.¹⁹ A sad mix of bad luck and circumstance left Schiller, in poor health and close to retirement, to pen this lecture amidst the sympathetic Personalists of USC.

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The Final Test

Schiller had reason to be morose. Beset as he was by personal and professional circumstances that placed him on the sidelines of a movement he helped to promote, he instead struck an optimistic stance. Schiller held out hope that the pragmatic test was one worthy of pursuit:

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Truth is attractive and satisfactory. But it is by no means always easy to define which of the satisfactions which occur in truth-seeking are logically good, which of the consequences used to test a truth-claim are related to its truth and properly its consequence, and which are merely accepted on account of their [emotional] and psychological appeal. On this point, there may plainly be considerable differences of opinion among pragmatists as among other folks, at any rate at first. Ultimately no doubt the pragmatic test of the consequences will discover these difficulties and reveal which of the satisfactions of the truth-seekers were good and logical and which merely psychological and treacherous.

The striking thing about this conclusion is that it provides sanction for erasing Schiller from the pragmatic ledger. His approach, steeped in traditions of psychology and pragmatism that were already being undone, proved

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unattractive and unsatisfactory. Schiller's James was not to be pragmatism's James. His pragmatic humanism was not to be pragmatism's future. But these facts should not stand as the final indication of Schiller's value. For there remains in this lecture, even seventy years later, something of the vigor and spirit that made him the "literary" wing of pragmatism.²⁰

This lecture serves, then, as a historical snapshot worthy of some measure of reclamation. Granted, the history of pragmatism has, with minor excursions notwithstanding, done well without Schiller. This essay doesn't challenge that fact. But a history of pragmatism remains incomplete to the extent that it ignores one of those figures central to the development and propagation of pragmatism; it remains attractive but unsatisfactory. Schiller stands as one of the last first generation defenders of a Jamesian approach to pragmatism. His particular take on that lineage remains an unexplored option for a variety of contemporary endeavors: the study of argumentation and informal logic, the renewed interest in the Sophists, the rise of the rhetoric of science and inquiry, and the heated discussions of the relationship between philosophy and religion. Moreover, pragmatists should be more welcoming. In a field of inquiry that routinely grandfathers in scholars of all kinds, that embraces historical figures of varied inclinations, this outsider deserves more. Pragmatists need not agree with him to give him his due. But they might do well to consider how his views of pragmatism give voice, now and then, to the diversity pragmatism professes to contain.

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Notes

¹ The renewed focus on Schiller during this time was largely the result of four philosophers. The interest was started with Reuben Abel's *The Pragmatic Humanism of F. C. S. Schiller* (King's Crown Press, 1955) and his collection of Schiller's essays, *Humanistic Pragmatism: The Philosophy of F. C. S. Schiller* (Free Press, 1966). Additionally, there was Kenneth Winetroun's *F. C. S. Schiller and the Dimensions of Pragmatism* (Ohio State University Press, 1967) and half a dozen additional journal articles. Herbert L. Searles and Allan Shields' *A Bibliography of F. C. S. Schiller* (San Diego State College Press, 1969) provided the first attempt to document Schiller's voluminous assortment of essays, reviews, books, and other published material.

² Beyond the occasional journal article, reference to Schiller's work ebbed until the mid-1990s. This renewed interest was fueled by Professor of English Steven Mailloux. His edited volume *Rhetoric, Sophistry, Pragmatism* (Cambridge UP, 1995) and stand alone *Reception Histories: Rhetoric, Pragmatism, and American Cultural Politics* (Cornell UP, 1998) directed readers to Schiller's novel merger of Sophistry (in the use of the exemplar Protagoras), pragmatism, and rhetoric. In this century, Philosopher John Robert Shook has been the most consistent in bring attention to Schiller. His website, *The Pragmatism Cybrary*, carries a revised version of Searles' and Shields' bibliography. His research center, The Pragmatism Archive, contains most if not all of Schiller's publications. As editor of *The Early Defenders of Pragmatism* series (Thoemmes, 2001), Shook featured Schiller prominently. His "Schiller, Ferdinand Canning Scott (1864-1937)" article in the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century British Philosophers* (Thoemmes, 2002), reprinted in the *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century British Philosophers* (Thoemmes, 2005) also presented a general overview of Schiller's philosophical work. Most recently, Shook has authored "F. C. S. Schiller and European Pragmatism," in *A Companion to Pragmatism*, (Blackwell, 2006) and co-edited (with Hugh McDonald) *F. C. S. Schiller on Pragmatism and Humanism: Selected Writings, 1891-1939* (forthcoming from Humanity Books in 2008). This list is by no means exhaustive. But it is—strikingly so, given Schiller's intimate connection to the foundation of pragmatism—more than representative.

³ Details related to the courses Schiller taught at USC are based on: Finding Aid for the F. C. S. Schiller Papers (Collection 191), 1968, Department of Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, 25-6.

⁴ Readers will note two items which point to this conclusion: (1) the title of this manuscript is "Pragmatism 1934²" with no accompanying note, and (2) in the manuscript marginalia there are dated notations ranging from "'33'" to "'35.'" It is also clear that this was a working draft and not merely a previous version of the course to which Schiller added minor additions. Towards the end of the first (introductory) chapter Schiller commented: "... there are many approaches to Pragmatism, at least for those who have the pragmatic temper. I propose to study these approaches

next and to distinguish them as the biological (ch. ii), the psychological (ch. 3), the logical (ch. 4), and the scientific (ch. 5), the ethical (ch. 6) and the religious (ch. 7).” But the text that follows goes on to include three additional chapters: Pragmatism As Method, Pragmatic Theory Of Truth, Pragmatism And Metaphysics. And these additional chapters cover many of the same ideas found in: “The Personalistic Implications of Humanism, I. Humanisms and Humanism,” *Personalist* 18, no. 4 (October 1937): 352-68; “The Personalistic Implications of Humanism, II. Logic: A Game, or an Agent of Value,” *Personalist* 19, no. 1 (January 1938): 16-31; “The Personalistic Implications of Humanism, III. Ethics, Casuistry and Life,” *Personalist* 19, no. 2 (April 1938): 164-78; and “The Personalistic Implications of Humanism, IV. The Relativity of Metaphysics,” *Personalist* 19, no. 3 (July 1938): 241-54.

The dating of the manuscript is also made easier by what appears on its reverse side. The back of the 90 page lecture manuscript contains handwritten drafts of two of Schiller’s essays (the 1934 lecture “Fascism and Dictators” that also appeared in the posthumous *Our Human Truths* [1939]; and “Burning Questions,” *Personalist* 16.3 [July 1935]: 199-215). All references to the lecture herein are based on a transcription of the lecture as found in: F. C. S. Schiller, *Pragmatism* 1934, [1935], *Courses*, Box Ten, F. C. S. Schiller Papers (Collection 191), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

Finally, a word about this transcription: All notations, symbols, and formatting choices within the text of the lecture are Schiller’s. Parenthetical comments by Schiller have, in the main, been removed. Bracketing is meant to indicate the transcription of words and phrases that were in doubt or illegible. Ellipses found within the text of the transcription are meant to indicate the points at which the text has been truncated and are made at the author’s discretion.

⁵ Susan Haack, Review of *Pragmatism: A Reader*, ed. Louis Menand, *New Criterion* 16, no. 3 (November 1997): 69.

⁶ F. C. S. Schiller, preface to *Humanism: Philosophical Essays* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1912), xi-xxix.

⁷ The chapter he is referring to originally appeared, with the same title, as F. C. S. Schiller, “William James and the Making of Pragmatism,” *Personalist* 8, no. 2 (April 1927): 81-93.

⁸ Readers are directed to F. C. S. Schiller, review of *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vol. 1: Principles of Philosophy*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, *Personalist* 13, no. 2 (April 1932): 142-3; review of *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vol. 2: Elements of Logic*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, *Personalist* 14, no. 2 (April 1933): 140-1; review of *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vol. 3: Exact Logic*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, *Personalist* 15, no. 2 (April 1934): 174-7; review of *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vol. 4: The Simplest Mathematics*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, *Personalist* 16, no. 1 (January 1935): 78-80; review of *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vol. 5: Pragmatism and Pragmaticism*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, *Personalist* 16, no. 2 (April 1935): 169-73; review of *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vol. 6: Scientific Metaphysics*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, *Personalist* 17, no. 2 (April 1936): 196-202. Schiller’s view of Peirce wasn’t always as critical. As a younger scholar, Schiller was at times gracious in his brief correspondence with Peirce over the meaning of the concept pragmatism. For the substance of the letters between Schiller and Peirce, refer to Frederick J. Down Scott, “Peirce and Schiller and Their Correspondence,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (July 1973): 363-86.

⁹ William James, Cambridge, MA, to F. C. S. Schiller, 17 January 1908, *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 11, eds. Ignas K. Skrupkelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003), 522 (the original copy of this and subsequent letters is housed in Educators and Librarians Collection, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford).

¹⁰ William James, Cambridge, to F. C. S. Schiller, 26 Jan 1908, *The Correspondence*, vol. 11, 527.

¹¹ As with other comments, Schiller here is obscuring a bit of his bluster. Though he critiques Plato far earlier, his first sustained comparison of Plato and Protagoras occurs in F. C. S. Schiller, “Plato and His Predecessors,” *Quarterly Review* 204, no. 406 (January 1906): 62-88; revised and included in *Studies in Humanism* (1907) as “From Plato to Protagoras.” He elaborates on his theory of Protagoras-as-Pragmatist in the pamphlet F. C. S. Schiller, *Plato or*

Protagoras? (Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1908). This tract attracted a good deal of criticism; most notably, from the Greek Scholar John Burnet.

¹² F. C. S. Schiller, *Studies in Humanism* (London: Macmillan, 1907), xiv-xv.

¹³ An instructive example is Dewey's tribute to Schiller after his death. Brief and generally positive, it contains the slight that Schiller's "dominantly psychological" approach was path-clearing rather than ground-breaking (John Dewey, "F. C. S. Schiller: An Unpublished Memorial by John Dewey," [28 November 1937] ed. Allan Shields, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 3 [1967]: 52).

¹⁴ Interested readers will catch the gist of this debate in: Lizzie Susan Stebbing, "Pragmatism and the Dictum 'All Truths Work,'" *Mind* 21, no. 83 (July 1912): 471-2, and "The 'Working' of 'Truths,'" *Mind* 22, no. 86 (April 1913): 250-3; F. C. S. Schiller, "Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11 (1910-1911): 144-65, "[The 'Working' of 'Truths,'](#)" *Mind* 21, no. 84 (October 1912): 532-5, and "[The 'Working' of Truths and Their 'Criterion,'](#)" *Mind* 22, no. 88 (October 1913): 532-8. Later in life, Schiller railed against Symbolic Logic, seeing it as just an updated attempt at Formal Logic. He attempted, through journal editor and USC Department Chair Ralph Tyler Flewelling, to goad Stebbing into another debate. This time, however, she remained silent (see F. C. S. Schiller, "The Sacrifice of Barbara," *Personalist* 12, no. 4 [October 1931]: 233-43).

¹⁵ F. C. S. Schiller, "On Preserving Appearances," *Mind* 12, no. 47 (July 1903): 353. This article is one of the first in a series of career-long salvos directed at Bradley. For a variety of reasons—their proximity to each other, the differences in their standing and philosophical outlook, their penchant for trading in barbed and dismissive criticisms—Schiller took to using Bradley as a representation of all that was wrong with philosophy. And he took to his task by way of more endorsements from James. Though worried that Schiller pushed the polemic too far, and attempting in letters to both Schiller and Bradley to get them to see the merits of each other's case, James nonetheless sides with Schiller. In a response to Bradley's attacks on Schiller, James comments: "Mr. Bradley in particular can be taken care of by Mr. Schiller. He repeatedly confesses himself unable to comprehend Schiller's views, he evidently has not sought to do so sympathetically, and I deeply regret to say that his laborious article ["On Truth and Practice," *Mind* 13, no. 51 (July 1904)] throws, for my mind, absolutely no useful light upon the subject. It seems to me on the whole an *ignoratio elenchi*, and I feel free to disregard it altogether" (William James, "Humanism and Truth," *Mind* 13, no. 52 [October 1904]: 458).

¹⁶ It is indeed the case that Schiller, more often than not, would reference James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890) as much if not more than *Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results* (1898), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), *Pragmatism*, or (the under-appreciated) *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to Pragmatism* (1909).

¹⁷ William James, Chocorua, NH, to F. C. S. Schiller, 9 June 1896, *The Correspondence*, vol. 8, 153.

¹⁸ Miller's complaints are found in "'The Will to Believe' and The Duty to Doubt," *International Journal of Ethics* 9, no. 2 (January 1899): 169-95.

¹⁹ Goldstein, who was introduced to James by Schiller, is of particular import because he was excised out of the discussion of pragmatism altogether. The standard coverage of Schiller until the publication of *The Correspondence of William James*, most notably that of Kenneth Winetroun, makes note of a letter that James sent to Schiller shortly before his death. The content of that note has been handed down via Perry's two-volume *The Thought and Character of William James* (1935). The actual letter states in full: "Dearest Schiller -- Your offer to come to London to see us is lovely, but my condition had better go without a meeting. Five minutes would mean little; + anything more serious would add too much to the fatigue of my journey, rather hazardous at any rate, to L'pool . . . I leave the 'Cause' in your hands, yours and Goldstein's in Germany—I don't feel sure about Kallen yet, tho he's a noble fellow. Good bye + God bless you! Keep your health, your splendid health! It's better than all the 'truths' under the firmament. Ever thy W. J." (William James, Rye, to F. C. S. Schiller, 8 August 1910, *The Correspondence*, vol. 12, 573). Perry's version removes the references to both Goldstein and Kallen.

²⁰ This label is from Bertrand Russell, himself no fan of pragmatism: “The three founders of pragmatism differ greatly *inter se*; we may distinguish James, Schiller, and Dewey as respectively its religious, literary, and scientific protagonists” (qtd. in Reuben Abel, *The Pragmatic*, 3).

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The Concept of Truth that Matters

Laura E. Weed

Abstract: This paper defends James's pragmatic theory of truth from the two most prominent theories of truth in contemporary philosophy: the post-modern deconstructionist theory and the analytic deflationary theory. I argue that truth is an important concept, which can best be understood as framed by James's radical empiricism. Paradigmatic examples such as court testimony, sincerity and personal integrity in speech, and accuracy of description of a recalcitrant reality, as it impacts a stream of consciousness, do a much better job of framing issues related to truth than do 'cats on mats' or the political ramifications of 'schizophrenia.' I argue that this pragmatic concept of truth differs sharply from the trivial correspondence embraced by the deflationist account and the texts-mirroring-texts account espoused by the deconstructionists. I also point out that James's conception of truth is the best for explaining discoveries about language in contemporary neuroscience.

William James argued a century ago for a conception of truth that establishes a clear middle way between the rigid logicism of contemporary analytical philosophy and the relativity of contemporary hermeneutics and deconstructionism. James argued for a humanistic and practical conception of truth, rooted in human experience and indexed to available evidence, and the perspective of human individuals or groups. In this paper I will argue that James's conception of truth is still the most important conception of truth for both philosophy and human life, for it stresses the humanistic conception of truth that occurs in court rooms, relationships of trust and, ultimately, in rules for integrity in science. I will argue for this position against some contemporary analytical and hermeneutical philosophers, and will claim support from contemporary results in cognitive science. But I will begin with a very brief summary of James's pragmatic view of truth.

1. James on Truth

a. Truth and Knowledge

James distinguished between two ways of knowing things; one could know something intuitively, in direct experience, as one sees a paper or a desk that is immediately before one's eyes, which he described as "an all around embracing" of the object by thought, or one could know through "an outer chain of physical or mental intermediaries connecting thought and thing," as westerners know Indian tigers.¹ James held that the intuitive form of knowledge was direct apprehension, unmediated by anything, and truth for intuitive knowledge was a matter of direct consciousness in the flow of experience. For conceptual or representative knowledge, in contrast, to know that a belief was true was to "...lead to it through a context which the world supplies."²

b. Truth and Theoretical Representations of Reality

Hence, we are not free to postulate any theories or facts we please, because the readings take place in rebus; in concrete experience, of either an immediate and intuitive kind, or of an intellectual kind apprehending processes

within the ‘context which the world supplies.’ The context for developing intellectual ideas includes processes in nature, representational systems developed by preceding groups of people for characterizing nature, a social world, and relationships between the stream of consciousness and all of the above, at least. The intellectual kinds of experiences, themselves, provide a process of verification, and become part of the process of verification for future truths, as well.

...[B]eliefs at any time are so much experience *funded*. But the beliefs are themselves parts of the sum total of the world’s experience, and become matter, therefore, for the next day’s funding operations. So far as reality means experienceable reality, both it and the truths men gain about it are everlastingly in process of mutation—mutation towards a definite goal, it may be—but still mutation. ³

James’s metaphor comparing the value of true knowledge with the value of banking operations highlights his claim that truth must be expedient—it must be fruitful and productive. Experiences funding truths are also interactive; they can not be isolated from one another, for each tends to ‘boil over’ and affect other experiences and facts. So, theories and facts are both continually being corrected and revised to account for unforeseen consequences of other facts. James described the pragmatic theory of truth in these words.

True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot. That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as.

... The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process, the process namely of its verifying itself, its *verification*. Its validity is the process of its *valid-ation*. ⁴

So, truth, for James, was not separable from the contexts of conscious experience, interaction with processes in the surrounding world, relationships among things and ideas, and representative theories that we hold about how the world works.

According to James, there is a ‘tight squeeze’ between theories that work and facts that substantiate theories, and are verifiable. Sometimes, two distinct interpretations are equally compatible with the facts, but usually not. The discovery of enough wayward facts will necessitate a revision or revolution in theory and new theories lead people to look for facts not previously imagined or considered. ⁵

Thus, James’s view does not fit neatly into either a correspondence or a coherence view of truth. It is not correspondence, because the terminal points of the truth-making relation are not propositional sentences and things, but experiences in the stream of consciousness, and processes of perception, representation or validation that verify the experiences.⁶ And it does not fit neatly into a coherence view of truth because truth has more in common with health and wealth than it has in common with internal consistency in a logic system.⁷ That is, the appeal of avoiding falsehood has a regulative power that parallels the appeal of avoiding high-calorie junk food and high-interest debt. It does not have a formal, conceptual appeal, except in the select cases of necessary truths. Indeed, James ridicules the logical coherence view, that the body of all of our truths forms a logically complete and consistent schema, as an insignificant triviality.⁸

c. Mistakes of Rationalism

We get the regulative notion of an ‘Absolute Truth’ towards which all of these cognitive, perceptual, representational and inter-relational processes aim, according to James, by looking backward at the history of intellectual progress and seeing how many corrections and adjustments have already taken place in our thinking about facts and theories. Euclidean Geometry, Ptolemaic Physics and Astronomy, and Scholastic Logic and Metaphysics have all been replaced through the development of new systems of fact and theories.

But, if we look forward, we can make the mistake of thinking that some absolute truth is already there, in completed form, just waiting for us to catch up with it. James retorts that any new theories will have to be made, just as the present ones were. Truths emerge from facts, but they also dip forward into facts and add to them; then the new facts again create new truths.⁹

James argues that the rationalist claim that truth has nothing to do with practical reasoning is a mistake like the ‘sentimentalist fallacy’ about morality. Kant had argued that morality was a question of abstract, universal truths learned from pure reason via a ‘categorical imperative.’ A consequence of this point of view is that acts are only

moral if they follow the logical rule, and never because they are motivated by loving feelings or done because positive consequences will result. Kant claimed that only logical coherence with a categorical imperative counts in establishing morality; experience is completely irrelevant.¹⁰

Against Kant, James argues that a Kantian moralist could recite all kinds of empty platitudes about justice, but could never recognize it, or its absence, if he saw it in the street. Both truth and morality have to be matters of practice in experience, or they are meaningless, according to James.¹¹

d. Truth is neither ‘what makes one happy’ nor ‘confirmation.’

Bertrand Russell attacked James’s conception of truth, as claiming merely that the true is that which has good effects. But Hilary Putnam has recently defended James from the Russellian assault, by pointing out that Russell had taken James’s position out of context, and largely misunderstood it. Putnam points out that Russell misread James’s claim that truth is expedient as meaning that whatever makes someone happy is true. In contrast, Putnam argues that James was careful to specify that different kinds of expediency applied to differing types of claims. In the case of science, expediency means predictive value, simplicity, conservation of past discoveries and coherence with life’s demands, not making one happy.¹²

Further, Putnam argues that James did not confuse truth and methods of confirmation, as Morton White and Martin Gardiner claimed. James saw a clear connection between confirmation and truth, but did not reduce either to the other, as Putnam explains:

To say that truth is “correspondence to reality” is not false but empty, as long as nothing is said about what the “correspondence” is. If the “correspondence” is supposed to be utterly independent of the ways in which we confirm the assertions we make (so that it is conceived to be possible that what is true is utterly *different* from what we are warranted in *taking to be true*), then the “correspondence” is an occult one and our grasp of it is equally occult.¹³

Thus, for James, truth was not reducible to confirmation or to practical effects, but neither was it radically divorceable from the processes and context from which it emerges.

e. Why Truth is a Process, and both Experience and the Practical Results of Representations in Theories Matter.

Contemporary analytical philosophers contrast truth with falsity, and understand truth in terms of a two-sortal T/F logic system. But small children and uneducated people who have no conception at all of two-sortal logic, nevertheless have a very clear conception of what it means to tell the truth. The operative contrast, in the practical as opposed to the technical case, is not only with falsehood, in the abstract sense, but also with lies on the one hand and mistakes on the other hand. Mistakes are errors in truth that are forgivable, correctable and inevitable consequences of human failure to be omniscient. They are relatively small failures of accuracy that might occur through excessive vagueness or inattentiveness to details. Of course, mistakes can be deadly or costly, especially if they occur in a context in which accuracy is essential, such as medical or engineering activities. For these matters, accuracy is as important as avoiding lies. James agreed about the need for accuracy in science, but rightly pointed out that there are other ranges of human activity within which, “...[N]o bell in us tolls to let us know for certain that truth is in our grasp.”¹⁴

Lies, in contrast, are deliberate, malicious attempts to deceive, defraud, or manipulate another person as a victim. The abstract conception of falsehood glosses over the differential moral and practical experiential impact of mistakes and lies, and does not admit of degrees of error, through scaling either degrees of falsehood or degrees of truth. While there may be cases in which it is difficult to tell whether ‘mistake’ or ‘lie’ better characterizes a falsehood, there are clear cases of each. And it is the clear cases of each that most matter to humans, in our everyday lives. Enron executives **lied**, they did not make a mistake, when they told investors to buy the tanking stock that they, themselves, were dumping. This type of falsehood is a form of inter-human manipulation and deceit that matters very much, especially to its victims. In contrast, while a mistaken claim may cause harm, the rage typically generated by deceit is at least modified, if it occurs at all. Even small children make this distinction, very clearly, and for all people, while there is an interest in avoiding mistakes, whether made by oneself or another, the interest in not being lied to or manipulated is far stronger and much more compelling. Scientists and mathematicians may equate mistakes and lies. But most people, even those who are quite lazy about avoiding mistakes or about critically analyzing information for falsehoods, will become utterly enraged when they feel that they have been manipulated or deceived.

