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WHAT TO MAKE OF JAMES'S GENETIC THEORY OF TRUTH?

DAVID C. LAMBERTH

ABSTRACT

*This Presidential Address to the 2008 Annual Meeting of the William James Society pursues an overlooked avenue to understanding what James might have intended by his claim in *Pragmatism* to offer a “genetic theory of what is meant by truth.” The author argues that we can plausibly interpret this specific claim of James by appealing to Hermann Lotze’s conception of “genetic definition,” explicated in his 1874 *Logik*, which James read and annotated closely. The essay concludes by pursuing the implications of this thesis for understanding Pragmatism, ‘truth’ in James, and truth and pragmatism in relation to James’s other philosophical commitments.*

One of the longstanding challenges in interpreting William James’s pragmatism is understanding what sort of account he thought he was providing when he turned to the question of truth. Notably, James entitled *Pragmatism*’s central chapter on the subject “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth,” not “The Pragmatic Theory of Truth,” thus seeming to take a somewhat diminished view of what he offered. However, when introducing pragmatism in lecture two James refers to John Dewey’s and F. C. S. Schiller’s theories of truth, and notes that he himself will devote a lecture to explaining pragmatism’s theory. The standard assumption from the first presentation of the lectures was that James was indeed offering a theory of truth in the way we normally mean that term. That is, it was assumed that James was offering a definition of the nature of truth in terms of properties, principles, and causes and providing a systematic account of their interactions or relations. But as many commentators from then until now have noted, James’s account of truth is less what we ordinarily expect of a theory, and more something else.¹ The question is, what? In what follows I pursue an alternate and heretofore overlooked avenue to understanding what James might have intended with his account of truth, in hopes of shedding light on what sort of story James had to tell about this perennial topic in philosophy.

Specifically, I suggest that we can make at least some sense of James's claim to offer a "genetic theory" of truth by appealing to Hermann Lotze's conception of "genetic definition." Although the connection is abstruse, the perspective I take has implications for how one might interpret 'truth' in James, as well as for how one might interpret truth to stand in relation to pragmatism itself, and James's other philosophical commitments.

TURNING TO TRUTH

If one takes truth to relate to knowledge or knowing, one cannot help but notice that James works out variations on a theory of knowledge in a variety of places over the course of his career, ranging from *The Principles of Psychology* through his essays concerning radical empiricism on to his later writings, in addition to *Pragmatism*. I have argued elsewhere that much of James's understanding of knowledge is eventually premised on his radical empiricism, in contrast to those who take pragmatism to be a fundamental or standalone view for James.² Moreover, I have sought to present James's account of truth as dependent on, and largely subordinate to, this more comprehensive view. Notwithstanding this overall emphasis in my interpretation of James, my topic here is focused explicitly on his writings about pragmatism and truth, and the status of those claims. The view I adumbrate here is basically consistent with my broader strategy of interpreting truth in James, but it is also more specific about the particular rhetorical and theoretical location of James's actual discussions.

Looking at James's overt discussions of pragmatism, one finds shot throughout an appeal to pragmatism as a means of settling disputes or carrying on discussion on the one hand, and a related assertion of the pragmatic principle of meaning on the other hand.³ The first of these we might take to be a specification of the applicable context for the pragmatic method, and the second to be the principle undergirding the method itself. James's pragmatism is, however, often and more notoriously known for its pragmatic conception of truth, thus provoking questions about the scope of his pragmatism and its relation to traditional modern conceptions of philosophy which are, among other things, frequently dominated by epistemological concerns and ideas rather than by the practical sets of issues James otherwise seems to underscore in his pragmatic engagements.

Coincident with this, most readers and interpreters of James take his pragmatism to

involve two separable components or theories: the pragmatic principle relating to meaning and the pragmatic theory of truth.⁴ James himself suggested this reading, noting in the second chapter of *Pragmatism* that “Such then would be the scope of pragmatism—first a method; and second, a genetic theory of what is meant by truth. And these two things must be our future topics.”⁵

Though James was explicit about this two-fold aspect of pragmatism in 1907, in his early discussions of pragmatism between 1898 and 1904, James did not consider truth at all. In fact, in 1904 he noted in a letter to F.C.S. Schiller that:

‘pragmatism’ never meant for me more than a method of conducting discussions (a sovereign method, it is true) and the tremendous scope which you and Dewey have given to the conception has exceeded my more timid philosophizing. I welcome it, and admire it, but I can’t yet think out certain parts of it . . .⁶

James was encouraged by Schiller and the editors of *Mind* to enter the then lively fray on pragmatism and humanism, pragmatism having become all the rage due to the distribution of James’s 1898 Berkeley talk, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” which was complemented in 1903 by the appearance of Dewey’s *Studies in Logical Theory* and Schiller’s *Humanism*. Several months later in 1904 James accommodated these demands with his article “Humanism and Truth,” published in *Mind* but now better known for its inclusion in *The Meaning of Truth* (1909).⁷ Tellingly, that article begins with James’s assertion that “I myself have only used the term [pragmatism] to indicate a method of carrying on abstract discussion.”⁸ James specifies further that all that his pragmatism implies in the case of truth is that truths should have practical consequences, which we can most fruitfully read as simply applying the gist of the pragmatic principle of meaning to the concept of truth.⁹ He then notes that a wider pragmatism has, however, recently been developed, involving Schiller’s much stronger claim that the truth of any statement *consists* in the consequences. This later claim, both more substantively epistemological and ontological, and certainly looking more like a theory than anything James had yet said, is apparently the “tremendous scope” James noted in his letter. In any case, in his essay James rather strategically endorses Schiller’s proposal to call the wider pragmatism ‘humanism’ in 1904, thus leaving his own narrower pragmatism intact as the ‘pragmatic method.’ He then generously offers something of a defense of some of humanism’s

claims, though he demurs from defending Schiller explicitly, due, he says, to not having the book in hand.

When James came to write *Pragmatism* two years hence, he tossed in the towel on this strategy of separating the nomenclature of pragmatism from humanism. In this text he discusses Schiller's humanism overtly and notes that, "for this doctrine, too, the name of pragmatism seems to be fairly in the ascendant, so I will treat it under the name of pragmatism in these lectures."¹⁰ Although from this text James may be read to be content with this shift, letters indicate that he was never fully comfortable with the name 'pragmatism' itself, and probably also not with a complete elision of pragmatism with Schiller's humanism regarding truth.¹¹ (Indeed, one might read the separation of chapter six "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth" from chapter seven "Pragmatism and Humanism" to be asserting some resistance to the adequacy of Schiller's formulations.) More importantly, despite James's overt comments about the two topics of meaning and truth in his book, it is simply not evident from the text of *Pragmatism* that James thinks that the humanistic/pragmatic theory of truth requires, in any meaningful respect, anything further than what is implied by his more rudimentary or fundamental notion of pragmatism as a theory of meaning, or pragmatism insisting that truth have practical consequences.¹² James does state that he has two topics for the lectures: "first, a method; and second, a genetic theory of what is meant by truth." He does not, however, claim explicitly that he has two separable pragmatic doctrines, despite how readers have taken him.¹³

One path to understanding what James is doing in extending his discussion of pragmatism from meaning to truth can be extrapolated from his unelaborated and obscure statement that he is offering a "genetic theory of what is meant by truth." Two features of this comment are immediately salient. First, much as he eventually does with the title of the sequel to *Pragmatism*, James appears to be underscoring that what he is interested in is the *meaning* of truth, or perhaps better, what "truth" means, through his inclusion of "meant" in the phrase "a genetic theory of what is *meant* by truth." This suggests that he may be subordinating "truth" to the pragmatic method of clarifying meaning, treating truth as a disputed conception, which it certainly was then generally, as well as in the case of discussions of pragmatism. James's strategy under this reading, then, would be to apply the pragmatic principle of meaning to the disputed conception truth, rather than the then more typical strategy of seeing truth as the ultimate telos or foundational conception that gives meaning to all subordinate and constitutive

conceptions, even that of “meaning” itself. This reading correlates well not only with how James entered the truth debate, seeking to moderate among the conversants rather than lead with his own view. It also comports well with his continued attempts to clarify what truth as “agreement,” insisted on by so many of his contemporaries, could be understood to mean.

A second feature may also be evident in this enigmatic claim to be offering “a genetic theory of what is meant by truth.” By modifying his project with the term “genetic,” James may be (intentionally or not) telegraphing a particular, and perhaps rather specific, kind of account. If he was doing this, it was apparently lost on many of his contemporaries, none of whom picked up on this point; almost certainly it has been lost on now-contemporary readers. But I want to follow this lead in this paper and inquire into what James might have meant by “genetic” to see if it can illumine further the puzzling discussions in *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*.¹⁴ I should note that such a strategy is inherently tenuous—attempting to hang a full paper on the unexplicated inclusion of one modifier in the course of what was written as a public lecture. But in the spirit of pragmatism, I would suggest that the fruits of this endeavor be at least one criterion for the worthiness of venture.

Due to the prominence of the nomenclature of “the genetic fallacy” in twentieth century philosophy—in which one fallaciously judges the truth or value of something by interrogating its origin (or cause of acquisition in the case of beliefs)—one might assume that James in *Pragmatism*, much as Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals*, intends to offer an account appealing to truth’s historical or grammatical origins. James himself, like Nietzsche, had prominently noted the independence of origin and value in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* when he discussed the faults of medical materialism’s criticisms of religion. Moreover, such an origin-oriented interpretation of “genetic” would seem loosely to fit into the general evolutionary mind-set that otherwise inflects James’s thought. On the contrary, though, it does go against the general grain of pragmatism’s interest in present and future function and value instead of the retrospective focus on origins.

Plausible though an appeal to this concept of genetic may seem, this usage of the phrase “genetic fallacy” is anachronistic. The explicit phrase was only introduced into philosophical terminology in the 1930s by Morris Cohen and Ernest Nagel in their *Introduction to Logic and the Scientific Method*.¹⁵ Moreover, James’s own emphasis on the independence of truth and value from origin, evidenced in his conception of spiritual judgment in *Varieties*, for example,

renders this interpretation implausible.

While it is admittedly not possible to determine exactly what James had in mind in mentioning once a “genetic theory of what is meant by truth,” there is a more plausible candidate for the James’s use of “genetic,” and that is R. Hermann Lotze’s articulation of “genetic definition” contained in his 1874 *Logik*. James not only owned this book in German and English, but we also know that he read it closely and referred to it frequently in both his writing and teaching. James’s German copy of the text, held by Harvard’s Houghton Library, is actively annotated in the margins of the whole work, and specifically attends to the discussion of genetic definition. As Otto Kraushaar observed in four essays from 1936-40 on James and Lotze, James not only read Lotze and was influenced by him, but he reserved the highest praise for Lotze throughout his career, calling him “the most exquisite of contemporary minds,” among other accolades.¹⁶ Indeed, in *Pragmatism* itself James refers specifically to “the great Lotze,” though on a different subject from genetic theories.¹⁷ Peirce and Josiah Royce frequently lamented that James was not an avid student of logic; it may well be that Lotze’s *Logik* was the only text on the subject which James thoroughly digested.

LOTZE’S LOGIK AND GENETIC DEFINITION

Lotze’s 1874 *Logik* was the first volume of his mature system of philosophy, complemented by his *Metaphysik* in 1879. The *Logik* is divided into three books: Pure Logic (or “on thought” or thinking), Applied Logic (on inquiry or investigation), and Methodology (or “of knowledge”). Lotze notes that he patterned the book on pure logic after his 1843 *Logik*. He also thought the third book—which deals with questions as they have historically emerged, much as Hegel’s introductions to his own *Logics* did—was inadequate in its execution. Thus the most substantive contribution of the 1874 *Logik* was to be found in the middle book on applied logic, or inquiry, even though Lotze himself notes that this portion of the text is idiosyncratic.

Lotze’s understanding of applied logic is not what one might expect from today’s use of the term, which frequently involves the application of logic to other fields. Rather, by applied logic Lotze understands something more like the study of right reasoning approached from the concrete, phenomenological perspective, in contrast to pure logic, which approaches thought and forms of reasoning formally and in idealized form. He thus notes that applied logic takes as its

subject matter the task of investigation, which is occasioned by the need to remedy problems of reasoning posed by the actual world and the difficulties of thinking within it, in contrast to the formal aspects of logic apparent only in pure systematic thought.¹⁸ Lotze's view is that real world objects in real world settings do not normally appear for us, or stimulate concepts or ideas in us, in the ideal way that formal logic would have them considered. Hence the lead problem for applied logic is the practical set of issues of delineating, defining, and specifying the objects we seek to discuss or understand. Investigation or inquiry is the means to that, and hence the primary application of logic in experience. Interestingly, Lotze's view here follows the formal structure of Hegel's dialectic and logic, where concept—which is formal and ideal—precedes determinateness in philosophical presentation; historically or phenomenologically speaking, however, determinateness is always where we actually begin. Lotze's skepticism about the ability of actual ideas to emanate necessarily into knowledge, however, is contrary to Hegel's optimistic understanding of the modern human situation.

Given this overall perspective, Lotze opens his analysis of investigation—applied logic—with the challenges of specifying or defining objects and the ideas and relations in thought they eventuate in. He has an interesting take on this subject, locating the issue of definition in the context of the possibility and necessity of communication. He thus sees investigation essentially as a communal affair, aligning his own analysis with the inherently communal endeavor typical of modern science. (This orientation to both language and science makes it thus no wonder that Lotze has more recently been seen as a bridge to analytic philosophy.¹⁹) In contrast to material objects, which he notes can often simply be passed from one person to another hand to hand, “we can,” Lotze notes, “communicate [inner states, sensations and ideas, feelings and impulses] only by subjecting our neighbor to conditions under which he will be compelled to experience them or beget them anew in himself.”²⁰ In light of the necessity of specifying what one is attempting to communicate, some form of definition or specification is thus essential.

In Lotze's view, definitions divide into two categories, descriptive and genetic. Description involves attempting to fill in the outlines of the idea under consideration by invoking the specific concepts or subordinate ideas involved, then attempting further to specify sufficient details so that the person being communicated to can form the accurate conception in their mind. Lotze observes that this sort of definition may be offered principally in the case of “actual things

which we know from the outside and whose definition therefore is in fact nothing but a methodical description.”²¹ Lotze expounds at length on what the ideal for methodical description is, specifying that all concepts involved in the description should be specific and non-circular, and that elegance and brevity ideally must be observed. The example Lotze offers, after much discussion of the process of refinement, is the definition that “a circle is a line which contains all the points in one plane which are equidistant from any point.”²² Lotze also notes that the usual method of descriptive definition involves specifying the proximate genus of the object under definition and the characteristic mark that distinguishes it, much as in Linnaean classification. Thus the example of the circle is defined by reference to its genus, line, with the unique mark of the type of line being equidistance from one point on the same plane.

Where descriptive definitions are direct in constituting the concept under description, invoking directly known constituents in a definitive way, Lotze’s genetic definition, by contrast, tries “by indirect means to make us form a mental picture of [a conception] *M*, when it is impossible or inconvenient to say directly what *M* is.” That is, in the case of descriptive definition, the object is both known directly and produced through the complete invocation of appropriate known concepts. Genetic definitions do not construct the discrete idea from its constituents so much as invoke it for another thinker by other means. In offering such a definition, one fixes the conception “not by the mere addition of other ideas, but by freely using and manipulating them at will” such that the intended idea can be produced. Lotze understands this genetic definition “not [to be] a statement of the process by which the content of the conception *M* is actually found, but only an indication of the way in which the *mental picture* of this content *M* may or must be formed.”²³ In contrast to the descriptive definition of a circle, which specifies its constitutive logical features, Lotze gives an example of a genetic definition of a circle as follows: “Let a straight line revolve in one plane about one of its extremities, and combine the successive positions of the other extremity.”²⁴

The distinction here is subtle, but significant. While genetic definitions may be offered for conceptions that are also subject to descriptive definitions, as in the case of the circle, there are numerous conceptions that simply cannot (or cannot yet) be defined descriptively, according the parsimonious descriptive method of specifying proximate genus and specific significant difference. That is, conceptions that we do not know directly (for example, perceptually) as actual things, but only indirectly for whatever reasons, do not submit well to descriptive

definition, because we do not know all the specifics relevant to their description. In these cases, genetic description is the only option for investigation or inquiry to proceed. In a genetic description of these things known only indirectly, the conception must be fixed not simply by associating all other relevant conceptions to it, elegantly but efficiently, but rather by putting some relevant conceptions into active and dynamic use to generate the mental picture of the conception being described in the person to whom one is communicating.

Though he is critical of aspects of idealism, Lotze's *Logik* admits of strong idealistic commitments, not the least being his understanding that the true objects of knowledge are all mental. But for Lotze, the mental picture generated by a genetic definition itself does not necessarily suffice fully for the thing actually to be known, as it retains its indirectness by virtue of the sort of conception it is.²⁵ (The exception to this is when the object to be known is a purely mental object, such as a mathematical one, which can then be dissected for descriptive definition once presented genetically.) Genetic definition does, nonetheless, contribute a "higher degree of definiteness than [the conception] has yet [had]," thus contributing at least to making the object (idea) under investigation clearer to the mind.²⁶ Invoking the Cartesian desiderata of clarity and distinctness, Lotze goes on to note that to attain further distinctness would require knowing the general law that regulates the idea, as well as its distinguishing mark or marks. He thus indicates that genetic definition moves us part of the way towards knowledge, but not wholly to it, since it leaves us unclear on the real gist of the particular under definition.

Lotze makes one more point in this discussion relevant to James's account of truth. When reflecting on clarity and distinctness in common communication and speech, he observes that the untrained intellect frequently converts adjectives and verbs, such as "sick" and "to live," into substantives before proceeding to define them as objects, thus producing "a strange mythology that speaks as if these terms stood for things with a being of their own." Lotze, by contrast, recommends proceeding with more care as the physical sciences do by giving such terms "their proper place in the grammatical structure of the definition," letting them refer plainly to their possible subjects. Hence the definition "a living organism is *sick* when its functions depart from a certain course" attends primarily to the subjects to which the adjective "sick" can apply, thus avoiding making sickness into a general substantive when there is no such concrete substantive with which to become acquainted.²⁷ This practice has the benefit of avoiding a confusion of actual things met with in the real world with substantives created

through mere grammatical construction, thus maintaining clarity in our communications and investigations, and promising the possibility of inquiry proving more productive over time.

JAMES'S GENETIC THEORY IN LIGHT OF LOTZE

Lotze's general notion of applied logic as the logic of investigation is well-suited to understanding James's enterprise in *Pragmatism*. James's general contention that pragmatism is a method of dispute-settling implies that pragmatism itself is about the logic of inquiry, or applied logic. (This comports well with the perspectives of Peirce and Dewey, although both elaborated general theories of inquiry more than James.) Further, Lotze's notion that investigation (applied logic) fundamentally concerns communication also fits well with James's general model of discussion in *Pragmatism* as well as his objectives in the lectures. James figures the task of the text of *Pragmatism* as a whole to be that of communicating what pragmatism is, and what it implies, to his audience; 'pragmatism' in this case is has fundamentally to do with the logic of inquiry. Internal to this task of communication is giving examples that at minimum render the idea of pragmatism at least clearer, if not also distinct, for the reader.

In the case of the pragmatic principle of meaning, James gives a number of examples that demonstrate, or at least allow the reader to abstract, the principle he has in mind. (This is analogous to a communication strategy more basic than definition, also described by Lotze at the beginning of his applied logic.) One might well argue that in the case of the pragmatic principle, James at least comes close to offering what on Lotze's terms is a "descriptive definition." He does this when, modifying Peirce's account, he defines pragmatism's theory of meaning by noting that our concept of the effects of a practical kind that an "object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare . . . is then for us the whole of our conception of the object."²⁸ For this to be a descriptive definition, we would have to be sure we were specific about the notion of an 'object,' and that of 'effects' and 'sensations,' but it is at least arguable that James has gone far enough with Peirce's and his own specifications (despite what Peirce thought of those).

But James's statements concerning pragmatism's conception of truth are, I submit, a different matter altogether. Instead of providing a concrete and delimited definition in terms of

known or even discrete concepts, James instead seems more frequently to sidle up to truth and provide mere glimpses of it. He does so in a variety of ways, invoking a range of disparate and strained, if not also ambiguous, conceptions, rather than defining truth's constituent parts and indicating how they interact in a law-like manner. My suggestion, then, is that instead of reading James to be fundamentally muddle-headed and confused in his account of his so-called 'genetic theory of truth' in *Pragmatism* (as many already have), we would do better to read James as attempting to offer the lesser, genetic definition of truth on Lotzean terms. This interpretive strategy has the obvious benefit of salvaging James from his own lack of clarity, since it offers an avenue for understanding why the imprecision might be there. Even more, however, it allows us to pursue in more concrete detail some of the features that may follow from the kind of account James is giving, and even the kind of thing he is accounting for.

WHAT KIND OF THING IS TRUTH?

Before turning to the specifics of James's view on truth, I begin with the issue of what can be a suitable candidate for a Lotzean genetic definition. As noted above, Lotze thinks genetic definition is appropriate when it is either impossible or inconvenient to say directly what the object of inquiry is. It would be damning for James's *Pragmatism* if he had declined to define truth descriptively through the course of the whole book simply because it was inconvenient. To be fair critics, we should at least entertain this possibility. The facts of his coming late to the truth discussion suggest that James might simply never have come to think it out clearly. On the contrary, it does also seem plausible that James elects the genetic approach to truth in contrast to his descriptive approach to the pragmatic principle simply because he finds it impossible to meet the more demanding criteria of descriptive definition in the case of truth.

There are several reasons why this is so for James. From James's point of view, there is a fundamental ambiguity in experience and philosophy as to what sort of thing truth is. Throughout the text of *Pragmatism* James insists that truth is not so much a thing as a function, writing, for example, that "that new idea is truest which performs most felicitously its function of satisfying our double urgency [to assimilate the novel in his experience to his beliefs in stock]."²⁹ (We should note here the comparative use of "true" as an adjective in relation to this function.) In a different and rather rhetorical passage, James agrees with the dictionary definition that truth

is the property of agreement of our ideas with reality, but he immediately puts into question what ‘agreement’ and ‘reality’ both mean in this case. This makes it clear that the Lotze’s demands for descriptive definition are begged rather than met in such a case, at least until the pragmatic principle is applied.³⁰

A page later James explicitly states that “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.” This suggests that truth is more function than property, more process than product, more verb than noun, and that truth in the substantive form is not so much met with or found in experience as produced via some work we perform upon it. There are, to be sure, numerous truths to be met in experience. But as James details in “Pragmatism and Common Sense,” the trueness of these truths is more a function of their stability and unavoidability, their having become consolidated in speech and experience, than any real claim to what we mean philosophically by truthfulness.³¹ Common sense is, after all, something we cannot and should not avoid, but also something we cannot fully trust, as numerous examples of science show.

James does speak of truth as a completed thing, ‘truth absolute,’ in *both Pragmatism* and in *The Meaning of Truth*.³² But when he discusses this, it is almost always as a future possibility at best. “This regulative notion of an absolute truth to be established later, possibly some day to be established absolutely . . . will have to be made,” he writes. Elsewhere, with some apparent irony in comparison to Peirce (whom he seems to have in view), he writes:

The absolutely true, meaning what no farther experience will ever alter, is that ideal vanishing point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge. It runs on all fours with the perfectly wise man, and with the absolutely complete experience; and, if these ideals are ever realized, they will all be realized together. Meanwhile, we have to live to-day by what truth we can get to-day and be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood.³³

Clearly, truth absolute as a substantive is not yet achieved, and hence not ready to be subjected to the kind of scrutiny and investigation possible for things which we know directly.

If we take James’s comments about truth as a function seriously, and we pursue my hypothesis of working out of Lotze’s understanding of definition and inquiry, then several conclusions appear to follow. Truth, as the sort of function James intends, appears to be the kind

of “object” that admits primarily, if not exclusively, of being defined genetically rather than descriptively. In fact, it is not even clear that this conception of truth admits of being an object at all. Lotze’s understanding of genetic definition does seem capable of being used to elucidate functions in addition to objects, since it involves animating or putting into motion via their relations other elements in order to demonstrate or bring into mind the target of the definition. Insofar as truth is a function among a range of other sorts of legitimate objects of knowledge, like ideas, statements, and the experiences they intend, genetic definition would seem applicable, and perhaps even most specifically appropriate to it. James’s attempt to offer a genetic theory of truth thus seems to coincide well with his claim that truth is fundamentally a function among other parts of experience—most explicitly, between ideas or sentences, and the facts to which they refer.