James also considered truth-seeking a form of humanistic endeavor, rooted in human life, and in this sense, also, I believe he was correct. The moral, emotional and knowledge-seeking functions of human life cannot be as radically divorced from one another as the Platonism inherent in math and science sometimes misleads abstractly-oriented people to believe. As Putnam also insists, there are no fact-free values and no value-free facts.¹⁵ All mistakes, lies, and truths are bound up in personal conscious experience, processes of verification in reality, and the practical results of theorizing in people's daily lives. Abstract, two-sortal logic utterly fails to capture the immediacy and compelling moral force of the relationship among truths, mistakes and lies. 18

Likewise, hermeneutical over-personalizations of truth fail to capture the compelling nature of experiential, process verified truths, mistakes and lies. For, if everyone is entitled to an interpretation, and interpretations are not grounded in anything other than one's own imagination, no classification of any claim as a truth, a mistake, or a lie, can be correct. The Enron executives merely had their perspectives, and the duped investors had their perspectives, and no moral or factual distinction between the two perspectives obtains. But, again, it matters very much in human affairs whether someone's perspective rates as true, a mistake, or a lie. The rating system is humanist, moral, and, sometimes, legal, and this is the conception of truth that matters most. The human rights investigators on a truth-seeking mission to the scene of the alleged atrocities should be the paradigmatic instance of seeking for truth. 'Cats on mats' and meanings for schizophrenia are both misleading cases to take as paradigmatic. 19

In addition to being a western humanistic conception, James's conception of truth is also close to the Chinese humanistic conception of truth as 'sincerity.' While A.C. Graham has argued that Chinese has no word that corresponds to the English word 'truth,' in the semantic or truth-functional sense, Hall and Ames have argued that sincerity (*cheng*) is a pragmatic equivalent. The concept of sincerity in Chinese covers personal integrity, community responsibility, willingness to work hard to develop one's own talents and one's community's potential, as well as trustworthiness, or keeping one's word. ¹⁶ 20

2. The Tarski/ Soames Formalist Conception of Truth

a. Truth is a relationship between a proposition and a metalanguage.

Alfred Tarski is famous for articulating a conception of truth for formal languages that could circumvent some of the paradoxes of truth that beset formal conceptual and logical systems. The type of paradox that he was out to resolve is the type of paradox that results from a story like the Cretan Liar story, of Epimenedes of Knossos: A man from Crete says, "All Cretans are liars." If one tries to articulate the truth conditions for this story, it turns out that if the statement uttered is true, the man lied, because he is a Cretan, which results in the statement being false. And if the statement uttered is false, then, not all Cretans are liars, so possibly the speaker isn't lying, which would result in his statement being true. So, the statement is true if it's false, and false if it's true. A simpler version looks at a sentence like: 'This statement is false.' This sentence, also, is true if it is false and false if it is true. 21

Tarski saw that the problem with such statements is that they both use and evaluate truth concepts. He realized that by banning truth-evaluating concepts like 'true' and 'false' from a language in use, and exiling them to a 'metalanguage' in which the language of use is discussed, but not used, he could prevent the paradoxes.¹⁷ Hence, sentences like 'This sentence is false' could not be used, self-referentially, to refer to themselves, but could only be used in a metalanguage to refer to other sentences in the use language, such as "my desk is brown." 22

b. Tarski's Truth Schema and Deflationism

Tarski's truth schema, T, aligns a truth claim about a sentence in a metalanguage with a proposition in an 'object language' in the following way: 23

Metalanguage sentence + truth claim: "Snow is white." Is true, if and only if
Object language proposition: Snow is white. ¹⁸

Scott Soames characterizes Tarski's truth schema and related conceptions of truth by Gottlob Frege, Saul Kripke, Paul Horwich, Peter Strawson and himself as deflationary accounts, because they deflate the truth of a statement to a repetition of the statement, or to a claim that the truth of a proposition is redundant on the proposition itself. Soames says that as a general type of theory covering several more specific variants, deflationism admits of some degree of vagueness. But he attributes the following general philosophical perspective on truth to deflationists: 24

Still, it is fairly clear what sort of thing is to be ruled out. According to deflationism, sweeping philosophically contentious doctrines about reality and our ability to know it cannot be established by analyzing the notion of truth. Examples of such doctrines are the thesis that a statement is true iff it corresponds to a mind-independent fact that makes it true, and the rival thesis that a statement is true iff it would be rational for beings like us to believe it under ideal conditions of inquiry. These are independent doctrines that cannot be derived from an analysis of truth. The doctrines are compatible with deflationist analyses of truth. However, deflationism is neutral regarding them. ¹⁹

Soames argues that, though redundant and philosophically neutral on issues such as correspondence and rationality, deflationism is "...obvious, uncontentious, and. I suspect, without substantial philosophical consequences." ²⁰ But shortly thereafter he ends his book with this conclusion. 25

Truth is a central notion, and clarifying it can be expected to improve our grasp of related logical and semantic notions while indirectly illuminating a number of broader philosophical concerns. Throughout the history of philosophy the notion of truth has occupied a corner into which all manner of problems and confusions have been swept. One may take heart from the fact that we have at last begun to dispel those confusions.²¹

So, truth is an empty and contentless idea that is somehow central to philosophical reasoning. And it is a philosophically neutral conception with respect to contentious positions that, nevertheless, can improve our understanding of logic and semantics and indirectly illuminate a number of broader philosophical concerns. 26

c. Deflationary Truth vs. Pragmatic Truth

For a pragmatist, the deflationary account mis-identifies the end terms of the truth relationship as propositional entities, one in a meta-language and one in an object language, when the end terms of the truth relationship should be understood as processes, as experiences in the stream of consciousness, and processes of perception that link an active agent, or a community of active agents, to a lived world.²² To do this, the word 'truth' must function adjectivally to identify a heuristic that describes useful methods for identifying knowledge-seeking processes within the stream of consciousness. Like 'health' and 'wealth,' 'truth'²³ must identify the habits, practices, expectations and behavior that tend to be more likely than not to produce beliefs that are neither inaccuracies nor lies. The deflationary account of truth has no capacity to identify those truth-seeking processes. 27

Commonly, philosophers consider the habits, practices, expectations and behaviors that I cited in the last paragraph as matters of justification, rather than matters of truth. For Aristotle, clearly these are justification issues, in JTB, which, as Gettier pointed out, can be satisfied in cases in which truth remains evasive. ²⁴ A natural rationalistic reaction to the dilemma posed by the independence of J and T in JTB is to come to envision a world description consisting of sets of propositions that exist completely independently of any human knowledge-producing capacities. But James would agree with Putnam that: 28

Of course, if metaphysical realism were right, and one could view the aim of science simply as trying to get our notional world to "match" the world in itself, then one could contend that we are interested in coherence, comprehensiveness, functional simplicity and instrumental efficacy only because these are instruments to bringing about this "match." But the notion of a transcendental "match" between our representation and the world in itself is nonsense. ²⁵

Again, the end terms of the relationship are mis-conceived. Rationalists represent the truth of propositions as being completely isolated and unrelated to any process of verification or validation, in exactly the way that Putnam and James argue truth cannot be so isolated. The God's eye view of reality might exist in Plato's heaven, but James and Putnam point out that we humans don't live there, and have no access to the God's eye vision independently of our individual or collective human experience. We would not value the truth-functionality of any heuristics independently of the consequences of following them, and it is explicitly the fact that experiential and perceptual success occurs consequent to some behaviors that we designate the successes with the laudatory expression 'empirically true.' On the deflationary account, truth is utterly detached from experience, perspective-less, and without practical import, which for Putnam and James implies that either it is utterly unknowable or there is no reason to value it. 29

But more pertinently to my concerns in this paper, deflationary accounts of truth cannot distinguish degrees of accuracy nor distinguish between lies and mistakes. It has nothing to do with whether Enron executives cheated 23

investors or whether the General committed the atrocities he is accused of having committed. It is not a matter that anyone should even care about, much less become enraged over, on Soames' account. This sterilized and epistemologically neutered view of truth may play a role in a formal logic system, but it is completely impotent to explain truth in human affairs, much less why it matters, practically and morally.

Logicians like Soames, Frege, Tarski, et al., however, are at least concerned with retaining some eviscerated vestige of a Jamesian conception of truth; the notion of truth-functionality in arguments. I think the deflationary view is too thin to even retain that vestige of the notion, but at least that is the task that the logicians see themselves as undertaking. Even that vestige of truth is gone from hermeneutical approaches to philosophy. I will now turn to the hermeneutical approach to truth to show how it fares even worse than the analytical approach on the issue of truth. 30

3. Foucault and Rorty on Truth as Power

a. Truth is an expression of social power

Michel Foucault claimed that truth does not apply to objective facts of any kind, for there is no such thing as an objective fact. Just as there is no objective relationship between a proposition and a state of affairs or fact, there is also no such thing as an objective state of experience nor as an objective process of verification. All facts are, according to Foucault, constructed from human attitudes. The goal of such construction is always the negotiation of power relations among humans. Foucault speaks of language as having three planes of differentiation within which objects can be formed, and within which discourses, or words, may appear.²⁶ For Foucault, first, words and bits of discourse emerge from enabling social structures, which he calls the "surfaces of their emergence."²⁷ Then the range of things to which the socially emerged discourse will refer is specified by "authorities of delimitation" who have the social power to establish the characteristics that a type of discourse is to exemplify.²⁸ Finally, "grids of specification" are established by the authorities of delimitation, to socially mark the relevant subcategories and relations to comparable areas of discourse that a given discourse is to carry.²⁹ So, for Foucault, reference, thought, and the function of language in either reference or thought is exclusively and exhaustively a function of social negotiations of power among various social groups who vie for the status of 'authorities of delimitation,' with respect to specific areas of discourse. 31

The only possible meaning for the word true, in such a congeries of discourses, is correct usage according to the wishes of the respective social groups or institutions who are responsible for the system of discourse. Still worse, since the meanings of all discourses are merely conventional and infinitely flexible, and each individual is free to try to alter any discourse at will, meanings in language are really subject to a global form of anarchy. What any discourse means is only a function of what the currently most powerful speaker on the scene arbitrarily wishes for it to mean at the time. Under the reign of such a global anarchy, truth becomes a completely relativistic concept, and nothing can rate as either a mistake or a lie. 32

b. Rorty's misleading claim to be a pragmatist

Richard Rorty considers himself a pragmatist, but from his point of view, also, language is exhaustively a matter of social conventions reflecting established power relations among individuals and institutions. Rorty writes as if his position were close to that of William James,³⁰ but both James's appeal to the stream of conscious experience as a source of recalcitrant psychological truth, and his appeal to processes of verification as collaborators for theoretical and learned truth are missing from Rorty's approach to the subject. In the following passage Rorty collapses all of the terms used by pragmatists into a very Foucault-like social category as his analysis of how James's pragmatic conception of truth in praxis works: 33

If all awareness is a linguistic affair, then we are never going to be aware of a word on the one hand and a thing-denuded-of-words on the other and see that the first is adequate to the second. But the very notions of 'sign' and 'representation' and 'language' convey the notion that we *can* do something like that. ³¹

But James clearly uses the notion of a representational theory of reality. He envisions language as connecting empirical processes of interaction between oneself and a world outside oneself, through experience as an individual stream of consciousness. In his arguments against Clifford in *Will to Believe* James explicitly distinguishes between scientific cases for which truth can and should wait for verification, and moral, legal, personal, and religious cases for which the costs of waiting for certainty outweigh the benefits.³² Rorty also misidentifies the pragmatist's conception 34

of truth, or James's conception of truth, at any rate, in the following passage, from a discussion of Donald Davidson and Crispin Wright on the subject:

Content, pragmatists say on the basis of this argument, counts for vanishingly little in determining cognitivity, and defacto agreement on conventions for everything. That is why pragmatists think cognitivity a purely empirical, historico-social notion. But if conventions of representation can vary as blamelessly as sense of humor—or, more to the point, if the only relevant sort of blame is the sort that attaches to those who are insufficiently cooperative in achieving shared practical goals—then representationality, like convergence, is a broken reed. It is of no help in pinning down the nature of cognitivity or in offering a seriously didactic account of truth.³³

But James was a physician and a scientist committed to empirical research first and foremost, who clearly considered representationality and the content of both representations and the stream of consciousness very important to determining the pragmatic conception of truth. I think that Rorty has elided 'empirical' and 'sociohistorical' in the above passage to ignore the empirical stress in James' conception of truth and replaced it with a far more Foucault-like sociohistorical concept, for which he then usurps the 'pragmatist' label. Likewise, Rorty runs together 'shared practical goals,' 'representationality,' and 'convergence,' as if all three were the same, either for pragmatists in general, or for James in particular. But James, at least, a) does not think that goals have to be socially shared to be legitimate, b) values representations, of both shared and individual types,³⁴ and c) does not think that convergence necessarily follows from either of the other two. Indeed, James's take on convergence would be that it is only appropriately to be expected in science, where the evidence for some claim is potentially complete. Unlike Rorty, James can clearly distinguish lies from mistakes, and truths, of both pragmatic and scientific types, from both of them. Rorty, like Foucault, cannot. I don't think Rorty is entitled to call himself a pragmatist on the issue of truth, at least not of a Jamesian stripe. 35

c. Why claims that truth is power fail to identify the notion of truth that matters.

On behalf of the socio-historical view of truth, however, I agree that there is an important dimension of discourse, especially political and social discourse, that is driven by power relations among groups. Foucault's questions about who is allowed to speak and who becomes silenced by a manner of discourse are important questions for any conscientious truth-seeker to ask. In logic classes I often tell my students to look for what **isn't** said in a discussion: for this may reveal more important information on the topic than what **is** said does. The suppressed, ignored, denied, or merely glossed over information may be more revealing of the character of the discussion than the actual words said. But I don't think it follows from this platitude about discourse that truth is utterly unattainable, or bottomlessly murky. Indeed, the virtue of revealing the suppressed or denied pre-suppositions or pre-history of a discourse consists precisely in the cathartic value of that type of revelation in achieving a nearer proximity to the productive and useful truth. 36

But if one limits ability to speak of the impact of a discourse to its socio-historic roots and its power relations in society, one has missed the representational dimension of language use that James considered tied to both our stream of consciousness and the empirical world. Both processes of consciousness in experience and processes in the world with which human consciousness interacts are ultimately independent of the wills or power control of humans. Both are recalcitrant, although constantly changing, facts of a reality that is in many respects, biologically, psychologically, and ontologically, independent of human wills or power-relations. We may create theoretical constructs of knowledge, but we create these conceptual constructs out of experiential data about our own and the world's processes, which we do not create. Our own stream of consciousness and the world's causal flow are both given to us in a recalcitrant sense that no capricious 'will to power' can override. The second-person, social world, and especially the types of example of coercive social roles discussed by Foucault, such as 'homosexuality' and 'schizophrenia' may well be as subject to power relations as Foucault claims. But the first-person world of the stream of consciousness, and the third-person world of science and empirical research, are not as flexible as Foucault and Rorty presume. Here, whether a representation has reality right or not matters, and matters very much. Reality will rebound and hit one in the head, if one does not deal with it honestly and realistically. And since the inner-personal, and outer social and physical worlds ultimately interrelate to one another, even the discourse text of the social world does not float freely in deconstructible imaginative space. The objectively existing unearthed tortured bodies and the testimony of the survivor of the atrocities can speak with the power of recalcitrant reality against even the dictatorial political and social power of the general who committed the atrocities. 37

Harvey Cormier has also discussed the issue that I raised in this section of the paper, whether Putnam or Rorty is a better Jamesian, but, interestingly, Cormier concludes that Rorty is closer to James on truth issues than Putnam is. 38

Cormier argues that Putnam, like Pierce, is still wedded to a Kantian notion of absolute truth and necessity,³⁵ while Rorty shares with James,

...[D]efense of the individual person, individual experiences and individual freedom to act from the “vicious abstractionism” that James associated with the Hegelian view of truth.³⁶

My disagreement with Cormier, as Putnam’s with Rorty, seems to be a matter of stress on two facets of James’s thought. Putnam and I are stressing the scientific bent in James, while Cormier and Rorty stress the individualist strain in his thought. I won’t pursue this issue now more than I already have, although it might be interesting to revisit in another paper.

I will now turn to some contemporary cognitive science, to support my argument for a Jamesian, pragmatic view of truth.

4. Cognitive Science returns to James’s Stream of Consciousness & Notion of Truth

a. Varela and Mangan on mental duration and the fringe in consciousness

Although James’s *Principles of Psychology* remained a popular textbook for much of the twentieth century, his conceptions of how language works and how thinking takes place in a stream of thought was largely eclipsed by behaviorism in psychology³⁷ and logicism or deconstructionism in philosophy of language. All three intellectual movements claimed to be more ‘scientific’ than James was, despite the fact that he was a clinical physician and scientific researcher in his own right. But as the twenty-first century gets underway, science is moving in a direction that James and his view of truth would find more ambient than those twentieth century movements. I will point out some research in contemporary Cognitive Science that is revealing that James was on the right track in his theories about the functioning of the brain and its relationships to thought and language production.

Francisco J. Varela and Bruce Mangan have been doing research on temporal duration in phenomenal consciousness and the experience of conscious states ‘between’ the consciousness of objects or events, that they, following James, refer to as fringe consciousness.³⁸ Unlike reductivists, such as Daniel Dennett and Paul Churchland, who follow behaviorism to argue that all consciousness is reducible to neurological functioning which is ultimately describable in objective, third-person, scientific or syntactical language, Varela and Mangan argue that time, as experienced by humans, is deeply, pragmatically rooted in the intentionality, the emotional tone, and the dynamics of a lived life. The very conception of an object is a result of the interaction of sensations, intentions and emotions within a flow of experiential time, primed by dispositions to action.³⁹ Varela’s studies have demonstrated that the flow of time in phenomenal consciousness is complex and non-linear,⁴⁰ and not reducible to physical-computational temporal elapse.⁴¹ Varela explains phenomenal time as follows:

Even under a cursory reduction, already provided by reflections such as those of Augustine and James, time in experience is quite a different story from a clock in linear time. To start with, it does not present itself as a linear sequence, but as having a complex *texture* (whence James’ ‘specious present’ is not a ‘knife-edge’ present), and its fullness is so outstanding that it dominates our existence to an important degree. In a first approximation this texture can be described as follows: There is always a centre, a now moment with a focused intentional content (say, this room with my computer in front of me on which the letters I am typing are highlighted.) This centre is bounded by a horizon or fringe that is already past. (I still hold the beginning of the sentence I just wrote) and it projects towards an intended next moment (this writing session is still unfinished.) These horizons are mobile: this very moment which was present (and hence, was not merely described but lived as such) slips towards an immediately past present. Then it plunges further out of view: I do not hold it just as immediately and I need an added depth to keep it at hand.⁴²

What Varela calls object-events are the lived experience of an intentional focusing within this Jamesian ‘specious present’, and they produce what Varela calls a non-isomorphic neurophenomenology. A triple-braid of neurobiological events, formal descriptive tools derived from nonlinear dynamics, and lived temporal experience, in combination, constitute his new way to describe human thinking.⁴³ But, in its debts to James, the new phenomenological approach is a far cry from the reductivism of the recent past, especially as pursued by many analytical philosophers. Two key presumptions of the reductivist approach are rejected by Varela’s neurophenomenology: that thought consists of atomistic propositions and that a third-person behaviorist approach is adequate to explain the functioning of a mind and its thoughts.

For issues related to truth, the new approach indicates that any propositional analysis, given in terms of linear mathematical or logical functions, such as Tarski's or Soames's, must be mistaken. The locus for the representation that will be judged true or false is not specific enough to be restricted to a propositional form. The locus of representation is dynamically spread out in time, on a continuum of which the specious present is too insubstantial a slice to provide a static propositional form. The representation itself connects a conscious experience, of a non-linear sort to a holistic world-as-experienced; so the presumption inherent in the Soames/Tarski model that an isomorphism can be drawn between two static items, whether one is a proposition and the other is a world, or a representative proposition and itself, misrepresents the nature of the human representational relationship. Further, a Jamesian "stream of thought" representation will contain many elements explicitly ruled out as psychologism by the Fregian⁴⁴ Platonization of thought; emotional connections, connections by association, and intentionality, embodied relations to a moving body and its kinesthetic relations to space, time, and its environment, social expectations, and the like. The redundancy theory of truth, and its Fregian ancestry, was explicitly designed to renounce these elements of thought for the sake of constructing an abstract logic system unencumbered by human psychology. The human elements impose logical opacity, which is undesirable for a logic system, but uneliminable from representations in a stream of thought.

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But, because thinking involves specific processes rooted in brain chemistry, and is designed to do representative tasks directed at intentional and affective goals, truth is not a deconstructible free-floater, either. Someone's thoughts and feelings must be tied to their biochemistry, representational capacity, and motives, in important, specific ways. Contemporary cognitive science is also pointing out how brain biology imposes limits on what theorists can claim for human capacities, whether the capacities are ethical, psychological, or epistemological.

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For example, the studies of the brain damage of Phineas Gage have revealed that ethical reasoning is rooted in the ventro-medial pre-frontal region of the brain,⁴⁵ and is essentially connected with capacity to show emotional valence. Antonio Damasio claims, "The immune system, the hypothalamus, the ventro-medial frontal cortices and the Bill of Rights have the same root cause."⁴⁶ Since this is the last section of the brain to develop, and is not fully developed until 21 years of age, cognitive science is indicating that holding young teens fully morally accountable may be unreasonable. It seems likely in light of contemporary studies of the brain that epistemological theories like Plato's,⁴⁷ which claimed that reasoning improved when emotions were suppressed or transcended, were equally unrealistic. Damasio has shown that an emotionless person is one who cannot think or plan at all, not one with clearer and more pure reasoning.

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Bruce Mangan explains that the various threads of Varela's braid can be thought of as various types of restraints and limits on what consciousness can do to focus intentionality. He discusses these constraints and limitations in the following terms:

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What then is the operative limitation on the trade-offs in consciousness? At this point the answer should be evident: Articulation capacity. *At the deepest level consciousness IS the limited but infinitely plastic capacity to articulate experience.* This overall capacity is conserved during a large number of phenomenological transformations. Normally, when something becomes clear, something else becomes vague—the sum of total articulation remains more or less constant. ⁴⁸

So, intentionality, biology and representational capacity all aim in a specific direction; that is, the direction of articulating experience arising within a stream of consciousness. This is neither a free-floating imaginative capacity, nor a deterministic rule ordered mechanism, but rather is a multiply constrained set of specific processes directed at articulating the human experiences from which they arose. So, in this sense, truth is very personal, and a product of consciousness. But it is not a result of capricious willfulness, imagination or power seeking, nor a mechanistic result of brain chemistry, as understood in behavioristic reductivism.

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Varela et al., do not discuss the processes in the world that would provide the context for mind-independent truth. But since the Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics presumed to be true of the mind is so undermined by their research, we might presume it will vanish from the context and environment of thought as well. And, indeed, Lakoff and Johnson argue that it does.

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b. Lakoff and Johnson on processes in embodied consciousness and truth

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have recently pointed out that both the analytical notion of truth as correspondence between a proposition and an externally existing, independent reality and the hermeneutical notion of truth as a construction of a free-floating imagination depend on the Cartesian conception of a mind as a disembodied entity. Descartes, of course, was recycling some very Platonic and Aristotelian ideas of pure spirit or

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form, polluted matter, and mechanical causation. Since contemporary cognitive science has shown how dependent on the structure and function of our brains and the processes in the world our knowledge is, Lakoff and Johnson argue that both the scientific realism and the postmodern anti-realism of 20th century philosophy have been empirically discredited. They present their view of embodied realism, which looks quite Jamesian, in this way:

Since embodied realism denies, on empirical grounds, that there exists one and only one correct description of the world, it may appear to some to be a form of relativism. However, while it does treat knowledge as relative—relative to the nature of our bodies, brains and interactions with our environment—it is not a form of extreme relativism because it has an account of how real, stable knowledge, both in science and in the everyday world, is possible. That account has two aspects. First there are the directly embodied concepts such as basic level concepts, spatial relation concepts and event-structure concepts. These concepts have an evolutionary origin and enable us to function extremely successfully in our everyday interactions with the world. They also form the basis for our stable scientific knowledge.

Second, primary metaphors make possible the extension of these embodied concepts into abstract theoretical domains. The primary metaphors are anything but arbitrary social constructs, since they are highly constrained both by the nature of our bodies and brains and by the reality of our daily interactions. ⁴⁹

In the Lakoff and Johnson view of knowledge, as on James' view, conscious processes in an active, dynamic mind interact with a dynamic and changing environment, so there is nothing static on either end of the knower-known relationship that could be the terminal points for a correspondence relationship. Further, since they claim that truth is situational and depends on a person's understanding of the situation, ⁵⁰ there is a strong need for understanding of the perspectives of various individuals and groups to understand what is true. ⁵⁰

Much of what drives the perspectives in thought, for Lakoff and Johnson, are embodied metaphors, many of which operate at a sub-conscious level. The authors argue that metaphorical thinking is basic in reasoning, and most abstract thought is built on these basic, embodied metaphors. Logic is wholly inadequate to capture the embodied nature of thought because it rejects the basic metaphorical structure on which most thought is built. Their conclusions about the basic nature of human truth are: ⁵¹

Reason and our conceptual structure are shaped by our bodies, brains, and modes of functioning in the world. Reason and concepts are therefore, not transcendent... Much of everyday metaphysics arises from metaphor. ⁵¹

So, for these authors, as for Varela and Shear, language does not even have the structure it would need to have to be the type of thing that either analytical philosophers or post-modern philosophers describe it as being. Rather, language is a tool for understanding that emerges from a stream of consciousness, which is characterizable as having certain functional psychological constraints. The relationship of language to the world is that processes in the world seem describable by certain apt metaphors and projections of psychological processes, and empirical reiteration and study of these relations over time reinforces the value of some, which become established as scientific truths, while discounting the aptness or usefulness of other metaphorical or projected understandings, which are then discarded as counter-productive. Both individuals and society as a whole go through these learning processes. ⁵²

5. Conclusion: Truth, Consciousness and Reality

In this paper I have given a brief summary of James's conception of truth, and shown how many of James's key themes, such as the process-oriented aspects of truth, the dynamic and changing aspects of truth, its perspectival nature, and its rootedness in human consciousness, emotions, life and practical goals, are reflected in contemporary Cognitive Science, especially as articulated by Varela, Mangan, Lakoff and Johnson and Damasio. ⁵³

I have argued that the deflationist view of truth in contemporary analytical philosophy cannot capture the meaning of truth because it has cut its materials too thin in restricting considerations related to truth to very narrowly conceived logical considerations concerning propositions, and by shutting itself off from experience of the emotional and intentional aspects of a lived life. And I have argued that the socio-historical view of truth espoused by Foucault, Rorty and other hermeneutical philosophers cannot capture the meaning of truth because they do not consider the roles of a) stable functions of consciousness, and b) practical interactions with a recalcitrantly existent environment, in their considerations of the nature of truth. While James did not have all of what we need for a complete analysis of truth, he was on the right track. Cognitive science is learning from James, as one can see in references to his work in ⁵⁴

a wide variety of contemporary theorists. In addition to the ones that I have already mentioned, Bernard Baars is also relying heavily on James as a resource.⁵² James's theories of truth could also be used to a greater extent than they currently are to clear up confusions that abound in Philosophy of Language. James had the concept of truth that matters.

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Notes

¹ William James, "The Tigers of India," in *Pragmatism and Four Essays from the Meaning of Truth*, New American Library, New York, 1974, (reprint of *Pragmatism* 1907 and *The Meaning of Truth* 1909), p.227.

² Ibid. author's emphasis.

³ William James, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth", in *The Works of William James, Pragmatism*, eds. Fredson Bowers & Ignas Skrupskelis, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1975, p. 107.

⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

⁶ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, Dover Publications, Mineola, NY, (Holt and Company, 1890) p. 240.

⁷ "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," p. 104.

⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

⁹ Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis W. Beck, Bobbs-Merrill Co. Indianapolis, IN, 1959, p. 34.

¹¹ "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," p. 110.

¹² Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge, MA, 1995 p. 8-10.

¹³ Ibid. p. 10 (author's emphasis)

¹⁴ William James, *The Will to Believe*, in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, Longmans, Green and Co. New York, NY, 1903, p. 30

¹⁵ See Hilary Putnam, "Fact and Value", Chap. 6 in *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1981.

¹⁶ David L Hall, and Roger T Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1998, p. 162-163.

¹⁷ Jay L. Garfield, and Murray Kiteley, eds., *Meaning and Truth*, Paragon Issues in Philosophy, Paragon House, NY, 1991, p. 53.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.73.

¹⁹ Scott Soames, *Understanding Truth*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1999 p. 231.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 255.

²¹ Ibid.

²² William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, Dover Publications, Mineola, NY, (Holt and Company, 1890) p. 240.

²³ "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," p. 104.

²⁴ Gettier, Edmund, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* v. 23, 1963, p. 121-123. Many thanks to a blind reviewer of *William James Studies* for pointing out the need for this discussion in this paper.

²⁵ Hilary Putnam, "Fact and Value," reprinted in *Pragmatism, a Reader*, ed. Louis Menand, Vintage Press, Random House, NY, 1997, p. 345.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, "The Formation of Objects" in *The Archeology of Knowledge, and the Discourse on Language* trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, NY, 1972, p. 40.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁰ Rorty, Richard, "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Donald Davidson vs. Crispin Wright," in Lynch, Michael P., ed., *The Nature of Truth*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Cambridge MA, 2001p. 260.

³¹ Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida" in *Pragmatism, a Reader*, ed. Louis Menand, p. 316-317.

³² William James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, Longmans, Green and Co. New York, NY, 1903, pgs. 25-26

³³ Rorty, Richard, "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Donald Davidson vs. Crispin Wright," in Lynch, p. 271-272

³⁴ See, for example, James' treatment of individual experiences and their representations in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

³⁵ Harvey Cormier, *The Truth is What Works, William James, Pragmatism and the Seed of Death*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Maryland, 2001, p. 149.

³⁶ Ibid., p.159.

³⁷ See Eugene Taylor, *William James on Consciousness beyond the Margin*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1996 for an insightful history of how James' philosophy and psychology were marginalized by behaviorism in the twentieth century.

³⁸ Francisco Varela, and Jonathan Shear, (eds.) *The View From Within, First-Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*, Imprint Academic, UK, 1999 pgs. 11-140 and 249-252.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 128.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 112.

⁴² Ibid., p. 112-113.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 137.

⁴⁴ See Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Nominatum" in Garfield and Kitley p. 35 f.

⁴⁵ Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, Quill/Harper Collins Books, 1994, pgs. 8-10 and 32.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.263.

⁴⁷ Plato, *The Theatetus*, and *the Phaedo*, in *Plato, the Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series LXXI, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1973.

⁴⁸ Bruce Mangan, "The Fringe, a Case Study in Explanatory Phenomenology," in Shear and Varela, p. 251.

⁴⁹ George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Basic Books, Perseus Book Group, New York, NY, 1999 p. 96.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 128.

⁵² Baars led a seminar on James' psychology at *Tucson 2006, Toward a Science of Consciousness* at the University of Arizona in Tucson, and has devised a web course on James.

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Investigations into the William James Collection at Harvard: An interview with Eugene Taylor¹

Thibaud Trochu

*Abstract: While browsing among the archival data that remain in the James Collection at Houghton Library and especially regarding the remains of "William James's Philosophical Library", it becomes clear that William James was a very active reader. Among the various fields which stirred his interests, possibly the most striking, as shown by the huge amount of documents, is the field covering such topics as abnormal psychology related to religious experiences, from the most serious monograph in German psychiatry to fly-by-night psychic publications. Can an exploration of these documents help scholars understand how James built up *The Varieties of Religious Experience*? Is it possible to consider these materials as scaffolding that remain behind the scene of his published writings? So, we interviewed a scholar who investigated for years into this material in order to collect some insights about James's sources, about the philosopher's work in the privacy of his own study.*

While browsing among the archival data that remain in the James Collection at Houghton Library and especially regarding the remains of "William James's Philosophical Library", as identified by the James bookplate affixed to some 1000 volumes that were accessed on the open shelves among the millions of volumes of the Widener Collection, it becomes clear that William James was a very active reader. Among the various fields which stirred his interests, possibly the most striking, as shown by the huge amount of documents, is the field covering such topics as abnormal psychology related to religious experiences, from the most serious monograph in German psychiatry to fly-by-night psychic publications. Can an exploration of these documents help scholars to understand, for instance, how James built up *The Varieties of Religious Experience*? Is it possible to consider these materials as scaffolding that remain behind the scene of his published writings? What was the scope of his readings and how did he use them? Eugene Taylor is a scholar who investigated independently for years into this material and published useful books to explore those aspects of James's thought. In order to collect some insights about James's sources, about the philosopher's work in the privacy of his own study, but also on the *Exceptional Mental States Lectures* and their importance, we asked him a series of questions. The interview took place at William James Hall, which houses the department of psychology at Harvard University, on November 5, 2007, at the table in the seminar room on the 15th floor under the philosopher's portrait.

— Given the manifold possible entries into William James's works, how and when were you led to his writings?

The story began back in 1969 when I was a psychology major at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. It was a paradoxical situation because my professor, Jack Roy Strange, taught the history course at the graduate level and I was really interested in Carl Jung at that time. Jung was my main project for the semester. And there was a little woman across the table who worked on William James. I was fascinated when she gave her presentation. At one point she quoted from a letter that James had written to his wife after he had just bought their summer home, in Chocorua, New Hampshire, and he said "and it has fourteen doors and they all open outwards." I thought: "That's my man!"

In 1977, I had a contract with Plenum to do a chapter in a book called *The Stream of Consciousness: Scientific Investigations into the Flow of Human Experience*, edited by Kenneth Pope and Jerome Singer at Yale. My teacher, Jack Roy Strange, was also Kenneth Pope's teacher at Southern Methodist University and Ken asked Jack to do the historical chapter in the book, so Jack chose the title "A search for the historical source of the stream of consciousness." The chapter that I did was on "Asian interpretations: Transcending the stream of consciousness." I had the only illustration in the book: that was a mandala in which psychologists could look at, meditate, and see the stream of their own consciousness.

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At the time I went to Harvard for my admissions interview in 1977, I also registered to read in the James papers at Houghton Library. I had a Master's degree in psychology from Southern Methodist University and a book contract for a chapter, so they permitted me to register as a visiting scholar. While I was in psychology I also spent eight years studying comparative religions with the late Frederic Streng. He had been a student of Mircea Eliade at the University of Chicago. Streng introduced me to the techniques of historical scholarship in comparative religions in the University of Chicago tradition, and I applied them to archival investigation in the history of American psychology and psychiatry when I got to Harvard. That work had to do with the hermeneutic analysis of the documents, which was the essence of the method I employed to study James's Papers.

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- Could you retrace for us your investigation into the James's Papers at Harvard? How did you "reconstruct" and publish the 1896 Lowell lectures on "Exceptional Mental States?"²

Once I had registered to read in the James Papers, I started going through the indices. One was brand new and bound. The other was old and thin and tattered. Then I found two important clues. One, in the brand new one, I found reference to the fact that James had giving a course of Lowell Lectures in 1896 on Exceptional Mental States. I called these items up and found they were notes for a series of public lectures³. So that was the first clue. There were some one hundred twenty five pages in all. Then, before I left, I found a second clue, this time in the tattered index. It was a letter from James's son, Henry James Jr., who was a Harvard overseer and lawyer and executor of the James Estate at that time, dated 1923, offering to Harvard William James's personal library, which I estimate had over 2000 volumes in it⁴. As it turned out, the Department of Philosophy sent over Benjamin Rand, the Departmental librarian, and Ralph Barton Perry, James's designated biographer, who went to the James house and chose some four hundred and fifty books on subjects such as classical philosophy and a few others in their own areas of interest. These volumes were designated for the Treasure Room at Widener (that was before Houghton Library). But that eccentric Yiddish psychologist, Abraham Aaron Roback, who was friends with William James's boys, talked them into telling Harvard that if the University wanted the four hundred and fifty they had to take an additional thousand that contained James's annotations. The books were on radical subjects like demon possession, witchcraft, multiple personality, and religious experience, subjects deemed inappropriate if you publish in the sciences, such as cognitive-behaviourism or rationalist philosophy. Harvard agreed to the arrangement and the four hundred fifty went to the Treasure Room but the additional thousand were given a William James bookplate and assessed to the open shelves among the several million volumes of the Widener collection, according to subject matter.⁵

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Then I had to leave because I was just there for three or four days for my admission's interview. It turned out that within two weeks I was given a notice that I was accepted. Then I came back in the fall and the first thing I did was go back over to the James Papers in Houghton Library. Through a series of machinations, I cannot exactly tell the details now, I found a note that the list of all the books that were given in 1923 was over in the Reading Room in Widener. So I went over there and looked at every single book in the Reading Room and find the list of these books that had belonged to James. That was the beginning because it turned out that the lecture notes that I had originally seen referred to page numbers and cryptic notes referring to books that were on that list. Through another series of machinations I managed to borrow a Professor's library card, which allowed me to check books out for an unlimited period of time. I also landed a small grant, in which I employed work-study students at the Divinity School to look up the call numbers of the thousand books, examine them on the open shelves, and bring back to me anything with annotations, so I could check them out on this Professor's card.

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As it turned out, there was an interesting archivist over at the Medical School who knew about William James and Morton Prince and James's connections to the so-called Boston School of Psychotherapy, which flourished between 1880 and 1920. He and some of his colleagues had just put on a conference on the subject. I went over there and looked into the situation. He was Richard Wolfe, Joseph Garland Librarian in the Boston Medical Library and Archivist at the Harvard Medical School. I confessed to him that I was a student in the Divinity School and I had these two or three hundred books I had been able to check out of Widener from James's personal library that contained his annotations and nowhere to put them. He took me down into the bowels of the medical archives and

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cleared all these shelves and said; “Here, put them up there.” The books remained there for two years. We studied the patterns of the annotations and two or three things became obvious.

First, the books were on many different topics, but numerous books were cross-referenced to each other on topics related to abnormal psychology and religious experience. 8

Second, James had given more than one series of Lowell lectures. The first series he gave in 1878 on “the Brain and Mind” became major chapters of *The Principles of Psychology*. The last series he gave was “Pragmatism,” in 1906, which became the seminal book of the pragmatist movement, *Pragmatism* (1907). But the one in 1896, hardly anyone knew about it. Perry had mentioned it in his Pulitzer Prize winning *Thought and Character of William James* (1935). But those who later also mentioned it, didn’t easily understand what it was all about because the lectures had never been published and the materials had to be reconstructed to find out what the ideas were that lay behind the notes. Also, one needed to track the references, which no one was willing to do, and Graduate students weren’t yet allowed to work in the papers. So, as a previously registered scholar, though I had later become a graduate student, I commenced their reconstruction anyway. 9

Third, one of the things that happened right away was that I began to discover associated materials. There were newspapers accounts of the talks, for instance. Also, I found out about the Harvard University Library Charging Records. The Charging Records contain a reference to every book that every student and every faculty member ever checked out of the Harvard Library from its founding from the original gift of John Harvard to about 1894 or so, when the Library went to a more efficient method of recording books that had been checked out. It was easy when I began the task of looking up what James had checked out as a student, because there were fewer books and the entries simply gave the author, title, and date that the book was checked out, next to the borrower’s signature. But later on, after he became a professor and the decades rolled by, there are more and more entries and the thing started to get unwieldy. This was before the introduction of the Dewey Decimal System, so to manage the situation University-wide, the Harvard librarians tried different experimental classification systems. Up until that time we have all the books that Thoreau checked out, all the books that Emerson checked out, and so on. We have all the books that William James checked out, starting in the 1860s and 1870s, except that suddenly, in the middle of the 1880s, it all changed, when there appeared only cryptic numbers and letters representing each entry. From that day to this, no one knew what those cryptic entries meant. Another scholar, Tom Cadwallader, from Bloomington, Indiana, and I, began to work with two employees of the archives and we spent two years reconstructing the history of the library’s early classification systems. 10

So when I began reconstructing the 1896 Lowell lecture notes, it turned out that there were many more volumes with annotations in them, keyed to the lecture notes. It appears that James had bought the books with Library money, kept most out for two or three years, heavily annotated some of them, and then sent them back, and no one had looked in the book until I pulled it off the shelves. So we had now three sources: one was the books that came from the gift of 1923, and then we had the books that James checked out at Harvard College as a means to track down the references in the unpublished lecture notes, and we had the newspaper accounts of the lectures as he had given them. 11

– How can we characterize the content of James’s philosophical library? Is it scattered? And what could you say about the marginalia, namely all the autographical markings and signs in James’s books?

Aside from the 1450 volumes offered to Harvard in 1923, there are lists by Ralph Barton Perry of books that were afterwards sold. There are numerous individual volumes that made it into Houghton from individuals. There are possibly more than two thousand volumes still in the James family home in Dublin, New Hampshire, in books cases, stashed in window seats, and so on, not all belonging to William James. There were also hundreds left on the shelves in the philosopher’s house at 95 Irving Street that were given away, sold to dealers, and put out at the William James Yard Sale back around 1980 or so. So, yes, the library is now somewhat scattered. 12

Regarding the marginalia, an interesting book by Abraham Roback was, in fact, titled *William James and his marginalia*, because Roback was the one who saw the marginalia first when the library was still in the hands of the James family⁶. He knew the importance of these marginal markings, and he convinced the James boys to get Harvard to take the extra books, even though they were on heretical subjects. So he wrote that book which is very interesting, but it was a casual analysis. It wasn’t like the work I did. When you actually took the annotations and applied them somewhere that had references to these annotations, they take on new meaning. 13

James’s marginalia is also readily identifiable. He would take a book and read it and he would put a very artistic pencil line down the side of a passage he thought interesting. It was a very distinctive line; you can tell just by the 14

pressure and the nature of it. He would never write in the text. He put maybe little checkmarks in the margins and things like that. But then in the back, he created his own index on the last blank page of the book which contained important pages from the book or other books in his library, or others' books that he had read. So, for instance, when you go to the notes for the Exceptional Mental States Lectures, you will find the reference to "Lowell Ontake P. 96." Percival Lowell, the astronomer, was known to William James. Lowell had written this book called *Occult Japan*, in which he was talking about the shamans who ascended Mount Ontake to perform trance ceremonies at the very top. There were two ways up: the way the laymen went and the back way, the way the Ryobu Shinto priests went. So, this was an account of the ascent of Mount Ontake up the priests' route and the trance rituals that occurred at the top. This was what James referred to in the notes for the *Exceptional Mental States Lectures*. When I found the book with his annotations in it, and turned to that page, it said in the margin "read this," which I presume meant, read this example to the audience.

So things like that occurred with each other. He had an idiosyncratic way of recording interesting ideas, and cross- 15
referencing them. He had a very definite system that he used. So it was quite possible in just a glance of 30 seconds to a minute to go through any book and see if the tell-tale pencil lines, the check marks, the index on the last page, and possibly any signatures or dates were there to identify the volume as having been read by James. I went into all the books I could, looking for those kinds of marks. In those that had them, I did start to apply the annotations to a reconstruction of the Lowell Lectures. Afterwards, we turned these books over to Houghton Library.

— *The philosopher's son, Henry James Jr, spoke somewhere about his father's library as "the largest collection ever assembled of crank literature in New England at the turn of the twentieth century." Could you help the international readers to understand this statement more precisely? What would the word "crank" have implied in James's mind? What was his concern when he says that he is "too easily a prey for 'cranks'"? Are they "lame ducks" (Santayana)? Are they fraudulent performers of psychic & religious phenomena?*

By the term 'crank' James's son was referring not just to the slightly deranged, but also to the Spiritualists, Mental 16
Healers, New Thought practitioners, Theosophists, Utopian groups, and the homeopathic-phreno-magnetists that populated what I would call the American psychotherapeutic counter-culture in the 19th century.⁷ There were similar developments in Europe and South America, but the US was definitely ground zero for such movements. The literature that these irregulars produced was mainly ephemeral—flyers, posters, off-prints, self-published books, underground newspapers, limited editions from a spiritualist press, fly-by-night magazines, and so on. It was material that was published which is now gone. Libraries usually do not catalogue such material. Usually there are not a lot of copies of one thing, and the only copy might be in the Library of Congress or it might not. James had his own personal collection of such literature.

I found one interesting advertisement in a folder of miscellaneous material that had belonged to James that, on a 17
single page, listed clairvoyants, astrologers, psychic healers, massage therapists, psychic readers, and a variety of different hawkers of elixirs. They all appeared to have come into town from different places and were staying at the same hotel, from which they offered their services, and this allowed the public to all come to the same location. You could heal a person from a distance, for instance, if you just brought the psychic a lock of the person's hair. Some of these movements had roots going back to the tradition of occult Christianity in Europe. Others were imported to the US as they proliferated abroad—homeopathy, phrenology, and mesmerism would be examples. By the 1830s, practitioners stood out thereafter, such as Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, who healed Mary Baker Eddy, and the trance psychic and healer, Andrew Jackson Davis, allegedly the father of American spiritualism. The Fox sisters followed. And then there were a generation of charismatic women such as Mary Baker Eddy, Helena Blavatsky, and others who started small but soon grew to lead international movements. James's interest in them was that he believed many were practicing sound methods of psychotherapy, the dynamics of which were just beginning to be understood by physicians and scientists. He had written about all this as early as 1868, when he reviewed Epps Sargent's *Planchette: The Despair of science* and A.A. Liébault's *Sleep and Analogous States*.⁸ His study of the psychics and mediums, such as Mrs Leonora Piper, convinced him that we were on the threshold of a new psychology. He associated himself with the psychical researchers and the psychopathologists, was a highly skilled hypnotist himself, and even took in a few patients into his home for treatment.

So James had a collection of this literature. It was "ephemeral" in the sense that it cannot be repeated; and through 18
successive generations of librarians it has been thrown out, displaced. For instance, there was a packet of articles on theosophy on the open shelves. It contained some of the only material I have ever seen on the early history of the Theosophical Society in Boston, which started in 1888. Theosophy in America at the time was taken over by Katherine Tingley and William Q. Judge. The American branch broke away from Blavatsky and the International group centered in India. Then, in 1926 or so Tingley was killed in a traffic accident and Annie Besant went around

and started collecting all of the break away lodges. So the modern history of Theosophy in the US starts in 1926. Nobody has any information about the period of the 1880s. James was a registered member of this earlier group. Sylvia Cranston, from Princeton, sent me the documentation on his membership, and his letters. That was one of the reasons he spoke so favourably about the Theosophists in *The Varieties*, in the chapter on 'Healthy-Mindedness.'