Even if truth is a function, as James insists, one might rejoin that it should in principle be capable of being defined descriptively. If one takes a mathematical function as a paradigm, it is clear that it is possible in the case of some functions, at least, to be definitive and to speak in a law-like fashion, both about the terms in question and the relations that hold among them. James himself is explicit in *The Meaning of Truth* that strictly speaking, truth pertains to ideas, to things we say, and not realities themselves in the objective sense. Thus one might be able definitively to describe this function in clear terms.³⁴ This seems, at points, to be James’s strategy, particularly when he proffers definitive sounding statements like “the true . . . is only the expedient in our way of thinking,” most of which provoked significant ire from his critics.³⁵ But the situation is complicated by that fact that for James, satisfactoriness is an essential component of the truth function, and satisfactoriness itself correlates both with our interests and our conceptions of the good. These interests and conceptions are fundamentally malleable and idiosyncratic, in the sense of having plural and subjective components internal to them. Thus the function of truth cannot simply be defined in the lawful way that a mathematical function can be delineated though, say a formula in differential calculus. Even if we were to make the good into a variable, the problem of satisfactoriness, which carries the weight of interest in James’s account, would vary independently and unquantifiably as a subordinate function within the truth function. As James notes when anticipating his discussion of humanism, “the trail of the human serpent is thus over everything.”³⁶ Were James an absolutist or a universalist rather than a pluralist about human desire, interest and the good itself, we might have an avenue towards a

more explicit formulation. But as he demonstrates as early as “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” he is decidedly not.³⁷ Hence the overlapping and potentially inconsistent formulations of the function of truth are not in fact necessarily contrary to the view he is seeking to generate in his audience members’ minds. This, I take it, is what James has in mind when he insists in *The Meaning of Truth* that he is a relativist, to the chagrin of many.³⁸

Having Lotze’s account in view affords one more observation on the question of what sort of thing truth is. It is difficult to find James to be clear at various points in the text because of his alternation between using ‘truth’ as a substantive and speaking of ‘truths’ being made, of their being true. Indeed, in the parts of *The Meaning of Truth* written after *Pragmatism* was published, James resorts more explicitly to talking about trueness and truthfulness in the place of truth. Lotze’s observation, which I noted above, that the untrained intellect frequently converts adjectives and verbs into substantives before proceeding to define them (erroneously) as independent realities seems *à propos* of James’s predicament. James has, as he notes in his account of the development of cognition in “Pragmatism and Common Sense,” inherited the linguistic habits of truth talk. What he seeks to effect, with pragmatism’s genetic theory of truth, is none other than to reorient this usage of truth as a substantive into what he takes to be its proper functional, and hence dependent, domain. James’s actual success at this is, in my estimation, fairly limited. He would have been more successful explicitly to prohibit the use of the substantive noun ‘truth’ as a stand-in for successful ‘knowledge-about,’ which really does almost all the work in his broader system, instead using only the adjectival or verbal formulations.³⁹ This would have permitted him to have a clear concept of truth, understood as the pragmatist’s regulative and future-possible notion, while nonetheless still affording clarity about achieved degrees of trueness in actual experiences of verification and knowing. We would be no closer to a descriptive definition of trueness, but we would at least have more consistent clarity in what James was seeking to delineate.

CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES ON PRAGMATISM

It is typical for anyone interested in James’s pragmatic theory of truth to focus on lecture six of *Pragmatism*, as that chapter appears both to be devoted to adumbrating a theory, and to deliver on James’s promise in the second lecture to give a genetic account of what is meant by

truth. But from the perspective of this discussion of genetic definition in light of Lotze, I suggest that a different, more contextual, approach to the text is warranted for one with this interest. James notes in lecture two that he actually intends to dedicate three lectures of eight to the topic of truth: "Pragmatism and Common Sense," on how truths become "petrified by antiquity"; "The Pragmatic Conception of Truth," in which he "expatiates on the idea that our thoughts become true in proportion as they successfully exert their go-between function"; and "Pragmatism and Humanism," where he intends to show "how hard it is to discriminate subjective from objective factors in Truth's development."⁴⁰ If we take seriously the indirect aspect of genetic definition which Lotze draws our attention to, we should also follow James's insinuation that these three discussions together constitute his attempt at defining truth, even though they do not all necessarily appear to be involved in the task of definition.

The first of these chapters is probably the least attended to. But it is important not least because it underscores James's historicist understanding of ideas, concepts and language, and warrants a series of cautions about taking any language to refer ideally, which is particularly distinctive of pragmatism. It also both animates the reader's desire to become more revolutionary and precise in our manner of thinking, as science would have us do, and warns about the slim likelihood of being able fully to achieve that ideal. James is, I should note, significantly more circumspect than both Lotze and Peirce about our ability to overcome this set of restrictions to our cognitive abilities in any significant respect, even though he too pushes for the value of scientific endeavors and orientations.

With this cautionary set of observations in place, James then proceeds in the sixth lecture to specify, as clearly as he can, his genetic account of the truth function in action. As I have already noted, he does so still indirectly, deploying other concepts and examples as means of illustrating when and how truthfulness distinguishes itself, sketching how the function appears to play out both in our language and our experience. None of the statements that appear to be descriptive definitions actually should be so taken, I submit. But we should read the chapter as a whole as designed to elicit in us a set of concepts or rough ideas of the kinds of interactions James seeks to distinguish. Most fundamental to that is the idea of making the meaning of truth practical, in the sense of attending to the effects that constitute truth functions in successful cases of knowing. Notably, one of these functions is agreement of truth with reality, but, as James so crucially insists, that is not all to understanding truth, but barely a beginning.

Following this indirect definition, or series of indirect definitions, of the basic functions of truth, James then proceeds to elucidate pragmatism's conception of truth by emphasizing the subjective aspects that necessarily inhere in it and its constituents. The chapter on "Pragmatism and Humanism" is in part James's attempt to make allegiances where he can with Schiller in particular, as a means of more broadly promoting the pragmatic movement; but it is also central in extending James's notion that truth has fundamentally to do with human social enterprises. It thus extends his historicist analysis from the fifth chapter, and further specifies the concepts in play in the sixth chapter's conception of truth itself. To read any one of these chapters on its own, I submit, sells short the overall genetic definition James is attempting to give of truth, since it obviates some of the components of his indirect attempt at specification. Clarity in his conception is thus sacrificed when we do not take James's whole account to be of a piece, despite its internal tensions and even apparent contradictions.

Looking at James in light of Lotze allows one final and important note concerning pragmatism's (and here I speak not only of the book) conception of truth. If my reading of James's understanding in light of Lotze is correct, in the sense that James did not think that truth admits of descriptive definition, then it is also the case that his pragmatic account of truth must be taken to be tentative, revisable, and refinable. If we were as optimistic as Lotze, we would take this to mean that James's account could be clarified, and even eventually moved towards becoming distinct, thus becoming subject to descriptive definition. This is, in a way, how Peirce inclined in his own counterfactual definitions of truth; it is also apt concerning Dewey's accounts of warranted assertibility that erased elements that mandated residual indirectness. But one of the features I find most distinctive about James's pragmatism is his tempering of his own optimism with a historicist and humanistic recognition of the fallibility of all our knowing enterprises, even those that seek to know how we know. This does not lead James to give up on the idea that what we mean by "truth" is meaningful, that seeking truth itself is critical to our interests and lives. But it does relativize the importance of truth as *the* ideal—and ideal topic—of philosophy, in favor of the actual effects, the actual goods, that truths and the quests for them have on actual human lives in the individual and aggregate senses. This, I submit, is one of the most salutary features of his pragmatism, and deserves repeated attention.

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NOTES

¹Graham Bird is a case in point here. See Graham Bird, *William James, The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London ; New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

²See David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³See, for example, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," William James, *Pragmatism*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, *The Works of William James* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), "Humanism and Truth," William James, *The Meaning of Truth*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, *The Works of William James* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), James, *Pragmatism*, 27ff., William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, *The Works of William James* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

⁴See, for example, Sidney Morgenbesser, "Response to Hilary Putnam's 'Pragmatism and Realism,'" in *The Revival of Pragmatism*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), Bird, *William James*, and Richard M. Gale, *The Divided Self of William James* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). H.S. Thayer makes this presumption in his "Introduction" to the *Works* edition of *Pragmatism*, though he is also clearly at pains not to take James's theory of truth to be a separate, fully fleshed out theory. See his "Introduction" in James, *Pragmatism*, xxix.

⁵James, *Pragmatism*, 37.

⁶William James, *The Correspondence of William James*, ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Elizabeth M. Berkeley, and Henry James (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 369.

⁷First printed as William James, "Humanism and Truth," *Mind* n.s. 13 (1904).

⁸James, *The Meaning of Truth*, 37.

⁹*Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁰See James, *Pragmatism*, 37.

¹¹For the former point, see, for example, James's letter to Schiller, 4 April 1907, and James to

Dickinson Miller, 5 August 1907, James, *The Correspondence of William James*, 345, 411. Supporting this latter point, note James's strategy of not discussing Schiller's own position directly in his 1904 "Humanism and Truth."

¹²This is something of a tricky issue, since, as H. S. Thayer notes, to provide a pragmatic account of the meaning of truth is, in a certain way, to give a theory of truth. But as Thayer also notes, James's theory doesn't offer the same kind of explanation that philosophical theories often offer.

¹³See James, *Pragmatism*, 37. Sidney Morgenbesser, commenting on Hilary Putnam's work, makes the point that accepting the pragmatic principle of meaning does not necessarily imply accepting a pragmatic theory of truth, but it is less clear that James understands this point.

¹⁴Graham Bird is the only commentator I have found who notes the significance of James's use of the term "genetic" and also the focus on the "meaning" of truth. Bird also notices that James seems to have an unconventional notion of definition related to his offering of a theory, and goes on to loosely outline something consistent with what I argue here. Bird does not seem aware of the Lotze antecedent for James's usage, and thus has to attempt an indirect reconstruction of what he could have intended (Bird, *William James*, 43, 56, 62). I will be treating this issue more fully in upcoming publications on James and truth, but owe the reader at least this much evidence here to render plausible my rather novel interpretation of the status of his position on truth.

¹⁵See Morris Raphael Cohen and Ernest Nagel, *An Introduction to Logic and the Scientific Method* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934), 388-90.

¹⁶For James's praise of Lotze, see James to George Holmes Howison in James, *The Correspondence of William James*, 181. For references to Lotze, consult the various indices of the Harvard edition of James's works. Lotze's influence on James, and James's great appreciation of and affinity to Lotze, is well-treated in a series of four articles by Otto F. Kraushaar published from 1936-1940. See Otto F. Kraushaar, "Lotze's Influence on the Psychology of William James," *Psychological Review* XLIII (1936); Otto F. Kraushaar, "What James's Philosophical Orientation Owed to Lotze," *The Philosophical Review* XLVII, no. 5 (1938); Otto F. Kraushaar, "Lotze as a Factor in the Development of James's Radical Empiricism and Pluralism," *The Philosophical Review* XLVIII, no. 5 (1939); and Otto F. Kraushaar, "Lotze's Influence on the Pragmatism and Practical Philosophy of William James," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, no. 4 (1940). The last of these is particularly helpful, though it does not consider the specific conception I discuss here.

¹⁷James, *Pragmatism*, 123.

¹⁸Hermann Lotze and Bernard Bosanquet, *Logic: In Three Books, of Thought, of Investigation, and of Knowledge*, Clarendon Press Series. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), 11.

¹⁹See the entry by David Sullivan, “Hermann Lotze,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2008/entries/hermann-lotze/>.

²⁰Lotze and Bosanquet, *Logic: In Three Books, of Thought, of Investigation, and of Knowledge*, 202.

²¹*Ibid.*, 221.

²²*Ibid.*, 218.

²³*Ibid.*, 222.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 222.

²⁵Lotze, I should add, is noted by James in both *Pragmatism* and “Humanism and Truth” as a source for his view of thoughts as additions to the universe, which is so characteristic of James’s thought. See James, *The Meaning of Truth*, 50, and James, *Pragmatism*, 123.

²⁶Lotze and Bosanquet, *Logic: In Three Books, of Thought, of Investigation, and of Knowledge*, 222.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 220.

²⁸James, *Pragmatism*, 29.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 36.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 96.

³¹See *Ibid.*, 92.

³²I have discussed at some length my view of James on absolute truth in an exchange with Hilary Putnam. See Jeremy R. Carrette, *William James and “The Varieties of Religious Experience”: A Centenary Celebration* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004), specifically Putnam’s Afterword and my response to Putnam.

³³James, *Pragmatism*, 106-7.

³⁴James, *The Meaning of Truth*, 87.

³⁵James, *Pragmatism*, 106.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 37.

³⁷See William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, *The Works of William James* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

³⁸James, *The Meaning of Truth*, 142.

³⁹See Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience*, chapter 1, for more on this.

⁴⁰James, *Pragmatism*, 37-8.

TOO HIDEBOUND: HEEDING INNER DIVINITY AND STEMMING CLASS PREJUDICE IN A REPUBLIC OF TRUTHS

AMY KITTELSTROM

In the summer of 1900, William James wrote a loving note to his son Aleck, who was ten at the time. “Your ma thinks you’ll grow up into a filosofer like me and write books,” the father wrote. “It is easy enuff, all but the writing part. You just get it out of other books, and write it down.” He should know; at the time, James was hard at work on the lectures that would become *Varieties of Religious Experience*, a book made mostly out of quotations from other books. We may chuckle at this bit of fatherly advice, with its fetchingly modest implication that James was a derivative thinker, because the unspoken reason we are all here is that we don’t think James was derivative at all. On the contrary: we have all devoted a significant proportion of our adult lives to studying James because we think he had something original, important, and valuable to say. We think that something had a lot to do with truth—as the title of this panel attests—and that it was just another show of his characteristic, seductive humility when he subtitled the book *Pragmatism* “a new name for some old ways of thinking.”¹

Well, maybe. But I think there is something to be gained by troubling such received truths about James, a few of which I will identify and explain in a bit more detail before contextualizing them in his work and in the history that made it possible. Yes, history. I know there are a lot of philosophers here, but I’m not one, and my training as a historian leads me to think of James as not only a maker of history, but also a product of it. Therefore, arraying James and his work in multiple contexts helps explain the meaning and significance of his ideas. The untold backstory and sidestories to pragmatism I’ll open up today shed a lot of light both on the

nature of Jamesian truth and on the pluralism that accompanied his signal contribution to the world of ideas.

But first, the received truths I will trouble. There are three of them. The originality I already invoked is one. The complaint that James was not as focused on the prospects and perils of democracy as other pragmatists, most notably Dewey, is another. The technical proficiency of his theories relative to more professional philosophers is the third. Loosening up all of this conventional wisdom makes James much more a man of his times, and that much more significant, really, for his historicity.

Received truth number one, then, is that James matters not for how he may have developed other people's ideas but, on the contrary, that his strikingly original cast of mind allowed him to take one pragmatic germ from C.S. Pierce and then to spring forth a grand set of theories—pragmatism, radical empiricism, and pluralism—which he then left to others to develop, systematize, and interpret. To others starting with Dewey, and leading to us.

His originality consists not only of his vaunted literary style, not even primarily of that way with words that makes a corollary truism of the claim that he wrote psychology like a novelist, his brother Henry novels like a psychologist. It was his way of thinking about truth, and experience, the center of one's vision, and the "ever not quite" of insight that distinguished James not only from his contemporaries but from everyone else in the history of philosophy up until that point. True, some acute observers note James's quite explicit indebtedness to Emerson, his so-called "godfather," and all sorts of analytical comparisons between James and other philosophers abound, but the history of his intellectual lineage is curiously abbreviated, as though the seismic shifts of the Civil War, Darwinian evolution, and the birth of modern culture cut James off from all that went before.²

But it did not. James was a product not only of his eccentric father and Swedenborgian mysticism, his eclectic European education and formative trip to Brazil, or the Metaphysical Club and sparring contests with the younger Oliver Wendell Holmes, but of a Boston and Cambridge that in the 1870s and '80s was culturally, intellectually, and spiritually very clearly continuous with the Boston of the 1840s and '50s: filled with religious thinkers who loved democracy and wanted to weave more of it into life. Most of them were still Unitarians before the Civil War; in James's Boston they were free religionists, or members of the Radical Club, where James met his wife-to-be, or fellow lecturers with James at the Concord School of Philosophy, or summer sojourners with James in Keene Valley in the Adirondack mountains, or neighbors in Chocorua, New Hampshire. Contemporaries of James's like the minister Samuel McChord Crothers, the free religionist Francis Ellingwood Abbot, the Unitarian John White Chadwick, the theologian Charles Carroll Everett, the prophet of democracy Thomas Davidson, and the ethical culturalist William Mackintire Salter are not the peers who typically make it into our conversations about pragmatism and radical empiricism because if the technical perfection of James's philosophy left something to be desired, theirs was positively unmentionable. They were amateurs. And yet they, like James, asked questions about how and whether one could have a religious faith in a scientific age, what role experience plays in the making of truth, whether the universe is one or many, and whether moral action is possible without free will. And their concerns, like those of James, grew out of a common cultural inheritance in romantic reform.

You might point out that what we find original about James is not his questions but his answers, which is fair enough. However, one underpinning of the essential humanism that he shared with these peers and their common intellectual heritage is absolutely crucial to understanding the pluralism he later developed: immanence. Divine immanence. Immanence was

not a word James used—“inner divinity” was more his style—but whatever you call it, James, his fellow Bostonians, and their mutual forebears all cared very little about the possible existence of a transcendent God out there, up there, responsible for creation and therefore susceptible to threats from scientists like Darwin; they cared very much for the idea that everyone bears a spark of divine essence and that this is the basis of both their rights and their potential. In this the father of Unitarianism—Reverend William Ellery Channing, who died the year James was born—resembles our father of pragmatism very much, and if I had the time today I would draw their intellectual connections with care. But let me point out just a few of Channing’s incipient pragmatisms in order to illustrate how James was, in part, but the reddest and ripest of the apples to fall from Channing’s tree.

Channing took actions to be the test of meaning, or of truth. This is best illustrated by an oft-repeated story from Channing’s youth, when he heard a terrible Calvinistic sermon on innate depravity, complete with threats of fire and brimstone, the inescapability of punishment for sin. Terrorized, the young Channing was even more dismayed when his father pronounced upon the sermon: “sound doctrine.” Sound doctrine! Then it was true! Dejected, the young Channing accompanied his father home. On the way, his father started whistling a cheerful tune. At home, his father calmly picked up the newspaper and started reading. The young Channing realized, “No! his father did not believe it; people did not believe it! It was *not* true!” For if innate depravity and Calvinistic predetermination were really believed, such mundane cheer were impossible.³

This relates to a second Jamesianism in Channing, a rejection of determinism as incompatible with moral action. One must have at least “a wiggle of the will,” in James’s language, in order to behave rightly; this is how James splits the difference between orthodox

Christianity and scientism. As I said, Channing's god was not terribly transcendent, and in the indwelling of the divine principle, individuals have the opportunity to choose the good, or at least the better, and thereby progress morally, and spiritually, which amounts to much the same thing. So here we have another pragmatism, focusing on the process itself as the site of meaning, ameliorating conditions. This emphasis on practice brings to mind the term James first used for pragmatism: practicalism. Channing said once "the whole of my life may be called, as it truly has been, a *process* of conversion." There is a strong feel of the "ever not quite" in this confession.⁴

There is more I could elucidate about the ways Channing's thought anticipated certain crucial features of James's philosophy—fallibilism, a future-orientation, and the contextual nature of truth are all important—but one deserves particular emphasis because the whither I'm tending with all of this is a fresh understanding of James's pluralism. James believed that different kinds of people are suited to different kinds of beliefs, right? The tender-minded and tough, the once-born and twice-born, the healthy-minded and sick-souled are all categories he used to describe different mental characters, which he then matched to different suitable beliefs. This is just one angle of James's pluralism, but it's an important one, because it says the truth is many-sided, and no one can purvey their own truth as universally suitable. Channing, good Christian though he was, thought much the same thing. He and some other Unitarians of his time were ecumenical, in favor of a "broad church" movement to include diverse beliefs, and this was not only a shrewd strategy for growing their denomination. When two famous heretics rocked the Unitarian church in the 1830s and '40s—I'm speaking of Emerson and Theodore Parker—Channing was perfectly sanguine. After Emerson's Divinity School address of 1838, Channing defended him against the charge of belittling Christianity and said, "there are divers gifts and

divers ways of presenting the truth. Mr. Emerson seems to be gifted to speak to an audience which is not addressed by any of the rest of us.” When Theodore Parker unwittingly broke with Unitarianism by lecturing on “the Transient and the Permanent in Christianity” in 1841, Channing again could not go all the way with the young heretic, but he praised Parker’s spirit as “honest” and “earnest,” urging him to continue speaking out “fully and freely.” This openness of Channing’s to multiple religious truths is an appropriate context for understanding James’s pluralism, as we will see.⁵

But first to trouble the second received truth about James, which is that as pragmatists go, he was relatively unconcerned with democracy and the problems of life in an industrial society. Indeed, the general understanding of this weakness of James’s social thought holds that this is regrettable in him. We would be prouder of James if he had done more to fight lynching, for example, beyond sending a single letter to the *Boston Evening Transcript*, or if his proud stance on American imperialism had been part of a broader historical record of activism on issues ranging from the rights of laborers to fair wages and bargaining power to the right of women to vote. The idea is that James was really an individualist—suspicious of “bigness and greatness” in all their forms, right?—where Dewey was the pragmatist who paid attention to the social sphere.⁶

Two objections. One is that not being an activist is not the same thing as not caring. For all the richness of James’s historical record, we actually do not know where he came down on every issue, how vociferously he may have argued over dinner on topics cognate to those we ourselves may argue over our own dinner tables without penning so much as a letter to the editor. But we do know how seriously he took Emerson, and if we’ve looked at James’s own volumes of Emerson’s works we know how energetically he underlined Emerson’s many passages urging his listeners to be true to their own callings. Activism was not James’s calling. We may be glad that

he pursued his vocation, a more fundamental engagement with the issues of perception and truth-claiming from which social problems spring.