- In the first chapter of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, entitled "Religion and Neurology", James spoke about what he calls "the psychopathic temperament", and he used, we have said, the word "crank". Maybe you might explain more about that, since as a European reader I'm quite baffled about this old-fashioned English expression?

In general, "crank" is a pejorative term originally used to refer to the 19th century New York publisher Horace Greeley, who was likened to the hand of a crank organ, forever grinding out the same old tune. Later it took on the meaning of 'near-insanity'. So it is used by a rationalist who doesn't believe in the afterlife, or by a biological psychiatrist who doesn't believe in the unconscious, or a minister who rigidly preaches the doctrines of Christianity, all of whom think the mental healers' claims are spurious and in the end false, so any one of these irregulars are labelled a "crank". When James used it, he was basically referring to someone else's judgement against people who are odd or irregular. Applied to mental life, it refers to a person whose ideas are outside the norm. The psychopathic temperament might be a term given by psychiatrists for a person who speaks from a state of theopathic absorption, for instance, claiming that God speaks through him, or that He is God. His followers, however, would not call him psychopathic.

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- If "crank" is a pejorative term, why did James seem to switch its meaning? What was his philosophy toward those persons?

He was their great champion. He believed they were onto something, but high culture, normative science, and common everyday reason had not yet noticed. Meanwhile, he also believed that the job of the scientist was to remain neutral while investigating their claims. For instance, he defended the mental healers against a bill in the Massachusetts Legislature put up by the Physicians' lobby that would have required anyone who saw patients to be licensed by taking a test devised by the physicians. James said there were bad apples in every bunch, even in the field of regular medicine, and anyway, "it was a poor policy to burn down the house just to cook a mutton chop" by trying to regulate the entire group. Rather, investigating their activities fairly could lead to new understanding of untried methods.² Similarly with the insane. The best cure for the insane, he had once said, was to keep them in constant contact with healthy minds. In the *Exceptional Mental States Lectures*, his claim was that our fear of the insane is a blanket judgement. Rather, he said, no one flaw is fatal. This is also true of geniuses. Quoting Lombroso he reminded us that "Madness always ferments in the dough of which great men and women are made." In *The Varieties* he reminded us that saints were not perfect. Actually, they almost always showed some morbid characteristics. In addition, psychologically, there was what he called "Myers's Problem," after the discoveries about the subliminal consciousness made by the British psychical researcher, F. W. H. Myers. That is, Myers conceived the interior life as a spectrum of states of consciousness from the psychopathic to the transcendent. He didn't really clarify that in a way in which others did, such as Richard Maurice Bucke, who talked about the same thing in his book *Cosmic Consciousness* in 1901. Bucke had been a friend of James and also Bucke's own example of an opening of the internal spiritual domain is depicted in James's *Varieties*. But James himself alluded to such a spectrum in his article called "Frederick Myers's Service to Psychology" which was written just after Myers's death in 1901.¹⁰ In that article James also identified Myers's Problem. This was the fact that the psychopathic and the transcendent always express themselves to waking consciousness through the self-same channels. For this reason they are so often confused for each other. So, we think that artists are insane or that someone's description of religious ecstasy represents the babbling of the deranged. The real question is, how can waking consciousness comprehend states of consciousness that are beyond itself? James conjectured that there must be some chink that opens up into waking consciousness that allows the chaotic to come through and in the chaotic you get both the worst and the best. So, he would certainly be willing to leave the question open.

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- How do you interpret the so-called "French school of experimental psychopathology" of that time? Its influence on James? For instance, how do you consider James's review of Liébeault's *Sleep and analogous states* in 1868? How can we explain James's early knowledge of that work? And what was his relation toward early psychoanalysis and "depth psychology"?

Well, the Germans were into experimental laboratory psychophysics and the English were into mental testing. The French were more clinically oriented, their medical schools being associated throughout the 18th and 19th centuries with their major teaching hospitals, so the focus was “la clinique,” bedside teaching, not laboratory experimentation. For them, that came second. But there was an important lineage in such fields as experimental physiology from Bichat and Magendie to Claude Bernard. Théodule Ribot introduced English and German psychology, but the French take on these developments was the emergence of French psychopathology around such figures as Jean Martin Charcot, a neurologist at the Salpêtrière Hospital, and Hippolyte Bernheim at Nancy. 21

In this regard, Auguste Liébeault was a French country doctor in the 1860s who kept a separate practice of patients whom he treated with hypnosis for free and he wrote a book about it. James was supposed to be in Germany attending the lectures of Helmholtz and Wundt, but was so dilapidated that he skipped this part of his education and fled to the baths at Bad Nauheim, where he convalesced and read. He had been exposed to hypnotism at an early age through a close family friend, the Swedenborgian and homeopathic physician, James John Garth Wilkinson. In addition, James was a product of Harvard Medical School professors who had been profoundly influenced by French clinical medicine.¹¹ 22

I had a correspondence with Henri Ellenberger, the existentialist historiographer in psychiatry, about this point.¹² He had written that very few people read *Sleep and its analogous states*, and reviewed it in Europe. I pointed out that James had reviewed it in 1868 in the American literature and he was very interested. The story is important because James is always portrayed as a student of Wundt and Helmholtz, when actually, he was an ardent Francophile. This was also right around that time of his near-suicidal episode, about 1867. Hypnotism was obviously a remedy he investigated in the treatment of his own condition. 23

So, I have appropriated the phrase “French Experimental Psychology of the Subconscious” from Alfred Binet, who used it in the 1890s when he referred to Ribot, Janet, and others. While James reviewed Liébeault in 1868, it was not until the 1880s that Hyppolite Bernheim discovered Liébeault and brought him to Nancy. After that, an ideological war broke out between Bernheim and Charcot on the scientific explanation of hypnosis. Bernheim said it was normal suggestibility and Charcot said it was a state peculiar to psychopathology. James somewhat straddled both camps. He had read Liébeault, but also, in 1882, through Ribot he had been introduced to Charcot, Binet, and others. Pierre Janet came on the scene around 1885. I’ve seen some letters between James and Janet. There is one glued into the book called *Mollie Fancher, The Brooklyn enigma* which is in the archives of the Harvard Medical School. I recall there might be one or two other letters that I have heard about. There are more letters to Ribot, I now realize, that draw other connections to James. One is James’s article called “What is an emotion?” from 1884, which had a big impact on Ribot while writing his essays on personality and on the pathology of the emotions. 24

– In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James mentions a “discovery first made in 1886.” Could you explain what it was all about? Is this the discovery of the so-called “subliminal self”?

The religious studies scholar, Ann Taves, author of *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, and I had a running argument about that at the meetings of the American Academy of Religion. She is a scholar of American religious history who has taken the work of Sonu Shamdasani and myself seriously about James’s contribution to experimental psychopathology, which James scholars usually do not do. It is usually said that theories on dissociation, hypnosis, and dual personality had no impact because they were not Freudian. So Professor Taves got into that and in 2002, when the anniversary of *The Varieties* came up, there was a James symposium, and she raised that issue about the so-called 1886 discovery. We claimed that James was referring to F.W.H. Myers on the subliminal. She claimed that it was in fact Janet’s paper delivered by Jules Janet, his uncle, to Charcot’s “Society for Physiological Psychology”.¹³ I nevertheless originally thought that James clearly in his own mind believed that it was Myers, and not Janet or Freud. I think Carl Jung mentioned that same passage and had claimed that it was F.W.H Myers whom James was likely referring to. We certainly didn’t have access to the same original documents. However, on further reflection, James may also have been referring to his discovery of the Belmont medium, Mrs. Piper. He did in several places refer to her as an important discovery. This fact has not been considered enough in the discussion. 25

- So, there was not only one discovery or one experiment? Wasn’t there also this work of Edmund Gurney, from the SPR in England, and others, men in France, who were doing experiments on post-hypnotic suggestion at the same time?

Yes, the psychical researchers in England were themselves experimenting with hypnosis, and also interested in the results of similar experiments carried on by the French psychopathologists. My understanding of it is that Janet had 26

developed the case of Léonie for his Ph.D. dissertation. He studied—very unlike Janet in his career—the problem of suggestion at a distance. This referred to the phenomenon where the subject could be hypnotized while the hypnotizer was not immediately present, but at a distance. This was likely due to hypnotic rapport having been already established at a previous time between subject and experimenter, making the subject hypersuggestible, also exacerbated by her hysteric condition. But it seemed also to have a slightly occult reference. Janet was a disciple of Charcot, but such “facts” nevertheless went against Charcot’s theory of the physical basis of hypnotic trance. That was the reason why this paper had been given some importance at that time.

As soon as Janet’s first paper on the subject was presented before Charcot’s group, a contingency of British psychical researchers and a separate group of physicians from Charcot’s circle met where Janet had worked with his patient in the asylum at Le Havre in France. Both groups jointly investigated Leonie. It was an historic meeting because it started the psychical researchers reproducing the experiments of the French Experimental Psychology of the Subconscious. Alfred Binet, with Charles Féré, was doing extensive researches in post-hypnotic suggestion, hypersuggestibility, and so on. In one experiment they placed a coin the size of a dime on the neck of an entranced subject and she was able to allegedly report the date on the coin. That was the kind of scientific studies which were done at that time, on phenomena that seems a little fantastic today. But that has to do with the ambiguous nature of hypnosis. There is something radically different from the rational waking state which most scientists cannot tolerate about the claims of hypnosis. That led James to maintain that psychology failed to have a language and an epistemology to deal with alternative states of consciousness.

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— In the philosophical biography of William James he published in 1935, Ralph Barton Perry ends by stating the importance of the “noetic quality of abnormal mental states.”¹⁴ What do you think about this statement? Does this address, for instance, the “mescal episode” due to S. Weir Mitchell? Or might we relate it to James’s dreams as he describes them in his late article “A Suggestion about Mysticism”? Can these forms of altered consciousness be a form of knowledge?

First of all, the “noetic quality of abnormal mental states” refers to non-ordinary states as a source of higher visionary knowledge than the facts garnered from the senses. Even alcohol intoxication, James had said in *The Varieties*, was capable of giving us a glimpse of the infinite; the only problem was, as a pickling agent, it was poisonous to the body, the only vehicle we have to experience those higher psychological states. To reiterate, again you have the problem of waking consciousness trying to understand states beyond itself. Now, James was not a proponent of the method of symbolism, as Freud and Jung were. They wanted to know the content of the patient’s dreams. This is what differentiates his contributions to a dynamic psychology of the subliminal from psychoanalysis or analytical psychology. James was rather an exponent of different states of consciousness, some dissolutive, as Myers had called them, some evolutive. This seems to imply higher or lower states, as when we might compare conditions where we witness the crippling disintegration of personality in the insane, as opposed to a highest state of unification leading to psychological health in the mystic, as in spiritual types. It also implies that there is a qualitative change in the rational waking state as it transforms into these other conditions. We know in psychiatry about crippling states of schizophrenia that are accompanied with extraordinary and penetrating perception of reality in deeper and more sensitive ways than the person in the normal state. It was also believed at the time that, while the psychical researchers had not produced any evidence for life after death, their investigations did suggest that normal human beings were capable of being trained to achieve supernormal abilities. Moreover, the line this development took was an appeal to the growth oriented dimension of personality. It is very clear in depth psychology that the purpose of symbolism is to be able to translate the data of non-rational states into some intelligible form that waking consciousness cannot otherwise deal with. The dialogue between consciousness and the unconscious takes place through symbolism: through symbolism in art, through symbolism in dreams, through symbolism in word association tests, or through symbolism in free association, after Freud. It is the language of psychotherapeutics. James reserved the method of symbolism for madmen,¹⁵ which is, I guess, why the depth psychologists used it.

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Concerning the “mescal episode”, there are a number of things to say. First, James received the peyote buttons from the Philadelphia neurologist, Silas Weir Mitchell, a close friend. Mitchell had gotten them from the US Government, who had ordered cavalry physicians at outposts in the Southwest to collect them from the Indian tribes who used them in religious ceremonies. Mitchell’s task was to find out more about what these substances were. Whatever chemical assay was performed, Mitchell and other physicians also ingested the peyote themselves and reported extraordinary states of consciousness. Today we call them entheogens within the psychedelic family of drugs—naturally occurring plant substances that induce visionary states of consciousness. They were originally classed as psychotomimetics back in the 1950s, because physicians believed they mimicked psychoses. James waited until he was up in the mountains on vacation to try the peyote, but swallowed only one cactus button. He became

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violently ill, throwing up and with horrific intestinal explosions. This is to be expected; as such symptoms are from the alkaloids in the plant. The Indians also believed that this flushing was a cleansing phase for the visions. But James had no visions, obvious enough to anyone who has taken them, because he did not take enough of the buttons. Nevertheless, there are some clues that suggest in the days following this that his perceptions became temporarily though only slightly more acute.¹⁶

The example of the telescoping dream is also an interesting one related to the development of a science of consciousness that is capable of accommodating the experience of psychic phenomena and exploration of the transcendent.¹⁷ Most James scholars have no clue how to understand James's interest in the paranormal, if they even acknowledge it at all. But for James, it was part of his larger project to understand consciousness. In one of the last essays he published before his death in 1910, entitled "A Suggestion about Mysticism," James was reiterating the idea that consciousness was a field with a focus and a margin, where the margin expands and contracts. He used the term "fall of the threshold" to describe a receding of the waters, so to speak, as with a low tide, so that what is below the surface of consciousness becomes visible. One can only imagine extensive mud flats with old tires or an abandoned vehicle that had been submerged, tree branches, and other decomposing vegetation, in other words,—what is forgotten and disregarded or of another world. But no! James described various permutations of experience in subliminal states and assures us there is much there to discover, particularly about ourselves. As one example, he gives an account of his own, where he woke up from one dream into another that he had had the previous night. There was a confusion of dreams that frightened him and when he awoke from dreaming in a panic, tried to go back to sleep but only succeeded in falling back into the dream within a dream within a dream. In a fitful but sleepless condition he eventually dozed off for the last two hours of the night without incident. In the article he attempted to fathom what these experiences meant; was he experiencing a thrombosis? Were they dissociated states? Did one dream come from a dream in one part of the night that recurred later in a new dream, but they were so discontinuous? Could one of the dreams have come from his own ancestral past which he only dreamt at a certain time of the night? That says several things. First, he spoke about dreams, which is very important since he did not believe in the method of symbolism and did not use the method to interpret dreams. So, it is almost as if he were describing things physiologically, as physiological facts, simply reporting it and saying "What do you think of it?" In any event, these were topics to be further explored. But at the end he did say: "The ordinary psychologist disposes of the phenomenon under the conveniently 'scientific' head of 'petit mal,' if not 'bosh' or 'rubbish.' But we know so little of the noetic value of abnormal mental states of any kind that in my own opinion we had better keep an open mind and collect facts sympathetically for a long time to come. We shall not *understand* these alternations of consciousness either in this generation or the next."¹⁸

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— It is little known that WJ's wife, Alice Howe (Gibbens) James, made a handwritten list of a dozen books, labelled "William James's most valuable and highly prized books."¹⁹ These books and pamphlets (most in German) are about topics such as trance, double consciousness, inebriety, hypnotism, animal magnetism, and psychic experiences,—from a physiological point of view. So, what can you say about this enigmatic list? About Alice Howe James? Why might she have written such a list?

Yes, this is a most curious list among the James Papers at Houghton Library. The correlation of this single sheet with what we now know about the *Exceptional Mental States Lectures*, and with what we just talked about, I think is very important. I imagine it was a little place in his library where he kept all this material together meaning to get to it. He probably got some of these articles from the authors directly. So, they meant a lot to him, partly because they were from colleague whom he knew with whom he communicated. They might seem strange for mainstream interpreters who are not trained to think in those terms and who see nothing but crank literature. But I think these were primary examples of what James intended to describe as what was beyond the margin. That is the way in which we might understand it. That is the way it comes to consciousness. And this is the language, picked up from these different writings that he was using to understand these peculiar mental states. So, if we examine the documents I think that becomes clear.

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To my mind, this list is the virtual philosopher's stone—ignored as insignificant, yet it begins to define the core of his psychology, and how that psychology, in my mind, is connected to his philosophy, particularly his radical empiricism. It is usually imagined that James's psychology was archaic as compared to the modern prejudices toward psychoanalysis, or unrelated to modern conceptions of cognitive science. Because this list may define the core of what William James's psychology represents. This certainly explains the greater number of books on these subjects with annotations in the original gift of his library to Harvard in 1923. But he became extremely distracted in the 1890s with developments around pragmatism, the battle against other philosophers to argue him down, the eventual advent of pragmatism as the defining philosophy of the Progressive Era in American social thought, and the advent

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of pragmatism as the first uniquely American philosophy to have international consequences. He also sustained a major injury to his heart around that time and that must have slowed him down considerably.

As for why the list is in Alice's hand, we have examples of manuscripts for James's books copied in the hand of James's daughter Margaret, and accounts of James rowing around the lake while his wife, Alice, sat at the back of the boat and copied down whatever he said. She was familiar with his work and would have wanted to make sure after he died that Ralph Barton Perry, already designated as James's biographer, or Henry James Jr, the son and lawyer who edited the first set of James's letters, were aware of particularly these materials. 33

In the end, James was looking for the larger connection in terms of what I would call a whole organism physiology. He was against the method of symbolism as it was developing in the field of psychotherapeutics, and yet we employ this method as a way to talk about the mind-body connection, which is at the heart of psychotherapeutics. At the same time, James's vision was a long one and by no means Cartesian. The classical separation in the West of mind and body created a distorted medicine—so successful on the physical side, while, as Jung has said, our understanding of the mind still resembles a 14th century map of the world. James was looking for some other way to conceptualize the physical and the mental and, of course, that was at the heart of his radical empiricism: the relation between our experience and our understanding. He was never able to finish this task he had set for himself. His metaphysics remained incomplete, and he left us an unfinished arch. In any event, I would equate this list to what a mature philosophy of radical empiricism would look like back at that time, supported by what James believed would be a scientific psychology of consciousness. Such a psychology for James had to account for the vegetative nervous system, trance consciousness, and pure experience before the differentiation of subject and object, as in the description of ecstatic states of consciousness expressed across cultures. I would say that this is even more urgent today than in James's time, and explains why his materials remain so current, even after 100 years. 34

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Notes

All of James's writings are referred to the complete edition *The Works of William James*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1977-1988.

¹ I would like to thank the Houghton Library Staff for their kindness and skills, and Professor Nobuo Kazashi, witness, advisor and also photographer of the meeting

² Taylor, E.I. (1982). *William James on Exceptional Mental States*. New York: Scribner's Sons.

³ The notes are in The James Collection at Houghton Library, bMA Am 1092. 9 (4402-4405), and are transcribed in *Manuscript Lectures*, 'Lectures on Abnormal Psychology', p. 55-81.

⁴ Letter from Henry James Jr to A. C. Coolidge, Director of the University Library, dated November 19, 1923, inserted in the Official Shelf List, The James Papers, Houghton Library.

⁵ "List of Books and Pamphlets selected from the Library of William James and presented to Harvard College by his Family, 1923", Houghton Library, bMS Am 1092.9 (4579).

⁶ Abraham Aaron Roback (1890-1965), *William James, his Marginalia, Personality and Contribution*, SCI-ART Publishers, Cambridge MA, 1942. See also A. A. Roback Papers, Houghton Library, MS Am 2518, and Taylor, E. I., "Abraham Aaron Roback", *American National Biography*, Oxford University Press, American Council of Learned Societies, 2001.

- ⁷ Taylor, E. I (1999). *Shadow Culture: Psychology and Spirituality in America*, Washington DC, Counterpoint.
- ⁸ *Review of Planchette* by Epes Sargent (1869), *Essays in Psychical Research*, p. 1 ; *Review of Du Sommeil et des Etats Analogues*, by A.A. Liébeault (1868), *Essays, Comments and Reviews*, p. 240.
- ⁹ On James's view on the "Medical Registration Act" (1894), See various letters to editors published in *Essays, Comments and Reviews*, p. 142 – 150.
- ¹⁰ "Myers's service to psychology" (1901), *Essays in Psychical Research*, p. 192.
- ¹¹ Various reviews on French psychopathology are published in *Essays Comments and Reviews*. See also James's article entitled 'the Hidden Self', *Essays in Psychology*, p. 247.
- ¹² Ellenberger, H., *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, New York, Classic Books, 1970.
- ¹³ About the so-called "discovery", *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 190 ; Ann Taves, *Fits, Trance, Visions*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1999. For a complete discussion, "The Fragmentation of Consciousness and the Varieties of Religious Experience", in Proudfoot W. (dir.), *Re-Experiencing the Varieties of Religious Experience, William James and the Science of Religions*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004.
- ¹⁴ The "noetic quality of abnormal mental states" has been coined by James and developed in the chapter on Mysticism in *The Varieties*. Perry, R.B. (1935) *The Thought and Character of William James*. Boston: Little & Brown, vol. 2, p. 674-677
- ¹⁵ In a letter to Miss Calkins dated September 19, 1909, James says: "[...] I strongly suspect Freud, with his dream-theory, of being a regular *halluciné*. [...]". And on September 28, 1909, to Flournoy: "[...] I hope that Freud and his pupils will push their ideas to their utmost limits, so that we may learn what they are. They can't fail to throw light on human nature; but I confess that he made on me the impression of a man obsessed with fixed ideas. I can make nothing with his dream theories, and obviously 'symbolism' is a most dangerous method [...]", Skrupskelis, I., Berkeley, E. (editors), *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 12, p. 331, 335.
- ¹⁶ The "Mescal episode" is known by a letter from James to his brother Henry, dated June 8 1896, and another to Benjamin Paul Blood, dated June 28, 1896. In the Chapter X of *the Varieties of Religious Experience*, James quotes an experience of "chromatic hallucinations" induced by mescal from James Henry Leuba. In his Notebook containing outlines for the Gifford Lectures he notes, "all kind of odd experiences, mescal, ecstasies etc. give them indeterminate possibilities". See also Silas Weir Mitchell, "Remarks on the Effects of the Mescal Buttons", *British Medical Journal*, 1896.
- ¹⁷ "A suggestion about Mysticism", *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 157.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- ¹⁹ "Valuable and much prized books of William James", in the hand of Alice Howe (Gibbens) James, Houghton Library, bMS Am 1092. 9 (4581).

“The Many and the One” and the Problem of Two Minds Perceiving the Same Thing

Mark Moller

Abstract: William James never completed “The Many and the One,” the systematic metaphysical work that he began writing in 1903. Most scholars attribute this failure to illness, temperament and/or distraction. In this paper, I argue that this does not get it quite right. I show, instead, that there is a flaw in James’s radical empiricism, as he originally conceived of it, that he became aware of and which prevented him from completing “The Many and the One.” James believed that a successful defense of his radical empiricism required that he show that it could provide a satisfactory account of how two minds can simultaneously perceive the same thing. However, as he tried to work out this philosophy systematically, he came to doubt that it could provide this account. I show in the paper that it was this doubt that ultimately kept him from completing “The Many and the One.”