The second objection to the idea that James was not engaged in the social problems of his time, however, is a request that we look more carefully at his words, once again. There was no individual in James's thought separate from all others. When he talked about "great men" he did not mean that they acted somehow alone. It may have taken George Herbert Mead to develop the social self but we all know it was James who named that self, social, and took its obligations seriously. When James used the example in *Principles of Psychology* of the alcoholic who decided to take a drink but "won't count it this time," and teased that "a kind Heaven may not count it; but it is being counted none the less," he was neither betraying a facile theism nor merely invoking the importance of habit in the formation of character. James was also writing out of the conviction he developed after his metaphysical crisis in his twenties that, in a quasi-Manichean manner, our actions are votes deciding what shape the universe will take. All of our actions, seen and unseen, count in creating the world we share. This, for James, is what "makes life worth living."⁷

I will deal more fully with this received truth about James's social thought in the course of treating received truth number three, which is essentially a lament over how unsystematic a thinker James was. If the thinness of his social engagement is regrettable, so too is the looseness and lack of clarity with which he stated his positions, for which we then depend upon a Lovejoy to carve into thirteen varieties. This view holds that there is much left unsaid in James's own oeuvre and that we will therefore continue to argue about what he really meant and what the implications of his theories are. This standard of philosophical excellence comes, of course, from the professional phase of academic philosophy, which began in the last decade of James's life—

James, the M.D., who wrote compellingly about the Ph.D. octopus that has ensnared us all. Professional philosophers like a watertight argument, technical virtuosity, specialized vocabulary, and exceptionless proofs. According to these standards, the best James may be the latest James, at least the most reliable James or most actionable James is the James who was actively trying to speak not to Unitarians or college teachers but to professional philosophers. In this way, *A Pluralistic Universe* of 1909 is the best place to go to understand what James meant by pluralism and what it meant to him. As he somewhat proudly, somewhat sheepishly reported of himself, at the end of his life he was trying to put forth as complete a system as possible, to have a last word despite his belief in the inescapability and even desirability of every word's being partial, contingent on its context, and fallible. So we take this last word as his best word because it is the one fashioned most to suit us professionals.⁸

However—*pace* to all you professional philosophers—academic philosophy has no firmer lock on any capital T truth than any other audience, pragmatically speaking. Other audiences, James's prior audiences, elicited different emphases from James, emphases that flattened out when James moved to systematize, which meant that he moved to generalize and depersonalize the pluralistic approach into rules that could apply anywhere. Valuable as that work is, the specific examples he used in his earliest attempts to explain pluralism are also valuable, particularly for efforts to understand the extent and significance of James's social thought. For although James certainly used pluralism as a corollary of pragmatism and radical empiricism—as a description of reality itself, reality as pluriverse—his pluralism was also something of a prescription. James recommended pluralism as a way of looking at others, really, as a practical tool for human progress, and this recommendation came first in the arena of religious belief and then in terms of class. It took later thinkers, most notably James's own

student Horace Kallen, to apply his pluralism to ethnicity and to race. It took Charlene Haddock Seigfried to apply it to gender.⁹

The problem of class divisions forms the subtext to James's companion essays, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" and "What Makes a Life Significant." I call them companion essays because "What Makes a Life Significant" clearly continues the argument of "On a Certain Blindness," which served as the basis for last year's presidential address before this group by John Lachs. I am not going to argue here with Lachs's contention that James overlooked several types of human blindness or that mitigating them more than slightly is both impossible and pernicious, although my reservations may become apparent. But I will take issue with one textual interpretation Lachs made, when describing the scene in North Carolina James used to illustrate the operation of human blindness. You'll recall James's description of the girdled trees, the rude dwelling, the poverty, and his driver the woodman's defense of their settlements. Lachs said that James "thinks the woodman's perception of his bit of reality is equally dismaying," which is possible only if "dismaying" means devastating to James's prior viewpoint. For James represents his response to the woodman's statement as an illumination: "I had been losing the whole inward significance of the situation." James credited the woodman with sacred significance.¹⁰

"Inward significance" is closely related to "inner divinity," as the rest of the two essays shimmeringly suggest. The importance of the subject to James is evident not only from his drawing attention to "On a Certain Blindness" in the preface of the volume in which it was published, nor only in the letter he wrote to his young friend Pauline Goldmark, saying that he hopes she will care for the truth it tries to express, but from the fact that in his correspondence, "blindness" becomes a metaphor he uses with friends and family to suggest that counteracting

“our brutal ignorance of one another” essentially became James’s chief spiritual practice. To give just one example, in 1900 his wife’s sister and her husband—this is William Mackintire Salter and his wife—adopted a Native American boy. Prior to the adoption, James wrote his mother-in-law trying to get her to discourage them on practical grounds. After the adoption, he wrote again to her, saying “It has been as striking a case of ‘a certain blindness’ as I ever knew, I taking the external mercenary mechanical view of an act which, as livingly entered upon by the Salters, was evidently one of passionate faith and impulse. I didn’t realize that Mack himself *wanted* the child so much.” Here it is several years after he wrote the essay, but he is still using the term “blindness” to characterize how hard it is to see into one another’s experience, and yet how crucial it is, because that living reality that beats within another’s breast is the reality that matters most in human relations.¹¹

This is pluralism. It is not only tolerating a remote, inaccessible reality, but crediting it with validity and working to revise one’s own reality—one’s “stock of truths”—in light of it. Now, this pluralism originated in the context of religious beliefs ranging from orthodoxy to outright atheism, but in these companion essays again and again James deals with issues of class. These examples make us uncomfortable, I think, and so we shy away; James’s language is so late Victorian, so unselfconscious, so certain that his audience is completely made up of people from his own elite type. But that tells us even more about his time and its distance from ours. We may be sure that our audiences are middle class now, because academia bestows that upon us all, but we mostly believe academics get here by merit or luck and that the American dream applies, so we do not assume we all arrive with the same experience. Plus we have all been through the consciousness-raising of the last third of the twentieth century. We therefore use safer examples in our illustrations of pluralism: private-sphere examples, interpersonal examples, politically

correct ones. James did not, because he really was trying to figure out how to credit laborers, so remote in experience and subjectivity from himself, with equally intense, equally valid, equally active inner divinity as his own kind.¹²

Looking carefully at James's language in these essays, we find that what sounds condescending is more like groping, the groping he uses as a form for mirroring the content of the essay, which is that the only way to try to dispel the blindness is to approach it gradually, partially, acknowledging the partiality of the effort but valuing the effort of trying to divine the inner subjective reality of another. James refers to "we of the highly educated classes (so called)," which cues his understanding that life still educates the uneducated; it educates them with lessons he and his audience have not learned. He tries to imagine his way into those lessons, and it is here we get squeamish: James's talk of "savages and children of nature," peasant women in Vienna, the quid of tobacco and the glass of beer does not sound like enlightened talk to our ears. But listen: "Divinity lies all about us, and culture is too hide-bound to even suspect the fact." Trapped in the hides of our cultures, not blessed with the American open-ness of a Walt Whitman, we miss the heroism "in the daily lives of the laboring classes." James is using the same term here, by the way—"the laboring classes"—as Orestes Brownson, most radical of the Transcendentalists on issues of class.¹³

James asks whether contemporary authors are "still too deep in the ancestral blindness, and not humane enough for the inner joy and meaning of the laborer's existence to be really revealed? Must we wait for some one born and bred and living as a laborer himself, but who, by grace of Heaven, should also find a literary voice?" Again, we cringe from this language. Is James suggesting that only divine grace could make a laborer write well? I think instead he is essentially protesting the social conditioning of his highly classist society, where child labor was

absolutely legal and widespread, where the eight-hour movement was practically a pipe dream, and alienation between workers and management was so extreme that Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*—a utopian fantasy contemporary with these essays—depicted worker/management relations as essentially warfare, which has been corroborated by historians. James thought this extreme situation kept anyone born working class from developing the literary voice that would allow a reader like James to understand their experience.¹⁴

So he had to imagine it himself. Aided by Tolstoy's romanticization of Russian peasants, Walter Wyckoff's memoir of his year as a day laborer, Robert Louis Stevenson's description of life in the slums, and Phillips Brooks's testimony to "the higher manliness of poverty," James tried to speak to "what is called the labor-question" as principally a problem of blindness. Blindness to the "ideality," or inner divinity, hidden within workers. Recovering James's historical roots in the antebellum romantic reformers who thought so much about indwelling divinity helps us understand the function of his pluralism here. Recognizing the company he was in outside of academic philosophy, in the 1890s when he wrote these essays, helps us grasp the last lines of "What Makes a Life Significant." James urged a pluralistic apprehension across class lines: "If the poor and the rich could look at each other in this way, *sub specie æternitatis*, how gentle would grow their disputes! what tolerance and good humor, what willingness to live and let live, would come into the world!" Under the gaze of eternity, or according to their essential form, as beings with equally divine but hidden inward impulses: James thinks this view would cool class antipathies.¹⁵

Naïve, I'm sure, where money is concerned, but this is essentially the idea behind the most progressive social actions being taken in James's time on this issue. The settlement house movement aimed for what Habermas would call intersubjectivity, exactly this Jamesian mutual

opening up of inner significance. Salter arranged conversations between workingmen and management in Chicago on the same logic. James's friend Thomas Davidson gave lectures on New York's Lower East Side on a similar principle, a venture that became the Breadwinner's College before being absorbed into City College. James was in good company in thinking, as he wrote to Jane Addams in 1902, that "The religion of democracy needs nothing so much as sympathetic interpretation to one another of the different classes of which Society consists." Define "class" broadly, and it may yet.¹⁶

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NOTES

¹ William James to Alexander Robertson James, [May 1900], *The Correspondence of William James: Vol. 9, July 1898-1901* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 2001), 196-971. *Pragmatism's* subtitle provides a useful entry to neopragmatism in James T. Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?" originally published in *Journal of American History* in 1996, reprinted in Morris Dickstein, ed., *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 83-127.

² James latched onto the mystic Benjamin Paul Blood's phrase "ever not quite" as a way of capturing the elusiveness of ultimate truth, as in *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Putnam, 1909), 321. The importance of Emerson to James appears most recently in Robert Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 153-55. Richardson also follows the tradition of seeing James more in terms of his incipient modernism rather than as a product of pre-Civil War history, as does Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A History of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2001) and George Cotkin, *William James, Public Philosopher* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

³ Andrew Delbanco, *William Ellery Channing: An Essay on the Liberal Spirit in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 55-56.

⁴ William James to Thomas Wren Ward, March 1869, *The Correspondence of William James: Vol. 4, 1856-1877* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 369-371. David Robinson, ed. *William Ellery Channing: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 10.

⁵ On the broad church movement and its leader, the minister Frederic Henry Hedge, see Bryan F. LeBeau, *Frederic Henry Hendge, Nineteenth-century American Transcendentalist: Intellectually Radical, Ecclesiastically Conservative* (Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick, 1985), 107. For Channing's reactions to Emerson and Parker, see Paul Revere Frothingham, *William Ellery Channing: His Messages from the Spirit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), 30-32.

⁶ This oft-quoted phrase comes from William James to Sarah Wyman Whitman, letter of June 7, 1899, in *Correspondence, Vol. 8: 1895-June 1899* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 545-46.

⁷ William James on "Habit" from *The Principles of Psychology: Briefer Course* in William James, *Writings, 1878-1899* (New York: Library of America, 1992, 150-51. His essay "Is Life Worth Living?" (1895) is reprinted in *ibid.*, 480-503.

⁸ Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Thirteen Pragmatisms," *The Journal of Philosophy* V (January 2, 1908): 5-12; (January 16, 1908): 29-39. James, "The Ph.D. Octopus" (March 1903), in James, *Writings, 1900-1910* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1111-1118.

⁹ Horace M. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924); Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁰ John Lachs, "Human Blindness," *William James Studies* (2008): <<http://williamjamesstudies.press.illinois.edu/3.1/lachs.html>> [accessed 15 Jun. 2009.] William James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," *Writings, 1878-1899*, 843.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 708. The "brutal ignorance" phrase comes from James's letter to the progressive social reformer Pauline Goldmark, April 18, 1899, in *Correspondence, Vol. 8, 1895-June 1899* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 515-17. On Salter's adoption, see James's letters to Eliza Putnam Webb Gibbens, [June 20, 1900] and [July 5, 1900], in *Correspondence, Vol. 9, July 1899-1901* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 233-34, 244.

¹² For "stock of truths," see first *Pragmatism* (1907), in *Writings, 1900-1910*, 513.

¹³ James, *Writings, 1878-1899*, 856, 857, 866, 867. Orestes Brownson's article is actually titled by the book he is reviewing—Thomas Carlyle's *Chartism*—but scholars generally refer to it as his essay on "The Laboring Classes," the real theme of the piece. See Art IV, *Boston Quarterly Review* 3.3 (July 1840): 358-435.

¹⁴ James, *Writings, 1878-1899*, 867. Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (Boston: Ticknor, 1888). Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987).

¹⁵ James, *Writings, 1878-1899*, 873, 877, 880.

¹⁶ This important concept was first introduced in Jürgen Habermas, tr. Thomas McCarthy, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). James to Addams, letter of Sept. 17, 1902, in *Correspondence Vol. 10: 1902-March 1905* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 124.

A MANNERED MEMORY AND TEACHABLE MOMENT: WILLIAM JAMES AND THE FRENCH CORRESPONDENT IN THE *VARIETIES*

PAUL J. CROCE

ABSTRACT

Traditional views of the “French ... correspondent” reporting panic fear in the Varieties portray the anonymous William James in crisis followed by a Charles Renouvier-inspired commitment to free will, as a first step in his philosophical career. Revisionists propose that the intellectual path was less important than his personal troubles, and that the incident did not even happen prior to the philosophical commitment. There is, however, no evidence of the incident’s timing at all. Instead, the stylized and religious tone of the writing suggests that it is a composite and mannered memory drawn from a lifetime of experience and learning from moods of weakness and despair, which James enlisted to display the attractions of redemption for the “sick soul” temperament. In telling the story, James drew on both his personal difficulties and his intellectual development to create a potent teachable moment in his book on religious experience.

How irrelevantly remote seem all our usual refined optimisms and intellectual and moral consolations in the presence of a need of help like this! Here is the real core of the religious problem: Help! help!

—William James, 1902, *Varieties* 135

After a few month one feels well again, or at any rate, one can work again, and so one staggers on.

—William James, 1904, *Varieties* 507

I had a crisis ... which was more philosophical than theological.... Why God waits on our cooperation is not to be fathomed—but as a fact of experience I believe it.

—William James, 1874, *Correspondence*, 4:489

The “crisis of William James” is a well known but mysterious moment in American culture and the history of philosophy. It is at once an alluring story with limited and scattered pieces of evidence, and an important starting point for James’s own career and theorizing. The surviving sources are slim and elusive enough that James almost seems to be toying with us to

keep the case mysterious and dramatic.¹ James's youth floats like a surreal preface to his established career, and is often enlisted within the prefaces of works evaluating his life and thought. The importance of the crisis as a potent story in its own right and in relation to James's philosophy has also spurred scholarly detective hunts into this period to shed light into the darkness of evidence and develop narratives that will fit with the rest of James's career; much of the hunting, however, has involved more speculation than investigation. At the center of these searches is the case of the passionate "French ... correspondent," in "panic fear," cryptically anonymous in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* chapter on "The Sick Soul," even though he later said this was his own self. Despite the slim evidence, this incident has received a very wide range of interpretations ranging from traditional views emphasizing James's philosophical development with the crisis displaying a problem solved by his reading of Charles Renouvier and endorsement of free will, to revisionist views that emphasize the personal and psychological dimensions of the crisis, especially his troubles with his father, with his career, and with his sex life. However, new light can be shed on the incident by returning to the evidence about James's use of the story three decades after his youthful troubles in his text on religious experience; in that setting, James tells the story to explain the condition of humanity in spiritual despair seeking hope, comfort, and redemption.

THE TRADITIONAL NARRATIVE

In 1920, ten years after his death, James's son, the third American Henry James, launched a very plausible crisis-and-recovery narrative linking the French correspondent's panic fear story with William's declaration of a "crisis" in his April 1870 diary and his reading of Renouvier's philosophy. This was an important step beyond previous views, which had effectively overlooked the crisis years; for example, Émile Boutroux, in *William James*, makes no mention of any troubles stating delicately that during from 1869 to 1872, he simply "assumed no professional obligations." The sequencing from crisis to philosophical recovery made sense based on the conventional understanding that "crisis" meant an unambiguous trouble and on the assumption that the use of this word in the opening line of his Renouvier diary entry was indeed a reference to the *Varieties* text. The son conjectured a chronology: "perhaps it was during the winter of 1869-70." Reasoning backwards from indications of recovery in the diary entry, he gave a reason for the date: "one of the note-books contains an entry dated April 30, 1870, in

which James's resolution and self-confidence appear to be reasserting themselves." This line would become a centerpiece of James's reputation since the adoption of French philosopher Charles Renouvier's resolution for free will was "not only illuminating with respect to 1870, but suggests parts of the 'Psychology' and of the philosophic essays that later gave comfort and courage to unnumbered readers."² James's son gave a tidy answer to the mystery by very plausibly, but with little evidence, suggesting that the youthful problems were a prelude to an intellectual resolution, with the whole youthful period serving as the taproot for much of his mature theorizing.

Ralph Barton Perry amplified the view of the *Varieties* incident as indication of psychological troubles in *The Thought and Character of William James*, adding a scolding tone about the panic fear text and any suggestion of religious impulses in it: it was "a pathological seizure rather than a spiritual crisis," and it was "symptomatic of his desperate neurasthenic condition during these years," enlisting the prevalent diagnostic category of James's time for depleted energy and loss of will. He admits that the desperate Frenchman showed James's "understanding of religious mysticism," which in itself he associated with the "morbid mentality," but it primarily was a "hallucinatory adventure." Perry assumes the timing to be "between his return from Europe [in 1868] and the definitive improvement of his health in 1872, ... probably in 1870, just prior to his conversion to Renouvier." Perry christened the now-conventional wisdom about the turn from personal problems to philosophy with the religious word "conversion," but with secular meaning: it was a "personal crisis that could be relieved only by a philosophical insight" as a secular substitute for religion: Beginning with Renouvier, James developed "the gospel of belief.... To believe by an act of will in the efficacy of will." The turning point was a start but not a cure; his theories were his cure.³ Without questioning the identity or timing of the *Varieties* incident, Perry confirmed its place at the shadowy beginning of a philosophic career.

Gay Wilson Allen's *William James: A Biography* expands on the psychological characterizations of the crisis as a pathological incident, but remains within the philosophical interpretation. Creating his own detective language, he refers to James revealing "a crucial phase of his own psychological drama ... in his secret diary and in a disguised 'case history,' which he later published in his *Varieties*." The upshot of the drama was "James's later doctrine of 'The Will to Believe,'" but the very uncanniness of the case also foreshadows his "interest in faith

healing and psychic research.” The psychology folds into the intellectual interpretation with James from the time of his youth “desperate ... to find ... answer[s],” and the crisis illustrating that his search was a “symptom of his sickness.”⁴

S. P. Fullinwider’s “William James’s ‘Spiritual Crisis’” assumed that the *Varieties* story can be “dated from 1868 to 1870,” and he followed the interpretation that James was in trouble because “he needed a philosophy to lift him out of his depression.” But the philosophy he turned to was based on psychology—not his own troubles but the theories of his times. The “then-current definition” of James’s self-described “melancholia” and “nervous weakness” was “nervous exhaustion” or “neurasthenia” due to “loss of ‘nerve force.’” Fullinwider then shows that it matches the narrative of mental illness presented by the emerging profession of neurology in the 1860s to 1880s: the “exhaustion ... of the higher centers” allowed “the lower centers” with their “savagery [and] automatism” to gain control of the mind and bring insanity through a “loss of the sense of self.” According to the reigning views, “introspection was a step towards insanity,” and so, at the time of the crisis, by the terms of the theory, he “*was going insane*.”⁵ Rather than explore elements of James’s psychology in development that could have generated those dire feelings, Fullinwider turns to James’s later, fully developed ideas in arguing that his desire to escape the insane feeling of unreality in the youthful crisis “explain[s] how James arrived at his central theories,” by explicitly “attack[ing] ... the higher-lower doctrine, and not trying to exercise self-control over his lower nature.” Like the traditional narrative, this is a story of intellectual response to the crisis, but with neither Renouvier’s free will nor religious concerns. Instead, the crisis was a first step in James’s “transition from the philosophers’ ‘essences’ to a world—and a self—of process.” In fact, Fullinwider focuses on James as a psychological theorist of immediate experience, putting behind him the questions of “ultimate reality” of the crisis.⁶

Bruce Kuklick, in *The Rise of American Philosophy*, does not mention the *Varieties* case as he reviews James’s abundant youthful “physical ills ... [and] depression.” Kuklick turns immediately to theoretical issues: he was deeply bothered by scientific advocates such as Herbert Spencer whose determinism and materialism meant that “human existence had no meaning.” Instead, James embraced Renouvier whose voluntarism suggested a place for mind and the choices of the will even within science’s understanding of the natural world.⁷

Jacques Barzun's *A Stroll With William James* "find[s] heroism from the very start of William's odyssey," whose opening scene features the French correspondent in morbid fascination with an asylum patient; "like a painter," James had "objectified [Thomas] Huxley's [scientific] view of man as automaton, giving visual equivalents for the horror, vacancy, and desolation that the conception implied." Only once he could think of himself "as an active and rational being" could the vision "recede by degrees," and even then it required the "long intellectual analysis" of his theoretical work. Reinforcing the accepted thread from panic fear to ideas of Renouvier to all later theories, Barzun artfully rephrases the conventional wisdom: "James in his twenty-eighth year had forged in the throes of adversity a set of working principles by which to build a character. They were at the same time to determine the shape of a philosophy."⁸

REVISIONIST INTERPRETATIONS

The crisis-and-recovery narrative emphasized the intellectual character of James's problems and their solutions: Renouvier's ideas, or some equivalent, saved James from his personal doubts and intellectual worries, generally in a fairly swift conversion allowing him to begin his career and to create theories that replicated his personal solution in useable forms for others. Horace Kallen, in *The Philosophy of William James*, expressed the theme with terse pride in the power of thought: "what healed him was the attainment of his philosophy."⁹ Revisionists of the last few generations have reacted against this traditional reading of the crisis, by emphasizing psychological issues rather than intellectual formation in the young James. The chronology of the undated *Varieties* text has served as a lever for overturning the traditional views. Howard Feinstein proposed that the panic fear incident happened in the fall of 1872, two and a half years after the proclamation about Renouvier: therefore "there is no evidence that [Renouvier] had any effect at all ... on James's health." In fact, it was the very attraction to Renouvier that was a major part of James's problem, Feinstein argues: he needed to "stifle himself, ... force himself away from the philosophic speculation he loved." Excessive reflection disturbed him because it showed parallels to Henry James, Senior's youthful crisis, and William "feared that biology tied him inevitably to his father's fate."¹⁰

Feinstein's reasoning for the fall 1872 timing of the panic fear incident is based on circumstantial, if suggestive, evidence in some letters of the early 1870s. First, just one week

after bravely quoting Renouvier in April of 1870, William wrote to his brother Henry that, still, “I feel melancholy as a whip-poor-will”—so much for being recovered and converted. And yet he went on to say, in the same letter, “I have at last, I think, begun to rise out of the sloughs of the past three months.” Second, however, Feinstein presents as further evidence that even in a letter to Renouvier himself in 1872, James said that “my health ... has been very bad for several years.” Since that timing sweeps back over the supposed conversion to Renouvier, Feinstein concludes that therefore, “reading Renouvier had [not] produced such a dramatic improvement.” Tacitly bowing to the traditional view linking the French correspondent and Renouvier, Feinstein simply reverses the order of events. And so, Feinstein concludes that “in the fall of 1872, William broke down as his father had done,” and claims that “the date of this ‘crisis’ [the “panic fear” story] can be fixed through internal evidence,” by referring to an April 1874 letter to his brother Robertson in which William speaks of “a philosophical crisis associated with anxiety and despair.”¹¹

Feinstein regards the 1874 letter as a smoking gun for showing that the *Varieties* incident happened *after* the Renouvier diary (thus demoting its significance as a spark to philosophical innovation), since William speaks of “a crisis” he had had “just before and about the time of your last visit here”—which was in November of 1872—more than two years after the diary resolution praising Renouvier’s ideas about free will. Instead of Renouvier-style talk, William’s description of “a theoretical crisis” does indeed sound like the *Varieties* case: in it, there is a “need of knowing the truth, which after reaching a greater or lesser point of distress terminates in a faith.” As with the French correspondent, William shows sympathy for the comfort that comes from quieting the intellect (not “perpetually reinvestigating the warrants for ... faith”). Then “the sound thing to do is simply to go on living with it [faith] inside of you as a motive and an inspiration,” as he went on to say with little spirit of striving will.¹²

As with the *Varieties* story, there is no clear statement that William is describing himself here. He refers to a “theoretic crisis” rather than something his own personal issues. He is actually summarizing back to Robertson “what you say” about the “theoretic settlement of your relations to God & the universe.” Even more important, William goes on to compare his own struggles in sharp contrast with Robertson’s efforts; he distinguishes his own attitudes from his brother’s distinctly religious character: William said his “crisis ... was more philosophical than theological,” because it “did not deal with my personal relations to God as yours seems to have

done.” Then William shows his hope to strengthen his will: although the crisis “was accompanied with anxiety and despair &c—I worked through it into the faith in free-will and into the final reign of the Good conditional on the co-operation of each of us.” The end of the letter, with moralistic style—so different from the weakened and prayerful French correspondent—reveals problems with Feinstein’s reading: even if it would suggest the revisionist timing, it does not support the revisionist unimportance of Renouvier. William’s description of his “more philosophical than theological” crisis closely matches Renouvier’s arguments for “faith in free-will.” In other words, far from rejecting the French philosopher, William found support in Renouvier’s philosophy of free will for his own prior philanthropic faith. Then the earlier part of the letter, reviewing Robertson’s condition, coincides with the *Varieties* story as a display of the importance of comforting religious faith for “The Sick Soul” psychological type, with which he had full sympathy, especially in moments when his will was not feeling strong.¹³

Beyond challenging Renouvier’s influence, more revisionist works have focused on psychological explanations, and thus they have tacitly de-emphasized the development of James’s theories in general. Even before Feinstein’s work appeared, Cushing Strout’s “William James and the Twice-Born Sick Soul” helped to inaugurate a psychological reading of the crisis. Although he set an early date for the panic attack, between 1866 and 1869, he linked “this paralyzing recollection” to medical literature on insanity of the time, especially William Acton’s *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, about which James may have known (however, there is no evidence). Such works linked “the habit of introspection” with “the temptation of masturbation,” and both to the “threat to sanity.” With his “sexual frustration,” this “hideous figure [in the *Varieties* case], we may speculate, objectified ... the self-punishing guilt in his own symptoms.” In addition, vocational problems made James feel hemmed in: he was “ambivalently attracted and repelled by both science and philosophy—an ambivalence connected with his feelings about his father’s wishes, attitudes, and example.” Strout did not neglect intellectual issues, observing that from the crisis on, James established his own identity—by separating from his father yet “com[ing] to terms with his father’s teachings”—by “very slowly bid[ding] farewell to his scientific career and gradually mov[ing] from psychology toward those deep interests he shared with his father in religion and metaphysics.”¹⁴ Strout’s

interpretation shows personal troubles on the way toward—and even prompting—the fields of interest of his mature work.

In Strout's own work, he readily points out that many of his ideas came from collaboration with Howard Feinstein, who focuses on William's close ties with his father in *Becoming William James*. He observes that Henry James, Senior, without a clear vocation, imposed his ambivalence on the son, plunging William "into a mire of confusion and conflict over the choice of a vocation." The problem began with Henry's own father, who was stern, unreflective, very rich, and eager to keep Henry from inheriting money until he showed a more conventional vocational direction. Henry never did, but he was able to break the will in court; yet the triumph turned into a family curse, Feinstein argues, because it generated a "struggle over vocation and ... self-definition." William's depression stemmed from "his rage over the bind he was in" by being "a dutiful son" who was never able to satisfy a quixotic father. Feinstein depicts William reluctantly turning to science to save himself from speculation, with a spirit of grim duty: downplaying William's own keen interests, he argues that the father "forced ... the son ... into science." As William's depression deepened and he professed to be saved by Renouvier's doctrine of free will, Feinstein argues that the vocational and family problems were more important than theories: "Instead of freedom of the will, William needed to be freed from the will—his own and the testamentary shadow cast by [the grandfather]." ¹⁵

Sander L. Gilman's *Disease and Representation* expands on Strout's sexual theme. Based on the psychological evaluations of masturbation in the medical literature of the nineteenth century, Gilman associates James's "self-abuse" with the panic fear representing "a direct fear of receding into madness as a result of his own behavior." Gilman amplifies this reading with an engraving from Jean Etienne Dominique Esquirol's *Des maladies mentales*, an 1838 medical text, which depicts, according to Gilman, an insane masturbator, who visually happens to match James's verbal description. Although there is no evidence that James read Esquirol, Gilman also quotes Henry Maudsley's *Body and Mind*, a medical text James certainly knew—he read, reviewed, and taught other Maudsley books. Without making any claim to evidence in James's case—and selecting the medical evidence from Maudsley—Gilman argues that the conventional wisdom treated masturbation as richly symbolic of the slide into insanity because it encouraged "morbid sensations," sapped mental energy, and encouraged "suspicious

self-brooding.” These were things that James periodically exhibited, although the literature on the psychological impact of masturbation also cites traits that he did not show at all.¹⁶

Marian C. and Edward H. Madden’s “The Psychosomatic Illnesses of William James” assesses the crisis in terms of learning theory and James’s large proliferation of illnesses. They similarly begin with the father, not with his ideas, but with his “utterly pervasive” influence as a parent, especially his lack of commitment, which in turn prompted William’s tendency toward indecision and his development of psychosomatic illnesses at each juncture of commitment avoided. The crisis was simply one particularly intense example, one which they date to “soon after his ... March 9, 1870” diary entry about his beloved cousin Minny Temple’s death. As with all his troubles, they maintain, James “misconstrued what was cause and what was effect in his psychosomatic illnesses.” Moreover, “symptoms [were] ... produced by the occasion or even invented retrospectively,” and the psychological motivation was that “one can’t fail in an enterprise he is unable to undertake.” On the panic fear itself, although the Maddens point out that there is “little or no evidence to suggest that it was as intense and debilitating as he described it,” they do not doubt its existence in James’s youth, and so it was “magnified by the neurotic state in which James was nearly always immersed.” The Maddens also suggest that these psychosomatic tendencies influenced his theorizing, in his recognition that “all dimensions of mental life ... affect the physical functioning of the body.” Even though they also recognize that “physiological states ... to some extent determine what occurs in the mental world,” they do not pursue the implied intersection of mind and body that was so important to James. Instead they adhere to strictly dualistic assumptions: because “no physical cause was ever found for these assorted symptoms”—meaning by implication no modern medical diagnosis—“the only conclusion to draw is that the disorders were emotional in origin.”¹⁷ To the Maddens, James’s luxuriant array of mental, physical, and social problems show that he was a hypochondriac in the modern sense: the problems were all imaginary, that is, in his head.

Kim Townsend, in *Manhood at Harvard*, does not hesitate to say that “the most penetrating exploration James ever made into what precisely he was contending with during these years [of the early 1870s] is to be found in the culminating example that he gave in ‘the Sick Soul,’ in the *Varieties*.” Like Feinstein, Townsend dates the “panic fear [to] 1872,” and following Gilman, he emphasizes Esquirol’s treatise on mental illness and its depiction of an insane masturbator. He infers James’s guilty mood very indirectly: Esquirol’s patient is named

Aba, which also happens to be close to the Hebrew name for father, Abba. In later years, James's friend John Jay Chapman in conversation noted the importance to simple-minded people of the presence of God. Such a creature would "cry out, Abba, Father!" Chapman observed that with those words, "James started like—not a guilty—but angry thing surprised, and a trap door opened under the interview." Although the inferences are lurid, there is very little evidence to support this reading of the crisis. Moreover, masturbation is not a major player in Esquirol's book, even if evidence could be found that James did read it. In his chapter "On Madness," he cites masturbation as a cause of madness in only 11 cases out of 235; and when it comes to sexual causes of madness, he even adds that mania can also be "caused by continence"—given James's extreme awkwardness with women and his vow not to marry, this may have been a more immediate issue.¹⁸

EDGING BACK TO THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

In recent years, most works that deal with the young James have returned to the traditional reading about the crisis culminating in philosophical fruit even while often making some use of revisionist scholarship, but with more emphasis on religious thinking. In fact, most recent interpreters have mingled the schools of thought, generally taking the fact of the panic fear incident in James's youth for granted, with various intellectual and psychological routes to his soon endorsement of free will on the path to his mature philosophy. Henry Samuel Levinson, in *The Religious Investigations of William James*, makes no reference to revisionist views but makes use of its chronologies in his tacit endorsement of traditional views through depiction of stages of personal and philosophical resolution: the Renouvier reading was at the heart of the first stage; without explicitly referring to the *Varieties* incident, Levinson argues that James turned to "religion as a second stage of cure for philosophical melancholy." This reinforced the first stage, and therefore, "only in response to [the consolations of religion] did he commit himself to certain habits of mind suggested by Renouvier," and thus Levinson connects the conversion to free will, now with a religious accent and central to James's youthful crisis period. The net result was a transformation from "a life of 'merely cognitive or intellectual form' in the years around 1870," characterized by an "apathetic existence," and "his life thereafter, which was often charged with breathtaking energy."¹⁹

Erik Erikson's *Identity: Youth and Crisis* follows the traditional narrative and chronology, but emphasizes that the crisis experience was an "expression ... of a prolonged identity crisis." He refers to the tensions between James's embrace of free will and the French correspondent's religious impulses as the contest between "stubborn selfhood" and "the surrender to some higher identity." The ultimate importance of the crisis to Erikson is that through it James began to develop his psychological theories with ideas that are "the basis of psychotherapy, which"—in the spirit of the Renouvier diary—"aims at the restoration of the patient's power of choice." Robert Michaelson's "Identity and Conversion" similarly says that during James's "shattering angst," scripture texts sustained him, but the incident also pointed to tension with the father, who in trying to protect the son "could not provide [him] access to maturity." James was then only finally redeemed by Renouvier and free will, which "sustained James for a lifetime."²⁰

James William Anderson, in "'The Worst Kind of Melancholy,'" looks to James's December 1869 letter to his physiologist friend Henry Bowditch as evidence that "the fragmentation experience [cited in the *Varieties*] occurred in the autumn of 1869." Beyond that chronology, Anderson assumes the skeptical spirit of the revisionist outlook in stating that James's "philosophical concerns" were "inextricably tied to psychological factors."²¹ However, the psychology Anderson points to is his emerging volitional theorizing to cope with "lack of will" rather than his own psychological traumas.

In "William James and the Life of the Mind," Mark Schwehn points to James's "acute vocational crisis that exacerbated the depression that he experienced from 1867 to 1873." He cites James's temptations to suicide in the winter of 1867-68, while so lonely in Germany, and proposes that by the time he returned to the US the next fall, he was already "broken in body and mind." Without mentioning the *Varieties* case, Schwehn emphasizes the "critical turning point" of reading Renouvier, which along with reading poet William Wordsworth, allowed him to overcome materialist philosophies. Armed with this "healthy state of mind" generated by philosophical answers to his problems, he argues, James was able to take on work, and the theories he soon developed in "critique of vulgar naturalism" came from his personal resolutions forged during the crisis.²²

George Cotkin's *William James, Public Philosopher* tacitly follows Feinstein's chronology, with the *Varieties* story taking place after 1870, but goes on to claim its specific link

to an April 1873 diary entry that expresses a great fear: the struggling young man seemed to identify the famous “panic fear” incident with “a concrete description of the ‘abyss of horrors’ or the ‘Maya’ ... dread ... [of] a world ... marked by flux and indeterminacy.” James was tapping his fascination with ancient religion to explain the notion that the phenomenal world is unreal, and this in turn suggests a connection to his father’s spiritual philosophy. Although Cotkin recognizes the psychological conflicts of the revisionist outlook, especially Feinstein’s emphasis on the vocational struggles with his father, he does not “lose sight of the degree to which William consistently symbolized, and in the process expressed and repressed, these disputes into philosophical discourse.”²³ Like his father, he maintained a deep interest in depth spirituality, translated onto his own terms.

Charlene Seigfried, in *William James’s Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*, places the youthful crisis period squarely at the starting point of his philosophy, but only as a first stage. Closely following the traditional narrative about crisis and recovery through embrace of free will (but without mentioning, in this section, the *Varieties* incident or Renouvier), Seigfried argues that James overcame his “despair over the meaninglessness of life by asserting the right to believe.” This first bold stage is not a full prelude to his later philosophy, however, because “in his earliest writings the young James has not yet abandoned the philosophic quest for ultimate answers.”²⁴ She adds that later developments veering away from guaranteed truths were prompted by later crises, when he similarly refined his philosophy in response to personal and theoretical questions.

Frederick Ruf’s *Creation Out of Chaos* reviews the intellectual and psychological readings of the crisis period and proposes a theme that would permeate James’s concerns: “the image through which he perceives himself ... is that of paralysis.” Ruf then follows the traditional view in both chronology and interpretation. He states that “the French correspondent incident takes place ... between the fall of 1869 and the spring of 1870.” And he sees the first bloom of James’s mature thought in these years. He does not mention Renouvier or the April 1870 resolution for free will; however, he argues with a similar if more general theme that in response to the problem of paralysis, of inaction, James was able gradually “to achieve his own motion.” Then over the next few years, his recovery of health emerged with his development of theories of mind “flowing beyond narrow fixed limits” that had made him feel so immobile. With a similarly speculative and metaphorical outlook, Bush in *Halfway to Revolution*, mentions

Renouvier and the *Varieties* crisis in separate parts of his book, and offers no one particular theme about the crisis; he does, however, suggests an array of personal, social, and intellectual interpretations. James's "hypnagogic vision" displayed his "longing to escape the crudeness of American materialism and the naturalist ethic of 'survival,'" his own "desire for reassurance and love," his awareness of "the shock waves of the implausibility of religious description after the death of God," and the "fascination of the upper bourgeoisie" that he shared in "the 'world of spirits.'" ²⁵

Historian Tom Lutz, in *American Nervousness*, calls the *Varieties* case James's "spiritual autobiography" from "an event in the early 1870s, when James was having trouble finishing his medical studies." As with the traditional view, Lutz notes that James emerged from the crisis with "a new career and a new philosophy," and his evidence is his turn to philosophical issues and his 1870s diary entries on Renouvier. And so, "his philosophical conclusions" were "the answers to personal crisis." Lutz also calls James's crisis "neurasthenia"—as did James, but only years later, about this case, but also about other medical problems he repeatedly coped with. Similarly Bennett Ramsey's *Submitting to Freedom* places James's crisis in the context of the "spiritual crisis of the Gilded Age," frankly borrowing from Paul Carter's general contextual book of that name. Putting less emphasis on James's own personal path, Ramsey focuses on the loss of meaning that came with modernization and secularization. James's turn to private religious experience was representative of a popular reaction to these cultural problems. ²⁶

Eugene Taylor, concentrating on the post-1890 period in *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin*, does not mention the *Varieties* incident, but says that "[Chauncey] Wright's brand of positivism" drove him "nearly to suicide by 1870," a slough from which he "recovered by reading Wordsworth and Renouvier." In an earlier essay, "James on Psychopathology," Taylor mixed some psychological readings with this intellectual argument for James's early problems: James was "tossed back and forth between the deterministic materialism of science and the free will of philosophy;" and that "dilemma was perhaps symbolic of the struggle between his own choices and the will of his father." ²⁷

Philosopher Gerald Myers defended the power of philosophy by emphasizing the Renouvier diary entry and not mentioning the *Varieties* incident. James's declaration for the French philosopher's free-will position confirmed "whether a fundamental pessimism can be avoided." Myers supports this firm defense of the traditional view by saying that it can only be

“doubted by those who believe that a philosophical issue is not powerful enough to cause or resolve an emotional crisis.” Murphy, in *Pragmatism*, reviews James’s feelings of “horrible dread” also without mentioning the *Varieties*, but he proposes that James “lift[ed] himself out of his depression by the strength of his own will” as inspired by Renouvier.²⁸ These views emphasize the healthy-minded, willful sides of James’s thought, downplaying his religious interests.

By contrast, religious studies scholars tend to emphasize the *Varieties*. Ann Taves, in *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, does not mention Renouvier in evaluating the *Varieties* case of James’s “own experience ... as a further example of the sort of psychopathic temperament exemplified by John Bunyan,” another case James mentions along with his own anonymous case. James as French correspondent sets the stage for James the religious seeker. In bypassing James’s willful impulses, she emphasizes the “sick soul” side of his thought, arguing that in the *Varieties*, he was “moving toward” the “pluralistic, panpsychic, radical empiricism that came to full fruition in *A Pluralistic Universe*.” Similarly, Julius Rubin’s study of *Religious Melancholy* reviews James’s physical and mental symptoms and separately discusses the *Varieties*, but sidesteps his other views of free will and moral striving.²⁹

Donald Capps, in the essay “‘That Shape Am I’” (with title words taken from the French correspondent’s own fearful worry about identifying with the asylum epileptic patient), states flatly that “the breakdown occurred when he was 28 years old (in 1870),” and he follows Strout, Gilman, Townsend, and Lewis in proposing that it was a result of guilt over “auto-eroticism.” He bases this argument on James’s mention of his “moral degradation,” and the medical literature’s propositions that “epilepsy was ... caused by auto-erotic self-masturbatory acts.” After this frank borrowing from the revisionists, Capps defends the core of the traditional view by stating that “the turning point occurred in late April [1870],” when James declared for Renouvier and free will in his diary. However, by the time he wrote the *Varieties*, he simply “no longer believed that he could lift himself from the depths by his own act of will;” this follows the trend among religious studies scholars to emphasize the James of religious belief rather than the James of willful striving. And the reason James did not offer more explanations about himself were, Capps suggests following a psychological hint from philosopher Myers, that “James simply was not very self-analytical” or that he was “reluctant to speak negatively about his parents.”³⁰

Alfred Habegger, in *The Father*, offers a new twist on the theme about James's theoretical construction: his adoption of Renouvier's free-will philosophy was a "qualified version of his father's religion" because it would "take the creative power his father ascribed to God alone and parcel it out to each thinking individual."³¹ This is a more forceful and explicit version of the readings, such as Perry's, of James as a secularizer of religious views. This interpretation also solves a tension in the traditional interpretation because he portrays James's moralism not as an outlook in conflict with his religious sensitivity, but as a kind of democratized version of it.

Richard Gale, in *The Divided Self of William James*, believes the tension endures between James's moralism and his religion. With the anachronisms of twentieth-century philosophical language, he calls the *Varieties* case his "experience of existential angst in 1868." Gale argues that it demonstrates the weakness of free will in the face of morbid problems. This expresses James's mystical side that could not sustain the "Promethean self" and its "morally strenuous life." Although he does not mention Renouvier, he implies that James's attraction to free will is at the center of that other side of James's philosophy. While most interpreters make no attempt to reconcile these contrasting sides of James and of his crisis period, Gale joins Julius Bixler in emphasizing that the two sides existed in creative tension through his youth, with James remaining "a highly divided self throughout his life."³²

Linda Simon in *Genuine Reality* tacitly places the *Varieties* incident in the early 1870s although she registers a hint of skepticism about whether it is an actual primary source: Without doubting its timing, she notes its lack of fit with the rest of James's thinking of the time, observing that, "there is nothing in James's correspondence or journal entries for the period in which the attack occurred to reveal any religious conversion or epiphany." Instead she points out, following the traditional view, he registered a "belief in free will" with his April 1870 diary entry on Renouvier. Similarly, Louis Menand in *The Metaphysical Club* describes James's "deep depression" and many physical ailments in the winter of 1869-1870, but does not mention the *Varieties* case. Menand emphasizes James's turn to Renouvier, but points out that he continued to have troubles for years. He suggests that they were "psychosomatic disorders" and that the French philosopher did not cure him, but "James believed that Renouvier had cured him," which adds an ironic psychological grounding for Menand's reinforcement of the traditional view about the crisis launching James's mature philosophy.³³

REMEMBERING HIS TROUBLES, WRITING TO TEACH

The thinness of evidence between James's return from Germany to study physiology in October 1868 and his appointment in August of 1872 to begin his teaching career has invited a wide range of explanations about his "crisis," with eagerness to understand the launching moments of America's most popular philosopher. There is an impressive variety of interpretations. The very thinness of the record, combined with the diversity of James's thought, have made his youth a flexible platform which has been turned to show the young James aiming in many directions. And yet, questions remain about the crisis itself and James's French correspondent. What happened that spurred this gripping story of panic fear? Words and traits of the event, emerging from the story itself and from the times, can provide clues. This article concludes with attention to the words neurasthenia and crisis, the three-decade gap between proposed incident and the account, and the religious resolution of the story as told.

At the time, the incident in the asylum would have been recognized as a feature of neurasthenia. Although this medical outlook has been widely discredited, a few interpreters (Perry, Fullinwider, Lutz, and of course James himself) have recognized this dimension of the times and of James's own thinking. The term itself was a new diagnosis, coined and explained by George Beard in 1869. Neurasthenia means "nerve fatigue," resulting in the "want of nervous force," just as anemia "means want of blood." It provided a physical, neurological explanation for a "vast array of symptoms," most notably depression, anxiety, morbid fear, and hopelessness, but also many other mental troubles and physical pains throughout the body. Like modern physiological medicine emerging in the late nineteenth century (which James was studying in medical school and in Germany in the 1860s), neurasthenia identified physical causes for ill health; however, with the predominance of subjective symptoms in its etiology, the disease was presented as a result of functional problems in the nervous system—notably exhaustion of the tissues—rather than a set of problems caused by organic impairment. James's description of his depleted energy is similar to the way Beard and his colleagues used the metaphor of contemporary industrial engines that have a limited storage of energy in danger of being used up, because "men, like batteries, need a reserve force." James used this self-realization about his own battery of energy to make a modest but firm resolution: he had an impulse for "narrowing and deepening the channel of my intellectual activity, of economizing my feeble energies."³⁴ His

resolution shows that his good mood of this period was punctuated by earnest expectations for himself, along with a realization of the fragility of his mental and physical health. And both of those traits—his drive to learn and his constitutional weakness—suggest that he and those around him would have perceived his problems in terms of the nervous exhaustion diagnosis.

For James, as for many of his peers, such nervous exhaustion culminated in a crisis. At the time, this was a familiar word associated with the ideas of water-cure practitioners. While such practices are now widely associated with leisurely spas, in the nineteenth century they were a form of medical practice, one of the non-mainstream sectarian forms of medicine that circulated widely, including in the James family. When James went to Germany for scientific study, he also went to many water-cure establishments in search of improvements for his many physical and mental symptoms. Water-cure practitioners emphasized the power of nature's cures, fostered through a wide variety of water applications. Organisms are in a constant state of "appropriation and secretion," taking in and letting out substances both healthful and harmful. One significant cause of disease, they proposed, was congestion, with the body holding on to decaying matter, and health coming with its release. The body had its own natural mechanisms for removal of unhealthy material: Sweating drives such matter through the pores of the skin, and excretion could release still more. To supplement these processes, various baths would change the configuration of the blood vessels and other organs. Practitioners had confidence their cold water could constrain the capillaries even more effectively than drugs—without their often unhealthy side-effects. Careful distinctions in the use of temperature for different patients also applied to different types of illness. For example, "persons with shattered nerves must, under all circumstances, carefully guard against taking cold," instead "diseased nerves must be tranquilized not excited" and such patients need "temperate water" which "gradually soothes" the nerves. This was, of course, a condition that James was treated for repeatedly. These therapists viewed the use of cold water as a powerful tool, which if used improperly could cause injury or even death. However, in measured application, the shock of the cold water would bring improvement, but only after temporary worsening, such as "evacuations of the morbid matters in boils, eruptions, perspirations, diarrheas, etc." This was the period of crisis in the cure, and although uncomfortable, it was anticipated eagerly "with pleasure and hope." James was fully aware of this dimension of water cures, and so he may actually have welcomed his personal crisis, especially after years of water-cure treatment and after completion of his M. D. on the

effects of cold on the body. The crisis was a stage in the conversion of a long-standing health problem into a condition ready to exit from the body; in short, the therapy turned chronic diseases into acute ones, expressed in the crisis. This is why water-cure therapists, along with other sectarians, showed less concern for symptoms than did regular physicians. Instead of being objects for attack, boils or fevers were regarded as “radical curative endeavors of the organism.” They even called acute symptoms—really “crises”—“healing diseases.”³⁵ In this context, talk of James’s crisis is not just a tale of woe, but a recognition of worsening as an essential prelude to improved health.

The problems of crisis called for deep reflection, an application of introspective psychology on the person whose experience the psychologist knew best, oneself. James described his “horrible fear of my own existence” as an account of himself, however, it was written so many years after his youth, and it leaves so many factual gaps that it is not a fully reliable primary source. He composed it anonymously to illustrate a religious type in his psychology of religion and placed it in the “Sick Soul” chapter of the *Varieties*, serving as the last example in a series of reported religious conversions—after yet another anonymous French melancholic, the writer and mystic Leo Tolstoy, the Puritan John Bunyan, and the evangelical preacher Henry Alline—in all of which “man’s original optimism and self-satisfaction get leveled with the dust.” And it is accompanied by both a footnote equating the psychological reaction to “a very great trembling” during Bunyan’s conversion experience, and another note coyly comparing the experience to the youthful crisis of his own father, “another case of fear equally sudden,” the crisis of Henry James, Senior.³⁶

The person behind William’s vivid but unauthored description would have remained hidden had James not told a friend that the passage, ostensibly from a “sufferer,” written “original[ly] ... in French,” and “translate[d] freely” by James himself, was in fact the record of “my own case,” but “I naturally disguised the provenance!”³⁷ The “natural” need to disguise has generally been taken to mean that he was shy about exposing his personal life so publicly, even resorting to a clever but tricky hoax to cloak authentic facts about himself in a public statement. But in addition, his approach also hints that the case was not fully true to his experience. The story’s use suggests that he did not mention himself because he himself was not the point of the story. Then, even when he did admit that the case was his own, James added elusively that he was disguising the “provenance;” this reference to the source or point of origin of the case was

not the same as saying he was hiding his identity. Disguising of the source of the story suggests that its purpose runs beyond a mere report of an identifiable moment in his life.

There is no very definite reason to believe that James was not talking about himself, but the case is undated, the setting is not specified, and it was composed in retrospect. The mannered and carefully controlled story-telling quality of the narrative—so different from the “notes struck off with the animal heat of the fever upon them,” as he said of the private writings from his youth—suggests that the text is a composite of personal experiences, written from memory, and edited for public delivery and for illustration of psychological points about a religious type in the *Varieties*. He even offers the hint of distraction from his own identity by urging readers not to analyze the case too deeply: the “case has ... the merit of extreme simplicity.”³⁸ Like much of James’s mature work, there is a deceptive simplicity to it. The case is William James—or more likely the fruit of William James’s long reflections on his crises—filtered through time, and carefully edited and stylized.