Introduction

In 1902, having just completed *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James expressed in a letter to Henri Bergson his intent to begin work on a new book, his “*magnum opus*,” that would finally articulate his metaphysical views. 1

My health is so poor now that work goes very slowly; but I am going, if I live, to write a general system of metaphysics which, in many of its fundamental ideas, agrees closely with what you have set forth.¹

James never completed the book that he intended to write. Nor are any of the other books that he wrote during the last decade of his life the systematic metaphysical work that he had envisioned. All that remains from his efforts is a set of incomplete manuscripts housed in the James Collection of Harvard University’s Houghton Library.² 2

Although incomplete, these manuscripts, along with some other letters in which James described the book he was working on, provide a fairly clear picture of what it was to be like. We know, for instance, that its title was to be “The Many and the One.”³ We also know it was to be a book for scholars and not another collection of popular lectures like so many of James’s other works. But perhaps most importantly we know that the book was to be an articulation and defense of James’s radical empiricism. It was to present the details of this philosophy in a systematic and technical manner. 3

However, the question remains unresolved in the literature on James’s philosophy as to why he never completed “The Many and the One.” For instance, was James’s temperament unsuited for the task so as to make him incapable of the sustained writing required? Or was he perhaps too easily distracted by all of the requests he received to give public lectures? Or maybe the explanation suggested by James himself in the quotation above is the correct one. Perhaps illness kept interfering.⁴ Each of these explanations is certainly plausible, but I think that none of them get it quite right. I contend that a better explanation can be found by following Ignas Skrupskelis’ suggestion that there is a flaw in James’s radical empiricism that prevented him from completing the task he set for himself.⁵ Skrupskelis does not say definitively what this flaw is,⁶ but nonetheless he is correct that one exists. James’s defense of his radical empiricism requires a satisfactory account of how two minds can simultaneously perceive the same thing. James initially thought that his radical empiricism could provide this account, but as I shall show, as he tried to work out 4

this philosophy systematically, he came to doubt that it could. I shall argue that it was this doubt that ultimately kept him from completing “The Many and the One.”

Specifically, I begin this paper by giving a brief overview of James’s radical empiricism. In doing so, I cover territory that will be familiar to many of James’s readers. Where my account will differ from most, however, is that I shall rely heavily on “The Many and the One” manuscripts in providing it. My goal will be to construct what James took his radical empiricism to be when he was trying to write “The Many and the One.” However, I cannot avoid drawing on other materials that James wrote between 1902 and 1906, the period when he was most actively working on “The Many and the One.” Because the “The Many and the One” manuscripts are incomplete, these materials are necessary to fill in key aspects of his radical empiricism that are missing in “The Many and the One” manuscripts. I next explain why James’s radical empiricism requires a solution to the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same thing, what this solution is and why James came to doubt its success.

The Many and the One

“The Many and the One” manuscripts begin with the following remark:

Of every would be describer of the universe one has a right to ask immediately two general questions. The first is: “What are the materials of your universe’s composition?” And the second: “In what manner or manners do you represent them to be connected?”⁷

These questions specify what James believes are the two primary tasks of any metaphysical inquiry. One is to give an account of what the universe consists of, while the other is to explain how the unity of the universe is possible. James goes on to give his own answers to these two questions. In reply to the first, James writes:

My hypothesis is that the materials are what I shall call *experiences*. To be a part of the universe is to be experienced; and not to be experienced is not to be, in this philosophy of ‘pure experience.’⁸

The second sentence of this passage demonstrates James’s commitment to the “idealistic principle” that “*esse is experiri*...that a thing must be actually ‘realized’ in order to be real.”⁹ That this second sentence also follows the statement of his hypothesis makes it clear that James’s choice of the term “experience” as the name for the basic materials of the universe is intended by him to emphasize this commitment.

One consequence of this commitment for James is the conclusion that “‘absolute substances’ in the old dualistic sense of ‘material masses’ on the one hand, and ‘souls’ or ‘spirits’ on the other, cannot be allowed to be real.”¹⁰ Over the years many philosophers have followed Descartes in maintaining that there are two ontologically distinct substances in the universe – a material substance common to physical objects and a spiritual substance common to all to minds. James contends that these substances cannot have a place in his metaphysical system because one characteristic claimed of them is that they cannot be directly experienced, as their existence can only be inferred. Allowing such substances into his system would clearly violate the idealistic principle.

Given this insistence that the basic materials of the universe are experiences and his acceptance of the idealistic principle, one might expect James to propose a metaphysical system following in the idealistic tradition. One might, in other words, expect him to claim that reality is ontologically mental in its basic composition. This, however, is not his intention. James explains that his system “refines upon the term experience itself.”¹¹ Whereas the term “experience” is normally thought to refer to a “kind of spiritual stuff,” in James’s metaphysical system it refers to a “stuff” that is ontologically neither mental nor physical.

It is precisely to emphasize this new use of “experience” in his metaphysical system that James goes on to prefix the term “pure” to it: “By the adjective ‘pure’ prefixed to ‘experience,’ I mean to denote a form of being which is as yet neutral or ambiguous, and prior to the object and subject distinction.”¹² “Pure experience,” then, is the actual name for the material that James contends makes up the universe.¹³ It is intrinsically neither mental nor physical, but can become one or the other depending on what other experiences it becomes associated with as we reflect upon it.¹⁴ When these associations are of a certain type, an experience becomes mental; when they are of another type, it becomes physical.

[T]he attribution of either mental or of physical being to an experience is due to nothing in the immediate stuff of which the experience is composed, --for the same stuff will serve for either attribution -- but rather to two contrasted groups of associates with either of which, as they add themselves to the original

experience, our reflection upon it tends to connect it, and which in their totality are classed as the mental and the physical world.¹⁵

But care needs to be taken here to avoid misunderstanding James's claim that the universe consists of only pure experience. David Lamberth is certainly correct that "Pure experience' is not a general substance or substratum, analogous (in having various definite properties) to matter or minds in other philosophies."¹⁶ That is, pure experience is not a basic, general stuff that composes all experience; rather, pure experience is infinitely diverse and variegated. James makes this clarification most clearly in the article "Does 'Consciousness Exist?'" (1904).¹⁷ 13

there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced. If you ask what any one bit of pure experience is made of, the answer is always the same: 'It is made of *that*, of just what appears, of space, intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not'¹⁸

The point is that pure experience is pluralistic and not monistic. It consists of whatever it is experienced as being, and it is experienced as being diverse and variegated. James's use of monistic language in describing pure experience is only meant to emphasize the rejection of the ontological distinction between the mental and the physical.¹⁹ 14

This insistence that the basic materials of the universe are pure experiences that are ontologically neither mental nor physical is one way that James's metaphysics represents a radical break from traditional metaphysical theories. Most scholars in answering the question "What are the materials of the universe?" have sided with one of three positions. They are either dualists claiming that both minds and matter are real, or materialists maintaining that only matter is, or idealists arguing that minds alone are. James denies the truth of all three of these positions in "The Many and the One" and offers his philosophy of pure experience as a fourth alternative. 15

There is, however, a second way that James's radical empiricism represents a radical break from traditional metaphysical theories. It is brought out in his reply to the second question above, rephrased by James as "How are these experiences connected?"²⁰ He insists that there are "innumerable kinds of connexion among experiences, and almost any kind of connexion that might be admitted would weave them into some kind of a world."²¹ These connections range from the very "intimate" to the more "external." The connections uniting a personal consciousness are an instance of the former. Here the connections are so intimate that experiences flow together causing later experiences to suffuse with the experiences preceding them. The connection of two physical objects merely being "with" each other, on the other hand, is an example of a connection at the other extreme. Experiences connected in this way do not flow together. In fact, they have no more unity than what a collection of separate objects can be said to have. Many other connections, such as succession, nextness, separation, likeness, difference and conterminousness, fall between these two extremes. 16

James's willingness to regard such a variety of connections as real is again the result of his commitment to the idealistic principle. Consistent with this principle he argues that the sole requirement for the reality of connections, or as he goes on to call them, "relations," is that they actually be experienced. "The next point I wish to insist on is that the relations that connect the experiences *must themselves be experienced relations*. . . . As to be is to be experienced, so to be connected is to be experienced as connected."²² Thus, radical empiricism must find a place in its metaphysical description of the universe for all relations that are experienced as well as exclude from its description any that are not. 17

It is important here to appreciate the significance of James's claim that it is experienced relations that unify pure experience into a single universe. James is clear in "The Many and the One" and in the letters where he refers to this book that his aim is to develop a metaphysical system capable of superseding the metaphysical theories of the absolute idealists. These metaphysicians specifically denied that the unity of the universe could be explained by appealing to experienced relations. They held that any account that depicts the universe as held together by relations is inherently self-contradictory, and therefore, must be rejected as inadequate (since reality itself is self-consistent – i.e., rational). According to the absolute idealists, the "true" metaphysical view is one that recognizes instead that it is "one Absolute mind which envelopes the whole world as its object" and that "the world *is* by being thought-of by the Absolute."²³ By insisting that the universe consists of pure experience unified by experienced relations, James is intentionally placing his metaphysical system in direct opposition to this view that the Absolute is necessary to account for the unity of the universe. As we shall see, this decision to oppose the absolute idealists in this way shapes how James thinks the defense of his own metaphysical theory must proceed. 18

The Universe as the “Collectivism of Personal Lives”

James’s decision to accept the idealistic principle in “The Many and the One” gives rise to the question – whose experience is being referred to in the statement “to be is to be experienced”? The absolute idealists, of course, argue that one must ultimately take it to be referring to the experience of the Absolute, since any attempt to identify another source of experience will inevitably fail to account for the universe’s unity. James obviously has no intention of reaching this conclusion. Thus, he needs a way to answer the question that shows how accounting for the unity of the universe without the Absolute is indeed possible. 19

Part of James’s strategy is to refuse to answer the first question above on its own terms. In asking whose experience determines what exists, the question assumes that there must be a consciousness outside of experience that has experiences. James, however, denies that consciousness as such an entity exists, and argues, instead, that “‘Consciousness’ is invoked to explain the fact that things not only are, but get reported, are known.”²⁴ This is a crucial move for James in his attempt to offer an alternative to absolute idealism. No entitative consciousness, self or mind, either finite or infinite, is needed to be the subject of experiences because experiences are capable of experiencing each other. 20

I believe that we describe the facts much better by saying that experiences in their totality are reported *to one another*. The present experience is the only witness we need to suppose of the past one, the future experience the only witness we need to suppose of the present one. If we look at our experiences with the simple aim of describing their succession, we see that they form a stream which in important respects possesses the quality of continuity.²⁵ 21

Those who are familiar with James’s discussion of the “stream of thought” in the *Principles of Psychology* will recognize the similarities between that discussion and what he writes in this passage. James argued in the *Principles* that consciousness is like a flowing stream. Present thoughts flow out of and are partially constituted by past thoughts. This “continuity” between thoughts is possible because “feelings of relations” serve as transitions between them. Moreover, no entitative self is needed to have these thoughts, since each present thought is able to take on the role of the self by appropriating the contents of the thoughts preceding it, and thus know what its predecessors knew. Calling the present thought “Thought” (with a capital “T”), James writes in the *Principles* that 22

[e]ach later Thought, knowing and including thus the Thoughts which went before, is the final receptacle – and appropriating them is the final owner – of all that they contain and own. Each Thought is thus born an owner, and dies owned, transmitting whatever it realized...to its own later proprietor.²⁶

The similarities between these two discussions are not surprising. James’s model for reality in the “The Many and the One” manuscripts is the stream of thought. He wants to claim that reality has many of the same features that this stream exhibits. For instance, reality, like the stream of thought, is continuous because it consists of experiences united by experienced relations, and, like the stream of thought, reality is dynamic and in flux. New experiences are always coming into existence, while old ones cease to be.²⁷ In addition, the role of personal consciousnesses in the universe is much like the role of the present Thought in the stream of thought. Just as the present Thought is nothing but a mental state that takes on a unifying function, James insists that “a ‘mind’ or ‘personal consciousness’ is nothing but “the name for a series of experiences run together by certain definite transitions”²⁸ that has a unifying function as well. The present Thought appropriates the contents of our past thoughts and unifies them into our current self, while a personal consciousness appropriates the contents of past personal consciousnesses and unites them with new experiences that come to it as additions to those contents.²⁹ 23

Each of these claims about reality is crucial to James’s attempt to offer an alternative to the metaphysical theories of the absolute idealists. The importance of the claim that reality is continuous and in flux is that it offers an alternative to the absolute idealists’ view that the universe is “known by one [infinite] knower in one act, with every feature preserved, and every relation apprehended.”³⁰ This means that for the absolute idealists, the universe is forever fixed so as to make real change impossible. We make no difference in such a universe. We neither improve upon it through our efforts nor make it worse. James rejects this view completely. His aim is to argue for a conception of the universe that allows real change to occur in it and where our efforts have a role in causing it. He goes on in the passage from “The Many and the One” manuscripts quoted above to make his point: 24

This picture of the irremediably pluralistic evolution of things, achieving unity by experimental methods, and getting it in different shapes and degrees and in general only as a last result, is what has made me give to my volume the title of “The Many and the One”³¹

According to James, we, as conscious agents in the universe, have an active role in introducing new content and unity 25 into it. Such a view thus aligns his radical empiricism with his meliorism. In earlier essays, eventually published together as *The Will to Believe* (1897), and in lectures that he gave to teachers, eventually published as *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (1899), James took the position against the absolute idealists that the ultimate fate of the universe has yet to be decided. He insisted that it is an open question as to whether evil will triumph over good or the other way around. This, in turn, led him to claim that our choices and actions *do* make a difference in the universe, and, in fact, a crucial one. They help to decide how “the everlasting battle of the powers of the light with those of darkness”³² will turn out. This melioristic attitude only makes sense if the universe is malleable to human action, and, thus, it is one of James’s aims in developing his metaphysics to explain how this malleability is possible.

But James wants to give an even greater role than this to personal consciousnesses when it comes to determining 26 what the universe is like. In his review of the book *Personal Idealism*, published in 1903, James describes his conception of the universe this way:

If empiricism is to be radical it must indeed admit the concrete data of experience in their full completeness. The only fully complete concrete data are, however, the successive moments of our own several personal histories, taken with their subjective personal aspect, as well with their “objective” deliverance or “content.” After the analogy of these moments of experience must all complete reality be conceived. Radical empiricism thus leads to the assumption of a collectivism of personal lives (which may be of any grade of complication, and suprahuman, infrahuman as well as human), variously cognitive of each other, variously connative and impulsive, genuinely evolving and changing by effort and trial, and by their interaction and cumulative achievements making up the world.³³

Ultimately, for James, there is nothing more to reality than the experiences making up personal consciousnesses. 27 However, as he makes clear, these personal consciousnesses need not be limited to humans. James’s radical empiricism leaves room for the possibility of a divine personal consciousness, although such a consciousness would be neither omniscient nor omnipotent.³⁴ And, interestingly, the possibility of “infrahuman” (i.e., animal) personal consciousnesses is also recognized by James. In any case, his view seems to be that it is the experiences making up whatever personal consciousnesses there are, taken collectively, that constitute reality.

Admittedly, James’s view is less than clear here. He could mean that it is only the experiences of personal 28 consciousnesses existing now that determine what is real, but he could also mean that the experiences composing personal consciousnesses that have ceased to exist or will exist, do so as well. My own view is that James means the first of these. But if this is so, then one has to wonder about the status of the experiences in the latter kinds of cases. With regard to the experiences composing past personal consciousnesses, James seems willing to allow that experiences often cease to exist once the personal consciousnesses are no more. This may seem to be an odd view for him to hold, but James could reply that many of us accept the same view about our own past thoughts. We do not insist that these thoughts continue to be real. James can also point out that appropriation occurs with personal consciousnesses just as it occurs with thoughts. In the case of personal consciousnesses, the experiences composing past ones would cease to be, but existing personal consciousnesses could have experiences that are the functional substitutes of these past experiences, and hence much of their content would be retained. Finally, James can also say that in many cases the contents of past personal consciousnesses, although not explicitly recognized by existing personal consciousnesses, continue to exist “virtually” in their experiences. In “The Many and the One” manuscripts, James explains that when something is “‘virtually’ known... , that means that all the objective ‘conditions’ for the act of knowing ... are present, and only the act itself has yet to be supplied.”³⁵ James’s own example is the constellation of The Big Bear. From the moment the stars making up this constellation were experienced all of the conditions necessary for recognizing that configuration as The Big Bear were present in that experience and in any subsequent ones that appropriate it. All that is necessary for this “virtual truth” to become an actual one is for an existing personal consciousness to become aware of configuration and to name it as “The Big Bear.” Although James never worked out this account of virtual experience completely, he intended it to do much of the work of explaining how the contents of past personal consciousnesses, and for that matter of future personal consciousnesses as well, can be “real” without being “known” by an existing personal consciousness now.

The Problem of Two Minds Simultaneously Perceiving the Same Thing

But the idea that reality consists of the collective experiences of personal consciousnesses raises another difficulty for James in his defense of radical empiricism. Many believe that an incontrovertible truth is that one's experiences are private and cannot be shared with others. James, himself, in fact, made this one of the "five important characteristics"³⁶ of the stream of thought in the *Principles* arguing that "No thought even comes into direct *sight* of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own. Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law."³⁷ If it is true that the experiences composing personal consciousnesses are private in this way, radical empiricism ends up in solipsism. Personal consciousnesses never come into contact with each other, but are instead worlds unto themselves.

Another way to understand the difficulty that James faces is to view it in the context of his attempt to show that experienced relations are the source of whatever unity the universe has. Accounting for the unity that exists among the experiences of an individual personal consciousness is relatively easy for him. We have already seen that James's acceptance of the idealistic principle leads him to regard any experienced relation as real. This means that he can attribute the source of the unity existing between these experiences to these relations. Hence, if a personal consciousness experiences something as succeeding something else, the relation of succession is what unifies the experience of the first thing with the experience of the second. In the end, there is no limit to the different kinds of relations that James can identify as having this unifying function. Any experienced relation will do the work required. However, to defend his view that experienced relations are the source of the universe's unity, James needs to do even more than this. He must not only explain how the experiences within each personal consciousness are unified by experienced relations, he also needs to identify the experienced relation that unites these personal consciousnesses into a single universe. That is, he must explain how the many in this case can be one. But, if experiences are private to personal consciousnesses as he claimed in the *Principles*, it is difficult to see how the experiences of different personal consciousnesses could ever be united together by experienced relations.

As James sees it, the problem he faces requires that he explain how two minds can simultaneously perceive the same thing. He thinks that if he can provide this explanation, it would allow him to claim that at least some of the experiences composing personal consciousnesses can be public, and thus shareable with other personal consciousnesses. And if experiences can be public in this way, it also opens the door to his identifying the experienced relation that unites the experiences of personal consciousnesses into a single universe.

While James does briefly discuss the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same thing in "The Many and the One" manuscripts, his more extensive discussion of it can be found in the article "A World of Pure Experience" (1904). In that article, James begins with a related problem, namely, the problem of other minds. He admits that for him "the decisive reason in favor of our minds meeting in *some* common objects at least is that, unless I make that supposition, I have no motive for assuming that your mind exists at all."³⁸ Like so many others, James thinks that a belief in other minds is based on an analogy. I observe your body and conclude from its actions that a mind causes them to occur: "Its gestures, facial movements, words and conduct generally, are 'expressive,' so I deem it actuated as my own is, by an inner life like my mine."³⁹ But, James insists, this analogy works only because the other person's animated body is "a percept in *my* field[.] It is only by animating *that* object, *my* object, that I have any occasion to think of you at all."⁴⁰ It is your ability to alter my percept of your body coupled with my belief that you must have a mind to make those alterations that leads me to infer that you have a mind. But, if this is right, then your mind and my mind do "meet" in the same thing, which in the present case would be your body.

For James, there is little difference if one turns instead to the simultaneous perception of some other physical object. Here, too, your altering that object has an effect on my percept of that object. If, for instance, you blow out a candle when I am present, my candle goes out as well. It is also because of such common interactions as this that we infer that other minds exist, and the fact that we make these inferences so readily is sufficient, James thinks, to shift the burden of proof onto those who want to deny that we cannot simultaneously perceive the same thing: "If your objects do not coalesce with my objects, if they be not identically where mine are, they must be proved to be positively somewhere else. But no other location can be assigned to them, so their place must be what it seems to be, the same."⁴¹

But, James needs to do more than establish that it is reasonable for us to believe that two minds can simultaneously perceive the same object; he also needs to explain how such perception is possible. He is convinced that it is here where the real "cash value" of the philosophy of pure experience lies. As we have already seen, James's claim is that pure experience is ontologically neither mental nor physical, but that it can take on either of these characteristics depending on what other experiences it becomes associated with. In one context of experiences it can function as a thought, while in another context it can function as part of the physical world. But James is also convinced that there is no reason why a "portion" of pure experience cannot be in both of these contexts at the

same time so that it functions simultaneously as both a thought and a physical object. He makes this point most clearly in the essay “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist? (1904)⁴²:

a given undivided portion of experience, taken in one context associates, [can] play the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of ‘consciousness’; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective ‘content.’ In a word, in one groups it figures as a thought, in another group as a thing, And, since it can figure in both groups simultaneously we have every right to speak of it as subjective and objective both at once.⁴³

It is this idea that a portion of pure experience can be in both a mental and a physical context at the same time that then allows James to work out a solution to the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same thing using his philosophy of pure experience. Since a portion of pure experience can function as both a thought and a physical object concurrently, he has a way of explaining how an experience can remain public, that is, available to others, when it is being perceived by a single personal consciousness. It is the result of two contexts of experience, one mental and the other physical, intersecting. The experience at this intersection functions simultaneously as the perceiver’s percept and as the physical object that is being perceived, and it is the context of experiences that causes it to function as a physical object that ensures that it remains public and available to all other perceivers. Thus, there is no problem if we add a second perceiver so that two now simultaneously perceive the same object. In this case, the second personal consciousness is nothing but a third context of experiences added to the first two. 35

If one and the same experience can figure twice, once in mental and once in a physical context... one does not see why it might not figure thrice, or four times, or any number of times, by running into as many different mental contexts, just as the same point, lying at their intersection, can be continued into many different lines.⁴⁴

Once again, the physical context in this case ensures that the experience remains available to each personal consciousness even though the experience is simultaneously a part of both mental contexts.