This illustrative case of “the worst kind of melancholy” took place of an evening during the simple routine of walking “into a dressing room in the twilight,” as he added with brittle artificiality, “to procure some article that was there.” The quiet was interrupted “without any warning” when “there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum.” The reported case does not take place in an asylum, but involves the memory of a scene at one. This was one of the only identifying markers in the whole text, since James had in fact been interested in asylum work at least since 1863, and he had worried about his own sanity from about that time. But even this link to James himself is not firm: despite his youthful fears about his own mental state, he says of the French case that it did not involve “any intellectual insanity or delusion”—an indication of a different identity, or just hopeful thinking about his own? The image from an asylum was central to the case, but it was not itself an example of madness. Although there is lurking fear of insanity, the point of the story is the importance of religious conversion for the “sick soul;” as he explains in the chapter, this personality type requires a stark path through utter pessimism about humanity’s rational and moral abilities before the hope and help of religion can be achieved. Conversion requires the possibility for change, and although epilepsy is now widely regarded as a physically based ailment, James regarded it as “largely a matter of habit.”³⁹

Even without confronting the actual epileptic, even just the mental image of the patient within the incident itself was vivid and troubling: the youth had “greenish skin,” was “entirely idiotic,” and looked “absolutely non-human,” like a “sculpted Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy.” These were not just scary pictures, since “this image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other.” Still, that combination was not complete, since, although he feared “that shape am I,” he added that the identification was only “potentially” so—as with his disguising of “the provenance,” he was diverting from direct identity. Even with only the potential to take on that shape, it converted him to “a mass of quivering fear” because of his own weakness. Therefore, “nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me.” There is no report about what would bring that hour or prevent it; that is presumably because it is a report of the irrationalities of abject fear—and that inaccessibility to understanding is what makes it so fearful. The image left him “with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before, and that I have never felt since.” As crises that brought positive results, in the spirit of water-cure, this experience was full of insight—“a revelation”—and in this case, it brought sympathy “with the morbid feelings of others.” In addition, he felt amazed by those, like his mother, who lived with such “unconsciousness of danger.” The reference to the mother is another point of potential identification with James himself since the description of her, as “a very cheerful person” who lived with little inquiry into “dangerous” religious thoughts, closely matches Mary James. The realization of the vulnerability of existence was the point of the piece as written, since it would show how a “sick soul” is formed; in contrast to the healthy-minded soul, this darker personality type feels the “pit of insecurity beneath the surface of life.”⁴⁰ For those with such recognition of bleak sides of life, there is such a deep inadequacy about the natural self that there is a need for recourse to powers beyond the natural order in order to feel truly whole.

The French correspondent’s account recalls James’s pair of leanings toward willful strength and craving of security and comfort—struggle and acceptance, fighting faith and comforting faith—although this case is a more extreme version of resignation of will than any that James himself ever directly reported. In other cases of depressed moods, he would refer to the difficulty of summoning will power, or he would regret that he did not have a reservoir of faith or ideals in which to seek such comfort. He did not ever pray in the style of the French correspondent. Later in life, he even said that it made him feel “foolish and artificial.” In his

youth, he rarely mentioned prayer. In his letters, he would gush, often extravagantly, with emotion and good wishes, but no matter the trouble, he did not say he would pray. And in those rare private moments when he did, it was itself a way to fortify his will drive, not a slide into resignation and comfort. He even quoted in his diary from “one fine prayer” that he had come across in 1868: “Now God help me through this! For you know that I am in the right and you see that I am trying to help myself.” As with his water cures and stretches of rest from work, prayer was a brief way station on the way to renewed willful action. By contrast, the Frenchman goes much further in his belief that “this experience of melancholia of mine had a religious bearing.” Specifically, the sufferer reports that if he had not “clung to scripture-texts” from the Bible, “I think I should have grown really insane.”⁴¹ Although James never put his name to such traditionally religious solutions for his depression, he often expressed sympathy and admiration for the power of faith, and the general pattern of seeking spiritual comfort was wholly familiar and even an occasional practice.

Despite these differences in degree of orthodoxy, there is clearly some kinship between the anonymous case and his own experience. The pattern of seeking comfort was the same, even as it was a much more extreme case of resignation to religious comfort, and even as its form was drawn from Biblical religion rather than James’s own less denominational, more spiritual impulses—with the use of shades of traditionalism that could have immediate popular appeal for audiences of the *Varieties* in Christendom. He drew on his own experiences and beliefs to create an exaggerated crystallization in narrative form of his own theoretical admiration for the power of gaining comfort from religious absolutes; it reads like a composite description of his own experiences, generalized and tailored for public presentation. James did not write up the case as an autobiographical account, but as illustration of the power of religion, especially for the “sick soul” constitutional type, in a text on the psychology of religion.⁴² The religious conclusion to the Frenchman’s case provides further confirmation that, with this story, William James is recording his recognition of the powerful fruits of religious faith expressed in a way to speak to a wide audience.

Early views of James’s crisis were born from the mingling of the French correspondent’s case with James’s diary reports of the early 1870s, but once that view was widely accepted, reference to the crisis took on a life of its own often without reference to the actual events, but with important insights about various parts of James’s theories. Revisionist views took issue

with the chronology of the traditional narrative and the exclusively intellectualist readings of the crisis in general. Despite the enrichments that have come from this embedding of James the philosopher in his early issues with vocation, family, and sex, the revisionist interpretations have passed through James scholarship with little permanent effect. Bypassing that questioning and challenging attitude has allowed traditional perspectives on the crisis and James's development of theory as therapy to come to the fore again. This turn points to the solidity of James's substantial intellectual growth even during these troubled years and suggests the often conjectural nature of the revisionist arguments, after all, the very lack of evidence for dramatic personal factors has often served as evidence for their significance because of his presumed embarrassment or concealment. However, the story line of philosophical redemption itself suffers from a highly speculative chronology and avoids the benefits that can be gleaned from understanding the host of non-intellectual issues that James was coping with through his years of crises. These works have offered many insights about James's life and thought but still more insight on James's youth, and on its relation to his emerging theories, can be gleaned from understanding the story of the French correspondent by attending to the use of the story itself and how it was told.

And so, viewing the *Varieties* incident as a composite composition, used to explain the traits of the "sick soul," still maintains a connection to James's own experiences and reflections, but as a stylized memory of those times when he himself felt the dredging burden of the sick soul. In these moods, he could not sustain the willful posture of other sides of his experience and thinking. A detailed look at the sources cannot place that incident in any particular time, but perhaps that itself is one of its major purposes as it points to the way James repeatedly learned from his crises and crafted theories that combined willful action in the face of adversity with a place for religious comfort as a deep solace when the will was not enough. As with his turn to water-cures for relief when worn down, James would write with deep sensitivity and insight about religious belief after stretches of energetic hope in the power of moral striving. These two trends of his theorizing reflected the two legs of his own experiences. The crisis period was a seedtime for James's intellectual development and much of the stimulus and nurturance for his mature theories emerged not from his solutions to his crisis, but from his efforts to cope with the psychological, medical, and social problems that so troubled him, and that circulated with his theorizing as he developed his intellectual life.

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NOTES

¹ A number of commentators have expressed this point forcefully: For example, Fullinwider, in "James's Spiritual Crisis," says "he almost seems to be laughing at us" with the lack of explicitness in his comments; Townsend, in *Manhood at Harvard* notes that "James was anything but eager to have his audience get to the bottom of [his early troubled times]" p. 52.

² Émile Boutroux, *William James*, p. 6; Henry James III, in *Letters of William James*, 1:147.

³ Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 1:322, 2:675, 1:323, 1:324, 1:324-25. Bixler, in *Religion in the Philosophy of William James* distinguishes the morbid from the moralistic sides of James (p. 7), a pairing that Perry pursues with reference to James's "comforting faith" and "fighting faith" (Thought and Character, 2:324), and that John McDermott also suggests about James's "escapist" religion and voluntarist "attempts to confront the actualities" of life (*Writings of William James*, pp. xxx and xxviii). F. O. Matthiessen, in *The James Family*, also calls the incident a "terrifying hallucination," but maintains that James "found his way back to life, not through religious conversion," but through Renouvier's philosophy of free will (pp. 216 and 218). By the 1970s, the narrative of philosophical redemption was so thoroughly accepted that William Clebsch, in *American Religious Thought, a History*, could seamlessly weave the French correspondent's account into his narrative as if it were simply another primary source, with Renouvier as the "antidote to th[e] misery" (pp. 139-40). In the wake of Perry's major influence, there was little explanation for the shift from religious mood in search of comfort to willful striving through the assertion of free will.

⁴ Gay Wilson Allen, *William James: A Biography*, pp. 163, 165, 164, and 165.

⁵ Fullinwider, "William James's 'Spiritual Crisis,'" pp. 39-40, 42, 43, 46, 45, 47, 49, 52, and 55.

⁶ Fullinwider, "William James's 'Spiritual Crisis,'" pp. 53-54, 56, 57, and 55.

⁷ Kuklick, , pp. 160, 161, and 166. In the spirit of this voluntarist theme, Robert Richards, in "The Personal Equation in Science," Schwehn, *A William James Renaissance*, also does not refer to the *Varieties* incident, proposing that the crisis was about "exercising the will in pursuit of definite goals." In the next few years, when he got a job, married, and adopted Renouvier's philosophy, James went into "gradual remission," and developed the basis for a "free and independent mind" (pp. 392-93). Richards then adds a significant intellectual component to the resolution of James's crisis in saying that this

outlook was further reinforced by Darwinism with its picture of mind evolving with spontaneity and selectivity—a scientific endorsement of the free-will method. A number of other commentators, often without reference to a youthful crisis, but focusing on James’s mature theories, have linked James’s appropriation of Darwinism to his development of a psychology of the mind as an active, selective, purposeful agent; for example, Ford, *William James’s Philosophy*, p. 27; Murphy, *Pragmatism*, p. 16; and many contributors to Donnelly, ed., *Re-interpreting the Legacy of William James*: Seigfried, “The World We Practically Live In” (pp. 77-89); Schull, “Selection—James’s Principal Principle” (pp. 139-51); Woodward, “James’s Evolutionary Epistemology” (pp. 153-69), Dewsbury, “William James and Instinct Theory Revisited” (pp. 263-91); Robinson, “William James on the Mind and the Body” (pp. 313-22); and Rychlak, “William James and the Concept of Free Will” (pp. 323-38). James Gilbert, in *Work Without Salvation*, makes tacit use of the traditional view without mentioning either the *Varieties* case or Renouvier in proposing that James resolved his crisis by the “assertion of will that he doggedly pursued in early 1870;” in keeping with his enlistment of James to illustrate cultural tensions over vocational direction, his resolution “made his decision to become a philosopher inevitable,” with deliberate construction of vocation from troubles a template for modern career paths (pp. 186-87).

⁸ Barzun, *A Stroll With William James*, pp. 268 and 18-19. Like Barzun, Daniel Bjork has great admiration for James’s genius. In *William James*, he acknowledges that in the text of the “worst form of melancholy ... there is no direct evidence that in it William referred to himself.” Bjork also downplays the Renouvier diary entry in favor of James’s own creativity, with his turn to will as a strategy in achieving original speculations.” Bjork thus lifts James out of the context of influences with his proposal for James’s development of his own Renouvier-style free will. “[H]is psychology and metaphysics were grounded in an insatiable craving to bring some fresh speculative perspective into the world.” This was the “creative grace” of James’s own philosophic innovations (pp. 287 and 89). A. N. Wilson, in *God’s Funeral*, presents a view characteristic of works that make brief reference to James’s youth within a broader history: James was “rescued” from his “sad period” by the French philosopher Renouvier, who converted him to a belief in mental causation” (pp. 318 and 320). As with the views of Barzun and other traditional interpreters, Wilson finds this conversion crucial to James’s rejection of T. H. Huxley’s automaton theory and other bold extensions of scientific authority James grappled with from the 1870s.

⁹ Kallen, *The Philosophy of William James*, p. 30.

¹⁰ Feinstein, “The ‘Crisis’ of William James,” pp. 76, 75, 77, and 74. The editors of *The Correspondence of William James* follow Feinstein’s chronology: 4:490.

¹¹ Feinstein, “The ‘Crisis’ of William James,” p. 76; William to Henry James, May 7, [18]70, in *Correspondence*, 1:158. William James to Charles Renouvier, 2 Nov[em]bre [18]72, in *Correspondence*,

4:431, translated in Perry, 1:662. Feinstein, "The 'Crisis' of William James," p. 77. Feinstein, *Becoming William James*, p. 241.

¹² William to Robertson James, April 26, [18]74, in *Correspondence*, 4:489. See Maher, *Biography of Broken Fortunes*, on the visit of Robertson with his new wife to the James home in Cambridge (p. 119). Feinstein makes his case for the decisive importance of the Robertson letter in setting the date of the *Varieties* crisis to fall of 1872 in *Becoming William James*, p. 241.

¹³ William to Robertson James, April 26, [18]74, in *Correspondence*, 4:489.

¹⁴ Strout, "William James and the Twice-Born Sick Soul," pp. 1066, 1067, 1071, and 1073.

¹⁵ Feinstein, *Becoming William James*, pp. 88, 57, 131, 194, 202, 245, and 310.

¹⁶ Gilman, *Disease and Representation*, p. 78. Many of Maudsley's other descriptions of the symptoms of masturbation do not match James's: "The patient becomes offensively egotistic and impractical; he is full of self-feeling and self-conceit, insensible to the claims of others," and he "often speaks of great projects engendered by his conceit." But there were other traits that James did have and that could be explained by other diagnoses of the time, including neurasthenia. Gilman enlists the engraving by Amboise Tardieu in Etienne Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*; this image refers to a section called "de la démence" [on madness] (p. 230), and it serves as an example of madness, but the section makes no mention of an insane masturbator.

¹⁷ Madden and Madden, "The Psychosomatic Illnesses of William James," pp. 376-90. Although he does not mention the Renouvier diary entry, Gérard Deledalle, in "William James and his Father," Corti, ed., *Philosophy of James*, uses the *Varieties* case to identify James's character traits, which he also shared with his father, thus suggesting a genealogical prelude to William's religious interests (pp. 321-25).

¹⁸ Townsend, *Manhood at Harvard*, pp. 52-53; Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, pp. 235 and 69 (my translation). In the early 1870s, James was "fully determined never to marry" because he wanted to avoid the "civic crime" of risking the birth of his unhealthy offspring" (*Correspondence*, 4:390-91).

¹⁹ Levinson, *The Religious Investigations of William James*, pp. 30 and 45. Levinson does date the *Varieties* case in passing: when discussing the "What is an Emotion?" essay of 1884, he refers to James's "severe melancholy roughly fifteen years before" (p. 44); and Levinson adds an extensive analysis of another anonymous passage in the *Varieties*, which he states is by "the same French correspondent" (p. 44). However, there is no scholarship to support this claim, and moreover, James says that this particular anonymous Frenchman had a sour melancholia, and "the querulous temper of his misery keeps his mind from taking a religious direction." This "irreligion" (*Varieties*, pp. 126-27) is in sharp contrast with the leanings of the French correspondent of the famous "panic fear" case. With a

similar emphasis on “religious belief as a saving faith,” Robert Vanden Burgt, in *The Religious Philosophy of William James*, maintains that James’s vivid “panic fear” indicated his awareness, as expressed in the “Sick Soul” chapter, that “the human estate of itself is not enough;” and so for Vanden Burgt, the incident illustrates James’s acute religious sensitivity (pp. 21, 26, 28, and 75).

²⁰ Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, pp. 151, 153, and 155; Michaelsen, “Identity and Conversion,” p. 321.

²¹ Anderson, ““The Worst Kind of Melancholy,”” Schwehn, ed., *A William James Renaissance*, p. 383, 373, and 376. The letter Anderson cites on p. 383, William James to Henry Bowditch, Dec[ember 29, [18]69, in *Correspondence*, 4:396-98, has no comments that are strikingly different from countless such references to “disgust for life” and other similar depressed expressions that he often made during these years; and the letter is also chock full of talk about physiology, including eagerness for “any bibliographic news”—hardly the stuff of a bleak outlook.

²² Schwehn, “William James and the Life of the Mind,” Schwehn, ed., *A William James Renaissance*, 429, 432, 433, and 433. On the significance of Wordsworth in James’s development, see Leary, “James and the Art of Human Understanding.”

²³ Cotkin, *William James*, pp. 59, 50, and 51; “maya” is not just a reference to some dreaded lower mental functions, but also a reference to the illusion-creating power of a god or demon in *The Vedas*; Diary 1, April 10, [1873], p. [87]. Perry, 1:343, quotes from this entry, but leaves out James’s most desperate passages about the “‘maya’ ... imperil[ing his] reason.” As with the elder Henry James’s view of worldly shadows cloaking spiritual substances, the term in South Asian religions also has the more generic meaning of the physical world which is illusory and transitory compared with the ultimate and enduring truths of Brahma. Especially in the Shankara tradition of Hinduism, maya distorts because it conceals and distracts from the essence of things; for example in the most popular portion of the Mahabharata texts, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the god Krishna says that “the delusion of the forces of Nature” brings “the bonds of attachment” to illusory maya, with its hapless followers hopelessly “clouded by desire” (Book 3, paragraphs 29, 19, and 38).

²⁴ Charlene Seigfried, *William James’s Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*, pp. 12 and 26. Approaching the youthful crisis from a literary perspective, Lewis, in *The Jameses*, also emphasizes its intellectual core, but he offers more general wording: James was steadily “inching closer to a decisive formulation of the dilemmas of being.” In tracing this path, Lewis includes non-intellectual factors. He places the *Varieties* incident in an exact time and even a particular place—in the early 1870s, in the “second-floor dressing room on Quincy Street”—and he speculates that “he was experiencing a sense of disgust at what appears (the evidence is skimpy) to have been a hard-to-overcome habit of self-abuse.”

Lewis is inferring that during James's extended intellectual discussion of "the moral interest," he is making an "allusion, probably, to auto-erotism." Lewis then concludes with the traditional view that James solved his crisis with the Renouvier resolution for free will, but he does not try to reconcile it with the religious message of the French correspondent (pp. 179, 190, 206, 202, 188, and 201). John Patrick Diggins, in *The Promise of Pragmatism*, reels back from the psychological interpretations, which he angrily dismisses as arguments for the centrality of "neurotic paternal tensions" and other "psychoanalytic categories." Instead, he proposes that the tensions of "modernism" can explain "James's struggles for self-definition." The key problem, Diggins proposes with a critical and cultural version of Seigfried's philosophical arguments, was that he was surrounded by "no fixed foundation on which to think." Like the traditionalists, but without mentioning the *Varieties* case or Renouvier, Diggins portrays James rebounding from physical and psychological troubles to develop "a philosophy of exuberance and uplift" (pp. 114-15).

²⁵ Ruf, *Creation Out of Chaos*, pp. 16 and 19; Bush, *Halfway to Revolution*, pp. 172, 249, 251, and 258.

²⁶ Lutz, *American Nervousness*, pp. 72-73; James took a long time to finish, but he did not, as Lutz suggests, "hav[e] trouble finishing medical school," and he graduated in 1869, not in the early 1870s. Ramsey, *Submitting to Freedom*, p. 27; Carter, *Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age*. William Barnard, in *Exploring Unseen Worlds*, also returns wholesale to the traditional view with a timing of the *Varieties* story "sometime early in 1870," followed by James's "journey to health" over the next few years "based on the power of a philosophically revised worldview." He "encapsulates this philosophical perspective" in the April 1870 diary entry citing the importance of Renouvier (pp. 84 and 86). Like Seigfried and in the spirit of some revisionism, Barnard cites examples of crisis experiences in James's later life (pp. 19, 21, 25, 29, and 37).

²⁷ Taylor, *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin*, p. 13; and "James on Psychopathology," Schwehn, ed., *A William James Renaissance*, p. 461.

²⁸ Myers, *William James*, p. 46; Murphy, *Pragmatism*, pp. 15-16.

²⁹ Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, pp. 270 and 282; Rubin, *Religious Melancholy*, p. 19.

³⁰ Capps, "'That Shape Am I,'" Capps and Jacobs, ed., *The Struggle for Life*, pp. 91, 92, and 99; Myers, *William James*, p. 49.

³¹ Habegger, *The Father*, pp. 476 and 488.

³² Gale, *The Divided Self of William James*, pp. 16, 17, and 258.

³³ Simon, *Genuine Reality*, p. 127; Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, pp. 218-19. In "William James and the Case of the Epileptic Patient," Menand offers an engaging account of many interpretations

of James's youthful crisis, especially the *Varieties* case. He includes sound critiques, especially of the psychological readings, and he concludes with a ringing endorsement of the importance of the crisis period for launching James's moral and religious ideas and commitments; he also reviews a biographical dead end that had seemed to show that his panic fear story was actually based on his own stay in an asylum before 1872. Menand evaluates the novelist Henry James's mistaken rendition of facts, a mix-up of Horatio Alger (who was a James family friend) with his brother William Alger (who was admitted to the McLean asylum in 1871), and texts of the era linking introspection, masturbation, and insanity, for a story line with "sensational appeal," which has appeared in various forms in many leading texts. However, as Menand explicitly shows, "every one of the leaves comes off this biographical onion" (*American Studies*, pp. 15-18). Paul Fisher in *House of Wits*, reports the *Varieties* incident without question and without a date, indicates surprise at conventionality of James's religious words, and reports his discovery of Renouvier as "just what he needed" (pp. 270-71).

³⁴ Beard, "Neurasthenia, or Nervous Exhaustion," p. 217; *A Practical Treatise*, p. 17; and *American Nervousness*, p. 11; and James to Thomas Ward, March 27, [18]66, in *Correspondence*, 4:137. Like pragmatism's emphasis on the consequences or use of ideas, so neurasthenia was a diagnosis about the use of tissues rather than their structural issues; and more immediately, like James's fascination for the relation of mind and body for the psychological work he would soon take on, this diagnosis similarly mingled the mental and physical in intimate interaction.

³⁵ Rausse, *The Water-Cure*, pp. 5, 108, 68, 111, 255, and 49; Shew, *Hydropathy*, pp. 125, 118, and 173; William Horsell, *Hydropathy for the People*, p. 231; Rausse, *Errors*, p. 38. When his brother Henry impatiently reported after a water-cure visit that "'the crisis' ... failed to relieve me & completely disagreed with me," the more medically knowledgeable William calmly reported that such were the stages in "a crisis bro't on by the Water Cure;" Henry to William to Henry October 16 [1869]; and William to Henry May 7, [18]70, in *Correspondence*, 1:108 and 160.

³⁶ James, *Varieties*, pp. 135, 134, and 135n; the father reported his crisis in *Society the Redeemed Form of Man*, pp. 43-54; and Bunyan in "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners." On the relation of the son's crisis to his father's, even to another example in the *Varieties* that may have been based on the elder Henry James, see Feinstein, *Becoming William James*, pp. 241-45; King, *Iron of Melancholy*, pp. 90-102 and 154-83; and Croce, *Science and Religion*, pp. 32 and 49-53.

³⁷ James, *Varieties*, p. 134; and William James to Frank Abauzit, June 1, 1904, in *Varieties*, p. 508. James's letter admitting the identity of the French correspondent first appeared in Flournoy, *La Philosophie de William James* (1911), p. 149 (but did not appear in the book's English translation, *The Philosophy of William James* [1917]).

³⁸*Correspondence*, 1:128; James, *Varieties*, p. 134. Some scholars have already suggested an artificiality about the story: Simon, *Genuine Reality*, p. 127; and Menand, *American Studies*, pp. 22-23.

³⁹ James, *Varieties*, pp. 134 and 135; Simon, in *Genuine Reality*, offers the conventional wisdom (from our time) that “epilepsy ... could not be cured by strengthening a patient’s will. An epileptic patient was at the mercy of his own biology” (p. 125); but James’s own comments on epilepsy and habit in his 1880-81 undergraduate philosophy class, “Psychology” do not refer to biological determinism; see Burdett notes in *Phil.* 5 (1880-81), James papers, p. 122. The role of insanity was secondary but important in this case. And the topic shows a connection to James’s early interest in asylum work and psychology. Following up on his vocational interests, he may have visited an asylum run by his cousin’s husband, William Henry Prince, or in connection with his clinical training at Massachusetts General Hospital, or with his own students while teaching physiology and psychology after 1873. There is also hearsay evidence that James himself was a patient in an asylum, the McLean Asylum in Somerville, but the McLean Hospital (to use its current name) will not release any information about patients, not even to confirm or deny their residency there. Even if he did not have such a personal experience, he could certainly write with vivid empathy about “insane melancholy.” Victims of its “overwhelming horror” did not experience merely the “intellectual perception of evil,” he noted in the same *Varieties* chapter, but “the grisly blood-freezing heart-palsying sensation of it close upon one”—horrible fear indeed; James, the *Varieties*, p. 135. Dickinson Miller, a student of James in the early 1890s, reported about “two insane asylums which he had arranged for the class to visit;” Miller, *Philosophical Analysis*, p. 50. For the conjectures about James’s stay at McLean Asylum, see Kazin, “William James: To Be Born Again,” p. 248; Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories*, p.415; Townsend, *Manhood at Harvard*, p. 43; Simon, *Genuine Reality*, pp. 121-22; and Menand, *American Studies*, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁰ James, *Varieties*, pp. 134-35; Fisher, in *House of Wits*, provides rich accounts of Mary James who had an intellect not particularly reflective, but very astute.

⁴¹On James’s twin commitments to “acceptance” and “struggle,” see Pomfret notes, c. August 1869, James papers and in Perry, *Thought and Character*, 1:301 (my translation); and *Varieties*, p. 341; also see James’s endorsement of “holidays to the spirit” for its relief from “energizing ... strenuous” work of willful commitment; PRG, p. 43 and MT, pp. 123-24. His response to James B. Pratt’s “Questionnaire” on personal religious beliefs (1904), in the James papers, is also in LWJ, 2:214. James occasionally used prayerful words in addressing friends, but they were generic, secular phrases; for example, he wrote to his brother Bob, “Pray do what you can for your eyes,” and “a blessing on you, and on your girl [his wife],” Aug[ust] 1, [18]71 and Sept[ember] 2, [18]73, in *Correspondence*, 4:421 and 444; and Diary 1, May 1, 1868, p. 48. Although James did not himself pray in the traditional manner of

the French correspondent, he did show deep sympathy for those who had “intercourse between themselves and higher powers with which they feel themselves to be related,” and he frequently visited Appleton Chapel; *Varieties*, pp. 366, and also see pp. 411-12; Palmer, “William James,” p. 34.

⁴² The “mannered memory” reading of a moment from James’s young adulthood bears some resemblance to Sigmund Freud’s theory of “screen memory,” his description for the way memories help in the process of coping with difficult experiences of the past, so that “what is recorded is another psychical element closely associated with the objectionable one.” Freud’s idea coincides with James’s case in that his later memory (perhaps) changed the content of the original experiences to (perhaps) a more acceptable form through a presentation with ordered clarity and with a traditionalist conclusion to the narrative. In addition, Freud points out that “there are numerous types of cases in which one psychical content is substituted for another;” so he suggests the possibilities for cases like James’s but he does not explore them. Freud is dealing with early childhood memories while James is remembering from late back to early adulthood; where children have obscure bits of perception that are then formed by the later memory, James had (at least the potential for) a clear adult memory in the original experience itself. Moreover, this memory of young adulthood was adapted for public presentation in lecture and book publication. However, we do not have his privately recorded memory, and so this public one cannot simply be treated as if it were. Instead, the primary-source (public) record shows James engaging in an activity (visiting an asylum) with some feelings that coincided with large portions of moods in early adulthood (uncertainty, depression, weakness, religious leanings) from his biographical record, but without other portions of his moods during the same period (willful struggle, constant learning, spiritual rather than traditional religious leanings), acting with more orderly behavior than he could summon at the time (but that he longed for), and expressing the psychological value of religious belief that in his youth he often longed for, but that he would sometimes feel more strongly in his later years—and which was the very point of the public argument he was making in the *Varieties*; Freud, “Screen Memories,” pp. 307, 308, and 322; and *Varieties*, pp. 134-35.

MARCUS AURELIUS, WILLIAM JAMES AND THE “SCIENCE OF RELIGIONS”

EMMA SUTTON

ABSTRACT

*This essay explores the significant role that the writings and Stoic philosophy of Marcus Aurelius came to play in the life and work of William James. James’s correspondence reveals that he first read Aurelius’s *Meditations* during the troubled ‘crisis years’ of his twenties. Moreover, these writings were a source of solace for James and informed his personal life philosophy during this period. There is evidence that it was from a Stoic standpoint that he contested his father’s faith. And, in later years, it is his interrogation of the experiential divide between a life lived under Stoicism and one lived as a ‘religious’ believer that lies at the heart of his Varieties of Religious Experience.*

Marcus Aurelius, Emperor of Rome during the second century AD,¹ was the author of a Greek text, known today as *Meditations*.² Written originally for himself, and not for publication, the *Meditations* belong to a type of writing called *hypomnēmata* in antiquity which can be defined as ‘personal notes taken on a day-to-day basis’.³ They comprise one of the few remaining texts setting down the principles of the Stoic way of life which consists, essentially, in mastering one’s inner discourse – thoughts, emotions, intentions.⁴ How these personal ‘notes’ came to be preserved is unknown since the earliest testimonies of the book being read and copied date to the Byzantine tenth century. In the West the first printed edition was brought out in Zurich, in 1559, accompanied by a Latin translation.⁵

For their author the *Meditations* were a source of solace and guidance during life’s troubles; written and re-read by him during his many military campaigns, waged against various tribes of invaders, at the borders of his realm. They consist, in effect, of repeated appeals to himself to remember and apply the tenets of Stoic philosophy to his day-to-day life. And they rest on a central doctrine: the idea that it is crucial to recognise the difference between what we can control and what we cannot. There is an assumption that whatever happens to us it is within our power to control how we respond to those events and, crucially,

that everything happens for a reason, even though that reason may not be apparent to us. The *Meditations* have been interpreted as a philosophy of consolation and there is evidence to suggest that it was this aspect that appealed to their nineteenth century reader, William James.⁶ This paper will explore the significant role that the writings and philosophy of Marcus Aurelius came to play in James's life and work.

WILLIAM JAMES AND THE MEDITATIONS

James is best known for his text book, *Principles of Psychology*, and many other pioneering works in the realm of philosophy, addressing questions surrounding religion, truth and warfare in his writings.⁷ But he was also a prolific letter writer throughout his life and much of this correspondence, to friends and family, was preserved after his death. It is these private writings that document his introduction to the words of Marcus Aurelius.

In 1866 James was living in Boston having just returned from an expedition to Brazil, to study the fauna of the Amazon, in the employ of the Harvard scientist and collector Professor Louis Agassiz. James had suffered since his late adolescence from a troubled state of mind and body and his condition consisted in part of physical symptoms, such as a persistent backache, headaches and stomach problems, and also a deep and recurring melancholy.⁸ The years immediately following his return from Brazil were a particularly bad time for him. He was tortured by the difficulty of deciding on a suitable vocation and plagued by his distressing symptoms.⁹

James had entered Harvard Medical School several years earlier, and his plan was to resume his medical training there. On his return from Brazil however, it was too late for him to enrol in the current term's courses so he undertook an undergraduate summer internship at Massachusetts General Hospital instead. It was an experience that left him with little enthusiasm for a career as a physician. He found the hospital routine boring and intellectually unsatisfying and his work there left him impatient and physically drained. In particular, standing all day put a strain on his already troublesome back.¹⁰ Moreover, medicine had never been James's first choice as a career. When he originally took the decision to begin his medical training, two years earlier in 1864, he was torn by indecision. His preference was to study 'natural science' but he despaired at the prospect of supporting himself, and a potential future Mrs James, on the proceeds of such an occupation. At that time he saw medicine, which involved the opportunity for a limited amount of scientific study, as being a compromise between science and a more lucrative career in "business". In short, James had

never been at all sure what he should be doing with his life and, at this point, the path ahead was extremely uncertain.¹¹ It was in this state of mind that he read the *Meditations* for the first time.

In June 1866 James wrote to a close friend, Thomas Wren Ward,¹² who it seems was suffering from his own greater state of restlessness and whose last letter, James notes with concern, was marked with a “melancholy tone”. In the course of advising his friend on how to deal with life he writes:

I began the other day to read the thoughts of Marcus Aurelius, tr. by Long, pub^d. by Ticknor, which, if you have not read I advise you to read, slowly. [...] He certainly had an invincible soul; and it seems to me that any man who can, like him, grasp the love of a “life according to nature”, ie a life in which your individual will becomes so harmonized to nature’s will as cheerfully to acquiesce in whatever she assigns to you, knowing that you serve some purpose in her vast machinery wh. will never be revealed to you, any man who can do this, will, I say, be a pleasing spectacle, no matter what his lot in life. I think old Mark’s perpetual yearnings for patience and equanimity & kindliness wd. do your heart good. – I have come to feel lately more & more (I can’t tell whether it will be permanent) like paying my footing in the world in a very humble way, (driving my physicking trade like any other tenth-rate man), and then living my free life in my leisure hours entirely within my own breast as a thing the world has nothing to do with; and living it easily and patiently, without feeling responsible for its future.¹³

He goes on to reflect that “these notions and others have of late led me to a pretty practical contentment” and expresses his hope to his friend that they “may suggest some practical point of view to you.”¹⁴

Like James, Thomas Ward was also unsure about his choice of career. He had begun working in the New York branch of his father’s banking firm, Baring Brothers, earlier in the year but was unconvinced that banking was for him. It seems James had found comfort and guidance, with regards his vocational plight, in the words of Marcus Aurelius and hoped that his friend might do likewise. Specifically, the *Meditations* suggested to James the consolatory idea that by following the career path that fate (“nature”) has assigned you, however uninspiring, you are justifying your existence in some way; “paying your footing in life” and

“serv[ing] some purpose.” And, moreover, that any loftier aspirations you have, that occupy your free time, should be pursued in a spirit of patience rather than anxious fretting over the outcome or “feeling responsible for [their] future.”

In light of this letter it seems that the words of Marcus Aurelius made a significant impression on the twenty-four-year-old James. At a time when he was unsure of his direction through life the Stoic philosophy offered useful instruction and reassurance. In a subsequent letter to the same confidant, eighteen months later, he re-iterates the sentiments he extolled previously and confesses that:

...in the lonesome gloom wh. beset me for a couple of months last summer, the only feeling that kept me from giving up was that by waiting and living by hook or crook long enough I might make my nick, however small a one in the raw stuff the race has got to shape, and so assert my reality. The stoic feeling of being a sentinel obeying orders without knowing the General's plans is a noble one.¹⁵

His account of this very difficult period gives the impression that he had felt supported by the faith of Marcus Aurelius, by his trust that the universe will guide our path towards a rewarding future regardless of whether, from our personal vantage point, our lives are unfolding in a way that currently makes sense. And, the other idea that appears to have given James strength in his darkest hours is that a purpose in life can be found through our efforts to help the rest of mankind, “the race,” in some way. In his words:

So that it seems to me that a sympathy with men as such, and a desire to contribute to the weal of a species, wh., whatever may be said of it contains All that we acknowledge as good, may very well form an external interest sufficient to keep one's moral pot boiling in a very lively manner to a good old age.¹⁶

It seems that this life goal, of “contribut[ing] to the weal of [our] species” was, James's hoped, enough to maintain his spirits, (his “moral pot”), and prevent his lapses into melancholic inertia. The notion that we live in order to serve our fellow man through our actions is a central tenet of Stoicism as set down in the *Meditations*.

“THE GOOD OF HUMANKIND”

According to Pierre Hadot, in his analysis of the *Meditations*, Stoicism was born of the fusion of three traditions: the Socratic ethical tradition, the Heraclitean physical and ‘materialistic’ tradition, and the dialectical tradition of the Megareans and of Aristotle. Together these elements formed a Stoic “philosophy of self-coherence.”¹⁷ Underlying this system is the concept of the Universe as ruled by a single *logos* or ‘Reason.’ The aim of philosophy is to guide its practitioner with regards the “act of placing oneself in harmony with the *logos*.”¹⁸ It is only through choosing to act in harmony with the fundamental ‘Reason’ of the universe, (of which rational human nature is one manifestation), that a life of moral goodness, the only life of any value and happiness, can be lived. Such notions of harmony involve the philosopher abandoning their partial, egotistic perspective on life and choosing instead to prioritise the common good of the universe and of society. It was these themes, passed down from his Stoic predecessor Epictetus, that Marcus Aurelius develops in his *Meditations*.

In the words of Marcus Aurelius: “let your impulse to act and your action have as their goal the service of the human community, because that, for you, is in conformity with your nature.”¹⁹ For Marcus Aurelius the goal of our actions must be “the good of humankind” since “[t]he rational faculty is simultaneously the faculty of social life.”²⁰ In other words the law of human and social reason, which is fundamentally identical to the universal ‘Reason’ of ‘Nature’ as a whole, demands that we place ourselves entirely in the service of the human community. Furthermore, it is clear that good intentions or impulses are not enough. His Stoicism requires focus and action since “the human soul dishonours itself when it does not direct its actions and impulses, as much as possible, toward some goal.”²¹

It is interesting to note that these instructions bear a striking resemblance to James’s attitude towards sentimentality. In his *Psychology: Briefer Course*, he declares: “There is no more contemptible type of human character than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer, who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but who never does a manly concrete deed.”²² He continues by giving the example of “the weeping of the Russian lady over the fictitious personages in the play while her coachman is freezing to death on his seat outside” which, he declares, is “the sort of thing that everywhere happens on a less glaring scale.”²³ For James it would seem, as for the Stoics, it is the goal and the deed that count and without a pragmatic focus even ‘good’ emotions are worse than useless.

James's avowedly ethical writings also contain implicitly Stoic themes. At the heart of that series of essays lies his own ethical manifesto; his campaign for the "strenuous life."²⁴ In 1891 James delivered an address to the Yale Philosophical Club, entitled *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*, during which he described his intentions for such a life:

The deepest difference, practically, in the moral life of man is the difference between the easy-going and strenuous mood. When in the easy-going mood the shrinking from our present ill is our ruling consideration. The strenuous mood, on the contrary, makes us quite indifferent to our present ill, if only the greater ideal be attained.²⁵

Lewis Rambo refers to other essays by James, such as *Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment*, and *The Importance of Individuals*, to make the case that this "greater ideal", that James invokes, is the melioration and evolution of the human community.²⁶ In his insistence, that individual action and desire should be subjugated to the long-term greater social good, Stoic principles are clearly at work. Moreover, in his later publications on religion James refers explicitly to the Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius and cites him at length. But before exploring these particular works further it is necessary to consider the intellectual context in which he originally developed and maintained his interest in Stoicism.

THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT OF JAMES'S STOICISM

James was an avid student of philosophy from a young age so it is not at all surprising that he should have read and studied the texts of Stoics.²⁷ Although slightly ahead of his time, in reading the *Meditations* in 1866, the Stoic philosophers of the Hellenistic era were a popular subject amongst historians of philosophy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century before being eclipsed as scholarly attention turned to the Presocratics and the Neoplatonists. (Subsequently, from the early twentieth century until recent years, Stoicism received so little interest that one author writing on the subject in 1992 claimed to have drawn most of his secondary literature from this period of enthusiasm during the end of the previous century.²⁸ This might explain the extremely limited amount of historiographic interest to date in the topic of Stoicism in the context of James.)²⁹

Along with his interest in philosophy James displayed, from his youth, a fascination with the natural sciences. In a letter to a friend the sixteen-year-old James exclaimed: "If I

followed my taste and did what was most agreeable to me, I'll tell you what I would do. I would get a microscope and go out into the country, into the dear old woods and fields and ponds – there I would try to make as many discoveries as possible.”³⁰ And, as discussed above, when it came time to settle on a vocation, years later, science was still his first choice of the options on offer.

In the realm of his family however, a very different influence was active. Eugene Taylor has brought to light the role that the religious leanings of James's father played in his life.³¹ Henry James Sr. experienced a mystical awakening, when James was a young child, and later went on to publish several works on his own unique theological philosophy which was informed by the Swedenborgian faith.³² James however, despite his best efforts, found his father's religious ideas difficult to comprehend. Correspondence, between Henry James Sr. and his son, suggests that it was from a Stoic perspective that James contested his father's beliefs.

During the Autumn of 1867, over the course of several letters, James attempted to elicit from his father a better understanding of his faith. Their discussion touched on the topic of what comprises man's "conscious life". In concluding his own rendition of his father's ideas James writes "[i]f our *real* life is unconscious, I don't see how you can occupy in the final result a different place from the Stoics, for instance.”³³ He appears to be alluding to the Stoic assumption that events in the universe are governed by *logos*, or 'Reason,' but that this underlying meaning or purpose may not be apparent to us or, in other words, part of our consciousness. His main point of contention, however, was with Henry James Sr.'s account of the creation of the universe and the role of a "Creator." And here again it appears to be from a philosophical position consistent with the Stoicism of Marcus Aurelius that James tries to contrast and comprehend his father's account.

Henry James Sr.'s concept of creation consisted of a two part process. It involved firstly, the birth of the natural world, a process akin to the Christian creation story, and then secondly and crucially, the return of the individual to the Creator ending in "the ultimate marriage between the two which we call creation.”³⁴ This ultimate 'return' to the Creator is brought about via an inevitable, spontaneous spiritual reaction within man. According to Henry James Sr. we are at first seduced by what is in effect an illusion; our own selfhood. Ultimately however we become disheartened by our perceived separateness from God that is implied by the concept of our being a distinct 'self'. And, we eventually begin to turn away from selfish preoccupations, "to separate myself from myself as it were," by, for example, "paying some regard to my neighbour, or learning to identify myself to some extent with

others.”³⁵ In this embrace of the plight of our fellow man, which is driven by the unconscious presence of “infinite goodness, truth, & beauty”³⁶ within us, we rise up to fulfil our spiritual destiny; our union with our creator.

What was particularly unclear to James was how his father’s description of the universe could escape the label of pantheism which Henry James Sr. had always denounced. Since every individual’s eventual “marriage” with God was pre-ordained, and the seeds of this union were ever present since birth within their spirit, it was difficult for James to see how his father’s ‘God’, as defined by his version of ‘creation’, could be anything other than all-encompassing ‘everythingness.’ It seemed to James that “the whole process [of creation] is a mere circle of the creator described within his own being and returning to the starting point.”³⁷

He admitted to his father that “I think that spontaneously I am rather inclined to lapse into a pantheistic mode of contemplating the world” and explained his conception of pantheism as consisting in “there being a necessary relation between Creator and creature, so that both are the same fact viewed from opposite sides and their duality as creator & creature becomes merged in a higher unity as Being.”³⁸

An understanding of a creator such as this is representative of the Stoic system. Within this system God is nothing other than universal ‘Reason,’ producing in self-coherence all the events of the universe.³⁹ In other words, for the Stoics God simply *is* Nature as opposed to the Christian understanding of God as an external force that exists outside of and creates and shapes Nature.⁴⁰ It is this very distinction which William claims he is unable to find evidence for in his father’s version of Creation despite, he insists, the “scorn with which [his father] always mention[s] Pantheism” and the “broad gulf” he places between it and “Creation.”⁴¹

His father, responding to these points, tells James that his inability to grasp his vision of the world arises “*mainly* from the purely *scientific* cast of your thought just at present and the temporary blight exerted thence upon your metaphysic wit.”⁴² He writes that the types of problem they were discussing must “seem very idle to the ordinary scientific imagination, because it is stupefied by the giant superstition we call Nature.”⁴³ Intellectually speaking Henry James Sr. declared his son to be at a “scientific or puerile stage of progress” with his conviction that Nature is the “objective source or explication ...of all phenomena” leaving God, “- though we may continuously admit his existence out of regard to tradition,” “a rigid superfluity, so far as the conduct of life is concerned.”⁴⁴ His criticism, that James’s concept of a God is one who is labelled as such out of tradition but is essentially ‘irrelevant’, is precisely

the argument levelled by some of the ancient critics at the Stoic system of belief.⁴⁵ It would appear however, that it was exactly this aspect that appealed to James.

Paul Jerome Croce describes how James's early professional writings reveal the divided allegiances of their author. He depicts him as being pulled in two directions, both by his enthusiasm and awe for the potential revelations of scientific enquiry and by his personal affinity for the ideas of metaphysics. In Croce's analysis of the various book reviews that James wrote during this period he reconstructs James's nascent professional agenda for the field of psychology. This was to "establish a middle path between a positivism that naively espoused faith in scientific naturalism and a spiritual view of mind that let religious belief close off inquiries into the body's operations."⁴⁶ In this context, it would seem that Stoicism offered James a 'minimalist' vision of a metaphysical reality that could keep house with science, unlike the 'spiritualist excesses' of other religions such as his father's. In this way his Stoic faith satisfied his need for a moral structure to life but did not contradict the findings of the new scientific psychology. In his 1874 review of Henry Maudsley's work, *Responsibility in Mental Disease*, James refers explicitly to this re-assuring coherence in his discussion of the section on "The Prevention of Insanity" and "the hygiene of the mind." Maudsley lays "immense stress in his conclusions," James reveals, "upon inward consistency of thought and action, [...] and indifference to outward fortune as a ruling mood" which are also, he points out, the moral ideals of a "great Roman emperor". He finishes by stating that "[m]oralists need not be anxious when the most advanced positivism comes to practical conclusions that differ so little from those of the 'metaphysically' minded Marcus Aurelius."⁴⁷ There is also evidence that James continued to respect and identify with the Stoicism of Aurelius for many years to come.

In 1878 for example, eleven years after the exchange of views with his father, James sent a copy of the *Meditations* to his brother Henry who was living in Paris at the time.⁴⁸ And, twenty-seven years later still, James sent another copy this time to a young woman, Pauline Goldmark, with whom he enjoyed a close friendship and correspondence. Ignas Skrupskelis, one of the editors of *The Correspondence of William James*, remarks pointedly of their relationship: "Perhaps she made him feel young again and no more. But one exchange very much invites reading between the lines!"⁴⁹ In any case it is clear from the accompanying note that even in his sixty third year the book was one which still brought him comfort and afforded respect in his eyes.⁵⁰ Despite his continued affinity for the Stoic doctrine however, it is apparent that even in his youth he wished he could sustain religious beliefs more akin to his father's.

THE LIMITS OF STOICISM

Although their debate by correspondence, discussed above, appears to end with James no more convinced by his father's creed he does end on a conciliatory note.

I have now laid bare to you the general complexion of my mind. I cannot help thinking that to you it will appear most pitiful & bald. But I cannot help it and cannot feel responsible for it. Heaven knows I do not love it, and if in a future letter or letters you are able to sow some seed in it which may grow up and help to furnish it I shall be thankful enough.⁵¹

A few months later, in one of his letters to his friend Thomas Wren Ward, he begins by urging him to consider in his mood of "inward deadness and listlessness" that he can achieve some purpose in life through contributing in some small way to the "welfare of the race." But on this occasion, whilst preaching notions of the Stoic goal of helping humankind, he also notes what is missing from such a way of living: namely the emotional sustenance of intimate contact with a spiritual world beyond his own interior life: "I know that in a certain point of view, and the most popular one this [stoic life] seems a cold activity for our affections, a stone instead of bread. We long for sympathy, for a purely personal communication, first with the soul of the World, then with the soul of our fellows – And happy are they who think or know that they have got them!"⁵²

And, in a letter eight years later to his soon to be wife, Alice Howe Gibbens (another Swedenborgian), he alludes again to the limitations of his beliefs:

The hardness of my Stoicism oppresses me sometimes; My attitude towards Religion is one of deference rather than of adoption. I see its place; I feel that there are times when everything else must fail & that, or nothing, remain; and yet I behave as if I must leave it untouched until such times come, and I am driven to it by sheer stress of weather. I'm sure I'm partly right, and that religion is not an everyday comfort and convenience. And yet I know I'm partly wrong...⁵³

From these letters it appears that although unable, or unwilling, to share the faith of Alice and his father he continually worried at the substance and limitations of his own beliefs. Nineteen years later in 1895, (thirteen years after the death of his father), he returns to this theme in an address to the Harvard Young Men's Christian Association. It is clear that by this point his sense of unease had turned into a conviction that 'religion', as something beyond Stoicism, must have a place in his life. In his speech, later published as the essay *Is Life Worth Living?*, James cites the words of Marcus Aurelius; "O Universe! What thou wishest I wish." This is a noble sentiment, he declares, but one that becomes untenable in a world where 'Nature' displays contradictory phenomena of both good and evil. In such a world the Stoic system fails and "the visible surfaces of heaven and earth refuse to be brought by us into any intelligible unity at all."

He goes on to describe the extreme pessimism and suicidal view of life that arises in those who acknowledge "the contradiction between the phenomena of nature and the craving of the heart to believe that behind nature there is a spirit whose expression nature is."⁵⁴ He counts himself amongst those who have become convinced of the limitations of "the naturalistic superstition, the worship of the God of Nature."⁵⁵ "For such persons," he continues, "the physical order of nature, taken simply as science knows it, cannot be held to reveal any one harmonious spiritual intent. It is mere *weather*."⁵⁶ In essence he has abandoned Stoicism in the face of its resigned acceptance of all that is evil. Instead, he has come to believe that there must be a separate 'spiritual reality' beyond and distinct from the natural world that is currently observed by scientists.⁵⁷

He concedes that there is no way to know or prove the existence of an "unseen world" of God but raises the concept of a "German doctor's" description of "*Binnenleben*", or 'inner life', in what appears to be a reference to the writings of Moriz Benedikt, the Viennese neurologist.⁵⁸ When James invokes the term in his own lecture he insists that our "*Binnenleben*" is the "deepest thing in our nature" and here faith is safe from the arguments of science and the need to prove the reality of God.⁵⁹ For Benedikt, an individual's "*Seelen-Binnenleben*" consisted of a parallel mental life: "[U]nder the calmest surface of the emotional life surges and seethes an inner life of the soul." This inner second life is born of the imagination in conjunction with the unending multitude of "lasting impressions and memories, thoughts and feelings, inclinations, needs and skills of the individual." It appears to others only in fragments, "in attitudes and facial expressions, in words and behaviour."⁶⁰ Ultimately, it is through developing this line of thought, with regards the role of an alternative, secondary realm of psychological activity, that James finds the answer to his

lifelong internal struggle between science and religion. The conclusion of his later work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, can be read as his solution.

THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Published in 1902 *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was originally delivered by James as a series of lectures through his appointment as a Gifford Lecturer on Natural Religion at the University of Edinburgh.⁶¹ In the second lecture, entitled ‘Circumscription of the Topic’ James, by defining religion to his own ends, explains to his audience what it is that he plans to examine. His subject, it transpires, is precisely that which, as revealed above, has occupied his thoughts for many years: What is it that separates those who ‘have religion’, such as his father and his wife, from the Stoics? And how do they come by their faith in their religious beliefs?

James begins by stating that both ‘morality’, (including Stoicism), and ‘religion’, (Christianity for example), share a fundamental teaching: that we should accept the Universe in all its workings. What makes them different however, is how they go about this acceptance. He contrasts the words of Marcus Aurelius “If gods care not for me or my children, here is a reason for it” with Job’s cry “Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him!” The words of the former carry a “frosty chill,” he declares, “devoid of passion and exhalation.” The Roman Emperor *respects* the divine order he adheres to “but the Christian God is there to be *loved*” insists James.⁶² He goes on to compare more of Marcus Aurelius’s words with those of the old Christian author of the *Theologia Germanica*. Although their central creed, that the conditions of life should be accepted uncomplainingly, appears in abstract terms to be the same he stresses “how much more active and positive the impulse of the Christian writer to accept his place in the universe is! Marcus Aurelius agrees *to* the scheme – the German theologian agrees *with* it. He literally *abounds* in agreement, he runs out to embrace the divine decrees.”⁶³ James also explains why this is significant in that “[i]t makes a tremendous emotional and practical difference to one whether one accept the universe in the drab discoloured way of stoic resignation to necessity, or with the passionate happiness of Christian saints.”⁶⁴

Later he develops this theme in his discussion of the circumstances in which this difference really matters. What the Stoic achieves he achieves through an effort of volition, James declares, whereas the practice of the Christian faith requires no exertion of volition because it thrives on the “excitement of a higher kind of emotion.” Where ‘morality’ breaks

down, James insists, is when reserves of personal will and effort run dry; when "morbid fears invade the mind" and "death finally runs the robustest of us down."⁶⁵ In short James is returning to his old theme of the inadequacy of Stoicism as he finds it. It appears that, from James's perspective, the words of Marcus Aurelius may give life a purpose but they do not make living such a life any easier.

During the rest of the lectures he explores the nature of what it is that Stoicism lacks. He characterises the mystical states through which religious conversions take place and attempts to understand why such events are accessible to some but not to others. He concludes by offering up a theory which he believes can explain the origins of such experiences. The answer lies, he is convinced, in the new research into the structure of human consciousness. Specifically, the "discovery" of additional regions of consciousness, "in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts, and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether."⁶⁶ He proposes that religious experiences are the result of the "subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the experiences of life" which "hatch out" or "burst into flower" during a religious conversion event.⁶⁷ In other words, a 'message from God' can be interpreted, in psychological terms, as a message from a separate subliminal consciousness.

At the time he wrote *The Varieties* there were many competing descriptions of the nature of subconscious or secondary states of mind. Although previously it was Benedikt's concept of a 'second life' of the soul that he referenced, in these lectures it is the insights of the French psychologist, Pierre Janet, and the English psychical researcher, F. W. H. Myers, that were explicitly invoked. And, although he clearly stated his debt to Janet, in the preface to *The Varieties*, it is clear that, in one crucial respect it is Myers's description of the subliminal conscious that informed these particular lectures.⁶⁸ Unlike Janet, Myers believed that the subconscious realm is also the home of the "super-conscious;" the gateway to consciousnesses beyond our own.⁶⁹ Accordingly, James was able to leave open the door to the possibility that mystical states are genuine communications with a supernatural world at the same time as allowing that sometimes they are merely "uprushes" from our own, alternative, buried mental lives. In both cases the immediate origin of the experience was the same; a subliminal consciousness.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that the Stoic philosophy of Marcus Aurelius resonated with James when he first read the *Meditations*, aged twenty-four, and that he prized the message that it held for him, especially in his youth. He seems to have valued Stoicism for its moral guidance and reassurance and because it occupied a middle ground, alienating neither science nor metaphysics. Later on he appears to have abandoned Stoicism, at least for himself, in favour of a life philosophy that allowed for the existence and agency of an “unseen spiritual world” distinct from “Nature”. Despite adopting this as a personal preference however, the Stoic creed was clearly not one he could leave behind entirely. Whilst acknowledging the inadequacy of the metaphysical basis of Stoicism, as he later finds it, he appears to remain wedded to Aurelius’s ethical values and programme for the ideal life. Moreover, references to, and re-examinations of, the Stoic faith continue to haunt his later works.

In essence the starting point and part of the motivation behind *The Varieties of Religious Experience* appears to be James’s reprise of the old debate with his father: the question of what distinguishes Stoicism from ‘religion.’ Only this time, as Taylor has pointed out, he does seem to have achieved some sort of a reconciliation of their two points of view.⁷⁰ Through his theory, invoking the role of the subconscious regions of the mind in religious experiences, he was able to account for the mystical experiences and beliefs of his father, and others like him, in a way that made sense to his self confessed ‘naturalistic’ turn of mind. Moreover, he succeeded in convincing himself of a worth for such experiences, beyond the merely practical one of helping someone get through life: in addition, he declares, the mystical state is likely a “superior point of view;” “a window through which the mind looks upon a more extensive and inclusive world.”⁷¹

It seems though, that all this reconciling had occurred on an entirely intellectual plane since James described himself as no closer to experiencing the “supreme happiness” which is “religion’s secret” than he was in his youth. Such experiences are the province of religious men of the “extremes type” whereas, speaking of mystical states, he confided that “my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely and I can speak of them only at second-hand.”⁷² It would appear that, experientially, James had not been able to move significantly beyond the “cold activity” of his Stoicism.⁷³ Moreover, it is ironic that the very concept of his project, to establish a “science of religions,”⁷⁴ would have been, for his father, somewhat of a contradiction in terms. In Henry James Sr.’s eyes it was precisely his son’s

adherence to the doctrines of science that made him impervious to the longed for joys of true religious experience.

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NOTES

¹ Mark Morford, *The Roman Philosophers: From the time of Cato the Censor to the death of Marcus Aurelius*, (Routledge, 2002), p. 229.

² The writings were originally untitled by the author and have been given a variety of names since including: 'On his life', 'About Himself and to Himself', 'On the Duty of Life'. See Pierre Hadot, (translated by Michael Chase), *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, (Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 24.

³ Ibid., pp. 30-32.

⁴ Marcus Aurelius is regarded as the last of the Stoic philosophers and in his *Meditations* he frequently acknowledges the wisdom of his predecessor Epictetus. Epictetus was, in turn, influenced by the founders of the Stoic school: Zeno and Chrysippus. See Ibid., pp. 50, 59, 73.

⁵ Ibid., p. 22; Mark Morford, *The Roman Philosophers*, p. 230.

⁶ For a discussion of the *Meditations* as a philosophy of consolation see David J. Rosner, 'Marcus Aurelius: Philosophy as Consolation' in Phil Washburn, (ed.), *The Many Faces of Wisdom: Great Philosophers' Visions of Philosophy*, (Prentice Hall, 2003).

⁷ See for example his essays and books entitled: 'The Moral Equivalent of War'; *The Will to Believe*; *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; 'Is Life Worth Living?'

⁸ Gay Wilson Allen, *William James*, (Viking Press, 1967). pp. 70, 92.

⁹ Jacques Barzun, *A Stroll with William James*, (Harper & Row, 1983), p. 15. Many of these symptoms continued intermittently throughout his life and he would later come to describe his condition as 'neurasthenic'. Neurasthenia, a popular diagnosis of James's day, was described and so

named by the American neurologist, George Beard. See Ibid., pp. 7-8. See also Tom Lutz's chapter on James and Neurasthenia in Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness: 1903, An Anecdotal History*, (Cornell University Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Gay Wilson Allen, *William James*, pp. 118,121.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

¹² Tom Ward was the son of Samuel Gray Ward, Henry James Sr.'s banker in Boston. Tom was also a student at Harvard and he and William had embarked on the trip to Brazil together. See Ibid., pp. 79,101.

¹³ William James to Thomas Wren Ward, Jun. 8th 1866, Skrupskelis and Berkeley, (eds.), *The Correspondence of William James, Vol. 4: 1856 - 1877*, (University Press of Virginia, 1995), p. 139.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ William James to Thomas Wren Ward, Sep. 10th 1867, Ibid., p. 250.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*, pp. 75-76.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁹ Cited in Ibid., p. 185.

²⁰ Cited in Ibid., p. 184.

²¹ Cited in Ibid., p. 185.

²² William James, *The Works of William James: Psychology: Briefer Course*, (Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 136.

²³ Ibid., pp. 136– 37.

²⁴ Lewis Rambo makes the case that James's vision of a "strenuous life" formed the core of his normative ethics which he explicated in a series of essays, between 1879 and 1896, and later brought together and published as *The Will to Believe*. See Lewis R. Rambo, 'Ethics, Evolution, and the Psychology of William James', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 16, (1980), p. 50.

²⁵ William James, 'The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life' in *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy*, (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), p. 211.

²⁶ Lewis Rambo, 'Ethics, Evolution', pp. 51-53.

²⁷ In his biography of James Gay Wilson Allen refers to him reading Schopenhauer and Renan as a teenager. Gay Wilson Allen, *William James*, p. 53. Several years later in a letter to his brother from Brazil James announced that "When I get home I'm going to study philosophy all my days". Cited in Jacques Barzun, *A Stroll with William James*, p. 20.

²⁸ Ralph Dorty, *The Criterion of Truth*, (Peter Lang, 1992), p. 1.

²⁹ Ralph Barton Perry makes a brief mention of how, in his youth, William James "was wont to preach the gospel of Stoicism". See Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William*

James: As revealed in unpublished correspondence and notes, together with his published writings, Volume II Philosophy and Psychology, (Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 352. Many other authors describe the 'crisis years' of his late twenties or the characteristics of his personal faith or philosophy without any reference to Stoic influences. See for example: Howard Feinstein, *Becoming William James*, (Cornell University Press, 1984); Jacques Barzun, *A Stroll with William James*; Bernard P. Brennan, *William James*, (Twayne, 1968); Richard M. Gale, *The Philosophy of William James: An Introduction*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³⁰ William James to Edgar Beach Van Winkle, Mar. 1st 1858, Skrupskelis and Berkeley, *The Correspondence*, Vol. 4, p. 14.

³¹ Eugene Taylor, 'The Spiritual Roots of James's Varieties of Religious Experience' published as part of the introduction to William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Centenary Edition*, (Longmans, Green, and Co., 2002).

³² For an account of Henry James Sr.'s mystical experiences and his theology see William James, (ed.), 'The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James', in Burkhardt, Bowers and Skrupskelis, (eds.), *The Works of William James: Essays in Religion and Morality*, (Harvard University Press, 1982).

³³ William James to Henry James, Sep. 5th 1867, Skrupskelis and Berkeley, *The Correspondence*, Vol. 4, p. 196.

³⁴ Henry James Sr. to William James, Sep. 27th 1867, Ibid., p. 208.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 206.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ William James to Henry James Sr., Sep. 5th 1867, Ibid., p. 195.

³⁸ William James to Henry James Sr., Oct. 28th 1867, Ibid., p. 218.

³⁹ Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel*, p. 76.

⁴⁰ John Sellars, *Stoicism*, (Acumen, 2006), pp. 92-93.

⁴¹ William James to Henry James Sr., Oct. 28th 1867, Skrupskelis and Berkeley, *The Correspondence*, Vol. 4, p. 218.

⁴² Henry James Sr. to William James, Sep. 27th 1867, Ibid., p. 204. (The italics are his.)

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 205.

⁴⁵ John Sellars, *Stoicism*, p. 93.

⁴⁶ Paul Jerome Croce, 'Physiology as the Antechamber to Metaphysics: The Young William James's Hope for a Philosophical Psychology', *History of Psychology*, Vol. 2, No. 4, (1999). p. 303.

⁴⁷ William James, 'Responsibility in Mental Disease by Henry Maudsley (1874)' in Burkhardt, Bowers and Skrupskelis, (eds.), *The Works of William James: Essays, Comments and Reviews*, (Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 283-284.

⁴⁸ Henry James Jr. to William James, Oct. 23rd 1878, Skrupskelis and Berkeley, (eds.), *The Correspondence of William James, Vol. 1: William and Henry, 1861 – 1884*, (University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 273.

⁴⁹ Ignas Skrupskelis, 'Introduction,' to Skrupskelis and Berkeley, (eds.), *The Correspondence of William James, Vol. 11: April 1905 – March 1908* (University Press of Virginia 2003), p. xli.

⁵⁰ William James to Pauline Goldmark, Dec. 28th 1905, *Ibid.*, pp. 130–131.

⁵¹ William James to Henry James Sr., Oct. 28th 1867, Skrupskelis and Berkeley, *The Correspondence, Vol. 4*, p. 221.

⁵² William James to Thomas Wren Ward, Jan. 7th 1868, *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁵³ William James to Alice Howe Gibbens, Oct. 9th 1876, *Ibid.*, pp. 547–548.

⁵⁴ William James, 'Is Life Worth Living?' in *The Moral Equivalent of War and Other Essays & Selections from Some Problems in Philosophy*, John K. Roth, (ed.), (Harper & Row, 1971), p. 73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵⁷ James wrote about another facet of monistic systems of belief, such as Stoicism, in his chapter on 'The Absolute and the Strenuous Life', in a later book entitled *The Meaning of Truth*. There he maintains that monistic systems "sanction anything," i.e. any personal action or tendency, since after their occurrence all events in an individual's life, are said to form part of "the universe's perfection." In this light, he argues, philosophic systems that adhere to the precept that there is an underlying unity and perfection to the whole of life may permit, but do not encourage, someone to lead a "strenuous life." In this instance he implicitly defines such a 'strenuous life' as one that is characterised by active participation in "the world's salvation." In one sense however, he sees this as a positive aspect of monistic, or absolute, philosophies. They accept and console those who are permanently incapable of participating actively in life in this way: "Absolutism" has a "saving message for incurably sick souls." See William James, 'Chapter 11: The Absolute and the Strenuous Life' in *The Meaning of Truth*, (Longman Green and Co., 1911).

⁵⁸ Previously, James's citation of the term 'Binnenleben' has been misattributed to Freud rather than Benedikt. See Grace Foster, 'The Psychotherapy of William James' in *Psychoanalytic Review*, XXXII (1945), pp.300-318. However, in the previous year, 1894, Benedikt had given a lecture at the International Congress of Medicine in Rome entitled: "Second Life: The Seelen-Binnenleben (Inner Life of the Soul) of the Healthy and the Sick." He also published the substance of this lecture in an article in the journal *Wiener Klinik*. See Oliver Somburg und Holger Steinberg, 'Der Begriff des Seelen-Binnenlebens von Moriz Benedikt', W. J. Bock und B. Holdorff, (Hrsg.), *Schriftenreihe der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geschichte der Nervenheilkunde*, Bande 12, (2006). pp. 231-240. Somburg and Steinberg also discuss James's use of Benedikt's expression but only in

reference to his 1899 lecture 'The Gospel of Relaxation'. They fail to note his earlier use of it in the lecture under discussion above; 'Is Life Worth Living?'

⁵⁹ William James, 'Is Life Worth Living?', pp. 88-89.

⁶⁰ This is my translation of Benedikt's words which are cited in the original German in Oliver Somburg und Holger Steinberg, 'Der Begriff des Seelen-Binnenlebens', p. 235.

⁶¹ Eugene Taylor, 'The Spiritual Roots', p. xxxii.

⁶² William James, *The Varieties*, p. 38. (The emphasis added is my own).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184, 395. See also William James, 'Frederic Myers's Service to Psychology' in Burkhardt and Bowers, (eds.), *The Works of William James: Essays in Psychological Research*, (Harvard University Press, 1986).

⁶⁹ F. W. H. Myers, 'Note on a suggested mode of psychical interaction' in Edmund Gurney, Frederic Myers and Frank Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living, Vol. II*, (Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1970).

⁷⁰ Eugene Taylor, 'The Spiritual Roots', p. xxxiii.

⁷¹ William James, *The Varieties*, p. 31.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁷³ G. William Barnard argues that James's "Walpurgis Nacht", his experience whilst camping in the Adirondacks in 1898, should be classed as a mystical experience. See G. William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism*, (State University of New York Press, 1997). pp 19-20. But, taking James's own words above, from the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, at face value implies that he considered himself only capable of experiencing mystical states "second-hand". This suggests that even his feeling of intense "spiritual alertness" that night on the mountains did not, as far as he was concerned, satisfy the requirements of a 'bona fide' mystical experience.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 396. James held that such a "science of religions" might "sift out from the midst of their discrepancies a common body of doctrine which she might also formulate in terms to which a physical science need not object. This, I said, she might adopt as her own reconciling hypothesis, and recommend it for general belief." See *Ibid.*, p. 394. Eugene Taylor describes James's own 'reconciling hypothesis' as "the development of a cross-cultural comparative psychology of subconscious states, especially of the mystical variety, and how people took such experiences from culture to culture." Eugene Taylor, 'Review of Proudfoot's William James and a Science of

Religions' in *Religious Studies: an international journal for the philosophy of religion*, Vol. 41, No. 4, (Dec. 2005), p. 487.

JAMES, DEWEY, AND DEMOCRACY

ERIC THOMAS WEBER

ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine John Dewey's correspondence and selected writings to illuminate Dewey's understanding of and possible shaping of William James's work as it pertains to politics and democracy. I suggest a way of seeing a richer connection between the thinkers than has been portrayed and a picture of influence flowing from Dewey to James.

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I agree with those scholars who see William James as a democratic thinker.¹ This claim may seem controversial insofar as James and John Dewey are often paired together and Dewey is thought of as the more socially and politically oriented of the two. Specifically, Cornel West and Robert Westbrook have argued that James was surprisingly uninterested in political matters.² No doubt, Dewey's work is more directly concerned with political issues of education, ethics, and collaborative social efforts than James's. It is a common approach to conceive of James as a solitary thinker who laid the ground for Dewey's work. In fact, the common ordering of the names, Peirce, James, and Dewey, often misleads newcomers to pragmatism to think that developments in their thought occurred chronologically from one to the next.

Throughout this paper, a broader theme will be developed, whose surface Ralph Sleeper has scratched in *The Necessity of Pragmatism*. That theme is the encouragement that Dewey's work represented for James.

Dewey explicitly urged James to work more specifically on the problems of philosophy, beyond his earlier focus on psychology. Although psychology was burgeoning in America, both James and Dewey moved away from it as a field of study when it came to focus on laboratory work. I imagine that a number of factors were relevant to James's move toward philosophy, not

the least of which was the completion of his thirteen-hundred page opus, *The Principles of Psychology*, which took approximately a decade to finish beyond the due date his publisher had in mind.

Among other scholars, Joshua Miller has offered some initial ways to present the case for thinking of James as having a *Democratic Temperament*. Whereas Miller's analysis is focused on James's work, my approach here is to make my case more from Dewey's letters to James, urging an increasingly explicit pronouncement of democratic ideals. The democratic impulse is one of the many features of James's thought that has not received a great deal of attention, perhaps because of the motivations for calling him an individualist.³ James's democratic tendencies begin with the scientific ethos that avoids tyrannical thinking in favor of evidence. Dewey's encouragement in correspondence with James is an underexplored factor in the development of James's move further into philosophy and in the expansion of the democratic ideal which drives it.

JAMES AND DEWEY

JAMES'S INFLUENCE ON DEWEY

Since my main focus will be on the reverse relation, James's influence on Dewey is worth making clear, at least briefly. As is well known, Dewey's earliest works are driven by Hegelian influences. In a review of Sleeper's *The Necessity of Pragmatism*, Larry Hickman explains that Sleeper "sees Dewey's lifework as an attempt to find a mean between the extremes of [Hegelian] idealism and scholastic realism."⁴ Over a certain interval, Dewey shakes loose some of his Hegelian baggage and ventures into his own work. His early volume on psychology, still heavily Hegelian, is not well received by James. In a letter to George Croom Robertson, in December of 1886, James writes, "Dewey is out with a psychology which I have just rec'd and but ½ read. I felt quite 'enthused' at the first glance, hoping for something really fresh; but am sorely disappointed when I come to read [it]."⁵

It is worth noting with regard to James's criticism here, that when writing this letter James is four years away from completing a twelve-year opus of his own on psychology. To impress James in the field of psychology, therefore, would likely be difficult at this point in his career. Four years later, James's *The Principles of Psychology* is published, receiving high

acclaim. Not the least of this is Dewey's praise. In a letter to James in May of 1891, Dewey writes,

I don't know that I told you that I have had a class of four graduates going through your psychology this year, and how much we have all enjoyed it. I'm sure you would be greatly gratified if you could see what a stimulus to mental freedom, as well as what a purveyor of methods and materials your book has been to us.⁶

As a fellow psychologist, Dewey was markedly and immediately impressed by James's work.

Beyond James's new approach to psychology, Dewey is equally impressed with James's writing style. Textbooks are often dry and dead. The vibrant style of James's writings, however, animates the work in an entirely novel way. In a letter to James from February of 1892, Dewey writes,

One of my friends summed up Sully's review [of the *Principles*] in [the journal] *Mind* for me as follows: 'A good book, but too lively to make a good corpse and every scientific book ought to be a corpse.' If we weren't indebted to you for any specific things, we should be indebted to you for what you did to break down this superstition.⁷

Two further letters from Dewey to James concerning the latter's influence help to bring out Dewey's understanding and contribution with regard to James's work. First, in January, 1904, Dewey writes, "I need hardly say what I have said before, such approval as you feel drawn to give means more to us than that of anybody else. None the less as far as I am concerned I have simply been rendering back in logical vocabulary what was already your own."⁸ Dewey is no doubt responding to the praise James has given him for Dewey's work on psychology and education. He clearly sees his work as an extension of James's psychology. In 1907, Dewey writes of his "appreciation of and indebtedness to, all you do."⁹ In what follows, I will present the result of Dewey's shift from Hegelian thinking to a new and exciting ethics, which James praises and builds on.

JAMES IN PRAISE OF DEWEY

Before discussing Dewey's encouragement of James, a few of James's letters about and to Dewey are worth citing, showing James's great praise of Dewey's work. The anomaly cited above, of James criticizing Dewey, reveals an early, first impression of Dewey as a Hegel scholar. Dewey's early work on ethics, psychology, logic, and education, progressing away from idealism, all receive great praise from James, and resemble James's later work in that regard.

As early as July of 1896, James writes of Dewey to Alice Howe Gibbens James. He recounts, "I heard a lecture by John Dewey at 2.30, & another by Bryan ... both very good. Unfortunately Dewey has already left – I should have stayed on indefinitely to hear more of his lectures."¹⁰ As of the writing of this paper, we still do not know which works James is referring to here, but around that time, Dewey writes on psychology, education, schools, ethics, culture-epoch theory, metaphysics and much more.¹¹

Later in a letter to Sarah Wyman Whitman of October 1903, James writes,

Chicago University has during the past 6 months given birth to the fruit of its 10 years of gestation under John Dewey. The result is wonderful – a *real School*, and *real Thought*. Important thought too! Did you ever hear of such a City or such a University? Here we have thought, but no school. At Yale a school but no thought. Chicago has both.¹²

Here we see the seeds of what James refers to by Dewey's inspiration in *Pragmatism*.¹³ Dewey, or so James believes, has really developed a school of thought, and of course, James sees the way in which his work is congruous with it.

In a letter to F. C. S. Schiller from April of 1906, James describes his agreement with Dewey's rejection of treating the world as propositional. Some see philosophy as the logical working out of the world's problems, only because the world is a set of propositions or facts that can be analyzed logically. Dewey, with his emphasis on the complexity of the world of experience, recognizes early that we must not view experience in such a limited fashion. An excellent example is his reply to James's discussion of reflexes, in "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology."¹⁴ In that article, Dewey notes the mechanistic rendition of reflexes and the story that psychology has been telling about them with regard to memory and habit formation. Dewey

criticizes the Meynert scheme, which James introduces, for not at all taking into account the complexity of the environment in which a child encounters stimuli. Dewey shows the continually popular notions of stimulus and response to be dangerously oversimplified. It is more accurate to say that stimulus and response are two sides of one thing – experience. And, in a sense, response comes first. The child who reaches for a candle and learns from the burn was not *struck* by a stimulus. He or she *found* it interesting and selected it for attention over any number of possible subject matters. James appreciates and accepts Dewey’s version of the world as complex and not merely “sentenced.” Though we describe experience linguistically, experience itself is not immediately sentenced. To Schiller, James writes, “Dewey’s powerful stuff seems also to ring the death knell of a sentenced world. Yet none of *them* will see it – Taylor will still write his refutations etc, etc, when the living world will be all drifting after *us*.”¹⁵ Here we have an explicit reference from James, taking Dewey and himself to be working almost as a team on pulling scholarship out into the world of the living, bringing intelligence to life outside the oppressive confines of academic tradition.