The final step James needs to take to complete his solution to the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same thing is to identify the experienced relation that unites the experiences of each personal consciousness to the experience common to both of them. In “The Many and the One” manuscripts, James claims that “of all of the different kinds of unity which the Universe of our experience encloses ... the essential kind ... is the continuity, the absolute nextness of one part to another.”⁴⁵ We are now in a position to see why he thinks this is so. According to James, something is continuous with something else “whenever the mind in passing from one to the other in thought, can imagine no third term intervening between them to serve as the medium of its transition.”⁴⁶ This continuity holds true in cases of perception involving a single personal consciousness. A person feels himself or herself to be continuous with the object he or she perceives. This feeling, then, identifies the relation that unifies the experiences composing that person’s personal consciousnesses with the experience that is the physical object. James insists that “continuous transition is one sort of a conjunctive relation,”⁴⁷ and that these feelings of continuity are “what make our experiences cognitive.”⁴⁸ Thus, the relation of continuity serves as the source of the unity between a personal consciousness and what is perceived. 36

It is true, of course, that in the case of simultaneous perception we do not feel ourselves to be continuous with the experiences of the other personal consciousness perceiving the same object. Thus, James cannot claim in this case that the relation of continuity connects the experiences of one personal consciousness to another’s directly. However, James thinks that he can claim that while the two consciousnesses are not continuous with each other, they are “conterminous”; that is, they are “each continuous with the same intermediary.”⁴⁹ This claim now gives James everything he needs. When two consciousnesses simultaneously perceive an object, each is continuous with that object, but conterminous with each other. Thus, it is the relation of continuity that unites the experiences of both personal consciousnesses into a single stream of experience. For James, it is these cases of simultaneous perception that personal consciousnesses engage in with each other that unify all experience into a single universe. In short, they allow “the many” to also be “one.” 37

The Miller-Bode Objections

As I stated at the beginning of this paper, my claim is that James failed to complete “The Many and the One” because he became convinced that there is a flaw in his radical empiricism arising from this solution to the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same thing. The evidence for this claim is to be found in the series of 38

notebooks that James kept from the fall of 1905⁵⁰ to February 1908. Known in the literature as “The Miller-Bode” notebooks,⁵¹ they contain James’s attempts to respond to objections that Dickinson Sergeant Miller and Boyd Henry Bode made to the version of this solution that James published in “A World of Pure Experience.” It was James’s inability to answer these objections satisfactorily that led him to give up writing “The Many and the One” for other projects.

Bode’s objection is one among a number he makes to James’s radical empiricism in the article “‘Pure Experience’ and the External World”⁵² published in 1905. The main thrust of Bode’s objection is that the solution to the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same object conflicts with the arguments against the compounding of consciousness that James had made in his *Principles*. In that work, James had claimed that every mental state is a unique psychic whole and not a compound of simpler mental states. He took this view, at least in part, because of the continuity of consciousness. Since the stream of thought flows, James held that one’s current mental state is the result of what is already in one’s personal consciousness fusing with what is being presented to it, and since the former is always different, no mental state can ever reoccur.⁵³ Bode seizes on this claim to argue that

in the ‘Principles of Psychology’... it is shown that no state of consciousness can be exactly duplicated within the experience of an individual, and it would appear that essentially the same proof will apply in comparing the experience of different individuals.⁵⁴

Bode’s point is that James’s own arguments in the *Principles* against the compounding of consciousness rule out the possibility of two personal consciousnesses sharing the same experience. They can share it only if at least one of two possibilities is the case. They both must either have the same experience as a constitutive part of their respective consciousnesses or at the moment they both perceive the object each personal consciousness must be in the exact same state. James’s own arguments show, however, that neither of these is possible.

Miller never raised his objection in his published writings. Instead, he made it known to James through letters and in an unpublished manuscript. Unfortunately, neither these letters nor the manuscript have been found. There is, however, a letter that Miller wrote to Ralph Barton Perry when the latter was working on *The Thought and Character of William James* where Miller restates his objection.

The objection as I made it is as clear in my mind now as then -- if one says, the very object is immediately given, one implies that it may be given to you and to me, or an identical part or aspect of it may thus be given, at the same time. Now the *other* contents or present objects of your mind and mine will *not* be the same. My objection has force only on one assumption, that what we mean by “consciousness” is a *relation* between the contents or objects of consciousness. The object O will stand in a relation of appearance with my *other* content of the moment, but insofar as *you* are conscious *of it*, it will not stand in this relation (i.e., you are of course not conscious of my other content, my bodily sensation for instance). That is, the object O will stand in a certain relation and not stand in it at one and the same time -- a self-contradiction.⁵⁵

Underlying Miller’s objection is another argument that James makes against the compounding of consciousness in the *Principles*. James also maintains in that work that “the essence of a feeling is to be felt, and as a psychic existent *feels*, so it must *be*.”⁵⁶ He then uses this claim to argue that a compound of simple mental states cannot account adequately for all of the features that are found in a single moment of consciousness. Specifically, it cannot account for the collective awareness that a single moment of consciousness possesses. If an individual’s personal consciousness were a compound, the simpler mental states composing the compound would each only be aware of itself and not of it and the others taken together.⁵⁷ In making his objection, Miller is contending that this argument from the *Principles* coupled with the one discussed in the context of Bode’s objection shows that James’s solution to the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same object is self contradictory. If it is true that in cases of perception the same experience is both the percept of an object and the object itself, then when that experience enters into a relation with the experiences composing a personal consciousness through an act of perception it must be altered by merging with those experiences, just as James’s argument in the *Principles* requires. Moreover, since the experiences making up each personal consciousness are always changing, and thus different, the experience is never altered in the exact same way. This is not a problem as long as only a single personal consciousness perceives an object, but it becomes one as soon as a second personal consciousness is added that simultaneously perceives that same object. In this case, the experience that is both the object and the percept of it stands in relation to two different sets of experiences simultaneously, which means that it must be altered in two different ways at once. And,

since an experience is as it is felt to be, the same experience would need to be in two different ways, which, as Miller points out, is self-contradictory.

Here it is not my aim to work through James's various attempts to respond to Miller's and Bode's objections in the "Miller-Bode" notebooks.⁵⁸ Rather, I only want to draw on these notebooks to establish that James came to regard these objections as disclosing a potentially serious flaw in his radical empiricism, and that he struggled for most of his remaining career trying to eliminate it. 43

Proof that he recognized the force of Miller's and Bode's objections is in the very first entry of the notebooks. 44

But in my doctrine that the same "pen" may be known by two knowers I seem to imply that an identical part can help *constitute* two fields.

Bode and Miller both pick up the contradiction. The fields are not then entitative units. They are decomposable into "parts," one of which at least is common to both, and my whole tirade against "composition" in the psychology is belied by my own subsequent doctrine!⁵⁹

Here James is acknowledging the conflict between his views that both Miller and Bode identify.

Other entries, however, show that James also sees the deeper implications that Miller's and Bode's objections have for his radical empiricism. For instance, in the second entry, he restates the problem he faces this way: 45

The question of two knowers of the same appears identical with the question: Can what is experienced *ex* be identical with what is experienced *co*? If it can, it would seem possible for it to have more than one *co*.⁶⁰

An experience is "co" when it is conjoined with a personal consciousness and "ex" when it is not. James recognizes in this entry that Miller's and Bode's objections call into question his claim that the same portion of pure experience can simultaneously figure in more than one context of experiences. If when I perceive an object, say a pen, the same experience is both the pen that I perceive and my percept of it, and if an experience is altered when it becomes conjoined to the experiences composing my personal consciousness, how can the pen that I perceive be identical to the pen before I perceived it? That is, how can the experience "co" me be the same as the experience "ex" me? But also, if an experience is altered by becoming conjoined to the experiences composing a personal consciousness, how can the same experience be my percept ("co me, but "ex" you), your percept ("co" you, but "ex" me) and the pen ("ex" both of us), when it seems clear given the arguments of the *Psychology* that the experiences must be different in each case? Radical empiricism's account of the unity of the universe requires that the experience be identical in all of these different relations, but as Miller's and Bode's objections point out this does not seem possible given James's own arguments. 46

James also sees that if he is forced to admit that the experience does change in this case, he is faced with this question: 47

But how, when all is simultaneous, can the parts *equate* the whole, and yet the whole be experienced as such, when each part only experiences that part? Either no whole is experienced here; or, if experienced, it must be by a more inclusive experient.⁶¹

If it is true that when you and I perceive the pen simultaneously our percepts of the pen are different, and thus that it is not the same experience that is conjoined to your personal consciousness that is conjoined to mine, then how can we be said to perceive the same pen (or be conterminous with the same object)? How can our two different experiences in this case be the same pen, or as James puts it in the passage above, how can the parts in this case equate the whole? Given James's insistence that whatever unity that exists in the universe is due to experienced relations, the only answer available is that an experienced relation is what unifies the two experiences so that they are both the pen. However, now a new question arises: Who experiences this relation? It cannot be either you or I. Thus, it must be a third personal consciousness, "a more inclusive experient," who experiences both your and my experiences together. But, of course, the last thing that James wants to allow is that this third personal consciousness is necessary in this way. He sees all too well that it is the first step down a short slope to admitting that the Absolute is necessary to unify the universe. 48

The rest of the “Miller-Bode” notebooks document James’s attempts to save radical empiricism’s account of the unity of the universe from the difficulties raised by Miller’s and Bode’s objections. In entry after entry, he either pursues strategies for explaining how the same experience can function in more than one context of experiences without altering, or if he is forced to admit that it does alter, why this does not undermine radical empiricism’s account of the universe’s unity. Although it is put in terms of the possible solution he is considering at the time, the second to last entry of the notebooks, dated February 10, 1908, shows clearly that it is still this same problem that James is struggling to solve. 49

The point is, having given up intellectualism absolutely, & adopted the compenetration view, to see whether the latter admits better of the *con* and *ex* relation being simultaneous, for such simultaneity is the crux that has bother’d me so long.⁶²

Those who are familiar with *A Pluralistic Universe* will recognize that James at this point has begun to think about the difficulty raised by Miller’s and Bode’s objections along the lines of the solution to it that he will defend in the lectures making up that book, and which he will give from May 4 to May 28, 1908, just a few months after he wrote this entry. In these lectures, he defends the view that the unity of the universe is possible because experiences “overlap” and “compenetrate” with each other.⁶³ However, these lectures also make clear that James paid a stiff price for this solution. Gone in them is the philosophy of pure experience in favor of panpsychism. Gone, too, are the arguments against the compounding of consciousness pursued so strenuously in the *Principles*. In his fifth lecture, he retracts these arguments and refers to his struggles in the “Miller-Bode” notebooks when giving his reasons for doing so.⁶⁴ Gone, too, is his commitment to “his intellectualist logic, the logic of identity,” that is, his commitment to refusing to allow the same to be in two different ways. James’s comment on this in the lectures leaves no doubt: “For my own part, I have finally found myself compelled to give up the logic, fairly, squarely, and irrevocably.”⁶⁵ 50

James’s final solution will not be taken up here. The purpose of this paper has been to argue only that there is good reason to think that James failed to complete “The Many and One” because of a flaw in his original solution to the problem of how two minds can simultaneously perceive the same thing, and not just because of illness, temperament or excessive demands on his time. What has been said about James struggle to solve this problem in the “Miller-Bode” notebooks is sufficient to complete this argument. 51

But what is the significance of showing that James failed to complete “The Many and the One” for this reason? It does help us to understand better the difficulties James faced as he tried to work out his radical empiricism systematically, and why he was led to make changes he did to it in *A Pluralistic Universe*. However, it is also my hope that the discussion in this paper serves to cast James’s failed attempt to complete “The Many and the One” in a much different light. James is often portrayed as a thinker who was unwilling, and perhaps even incapable, of doing difficult, technical philosophy, and it is fair to say that this portrayal over the years has contributed to his work being taken less seriously than it should be among philosophers. In my view, the claims by James scholars that he failed to complete “The Many and the One” because of illness, temperament or distraction are not accurate and only serve to exacerbate this situation. It is clear that James was willing and able to do the difficult and technical work necessary to flesh out the details of his metaphysical system. His struggle to solve the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same thing in his published and unpublished writings demonstrates this. In fact, I would contend that it was precisely his doing this kind of work that prevented him from ever completing “The Many and the One.” As he struggled to respond to Miller’s and Bode’s objections, pursuing and rejecting one reply to them after another, he came to see how deeply flawed his radical empiricism was, at least as he initially conceived it. It was his recognition of this that kept him from completing “The Many and the One” or any other systematic metaphysical work like it. Apparently, he eventually decided that the most he could hope to do is to paint his metaphysical system in broad strokes, as he does in *A Pluralistic Universe* and *Some Problems in Philosophy*. Still, one cannot help but wonder how James’s philosophy would be viewed today if his original aim of completing “The Many and the One” had been successful. 52

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¹ William James to Henri Bergson, December 14, 1902, in *The Correspondence of William James* 12 vols., eds. Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Elizabeth M. Berkeley, and John J. McDermott (Charlottesville and London: The University of Virginia Press, 1992-2004). Vol. 10, 167. Hereafter *CWJ*.

² The complete text of these manuscripts has been published in *Manuscript Essays and Notes, The Works of William James*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). Hereafter *MEN*.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴ H. S. Thayer in his introduction to the Harvard edition of *Pragmatism* gives all of these reasons for why James never completed his *magnum opus*. See H. S. Thayer, "Introduction" in *Pragmatism, The Works of William James*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), xiv.

⁵ Ignas Skrupskelis, "Introduction" in *MEN*, xx.

⁶ Skrupskelis does recognize that James's difficulty in solving the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same object was a serious obstacle to James's attempts to work out his radical empiricism (*Ibid.*, xxx-xxxix). Skrupskelis does not, however, draw the connection between this difficulty and James's failure to complete "The Many and the One." In part, this is because Skrupskelis thinks that James gave up the project of completing this book in late 1904 before James became aware in late 1905 that his solution to the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same thing is unsuccessful. Apparently, Skrupskelis bases his conclusion about the date both on the lack of any reference to "The Many and the One" in James's letters after July 1904 and James's decision to begin writing and publishing the articles that eventually became *Essays in Radical Empiricism* ("Notes" in *MEN*, 325-326). My own view is that James did not abandon writing "The Many and the One" until much later, most probably in the spring of 1906. On May 21 of that year, James states in a letter to Giovanni Papini his intent to "publish a digestible and popular volume intended as a text-book for students, & sketching the Universe of radical empiricism *a grands traits*" (*CWJ*, vol. 11, 226). I think that it is more plausible to hold that it is around this time that James gave up the goal of writing a systematic, metaphysical work that would have presented the technical details of his radical empiricism to other philosophers in favor of an introductory textbook that would present his radical empiricism in broad outlines more easily understandable by students. If this is right, then the decision to abandon "The Many and the One" project occurred after James became aware of the difficulties with the solution to the problem of two minds simultaneously perceiving the same thing. In fact, I think it was these difficulties, among others, that eventually led James to the alternative of writing the introductory textbook. As Peter Hare puts it in his introduction to the *Works* edition of *Some Problems in Philosophy*: "The restrictions of the format of an introductory text would, [James] must have hoped, allow him to refuse -- with a clear intellectual conscience -- to grapple unreadably with certain technical difficulties and permit him to present his philosophical system with the clarity he has so long sought." Peter Hare, "Introduction" in William James, *Some Problems in Philosophy* (1911), *The Works of William James*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, xviii-xix.

⁷ James, *MEN*, 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹² *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹³ Graham Bird has questioned whether James intends for his “philosophy of pure experience” to be understood as asserting an ontological claim. In focusing on James’s discussion of pure experience in the articles of *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, he suggests that James’s philosophy of pure experience is better understood as an “extended epistemology,” and thus treats this discussion as an attempt on James’s part to solve various pressing epistemological problems. It is difficult to fault Bird for trying to rescue the philosophy of pure experience from the objections he thinks it faces if it is read as asserting an ontological claim (regardless of whether these objections are correct). However, there seems little doubt that James does intend to assert such a claim. He stresses this himself in a letter to Charles Strong written on October 2, 1907. Referring to the articles that are Bird’s focus, James writes:

the problem there was metaphysical, not epistemological; it was an analysis of the nature of what is experienced, not of the meaning of knowing, and whatever epistemology I may have brought in was by the way, and illustrative, not fundamental. (CWJ, vol. 11, 455)

But I also think that the discussion of the philosophy of pure experience in “The Many and the One” leaves no doubt that James’s intent in writing this book is to do metaphysics in the traditional sense, and the claim that pure experience is the basic material of the world is an ontological claim.

¹⁴ Another way to put the point is that pure experience becomes mental or physical only once it is talked of. See James, ERE, 13. But also see William Joseph Gavin, *William James and the Reinstatement of the Vague* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992). Gavin provides an important discussion of pure experience in the context of James’s views on language.

¹⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹⁶ David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.

¹⁷ James’s letters establish that he was still working on the “The Many and the One” in the summer of 1904, but also that he had become frustrated with how slow his writing had gone up to that point. In letters to Francois Pillon (June 12, 1904, CWJ, vol. 10, 409) and to Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller (June 12, 1904, CWJ, vol. 10, 412), he laments at having written only thirty two pages in the previous two years. Apparently, just a few weeks after writing these letters, James decided that he could wait no longer to make the details of his radical empiricism public. In July of that same year, he wrote “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist” and by the spring of the following year he had finished most of the other essays on radical empiricism that were later republished as *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. There is, however, no indication in these or other letters during this time that James published these articles because he had abandoned his hope of completing “The Many and the One.”

¹⁸ William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1912), *The Works of William James*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 14. Hereafter ERE.

¹⁹ Two of the more useful discussions of James’s concept of “pure experience” are still John McDermott’s introduction to the *Works* edition of *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (ERE, xxx-xxxviii) and Charlene Haddock Seigfried’s *Chaos and Context: A Study in William James* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1978), 38-52.

²⁰ James, *MEN*, 21.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 22.

²³ Ibid., 7.

²⁴ Ibid., 25.

²⁵ Ibid., 29.

²⁶ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols. (1890), *The Works of William James*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 322. Hereafter, *PP*.

²⁷ Relevant here is the question of whether James is embracing panpsychism in “The Many and the One” or the view that reality is inherently psychic. Marcus Peter Ford, for instance, argues that James was a panpsychist at least up to 1904, at which point he gave it up for the “neutral monism” of the articles in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. If Ford is right, then this would make James a panpsychist when he began writing “The Many and the One. It is true that James does describe his view as being panpsychic once in “The Many and the One” manuscripts (*MEN*, 6). However, as we have seen, he also wants to claim that pure experience is ontologically neither mental nor physical, which would conflict with this description. One possibility, of course, is that James is simply inconsistent in these manuscripts (and perhaps in the articles in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* too, as Ford argues.). However, I think that Wesley Cooper is right that James is actually defending an “attenuated panpsychism.” That is, James ascribes to experience qualities that are normally attributed to the mental, i.e., change, continuity and purposefulness, but falls short of claiming that it is psychic. Although it is possible to point to passages where James does seem to say that experience is psychic as well, Cooper’s interpretation fits most of the relevant passages and has the advantage of eliminating the apparent inconsistency in James’s view. See Marcus Peter Ford, *William James’s Philosophy: A New Perspective*, (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982) and Wesley Cooper, *The Unity of James’s Thought* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 42.

²⁸ James, *ERE*, 39.

²⁹ James, *MEN*, 5.

³⁰ Ibid., 14.

³¹ Ibid., 5-6.

³² William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (1899), *The Works of William James*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 153.

³³ William James, “Review of *Personal Idealism*” (1903) in *Essays, Comments and Reviews*, *The Works of William James*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 544-545.

³⁴ James, *MEN*, 5.

³⁵ Ibid., 37-38.

³⁶ James, *PP*, 220.

³⁷ Ibid., 221.

³⁸ James, *ERE*, 38.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 39.

⁴² He does make this point in “The Many and the One” manuscripts too. See James, *MEN*, 19-20.

⁴³ James, *ERE*, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁵ James, *MEN*, 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁷ James, *ERE*, 25.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁹ James, *MEN*, 32.

⁵⁰ Again, my view is that James was still hoping to complete “The Many and the One” in the fall of 1905. See notes #6 and #17.

⁵¹ These notebooks have been published in *MEN*, 65-129.

⁵² Boyd Henry Bode, “Pure Experience and the External World,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 2 (1905), 128-133.

⁵³ See James, *PP*, 224-230 and 266-273.

⁵⁴ Bode, “Pure Experience and the External World,” 132.

⁵⁵ This letter is dated August 23, 1932 and is quoted in Gerald E Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 567-568fn.

⁵⁶ James, *PP*, 165.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 162-164.

⁵⁸ For a more detailed discussion of James’s attempts in these notebooks to respond to Miller’s and Bode’s objections, see Mark Moller, “James, Perception and the Miller-Bode Objections,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 37 (Fall 2001), pp. 609-626; Harry Heft, “Restoring Naturalism to James’s Epistemology: A Belated Reply to Miller & Bode,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 38 (Fall 2002), 559-580; Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience*, 146-202; and Skrupskelis, *MEN*, xxxi-xlii.

⁵⁹ James, *MEN*, 65.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶³ See William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909), *The Works of William James*, eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 121.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 96.

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Pragmatism in the 21st Century

Wesley Cooper

James's legacy has left pragmatism poised between the phenomenological and analytic traditions. The celebrated introspective descriptions in *The Principles of Psychology* and the doctrine of pure experience in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* have lent themselves to appropriation by the phenomenological school, whereas his instrumentalist philosophy of science in *Principles* has interested analytic philosophy of science, and his ideas about meaning in *Pragmatism* have drawn the attention of analytic philosophy of language. Ralph Pred's recent book, *Onflow: Dynamics of Consciousness and Experience*, interprets James's radical empiricism as a major first step in the direction of Whiteheadian phenomenology, deprecating linguistically mediated experience in preference for the pre-linguistic "buds" that are everywhere in nature. Robert Brandom's philosophy of language as developed in *Making It Explicit*, *Articulating Reasons*, and his recent John Locke lectures, *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* takes a radically different tack, associating James with a semantic theory, which he calls Wittgensteinian pragmatism, that is intended to complement and under-gird the Fregean semantics that is orthodox in mainstream analytic philosophy.

James anticipated that his radical empiricism and his pragmatism might diverge, remarking in the Preface to *Pragmatism*,

To avoid one misunderstanding at least, let me say that there is no logical connexion between pragmatism, as I understand it, and a doctrine which I have recently set forth as 'radical empiricism.' The latter stands on its own feet. One may entirely reject it and still be a pragmatist. (William James, *Pragmatism*, 1907)¹

As this quotation suggests, pragmatism and radical empiricism might take different and incompatible directions. No 'logical connexion' precludes that. A case in point is the contrast between Pred and Brandom. Brandom issues a severe challenge to any phenomenological turn like Pred's. He argues, following his teacher Wilfred Sellars, that appearances do not constitute an autonomous domain, but rather are dependent on the external things they are primarily appearances of. In an instance, we can experience an appearance of yellow because we experience yellow lemons. The phenomenological turn needs urgently to address this issue, because the argument seems destructive of the claim that a world of pure experience is fundamental, and that, as James writes in the essay "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?," "If you ask what any one bit of pure experience is made of, the answer is always the same: 'It is made of that, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not.'"² Either the Sellars/Brandom argument must be refuted, or a case must be made for a fallacy of ambiguity, according to which Brandom is attacking a conception of appearance that is irrelevant to the conception that's at play in the doctrine of pure experience.

Without an argument, there is literally nothing for the phenomenological turn to be *about*, for Brandom wants to understand experience as arising in a context of public following of rules in language games. Experience then is non-detachable from such contexts, whereas it must be detachable on the Whitehead/Pred account of *panexperientialism*, which posits experience in all sorts of contexts in which no such games are played. (Brandom's problem is quite different. His semantics calls into question the experience of animals incapable of language, though he struggles to

accommodate it as ‘parasitic’ upon the experience of language users.) Pred suggests that he would adopt Searle’s account of rules and rule-following, but that account bottoms out in brute physical facts, so there is a lingering question whether it can be detached from Searle’s version of naturalism and put to service in a monism of pure experience.

Pred structures his book around four figures: William James, John Searle, Alfred North Whitehead, and Gerald Edelman. James’s conception in *The Principles of Psychology* of the stream of thought provides his point of departure. Like Wilshire (1969), Pred interprets James as a protophenomenologist, but his treatment is different from Wilshire’s in three respects. First, it views James’s phenomenological insights as best continued and deepened by Whitehead; second, it allows a limited rapprochement with analytic philosophy, specifically with John Searle’s philosophy of mind, in order to remedy weaknesses in James’s account of intentionality by showing how James’s stream is imbued with propositional content; and third, it makes a case for compatibility between phenomenology and natural-scientific accounts of the brain by proposing cerebral-phenomenological correlations inspired by Gerald Edelman’s neural Darwinism. However, there are reasons to be wary of the Searle and Edelman connections. For one thing, both philosophers are materialists in the minimal sense that objective physical facts are basic. Pred doesn’t share this commitment, since the James/Whitehead world of pure experience is presumed to be more fundamental. Second, Searle’s account of intentionality is a *logic* of intentionality, although it also has phenomenological elements. Phenomenology in this subsidiary sense is innocuous and devoid of Pred’s special commitments. It pertains to subjective facts or facts with first-person ontology, for Searle, and these are high-level physical facts about the brain. There is no special problem about imbedding phenomenology in this sense into a logic of intentionality that goes beyond phenomenology to a *background* provided by the brain and the objectively physical environment. But neither the logic nor the background is available to Pred, apparently. *Perhaps* the background that Searle’s logic requires can be provided on a pure-experiential reduction of brain and environment, but the logic poses an intractable problem. It will require rules that must be spelled out with resources other than those disclosed by phenomenology. Especially on Brandom’s account of such rules, as noted above, they will be inseparable from discursive commitments that requires linguistic and behavioral resources that don’t seem available to radical empiricism as Pred understands it.

Pred theorizes James’s account of the stream of thought as continuous with his later radical-empiricist metaphysics. Whitehead takes that metaphysics further, insofar as his panexperientialism (Pred 2005, 137) “keeps in intimate touch with the way things are in raw experience, before the advent of reflection or analysis, although it applies nonetheless to reflective and analytic experience.” (Pred 2005, 302) Whitehead fully accepts Descartes’ problematic, according to which subjective experience is, as Whitehead writes, the “primary metaphysical situation....apart from experiences of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness.” (Pred 2005, 138) In effect, this makes the contrast with Brandom’s approach as dramatic and extreme as it can be, for on the latter’s view there is nothing one can say or do without a discursive context of language and behavior.

Searle is also understood as a radical empiricist “by Jamesian standards”, because he recognizes Jamesian conjunctive relations between experiences (in the form of experienced connections between intentional states); because Searle recognizes the importance of distinguishing mental phenomena from their description; and because he appreciates the first-person mode of access of mental life, inaccessible to ‘third-person’ observers. (Pred 2005, 55) Pred is quite selective at such points, evidently setting aside Searle’s naturalism, in which objective physical facts are basic, as well as Edelman’s view that all consciousness must be based on a materialist metaphysics. He presents Edelman as a mind-body parallelist. The parallel facts are grounded in a monism of pure experience. In this sense then Edelman too is a radical empiricist, *malgré lui*. Although Whitehead’s philosophy is the heart of the book, Pred is selective here too, doing without the central role of God in Whitehead’s system, (Pred 2005, 158) and more generally it “naturalizes” or “de-supernaturalizes” several Whiteheadian notions, in the sense that it eliminates anything in the system that is “not occurrent in ‘natural’ experience.” (Pred 2005, 170) (But see pages 174ff, where Pred writes about the optional benefits of thinking about possible contact with God.)

Brandom’s lectures are organized around themes rather than figures, though he acknowledges debts to Kant, Frege, Wittgenstein, and Sellars, among others. His Wittgensteinian or analytic pragmatism offers a new way of thinking about (Fregean) meaning and (Wittgensteinian) use, including a logic of the relations between meaning and use. There is no need to choose between (1) an anthropological, natural-historical, social-practice inquiry, and (2) a formal, mathematically inspired, model-theoretic semantics. What’s rejected is only the semantic logicist idea that logical vocabulary has a privileged role, and more specifically the conceit that philosophical analysis exhibits the meaning of one vocabulary as revealed by another, more logically perspicuous vocabulary. Brandom replaces the conceit by grounding meaning in use, especially practices in which score is kept of participants’ status in a network of inferences characteristic of the practices.

Brandom’s methodological pragmatism holds that the point of a semantic theory is to make sense of pragmatics. Meanings are theoretical entities postulated to explain or codify properties of use. This is supplemented by a

semantic pragmatism that tells us that only meaning's use can explain the association of meaning with a vocabulary. His illustrative case calls upon automaton theory to specify the abilities needed to deploy syntactically characterized vocabularies. Automata are not only syntactic engines but also practical embodiments of algorithms, and as such they *say* how some set of primitive abilities can be so exercised as to constitute more complex abilities. Whether vocabularies are simple syntactical ones or semantically complex vehicles for intentional or modal assertions, they are grounded in 'practices or abilities', a formulation that allows Brandom to move freely between social and individual/psychological considerations, though the emphasis is predominantly on the social. Brandom's pragmatism takes practices-or-abilities to be privileged with respect to the capacity to say, mean, or believe (hence to know) anything discursively. The normativity that arises in a social context of rule following is central, making possible a game of giving and evaluating reasons, and associated 'score-keeping' of what inferences people have committed themselves to and what inferences they are entitled to. The sentence's use in such language-games is basic, even more basic than the role of singular terms in referring to objects in the world. Indeed, Brandom offers an account of this role (having to do with the function of singular terms in inference and substitution) that does not depend on what objects there are. Not only does he not assume that 'buds' of pure experience are ontologically fundamental, but the very intelligibility of such items of pure experience is called into question by his Wittgensteinian and Sellarsian commitments. The way things seem or appear to the individual presupposes the way things are, as understood in a social context.

Returning to Pred: Experience is embodied but not merely physical, and it involves awareness but is not merely mental. Rather, the physical and mental are "aspects" of experience; they are "within" experience; they are indeed "aspects together within" it. As for experience itself, Pred treats it as bedrock: "Experience is what it is." (Pred 2005, 2) Brandom's Wittgensteinian response would probably be a request for the rule that determines the identity of the experience in question. That request can't be honored without going beyond phenomenology to its background logic, supplied in this case by a linguistic and behavioral context. Pred hopes to supplement his Whiteheadian metaphysics with John Searle's notion of 'the background', which would address these issues. But this employment is problematic because that notion causally reduces to facts about the central nervous system and the environment: brute, objectively physical facts. (Pred 2005, 64-65) 10

As deepened by Whitehead in *Process and Reality*, James's doctrine of pure experience is the thought that "all final individual actualities have the metaphysical character of occasions of experience." (Pred 2005, 138) This is a challenge to physics as normally understood, interpreting its fundamental notions, such as energy, within the Whiteheadian system. Energy is an abstraction from the emotional and purposeful energy in the "subjective form of the final synthesis in which each occasion completes itself." (Pred 2005, 179) The challenge extends upwards to biology as well, in the form of a Whiteheadian vitalism. The term 'actual' in the phrase "the actual receptor neurons in the actual nose [that are] passed along the actual relevant nerves to the actual brain" is used by Pred to emphasize the distinction between "the merely material entities of traditional scientific observation and the actual living cells." (Pred 2005, 185) Although Pred credits James with appreciating the importance of the 'transitive' as well as the 'substantive' parts of experience — its flights as well as its perchings — he finds James deficient for neglecting the genesis and constitution of the transitive buds, whereas Whitehead attends to these matters: "For Whitehead, the growth of a bud is the process of formation of a concrete experience." (Pred 2005, 10) This *conrescence* is fundamental, and only conceptual withdrawal from its actuality makes us think that the material world is paradigmatically concrete. 11

Whitehead overcomes the limitations of the 'stream' metaphor: "Whitehead goes 'into' the moment." (Pred 2005, 11) He extends the scope of radical empiricism to include a broader stream of buds not limited to streams of consciousness. (Pred 2005, 11) This is Whitehead's panexperientialism, a form of panpsychism that James only hinted at.

Whitehead applies the notion of buds not only to human moments of experience but also, more broadly, to actual entities or occasions — the final real things of which the world is made up. (Pred 2005, 11)

By bringing philosophical analysis into the bud, "Whitehead secures access to a post-Cartesian/Humean basis for ontology," which constructs consciousness "as it arises from pre-conscious phases of synthesis". (Pred 2005, 11) Pred quotes Whitehead as writing, "The process of conrescence is divisible into an initial stage of many feelings, and a succession of subsequent phases of more complex feelings integrating the earlier simpler feelings, up to the satisfaction which is one complex unity of feeling." (Pred 2005, 122) Conrescual approximation enables "stealing up on un verbalized propositions as they take form," suggesting "how much closer to experience and more concrete the conrescual approximation is than the intentional and processual approximations." (Pred 2005, 124) 12

Wittgensteinian pragmatics might suggest that the concreteness approximation actually employs linguistic categories 13
from beginning to end: in the division into stages, their integration and satisfaction, and their stealing up to
unverbalized propositions. It might suggest further that these categories arise in a context of rule-governed behavior
that gives them determinate sense. Language use reveals the network of inferences that underpins meaning; this is
Brandom's inferentialism. This use is inseparable from language-games of tracing paths of inference that reveal
commitments, defenses, and other moves in the games; this is Brandom's 'scorekeeping' model of language-games.

Pred counts his project a success if he puts you "in mind of what it is like to be you as you live through your 14
embodied moments," which requires getting 'beneath' language and waking the reader from "the bewitchment of our
intelligence by the subject-verb-object form of discourse." (Pred 2005, 17) I don't read Pred as recommending an
alternative, less distorting grammatical form of discourse. Rather, the bewitchment of language is censured in favor
of a relationship to experience that isn't distorted by language of any form. The distortion that language wreaks on
pure experience is a fundamental theme for Pred's Whiteheadian radical empiricism. If it crumbles, Pred's attempt to
re-invent radical empiricism fails. His readers will have to decide for themselves about this. Brandom's semantics
suggests that removal of distortion is always itself a language-imbued activity, apart from the 'parasitic' cases of infant
and animal experience. For instance, Wittgenstein recommended reminding philosophers of the ordinary use of
language in language-games.

Pred understands James's conception of the self as a "congeries of habits," subject to development and change, 15
such that an "I-me dialectic" is generated. Each moment in the history of the self "involves an I arising out of a me
and subsequently transforming the me, however slightly..." (Pred 2005, 24) However, this process is to be compatible
with free will. (Pred 2005, 26) Whitehead regards this as "the final contrast between a philosophy of substance and a
philosophy of organism," as quoted by Pred, inverting the Cartesian idea that the ego creates its thoughts into the
idea that the thought is a constituent operation in the creation of the momentary thinker. (Pred 2005, 129) However,
it is arguable that this isn't a helpful contrast, since 'a philosophy of substance' has been replaced in the theory of
personal identity by closest-continuer (best approximation, etc.) accounts of personal identity that do without
reference to any substance at all, Cartesian or physical. Rejection of the Cartesian idea was novel when James
dismissed the "soul pellet" theory of the self in *The Principles of Psychology*, but it is not fresh news.

Turning again to Brandom's Locke lectures: He interprets artificial intelligence as the claim that a computer could 16
do what is needed to deploy an autonomous discursive vocabulary (ADP), that is, a vocabulary whose use does not
depend on some other vocabulary. A computer language that passes the Turing test, according to his meaning-use
analysis, is VP-sufficient (a vocabulary's sufficiency to specify a set of practices-or-abilities) to specify abilities that are
PV-sufficient (sufficiency of some set of practices-or-abilities to deploy a vocabulary) to deploy an autonomous
vocabulary. This is expressive bootstrapping from a non-autonomous vocabulary of computation into an
autonomous vocabulary (of the English language, or whatever). He is especially interested in automaton
functionalism about sapience or mental content (as opposed to sentience or consciousness/qualia), and the
algorithmic, pragmatic-elaboration version of AI-functionalism, which he calls pragmatic AI. This latter is the claim
that there is a set of practices—or—abilities meeting two conditions:

1. It can be algorithmically elaborated into the ability to engage in an autonomous discursive practice.
2. Every element in that set of primitive practices—or—abilities can intelligibly be understood to be engaged
in, possessed, exercised, or exhibited by something that does not engage in any ADP.

These practices—or—abilities pertain to PP-necessity and sufficiency relations: the kinds of relations that obtains 17
when the capacity to engage in one sort of practice or exercise one sort of ability is in principle necessary or sufficient
for the capacity to engage in other practices, or exercise other abilities. So the fundamental question for AI is not
about symbol manipulation but rather about what PP-necessities and sufficiencies are out there: whether a practice—
or—ability admits of a substantive practical algorithmic decomposition. It contributes to the pragmatist program of
explaining knowing-that in terms of knowing-how, and sidesteps intellectualist traps surrounding symbolic AI. He
does not think however that that discursive practice is substantively algorithmically decomposable into non-
discursive practices—or—abilities, because there is another sort of PP-sufficiency relation besides algorithmic
elaboration, namely, practical elaboration by training, of the sort that Wittgenstein attended to in *Philosophical
Investigations* when he focused on how learners of a language-game are taught to participate in it.

Although an extensional possible-worlds semantics for intensional logics encouraged philosophers to overcome 18
empiricist scruples about these logics and employ them in their analyses, epistemological questions about how we can
know these possible worlds remain pressing. Brandom thinks that what helped legitimate modal idioms was the

attack on the semantic atomism of empiricism, in favor of tying meaning to inferential role, in the fashion of Quine. Even more helpful is the “Kant-Sellars thesis about modality”, which addresses Humean skepticism about rules and rule-following. Brandom emphasizes: “The ability to use ordinary empirical descriptive terms such as ‘green,’ ‘rigid,’ and ‘mass’ already presupposes grasp of the kind of properties and relations made explicit by modal vocabulary.”³ The Kant-Sellars thesis vindicates Ryle’s treatment of modal expressions as inference licenses. Sellars’s gnomic saying, “the language of modality is a ‘transposed’ language of norms,”⁴ means that normative vocabulary codifying rules of inference is a pragmatic meta-vocabulary for modal vocabulary. His ‘transposition’ is just this pragmatically mediated semantic relation between deontic normative and alethic modal vocabulary. The expressive role characteristic of alethic modal vocabulary is to make explicit semantic, conceptual connections and commitments that are already implicit in the use of ordinary empirical vocabulary. To relate this discussion quickly back to Pred: If these commitments are indeed already implicit in any radical–empiricist vocabulary, that vocabulary will be tainted for Pred’s purposes. It will be shot through with features of language games that the phenomenologist attempts to burrow under.

To the normative Kant-Sellars thesis, Brandom adds a modal one, as follows: In order to deploy ordinary, empirical, descriptive vocabulary, one must already be able to do everything needed to introduce normative vocabulary. In terms of meaning-use analysis, there are PV-necessary practices for engaging in any ADP, and these are PP-sufficient for practices that are PV-sufficient to deploy moral vocabulary. Brandom understands normative vocabulary to be a pragmatic metavocabulary for alethic modal vocabulary, in particular for logical vocabulary (including modal vocabulary). As such, it is a metavocabulary for semantic vocabulary more generally. 19

Understanding incompatibility between p and q in pragmatic terms (If S is entitled to p, then S is not entitled to q), 20 he argues that incompatibility-entailments generalize “counterfactual-supporting, modally robust inferential relations.”⁵ He concludes, “On the semantic side, incompatibility is an implicitly modal notion. On the pragmatic side, the normative concepts of commitment and entitlement provide a pragmatic meta-vocabulary VP-sufficient to specify practices PV-sufficient to deploy that modal notion.”⁶ Accordingly, he proposes that the propositional content of a sentence should be understood as the set of sentences that express propositions incompatible with it. The point about compatibility can be related to Pred’s phenomenological project, since that project must describe discursive processes of analysis of pre-linguistic experience, as noted above. If these descriptions have any content, they must figure in incompatibility relations that are ultimately spelled out in terms of the normative concepts of commitment and entitlement that arise in rule-governed language-games. In a word, the phenomenological project is *incoherent*.

Brandom turns to logical vocabulary, following the ‘incompatibility’ strategy as follows: Start with a material incompatibility-and-consequence-inference-structure that articulates the contents of non-logical vocabulary, and on that basis introduce logical vocabulary whose content is derived from that of the non-logical vocabulary on which it is based. Material inference, the practical sense of what constitutes good or bad reasoning, is basic; logical inference is derived. This turns on its head the classical project of philosophical analysis. But also that ‘practical sense’ is a feature of language-games, as just noted, that implicitly reveal the phenomenological project to be incoherent. 21

One of the big ideas that traditional pragmatism brings to philosophical thought about semantics, according to Brandom, is, “don’t look to begin with to the relation between representings and representeds, but to the nature of the doing, of the process, that institutes that relation.”⁷ He associates this idea with Dewey and Wittgenstein. Intentionality as practical involvement with objects expresses itself in TOTE (test-operate-test-exit) activity that is ‘thick’ in the sense of essentially involving objects, events, and worldly states of affairs. Such activity is developed in the special case of semantic intentionality displayed in language use. One must start with understanding the thick practices, “dissecting” out of them the two poles of the semantic intentional relations. The poles are “knowing and acting subjects and the objects they know of and act on, their representing activities and the objects and objective states of affairs they represent.”⁸ The thick practices “institute” or “establish” those poles. It is commitment to this order of semantic explanation that is most characteristic of the pragmatic tradition. This order of explanation generates Brandom’s Sellarsian critique of Pred-style radical empiricism, as in the following passage, in which he is summarizing Sellars’ position. 22

Because he [Sellars] thinks part of what one is doing in saying how things merely appear is withholding a commitment to their actually being that way, and because one cannot be understood as withholding a commitment that one cannot undertake, Sellars concludes that one cannot have the ability to say or think how things seem or appear unless one also has the ability to make claims about how things actually are. In effect, this Sellarsian pragmatist critique of the phenomenalist form of empiricism consists in the claim that the practices that are PV-sufficient for ‘is’-talk are PP-necessary for the practices that are PV-sufficient for ‘looks’-talk. That pragmatic dependence of practices—or–abilities then induces a resultant pragmatically mediated semantic relation between the vocabularies.⁹ 23

The radical empiricist might reply that one must distinguish (1) the epistemic sense of ‘appears’, which withholds a commitment, from (2) the phenomenological sense of ‘appears’, which refers to a first-person-accessible particular, a pure-experiential appearance. The Wittgensteinian element of Brandom’s Wittgensteinian pragmatism addresses this question, answering it with an argument modeled after Wittgenstein’s rejection of private languages. The alleged phenomenological particulars can be referred to only within public rules of an autonomous language game that includes rules about committing and withholding. So the radical-empiricist project of generating a publicly accessible world from a privately accessible world of pure experience isn’t going to work. The latter won’t be autonomous, but rather it will be parasitic upon the autonomous, rule-governed language-game of committing and withholding, etc., in a public context. 24

Brandom is recommending a meaning-use analysis in which inferential use underpins representational meaning, a marriage so to speak of Frege and the later Wittgenstein. So radical empiricism isn’t liable to criticism because it represents phenomenological processes of analysis, integration, and satisfaction of experience. It is vulnerable rather because it portrays those processes, incoherently, as prior to the doings that institute them. These doings must be set out in a normative, rule-governed context of commitment and entitlement from which a radical-empiricist metaphysics struggles to be free. 25

To conclude: Whether the phenomenologist’s struggle is in vain or not depends on whether the dependence on public norms of the concept of mind, according to Brandom’s tracing-out of the implications of Wittgenstein’s private language argument, leaves open any space for the kind of reports that phenomenology trades in. There might be such space, although the norm-dependency would seem to rule out radical empiricism’s doctrine of pure experience. Contrary to Pred’s hope, phenomenology won’t go that deep, if Brandom is right. Putting aside that hope, Pred might salvage an important domain for phenomenology by developing the Searlean element of his theory. For although Searle criticizes phenomenology for being blind to the logical structure of consciousness, which requires non-conscious background features (for example, the functioning central nervous system), he endorses phenomenology insofar as it reports ontologically subjective facts, facts with first-person ontology. (Searle 1996) Contrarily, Brandom follows those like Dennett and Davidson who restrict themselves to third-person ontology, as in Dennett’s notions of heterophenomenology and the Intentional Stance. The former notion is that everything that phenomenologists might want to say by reporting subjective facts, can be described and explained by reference to objective facts (facts with third-person ontology). The latter implies that facts about the mind are stance-dependent, relative to the purposes of those who adopt intentional descriptions because of their predictive value. Brandom’s emphasis is different from Dennett’s, drawing attention to norms and rules more than predictive success, (Brandom 1994, 58) but the orientation towards third-person facts is shared. If this is the major issue between pure-experience phenomenology and Brandom’s Wittgensteinian pragmatism, James’s doctrine of pure experience and Whitehead’s panexperientialism would not be relevant to its resolution. Much would depend on a Searlean defense of phenomenology as just sketched, and on whether Pred can legitimately employ Searle’s ideas about rule-following and background, which Searle presents as elements of a naturalistic worldview, in which objective physical facts are fundamental. 26

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- ¹ William James, *Pragmatism*, p. 6.
- ² William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 14-15.
- ³ <http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/locke/locke-w4.html>, p. 7.
- ⁴ <http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/locke/locke-w4.html>, p. 11.
- ⁵ <http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/locke/locke-w4.html>, p. 15.
- ⁶ <http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/locke/locke-w5.html>, p. 7.
- ⁷ <http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/locke/locke-w6.html>, p. 3.
- ⁸ <http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/locke/locke-w6.html>, p. 5.
- ² <http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/locke/locke-w1.html>, p. 15.

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Book Review

The Drama of Possibility: Experience as Philosophy of Culture. By John J. McDermott. Edited by Douglas R. Anderson. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007. Pp. 416. Cloth, \$85.00. Paper, \$30

I recently had the pleasure of reviewing *Experience as Philosophy: On the Work of John J. McDermott*. This is a collection 1
of essays about McDermott's writing and teaching. I have now been asked to review *The Drama of Possibility: Experience as Philosophy of Culture*. This is a collection of essays by McDermott. Reading these two books in the same year has been an interesting and instructive experience. That much McDermott in a relatively brief period of time is pretty intense. This experience was made even more intense by the fact that in that same period of time I suffered the death of several close friends—human and nonhuman—and several friends and family members encountered serious illness. This has colored my reading of *The Drama of Possibility* since death and illness are major themes in McDermott's writings. My reading has also been informed by the fact that for the last year and a half I have been in charge of overseeing the process of reviewing and revising the general education requirements at my university. For this reason McDermott's work on education and pedagogy took on a particular importance this time around. As I said in the review of *Experience as Philosophy*, I find these two themes to be intricately connected in the work of McDermott. Reading, and in some cases re-reading, the essays presented in *The Drama of Possibility* just affirmed this judgment.

In the "Afterward" to *Experience as Philosophy* McDermott notes that humans are not the center of existence, nor 2
do we have any special permanence or transcendence. He says it is *because* of this that we are called on to live active, meaningful lives. One very important way to do this is to teach. "To teach is to help others move through the vestibule and into the feast. The generational continuum of teacher and student is an ennobling lifeline and perhaps, at times a lifeboat on a fractured, contentious planet earth" (271). The essays in *The Drama of Possibility* bear this out. The editor of the volume, Douglas R. Anderson, says much the same thing.

As one who lives without belief in the supernatural, Professor McDermott also writes about our actual, finite 3
victories and losses, and about the possibilities that these victories and losses suggests for our contingent futures. The moral, the aesthetic, the religious, the political all take place for McDermott as a drama of possibility, and he repeatedly calls our attention to the dynamic interplay of loss and hope this drama presents. Finally, Professor McDermott's awareness of our precarious setting leads him to a Dewey-like commitment to pedagogy. Only through meaningful transactions across generations and cultures will we remain alive as a people and not resort to social stagnation or fall into cultural chaos. In the end, for McDermott, it all comes down to our willingness to learn and to teach—these are our most elemental existential projects (4).

The Drama of Possibility is an important collection. It includes work published as early as 1965 and 1968 and as 4
recently as 2004. There are also several pieces published here for the first time. This book represents over forty years of work, spanning five decades. While it might be impolite to say, this collection maps exactly onto my own lifespan. I was born in 1965. (This just adds another interesting personal element to my relationship to this work, not to mention that I'm Irish!) A lot has happened in these forty plus years and a lot happens in these pages.

The book is organized into five parts, each containing essays from two or more different decades. Each part 5
begins with a poem by McDermott. While each essay can be productively read, taught, or studied on its own, there is much to be gained by examining the book by its sections. There is also something important to be gained from going

beyond the sections and examining the work as a whole. I will briefly do both here. The necessary brevity does not do justice to what is here.

Part 1: An American Angle of Vision contains six essays which very directly address important aspects of the work of classical American philosophers—Emerson, Royce, James, Santayana, Dewey, and others. They also address American experience. This section moves from a certain loss of hope in “Threadbare Crape” to the hopeful pressure of possibility in “Possibility or Else!” In “Threadbare Crape” McDermott notes that the “increasing pressure of estrangement, and ontological, rather than functional, frustration, are of central moment. The issue in question, however, cuts deeper and may presage our having lost the capacity to rework and reconstitute the viability of a pluralistic and mosaic communal fabric which, in truth, is simply quintessential if we are to survive as a nation” (25). This section then begins to marshal resources for precisely this task of survival. In “An American Angle of Vision” we find the resources of a pluralistic, experiential, and experimental approach to amelioration. The essays specifically on Emerson and on Royce provide insights into our ability as individuals and as a community. Imagination helps us deal with risk and instability; it helps us construct possibility. Community helps us stay open to various and mediated interpretations. This mediation is aimed at amelioration. “Possibility or Else!”—an essay published here for the first time—focuses on William James and the idea that “we are not ontologically—that is, utterly—disconnected” (133). We are creative and able; we are always in process. So we (as individuals and communities) had better get busy in the world. The next section of the book tries to explain the activity of the self in the world.

Part 2: Envisioning, not surprisingly, deals with ways in which we find ourselves in the world and how we experience it. These four essays continue the theme of the reality of an unstable world. McDermott calls for a focus on relationships and pluralism. Further in “A Relational World” we find that if “reality is evolutionary, developmental, and processive rather than static or complete in any way, then it is imperative to realize that positions taken by human diagnosis and human intervention are significantly, although partially, constitutive of the future course of events” (151). Now we have consequences and responsibility—a call to thoughtful action. “If we have the ‘will be believe’ in both our capacity to effect human healing of unnecessary suffering and in our responsibility to do so, then we shall, in time create a human community worthy of the rich human tradition of hope, aspiration, and wisdom” (155). This is done in the face of our impermanence and so day by day.

Truly, then, meliorism is a salutary human approach, despite it lacking the drama of either pessimism or optimism. It takes no captives, makes no excessive claims, nor bows out in frustration at the opposition. Dewey evokes the deepest sentiments of human life, too often unsung and too often derided: that the nectar is in the journey, that ultimate goals may be illusory, nay, most likely are but a gossamer wing. Day by day, however, human life triumphs in its ineluctable capacity to hang in and make things better: not perfect, simply better (157-58).

To do this in the present day McDermott argues that we need to rethink space and time. Most specifically things cannot only be improved by relocating, we also need to see staying in place and dealing with limiting space as important opportunities of self-understanding and amelioration. Knowing who and where we are is important as we face up to our own transiency—the topic of the next section.

Part 3: Turning takes on disease, death, suffering, and starvation. These five essays push us to see our inconsequence. “We do not fit into the world as a Lego piece or a Lincoln Log. In fact, I believe that we have no special place in the organic constituency of nature. Our consciousness, so different, so extraordinary, so bizarre, especially in its dream state, is a marvelous and pockmarked perturbation of the conic history of DNA” (256). Our being makes us who we are, provides meaning, and maybe makes the world a better place. But there are no guarantees other than our transiency. For McDermott the question and answer is then “can we experience ourselves as terminal and yet live creative, probing, building lives which, nonetheless, ask for no guarantees and for no ultimate significance to be attributed to our endeavor? I for one, believe that we can live this way; nay, I believe that it is *only* in this way that we live a distinctively human life” (285). Death isn’t the problem, isolation from experience and lack of growth are what is worrisome. Without connections to our experiences growth is not possible. That kind of living stagnation is what we should seek to avoid. “Our impending death is not the major obstacle to our becoming truly human. The obstacle is found in our running for cover on behalf of our escape from death” (290). One of the most important ways to avoid this kind of stagnation is found in the pedagogical relationship of teacher and student—specifically the student and teacher of philosophy. “Pedagogy becomes, then, the twin effort to integrate the directions of experience with the total needs of the person and to cultivate the ability of an individual to generate new potentialities in his experiencing and to make new relationships so as to foster patterns of growth” (297). This is the human endeavor. Sections 4 and 5 deal with the importance of philosophy for a life of growth and purpose and with the necessity of teaching and learning for making such growth possible for us all—individually and collectively.

Part 4: Bequeathing takes on what philosophy has to offer the world today, and to each of our lives. These five essays show us philosophy as thinking that is willing to confront all ideas and the press of experience; philosophy enriches, deepens, widens, thickens, leads to growth. McDermott contends that the “message of philosophy” is “that there are possibilities ‘not yet in our present sight’” (343). It helps us ask questions and avoid living second-hand lives. Well done, it helps us shake off our “ontological lethargy” (375), helping us to see life as an activity. “The richness of the everyday, had we the will to savor our possibilities, would far exceed our fantasies. Indeed, our penchant for the fantastic is but an indictment of how casual and unreflective has become our daily posture in a world which screeches at us, though we hear not” (378). We need to listen and work to build “a liberating human future” (380).

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Part 5: Teaching addresses the importance of teaching, provides insights into pedagogy, and highlights some of the problems teachers face today. The focus of these five essays is on teaching us to be human; teaching us to live actively and creatively in the face of uncertainty and death. To do this we need a face-to-face pedagogy that engages the students’ experience in the process. Ambiguity and imagination need a place in the curriculum. Helping people understand and explore their experience is more important than information transfer. And this is the point of his work as a whole. McDermott may say it best in his “Prescription.” Going back to 1976 he reiterates a message that permeates his work. “(D)o not await salvation while the parade passes by. Surprise and mystery lurk in our experiencing the obvious, the ordinary. Salvation may be illusory, but salving experiences can occur day by day” (12). This is a powerful and important message for all of us to confront and wrestle with, whether in our own personal lives or in our lives as teachers and scholars. And wrestle you will. There are contradictions in these pages to be teased out, assumptions to be questioned, and conclusions to be challenged. It is a book that calls out an active response from the reader and poses challenges to one’s life.

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One drawback to the book is that the bibliography is published in *Experience as Philosophy* and not repeated here. This is a regrettable choice. So, you need to have both books on your shelf and there is every reason to do so. Whether you are teaching the works of McDermott himself, or anything about American philosophy, existentialism, teaching, death, or life, you will find essays that would work well in your class. If your own writing connects to these themes these will be important volumes to consult. I highly recommend reading *The Drama of Possibility*. Whether you read it from start to finish, or dip into particular sections and essays, it will provide you with a taste of philosophical writing that connects to our lives in important ways. My copy of the book is already crumpled and worn. It is a book that wears well.

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Book Review

The Dynamic Individualism of William James. By James Pawelski, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007, Pp.i-xiii, 1-185. \$60.00.

James Pawelski's *The Dynamic Individualism of William James* is a refreshing invitation to read William James as a reasonable thinker interested in bringing the various features of human experience into working concert. Pawelski does not suggest that James attempts to "clean up the litter" found in his philosophical endeavors. The litter is, after all, an important feature of our experience itself. But he does resist the various attempts to fragment James's thought—and James himself—into compartmentalized warring factions. The compartmentalized or "divided" James story has a long history and Pawelski addresses several of the prominent versions including those of Julius Bixler's 1926 *Religion in the Philosophy of William James* and Richard Gale's more recent *The Divided Self of William James*. In the former, Bixler insists that James is caught between what he calls "moralism" and genuine religious experience. In the latter, Gale argues that James is caught between trying to be a Promethean pragmatist and an experiential mystic. Ironically, as Pawelski notes, the divided, compartmentalized James stories are highly analytic and systematic, and are constructed out of the very sharp sorts of dividing lines whose deployment James routinely resisted. 1

The virtue of Pawelski's approach is his own receptivity to James's texts and his willingness to take seriously James's suggestion that philosophers seek to express a vision in their work, even when they do not articulate a carefully closed system of thought. In short, Pawelski listens carefully to James's words before offering interpretation. Unlike Gale, Richard Rorty, and others, he does not set out on a mission to advise James concerning what he ought to have said or thought. In contrast, consider by way of example Gale's claim that "James would be well advised to abandon this attempt to placate the realist and openly admit that his morally based analysis of epistemological concepts is highly revisionary of our common sense concepts and beliefs concerning belief-acceptance and truth" (Gale, p. 12). Indeed, the giving of the advice in this instance suggests a rather strong misreading of James's quasi-Peircean understanding of truth as a developing relation. In Pawelski's work there is less flippancy and more respectful consideration of the texts at hand. 2

The structure of Pawelski's argument is pretty straightforward. He takes the image of the psychological reflex action model, to which he believes James is committed, as a guide to his Jamesian story. The reflex model is constituted of three moments that stand in relations of reciprocal dependence to each other: perception, conception, and volition. Pawelski uses the model to argue that the various compartmentalized-James theses derive from attending to one or two of these moments to the exclusion of the others. Indeed, Pawelski acknowledges that, especially in his early work, James often focuses on one of these moments to a degree that the others might seem eliminable. For example, the will to believe angle seems to champion volition to the exclusion of intellectual, conceptual activity. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, on the other hand, we find a dramatic emphasis on the perceptual, where religious geniuses neither need to will their beliefs nor bother to conceptualize them. After establishing the various forms of opposition of the moments over the course of the middle chapters of the book, Pawelski turns to what he calls his "integrative thesis" of James's individualism. Bringing a variety of texts to bear on the issue, he tries to show that especially in his later years James intentionally worked to bring the three moments of the reflex action model into a working relationship. Pawelski 3

begins by rejecting the dichotomizing readings of James. Versus Gale's "divided self blues" he suggests that "the interplay of the Promethean and the mystical . . . is not only possible but also necessary for human flourishing" (p. 130). He concludes by developing an exemplary story of how perception, conception, and will all play roles in mediating the real but distinct human experiences of epiphany—insightful instances of experience—and mundanity—habituated everyday conduct. The upshot is that Jamesian individualism is not perceptual solipsism, political rugged individualism, nor ontological isolationism. Rather, James's radical empiricism and pluralistic panpsychism place the individual in a relational context that reaches out beyond the merely personal. This context includes history so that individuality is always dynamic and developing. But this relational context, in being pluralistic, falls short of the various forms of scientific and religious absolutism that would consume the individual. Pawelski's James, in short, is not bi-polar, but is contingently and fruitfully triadic and mediating. Not an absolute either/or, but a tentative and working both/and. "The individualism that arises from James's integrated self," he maintains, "brings together the volitional individualism of the *Will to Believe* and *Principles* and the perceptual individualism of *Varieties*" (p. 125).

There are occasional moments in the text where Pawelski himself is tempted by the sorts of discrete categories proposed by Bixler and Gale. And there are moments when he stretches texts in directions he would like them to go. But on the whole he remains sensitive to James's own sense of receptivity, and he does not try to dominate the Jamesian texts. The story he tells is not seamless, nor is it meant to be. He reveals the tensions with which James ultimately seems willing to live, but he does not let these tensions slide into bifurcations of a more radical sort in ways that James himself did not authorize.

The Dynamic Individualism of William James starts off slowly—a bit mechanical and methodical. In the middle sections the prose becomes more animated as Pawelski takes on what he takes to be some serious misreadings of James. The final chapters are, I think, even livelier as Pawelski works to explicate and explore his own vision of Jamesian individualism. In the course of this exploration, he comes to his previously noted distinction between the epiphanic and the mundane. The distinction is useful for describing the kind of mediating position Pawelski has to offer. But it is suggestive of more. In working this distinction off-handedly through the history of western thought, Pawelski reveals that he has more to say in this direction and that James, at this juncture, is a vehicle for his own thinking. In showing the kind of work James's individualism can achieve, Pawelski also suggests that one might take this individualism well beyond James into a variety of issues concerning the conduct of life. Thus, as good as this book is in carefully presenting a vision of James as integrating the strands of his work and interests, one hopes that Pawelski might, in some subsequent work, kick away the Jamesian ladder and develop his own mediation of the epiphanic and the mundane.

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Book Review

Brazil through the Eyes of William James: Diaries, Letters, and Drawings, 1865–1866. Bilingual Edition / Edição Bilíngüe. Edited by Maria Helena P.T. Machado. Translated by John M. Monteiro. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006. Pp. 230. \$29.95.

On April Fool's Day in 1865, the steamship *Colorado* left New York with a strange cargo: the Brazil-bound Thayer Expedition, led by renowned Harvard naturalist Louis Agassiz. Accompanying Agassiz was a motley crew of assistants and specimen collectors, one of whom was a gung-ho student volunteer named William James. 1

During his eight months in Brazil, James kept a diary, wrote letters home, made numerous sketches, and even composed a brief travel narrative ("A Month on the Solimões"). Thanks to the efforts of Maria Helena P.T. Machado, these documents have now been gathered together in one handsome, slim, and scrupulously edited volume: *Brazil through the Eyes of William James: Letters, Diaries, and Drawings 1865–1866*. As this is a bilingual edition, moreover, the entire text—introduction, letters, diary, narrative, captions, references, lists, acknowledgments—is printed twice: first in English (pp. 5-110), then in Portuguese (pp. 111-230). 2

Brazil through the Eyes of William James says precious little about philosophy, psychology, or religious studies. Nevertheless, I strongly suspect that James enthusiasts will find it a stimulating and intriguing read. Why? Here are four reasons. (1) To begin with, the editor's superb introduction ("An American Adam in the Amazonian Garden of Eden") puts the Thayer Expedition into its historical and cultural context (pp. 9-48). Among other things, Machado argues that the Expedition "was not exactly an innocent voyage of exploration" (p. 38) inasmuch as its agenda was shaped by sinister assumptions about race repugnant to James (pp. 38-39, 44-48). (2) The eighteen letters which James wrote to his family—specifically, to his father, his mother, and his siblings Henry and Alice—are minor masterpieces of the epistolary genre (pp. 51-85). Immensely readable and revealing, these missives range widely in tone: now fact-laden and full of reportage, now heartfelt and affectionate; now wry and urbane, now deliciously silly and whimsical. They will be savoured not only by aficionados of James's style, but also by anyone interested in the climate of sentiment in which the James clan dwelt. (3) Then there are James's sharp-eyed observations and splendidly vivid descriptions. Melancholy spider monkeys (pp. 99-100), marauding mosquitoes (pp. 57, 74, 89, 91), "the vile Sea" (p. 53), the virtues of hammocks (p. 68), the dangers of bananas (p. 56), pineapples "as big as a beaver hat" (p. 83), "lovely Indian maidens" (p. 74), "this expensive and dirty Rio" (p. 63), sublime Corcovado (p. 59), "the affluence of Nature" (p. 59), the enigmatic Agassiz (pp. 56, 58, 59, 75, 76), the appearance and manners of "polite and obliging" locals (pp. 54, 90, 92)—all these things, and many more, are made concrete and real for the reader. Young James, it is plain, was "a person on whom nothing is lost" (to quote his brother Henry's well-known advice to aspiring writers). (4) Another virtue of the volume is its artful use of arresting images—photographs, paintings, sketches, doodles, manuscripts—to complement James's written accounts of his Brazilian sojourn. Especially noteworthy in this collection are James's own drawings (pp. 13, 14, 25, 34, 52, 55, 67, 69, 70, 79, 82, 86, 89, 99), several of which are indisputable proof of artistic talent. His subjects are varied: his fellow explorers, the women of Rio, the indigenous people of the Amazon, Agassiz, monkeys, dug-out canoes, river-side scenery, and his beloved sister Alice. 3

By the time James left Brazil, he was weary of fieldwork—"I am thoroughly *sick* of collecting" (p. 84)—and had decided not to follow in Agassiz's professional footsteps (pp. 80, 84, 85). He completed his degree at Harvard Medical School, but grew disenchanted with medicine—just as he had with natural history and (before that) with 4

painting. With plenty of talent but no vocation, James started to drift, rudderless, through life. To comprehend the agonizing personal crisis he faced—a crisis which lasted into the 1870s—we need to understand his mind from the inside; that is, we need to understand how he saw the world. *Brazil through the Eyes of William James* helps us do just that. For this reason, among others, Machado's many-sided volume is an excellent example of scholarship undertaken in the service of the imagination. A rich and provocative work, it deserves a wide audience—on both sides of the equator.

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Book Review

The Soul of Classical American Philosophy: The Ethical and Spiritual Insights of William James, Josiah Royce, and Charles Sanders Peirce. By Richard P. Mullin. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007. HC \$68.50. PB \$28.95

Richard Mullin describes this book as having two purposes: first, to make the key ideas of James, Royce, and Peirce accessible to readers who are not specialists in classical American philosophy or philosophy in general, and second, to illuminate the merits of their ideas as they apply to thought and to life. When it comes to these goals, I believe that Mullin is, on the whole, successful. At the same time, however, I believe that the shortcomings of this book are significant enough to warrant elaboration in this review. I will begin with these, and end by focusing on the aspects of this book deserving of celebration.

In the first line of the text, Mullin stipulates that “in describing the soul of American philosophy,” he is focusing on the thought of James, Royce, and Peirce as they “dealt with issues that would be treated under the name of *soul* in traditional philosophy.” He enumerates these issues as “the search for truth; the meaning of whatever we call our ‘self,’ especially in relation to our bodily existence; free will; moral values; community, and our relationship with the Transcendent” (xi). The decision to discuss the thought of James, Royce, and Peirce in this regard is certainly sound, but the absence of John Dewey in this conversation is immediately glaring. Mullin is aware of this, asserting that despite his emphasis, he does not deny Dewey’s importance. He then gives a paragraph summation of Dewey’s philosophical vision, concluding that, “John Dewey stands out among the most important classical pragmatists and his work receives adequate and deserved attention” (xiv). Although Mullin is to be credited for acknowledging Dewey’s importance, his case for not treating Dewey at any length is rather unsatisfying. One might make the same remark about James or Peirce; each stands out among the most important classical pragmatists and the work of each receives adequate and deserved attention. So why engage them in the present work, but not Dewey?

The answer cannot be that Dewey says nothing or little about that which Mullin describes as falling under the name of *soul*. Dewey engages each of these issues within his cavernous corpus, some topics taking up residence at the heart of several books. I suspect that the motivation for Mullin’s exclusion of Dewey is intimated in the “Personal Note” marking the end of the Introduction, in which Mullin tells of his giving a series of lectures at the University of Trnava, a state university in Slovakia with a Catholic orientation: “The administrators were surprised to learn that American pragmatism is compatible with Christianity. I told them that this misunderstanding prevails among Americans as well. I suggested to my hosts that the work of James, Royce, and Peirce, coming from outside the Catholic tradition, could serve to revitalize Catholic philosophy in a way analogous to the way the works of Aristotle did in the thirteenth century” (xv). It seems that Mullin excludes Dewey because unlike James, Royce, and Peirce, Dewey overtly spurns organized religion. If this is the case, Mullin should state so explicitly; otherwise, it seems implied that Dewey has little regard for the matters discussed in this book or that the scholarship has exhausted all to be said of these aspects of Dewey’s thought. Either implication is gravely misleading, especially in a text intended for newcomers to the classical American tradition.

Another choice that arouses curiosity is that of treating Peirce after James and Royce, when Peirce is widely considered the founder of American pragmatism and clearly influences the thought of James and Royce. Mullin acknowledges the counterintuitive quality of the order in which he handles these figures, but defends his decision by pointing out that Peirce’s national and international influence emerged later than that of James and Royce (120). While this may be so, it would seem more helpful to the reader new to the classical American tradition to meet these

authors in biographical order. This book centers on the thought of these philosophers, after all, not on their public reputations. The treatments of James and Royce would have been richer if they had followed an account of Peirce, highlighting those tenets of his thought which each inherited and resisted. Moreover, the anticipatory groundwork Mullin would have laid in his discussion of Peirce would have helped to fill out a section of the book that feels fragmentary, especially when compared to the other two. While Mullin devotes sixty pages to James and forty-eight to Royce, he offers just twenty-nine on Peirce, including a chapter on the human person that Mullin himself describes as bringing “nothing new to the table” (158). Another approach would be to omit the discussion of Peirce altogether, in favor of deepening the discussions of James and Royce. Granted, if this were done, the book could not be cast as a general introduction to classical American philosophy, but would instead become a close examination of the philosophical dialogue between James and Royce, a juxtaposition that Mullin calls “one of the most fascinating comparisons and contrasts in philosophy” (67). Such a study would be a welcome addition to the literature, and finds its rudiments in Mullin’s work.

This book is indeed at its most fascinating when navigating the thick territories of James and Royce. Mullin’s 5
expositions of James on free will and spirituality would be of great service to anyone struggling to comprehend these dimensions of his thought. More impressive, though, is the clarity of Mullin’s accounts of Royce’s idealism and conception of the self. Here, Mullin is forced to explicate notoriously dense prose from *The World and the Individual*, and does so with elegance and élan. One heuristic strategy that Mullin employs is to contrast the positions of classical American pragmatists with those of philosophers who came before them. This is executed most effectively in the first two chapters dedicated to James and the first two chapters dedicated to Royce, very appropriate places, incidentally, for such comparisons to take place. With respect to the former, Mullin contrasts James’s radical empiricism with British empiricism, and James’s conception of the mind/body relation with those of a variety of ancient Greek and medieval thinkers. With respect to the latter, Mullin contrasts Royce’s notion of an idea with those notions found in British empiricism, and Royce’s notion of the self with those of a gamut of philosophers including Aquinas, Hume, and Hegel. These comparisons are all too brief but likely still helpful to the reader with a basic philosophical background. These portions could be particularly useful in survey courses in American philosophy at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Thus, despite my reservations about this book, it is fair to say that Mullin makes good on his goal of rendering 6
classical American pragmatism more accessible. Further, Mullin also succeeds in demonstrating the good that can come to our lives from a “deep drink from the spring of classical American pragmatism” (xv). For Mullin, the tie binding James, Royce, and Peirce is the view that belief in, and devotion to, the *soul* (as Mullin describes it) enriches the lives of individuals and communities alike. If this is the case, those unfamiliar with classical American philosophy have compelling impetus to seek the introduction Mullin provides.

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