In another letter to Schiller, from August of 1906, James writes, “I find Dewey’s article ... [‘The Experimental Theory of Knowledge,’¹⁶] *most illuminating & masterly*.”¹⁷ Among the works James has yet to write at this point are *Pragmatism, The Meaning of Truth, A Pluralistic Universe, Some Problems of Philosophy*, as well as numerous articles.

As Robert T. Westbrook points out, when Dewey criticized an element of James’s work, James then reconsidered. Westbrook writes,

Dewey was selective in what he incorporated into his thought from the *Principles*, for it was a profoundly conflicted, even contradictory, text, torn between epistemological dualism and an antidualistic “radical empiricism” grounded in evolutionary biology. Dewey was sharply critical of remnants of dualism and “subjectivism” in James’s thinking, while at the same time he responded enthusiastically to the “objective” biological strain—the rooting of human psychology in organic experience and history—that he found in the *Principles*.¹⁸

If Westbrook is right, then it seems Dewey’s strong criticism of James’s dualisms could have been an important reason why James distanced himself from dualistic thinking, to be the proud expositor of “radical empiricism” as a focused and important approach to inquiry.

One last letter by James bears mentioning here before we proceed to the specifics of Dewey's encouragement and advice for James. In a kind letter to Dewey from August of 1908, James writes to Dewey about his contribution to a volume in James's honor.¹⁹ Dewey's article, "Does Reality Possess Practical Character?" inspires James's words as follows:

Your own contribution is to my mind the most *weighty* – unless perhaps Strong's should prove to be so. I rejoice exceedingly that you should have got it out. No one yet has succeeded, it seems to me, in jumping into the centre of your vision. Once there, all the perspectives are clear and open; and when you or some one else of us shall have spoken the exact word that opens the centre to everyone, mediating between it and the old categories and prejudices, people will wonder that there ever could have been any other philosophy. That is the philosophy of the future, I'll bet my life.²⁰

It is easy to envision James as one who is simply aware of Dewey's work when he gives his Lowell Lectures on *Pragmatism*, for instance. The centrality of Dewey's thought for James, however, is dramatically underestimated given that presumption.

DEWEY'S ENCOURAGEMENT OF JAMES

In *The Necessity of Pragmatism*, Ralph Sleeper shows the importance of Dewey's logical theory for the development of pragmatism and its influence on James, though this latter relation is not his focus. He makes clear the fact that Dewey follows James with respect to experience, but differs with him with regard to necessity. Dewey's work against James's psychologism of necessity – making necessity a matter of mental structure – represents a great divergence between them. For Dewey, the "superstition of necessity" is a logical consequence of James's account of experience in the *Principles*. Yet, James would not come to see necessity in the way Dewey does until later in life.

Not long after the publication of James's *Principles*, Dewey writes him an excited letter²¹ about an inspiring reporter whom Dewey has met. Franklin Ford, previously affiliated with *Bradstreet's* publications in New York, inspires Dewey to write James the following in June of 1891:

... [T]here is something back (& something ahead) of whatever freedom of sight & treatment there is in my ethics. I got it from Franklin Ford to whom I refer in the preface ... Ford who was a newspaperman (formerly Editor of *Bradstreets* in N.Y.) with no previous [philosophical] training had been led by his newspaper experience to study, as a practical question the social bearings of intelligence & its distribution ... Well, he identified the question of inquiry with, in philosophical terms, the question of the relation of intelligence to the objective world – is the former free to move in relation to the latter or not? So he studied out the following questions (1) The conditions & effects of the distribution of intelligence especially with reference to inquiry, or the selling of truth as a business; (2) the present (or past) hindrances to its free play, in the way of class interests or (3) the present conditions, in the railway, the telegraph &c for effectively securing the freedom of intelligence – that is, its movement in the world of social fact, and (4) the resulting organization ...

Now I am simply reducing what was a wonderful personal experience to a crude bit of cataloging, but I hope it may arouse your interest in the man and his work...

... [P]hilosophy has been the assertion of [the] unity of intelligence & the external world in idea or subjectively, while if true in idea it must finally secure the conditions of its objective expression. And secondly I believe that a tremendous movement is impending when the intellectual forces which have been gathering since the Renaissance & Reformation shall demand complete free movement, and, by getting their physical leverage in the telegraph & printing press shall through free inquiry in a centralized way, demand the authority of all other so-called authorities.²²

What we find here is a muddled message from Dewey to James, in excitement over a new way of thinking that inspires Dewey in its democratic promise. At this point, Dewey is still quite young, and is getting his own philosophical feet wet. Nevertheless, there is no doubt to the numerous connections one can easily make between Ford's inspiration of Dewey and Dewey's encouragements of James into philosophical issues of pragmatism and democratic pluralism.

While the notion of “intelligence” is brought up in James, and, while it plays an important role in his philosophy, it is not developed until Dewey takes the notion further.

In this letter we see Dewey’s invitation for James to join in the project of democratic intelligence and philosophy. The salient notion here is the sense in which philosophy, ideas, facts, and truth, all have practical value for life, and can work in the effort of social and political improvement. I want to suggest the following three types of connection between this letter and developments in James’s later philosophy.

1. *Concerning pragmatism.* In this letter, we see explicit mention of the idea that truth has a cash value – literally for the journalist. Truth can be “sold,” but not in the sense that it can be changed on whim for a buck. Rather, objective aspects of the world and its truth are of great value, *cash value*. This is a clear and recurrent theme in James’s later philosophical work on pragmatism. One other element seems clearly relatable to even more technical understandings of pragmatism, though the passage is admittedly jumbled. Dewey writes about the need for ideas to secure consequences in the objective world. It is not enough for ideas to be true only subjectively for the idealist. Ideas must have value and meaning in real life.

2. *Concerning pluralism.* On the question of the freedom of intelligence, we can see elements of epistemology and metaphysics. I say both here because if there are objective and subjective features to the world, a common theme for James and Dewey, then the idea that a movement is in the works, according to Dewey, which is similar to the Reformation, implies that the movement in question is one which shatters the centralization of authority in religious, or in this case epistemological leaders. That is, each individual’s religious liberties were expanded in validating individuals’ direct experience of religion in the Reformation, and similarly, social intelligence is valued in democracy, validating each individual’s right and freedom to voice concerns of his or her own, contributing to public inquiry into social problems. Various world views must be acknowledged, according to James’s later writings, in the working out of belief, and here we see Dewey bubbling over with his excitement in encouraging James to make the connection as well.²³

3. *Concerning religion.* What I have just mentioned about James’s pluralism is noticeable too in his work on religion. Before the Reformation, there were strong divisions of class and authority in religious deliberations. Dewey notes this parallel in the Ford letter when describing Ford’s desire to overcome class interests’ influence on the distribution of intelligence.

Fundamentally, Dewey urges James to consider the validity of the experiences of a plurality of people, and Dewey does this with explicit reference to a tremendous movement like the Reformation. This set of ideas fuses four crucial elements of James's later thought: a, religion; b, pluralism; c, the validation of individuals' experiences; and d, the challenging of conventional authorities.

A few months later, in November of 1891, Dewey asks James the following influential question: "If the organic theory of intelligence is true as theory isn't it time something was done to make it true as fact, that is as practice? This inquiry has been bottled up in my mind so long that it now discharges at you as the most convenient target."²⁴ Dewey's position with regard to the organic nature of intelligence is not James's, though it is an extension of his psychology. James's notion of intelligence demands much working out – a task which Dewey takes up. What we find here, however, is the thread of asking about the *use* of the organic theory of intelligence. That is to say, why not develop a practical method based upon the theory of intelligence got from Darwin and James's psychology? This question, posed only a year after the publication of the *Principles* is an incisive prompting to get James thinking about the grander issues of philosophy and how they can be addressed by a method based on his psychological theory.

Aside from these foundational questions and urgings, Dewey also advises James elsewhere on the specifics of his work and on the burgeoning pragmatic method. In December of 1903, Dewey writes James about the habit of making a "personal tool out of discussion & inquiry out of a 'point of view' – And that is a good criterion – for a pragmatist anyway." He continues,

"Truth for its own sake" has upon complete pragmatic principles it seems to me not only a justification, but an absolutely indispensable function – without which the last word would be with an "environment" which finally determines what is & what isn't useful – and it make[s] little difference whether this environment is called "matter" or a complete system of thought-relations, or Experience per Bradley, or per Royce.²⁵

The idea we see here is that the search for truth for its own sake minimizes bias in inquiry, which for that reason is valuable and pragmatic as such. It would be a mistake to think that Dewey was

James's sole inspiration for pragmatism, of course. What I suggest is that Dewey was more of a sympathetic motivator, passionate about the same project. To give the development of pragmatism some perspective, James presents his early pragmatic essay, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," in 1898 in Berkeley, California. Nevertheless, Dewey represents an important colleague for James, not merely a follower.

In many senses, James's psychology, particularly in relation to habits, is tied to his ethical views. Indeed, Dewey takes this connection and runs with it. Education becomes the foundational ethical endeavor of living well in a community – reinforcing good habits through the use of intelligent, social inquiry. This connection, sown in James's *Principles*, is pushed further by Dewey in November of 1904. Regarding James's empiricism and its relation to the metaphysics that underlies Pragmatism, Dewey writes,

Of course, we come back afterward everywhere, to the difficulty of stating the nature & reasons of the fact that the objective, – the fire which burns, –is pliable, & submits to the exactions which we, in our subjective or psychical capacity, make of upon it – But if it be true, as it seems to me to be true, that the subjective is identical with reference to it functioning in an autobiography, this is just the fundamental question of morals – the interaction of persons and things –, or ... the relation of personal freedom & the stable order. And one of the many advantages of the pragmatic approach is that it identifies this ethical problem with the general problem of the relations of the objective & subjective in experience, instead of ... leaving the ethical in a small corner by ... itself.²⁶

The ethical, according to both James and Dewey, is a matter that pervades all of our experience. These thinkers find the notion of a distinction between matters of fact and matters of value misguided. Surely, this is not to deny the value of science. Rather, science, inquiry, and knowledge all point toward the same notion of intelligence, the formation of good, habituated behavior. As such, science itself is an ethical endeavor, as is art, and both just as much as politics.

In 1909, the year before James's death, Dewey pushed James to clarify his notions of pragmatism and radical empiricism. Dewey felt "impertinent enough to ask" about particular essays and phrasings. In February of 1909, he writes,

You will pardon this suggestion I hope but it seems to me that you concede, for the sake of better understanding, to the critic that ‘a happening is the ... same as a truth’ is to admit the very point in which his own confusion resides, and by encouraging him in that confusion ... prevent exactly the better understanding which you have aimed at?²⁷

Dewey here corrects James’s often overreaching efforts to explain to others the pragmatic point of view and its theory of truth. It is likely that James’s effort was due to his great desire to be inclusive and understanding of those who did not yet grasp his ideas. What distinguishes James and Dewey from so many others is their attention to the questions not only of philosophy, but *about* philosophy. What is it good for? How can it help us live well? Dewey also warned James to work more on the project of his germinal notion of pluralism, which Dewey saw as foundational to James’s democratic spirit.

I hope that what I have said so far has done enough to show the rich relationship these two shared in philosophy. A towering intellect in his own right, James nevertheless was certainly encouraged in Dewey’s engagements with him. The next section explores this relationship with focus on the theme of democracy and pluralism.

DEMOCRACY AND PLURALISM

In this section, I will show some of the ways that Dewey urged James to focus on the matter of pluralism and democratic political ideals, such as the matter of social intelligence that arose in Dewey’s letter about Ford.

A brief passage in Dewey’s letter to James from 1903 focuses on pluralism. Keep in mind, James’s *A Pluralistic Universe* was published six years later, in 1909. In 1903, Dewey advises James, “I think you must state your Plurality as a matter of historic significance (& hence of relativity) as well as the Universal, Unity &c.”²⁸ Dewey was an important and most careful reader of James’s work. What is more, Dewey gained James’s respect early in his career. So, when Dewey writes James with a recommendation concerning his work and what would be worth developing further, James is likely to have listened.

So far an important element of my categorization of James depends upon the idea that pluralism is important for democracy. Although James is justly criticized as one who is insufficiently political,²⁹ he nevertheless is concerned with issues foundational to democracy. Dewey believes that the elements essential to what "...democracy really means..." include "...its essential pluralism, experimentalism and consequent toleration." And, he continues, "it may be that the best thing which can happen to the ideal of democracy is to be put on the defensive. For then it will no longer remain a vague optimism, a weak benevolent aspiration, at the mercy of favorable circumstances ... It will recognize the infinite variety of human nature, and the infinite plurality of purposes for which men associate themselves together."³⁰ The notion that it is good for democracy to be on the defensive evokes James's chapter on habit in the *Principles* – one must keep one's habits flexible and adaptable, or else they will harden like any other undemocratic monism.

Recall the passage in Dewey's letter to James about Ford. Already at that point Dewey was emphasizing to James the importance of social intelligence and the tremendous movement that parallels the religious Reformation. We each have a part to play in the search for truth, because truth for James and Dewey is perspectival. Thus, democracy, if it is to be grounded on intelligent social inquiry, as Dewey would insist it must be, demands that the many different and changing voices contribute to the pursuit and exploitation of the fullest inquiry possible. With the break from accepted religious authorities that came with the Reformation, so too did Dewey and James see the potential for freer and greater adaptability of social practices. As scholar James T. Kloppenberg has written regarding James's political philosophy, "Norms cannot be imposed on a polity any more than they can be imposed on an individual; they must be chosen voluntarily and validated in action by the community. As I have noted, James described history as the ongoing effort to 'find the more and more inclusive ideal.'"³¹ Here we see the sense in which consent is a concept that is better suited to democratic theory if a more inclusive and adaptable form of government is maintained, allowing future generations their own opportunity to accept or reject the practices and decisions of previous generations.

One of the ways that James showed his desire to address a variety of audiences was evident even in his presentational style. In a letter to Arthur F. Bentley of August 1942, Dewey writes,

What you say about the tendency of James to adapt himself to the audience he was addressing is sound and shrewd. Of course we all do it to some extent, but James to an unusual degree. I think there were two causes. James had a democratic respect for the beliefs of others if they were sincere – (he was inclined probably to be a little overgenerous in assuming sincerity) and he was an artist with the artist[']s desire to communicate.³²

The trait Dewey describes here, of adapting to one's audience, is a democratic virtue. Indeed, in Plato's dialogues, Socrates strays from his dialectical method in the *Gorgias*, as his interlocutors demand speeches and pontification. James, no doubt, believes in adaptation, as does Dewey. The skill of varying one's approach to different situations is vital for natural, biological endeavors just as much as it is for social, ethical, and educational ones. When the student does not learn the notion or process this way, you say it or present it in another way until he or she does. Adaptation and attention to differences and pluralities are the mark of the democratic and of its foundation – education.

What sort of pluralism are we talking about in James's work? In Dewey's article, "Pragmatic Acquiescence," he describes the influence on James of the pioneer life. Dewey replies to Lewis Mumford's criticism that James mistakes the experiences of a generation – the pioneers – for the experience of all. Dewey explains that James's pluralistic, pioneer analogy describes the universe as "...not all closed and settled, which is still in some respects indeterminate and in the making, which is adventurous and which implicates all who share in it, whether by acting or believing, in its own perils." Dewey continues, "one who has not studied James patiently enough to learn how this idea is wrought into his treatment of all special topics, from the will to believe to his pluralism, from his empiricism to his moral and religious ideas, has not got far in knowledge of James."³³ All in peril have a claim and a stake in knowledge of public problems. Dewey here is pointing out the importance of understanding James's grand, vital view of the universe that bubbles up in all his theories. Dewey believes, furthermore, that James is the primary proponent of this view. Elsewhere he writes, "The term pluralism is very recent in English ... James has probably done more than anyone else to give it currency, in his *Will to Believe* (see preface in particular)."³⁴

It is important to see the relation between pluralism and democracy for both Dewey and James. Among the views that each fought was the immutable: for instance, the idea of the great chain of being,³⁵ the notion that human beings are part of a set of unchanging things in the world, ranked higher or lower on a spectrum of proximity to the divine. When Dewey ventured to criticize the notion that the so-called “savages” were indeed under-developed white persons, James was very much in agreement with Dewey’s sentiment. In fact, in a letter to Dewey from September of 1902, James writes,

Having just read your “Savage Mind” article in the Psych. Rev. for May, I cannot refrain from thanking you for a thing so “concrete” and full of veracious psychological imagination. Also humane, and calculated to dampen the conceit of our all destroying “Civilization.” Pray keep up that line of study.³⁶

James is referring, of course, to Dewey’s “Interpretation of Savage Mind.”³⁷ In that article, Dewey rejects the notion that the so-called savages have inferior or undeveloped minds. He writes,

The psychical attitudes and traits of the savage are more than stages through which mind has passed, leaving them behind. They are outgrowths which have entered decisively into further evolution, and as such form an integral part of the framework of present mental organization. Such positive significance is commonly attributed, in theory at least, to animal mind; but the mental structure of the savage, which presumably has an even greater relevancy for genetic psychology, is strangely neglected.³⁸

The democratic spirit in which James and Dewey continually grow finds an important source in this notion of transition and variability.

I have mentioned that the idea of consent is a way to link the notion of pluralism with democracy. It bears fleshing out in relation to the ideas of transition and variability. These two ideas arose to prominence in James’s and Dewey’s thinking first as biological ideas. Organisms survive as species when they are able to adapt to their environments. When you consider James and Dewey’s historical context, with the Civil War only a generation earlier than theirs, the idea

of adaptability would have appeared crucial for government as much as for species. The country was rebuilding after a conflict concerning the consent or dissent that some Americans exhibited with regard to the government. Americans, as Dewey noted in the Ford letter, were growing a movement similar to the Reformation. Each citizen has a direct contribution and value in considering the true or best government. Both James and Dewey fought the social contract tradition's idea of consent, handed down through theory and ahistorical ideas. Consider, by contrast, James's statement in his essay, "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," that "there is no such thing possible as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance."³⁹ Ethics must be developed, not in idea prior to engagement with others, but in the transactions among different individuals who each brings a unique perspective to the table.

Even in Dewey's early essays, though he is still entrenched in his Hegelianism, we find the spirit of democracy emerging and in a way that James takes up later in the name of pluralism. It offers a starting point for what we find later in the article on savage mind. Dewey writes,

In primitive societies morality is identified with the customs of the community; and these customs, receiving religious sanction, are thus binding religiously as well as morally. This fact tends to retard the growth of any theory of conduct. Custom when consecrated by religion is the essence of conservatism.⁴⁰

Here, Dewey lays out the danger of conservatism – the doctrine of holding a monistic, unchanging view of the world. It is solidified in religion, and halts moral progress. If the world is indeed always changing in the way James later describes, the most dangerous position one can hold is an unchanging one. Democracy demands adaptation, malleability, openness and experimentation. It demands an ethical approach that is suited for the type of changing universe we inhabit.

Whenever the notions of change, adaptation, and pluralism are mentioned, there are those who cringe at the danger these words represent to the conservative way of life: if we hold a pluralistic view of the world and values, then everything will become meaningless. Discussing just this problem raised by critics of James, Dewey writes,

James shows us that people were laboring under a misapprehension when they feared that the concept of pluralism would lead to chaos, and when they therefore

insisted upon forcing all experience into one mold of system and unity. But as a matter of fact, if we change our viewpoint and see human experience as a stream of consciousness which runs ceaselessly, there is need for both monism and pluralism in interpreting the phenomenon. In any case, human experience has ceased to be a “thing,” a dead concept; it is a living entity, and may be examined in a monistic frame of reference, or in a pluralistic one, as the nature of the occasion demands.⁴¹

Here, Dewey makes sure the point is clear – that pluralism is not an invariable notion to employ in all cases. Indeed, monism is sometimes called for depending on the situation at hand.

CONCLUSION

Much of this discussion has been phrased by Dewey’s pen. I take this approach to show where in Dewey’s work we might see the areas that James was encouraged in examining the democratic matter of a practical philosophy attentive to the societal changes surrounding them in their pluralistic contemporary context.⁴² The ultimate evidence of James’s spirit of democracy, however, is in his own words. In a letter to Ralph Barton Perry of July 1909, James sums up his democratic sentiment in his discussion of what he likes of Perry’s *The Moral Economy*.⁴³ He writes, “What I care for most is the reasoned faith in radical democracy, and the smiting and sweeping sentences in which every now and then it comes to the fore, scouting the pedantic, conventional, and scholastic alternatives, whatever they may be.”⁴⁴ James is a passionate advocate of the value of all people in the effort to live well together. He sees himself as a thinker who focuses on the nature behind such projects, such as what Dewey calls the infinite variety of human nature. We see these tendencies elsewhere, however. It is not only in Perry’s book that this tendency of James’s comes out. We find it in his beginnings in medicine, his social endeavor in the science of psychology, in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, in his *Will to Believe*, and most certainly, in his later work, *A Pluralistic Universe*. What makes one hesitate to call James democratic thinker is primarily the sense in which he seems introspective. Although his *Pragmatism* is more extroverted, his work on religion, psychology, and belief are generally more focused on the individual’s experience than Dewey seems to be. But, for James, the issue is not solitary. His are always issues that we all must face, and his spirit of openness

and interest in the pluralistic humility of respecting how others experience the world is exemplary of the democratic ideal.

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NOTES

¹ Authors who have argued this point of view in a variety of ways have included James T. Kloppenberg, Andrew F. Smith, Joshua Miller, and David Schlosberg. In a unique way, Colin Koopman has argued that James was a political thinker, but one focused on “personal freedom.” Koopman develops this unique approach in his article, “William James’s Politics of Personal Freedom,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 19, 2 (2005): 175–86.

² Andrew F. Smith offers a succinct statement of the scholarship that sees James as an individualistic thinker. See Andrew F. Smith, “Communication and Conviction: A Jamesian Contribution to Deliberative Democracy,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 21, 4 (2007): 259–274. See especially 262, where Smith cites Westbrook and West. Consider also that George Cotkin characterized James’s pluralism as “anarchistic,” which “impelled him to be wary of all governments, be they capitalist, socialist, and of the institutionalization of philosophy and science,” in *William James, Public Philosopher* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 17.

³ Westbrook describes James as a stubborn individualist in *Democratic Hope: Pragmatism and the Politics of Truth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 67. Once again, I am indebted to Andrew F. Smith for pointing me to this passage, “Communication and Conviction,” 262.

⁴ Larry A. Hickman, Review of Sleeper’s *The Necessity of Pragmatism* in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* XXIII, 3 (Summer, 1987): 446–453. Excerpt found on page 452. Brackets added.

⁵ Ignas K. Skrupleakis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley, eds. *The Correspondence of William James, Volume 6, 1885–1889* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 187. Referred to hereafter as *James Correspondence*, followed by the volume number and dates. Brackets added.

⁶ *James Correspondence*, volume 7, 1890–1894, 162–163.

⁷ *The correspondence of John Dewey, 1859–1952, 2nd edition*. General editor, Larry A. Hickman; editors, Barbara Levine, Anne Sharpe, Harriet Furst Simon (Charlottesville, VA : IntelLex Corp., 2001), 1892.02.08 (00463). Source will be referred to hereafter as *Dewey Correspondence*.

⁸ *Dewey Correspondence*, 1904.01.20 (00926).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1907.11.28 (04579).

¹⁰ *The Dewey Correspondence*, 1896.07.23, (09530).

¹¹ Dewey's important "Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology" article was first published in 1896, but it was probably not this paper that James heard, since Dewey later asks James in a letter whether he has read it. It was first published in *Psychological Review*, 3 (1896): 357–70. This evidence is inconclusive, however.

¹² *James Correspondence*, volume 10, 1902–1905, 324.

¹³ See, for example, William James, "What Pragmatism Means," in '*Pragmatism*' and '*The Meaning of Truth*' (Harvard University Press, 2000), 34–37.

¹⁴ First published in *Psychological Review*, III (July 1896), 357–70.

¹⁵ *James Correspondence*, volume 11, 1905–1908, 197.

¹⁶ First published in *Mind*, n.s., 15, July 1906, 293–307.

¹⁷ *James Correspondence*, volume 11, 1905–1908, 253.

¹⁸ From Robert T. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 66.

¹⁹ *Essays, Philosophical and Psychological, in Honor of William James*, Professor in Harvard University, by his Colleagues at Columbia University (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 53–80.

²⁰ *James Correspondence*, volume 12, 1908–1910, 73.

²¹ Robert T. Westbrook discusses this letter in *John Dewey and American Philosophy*, 54–55.

²² *Dewey Correspondence*, 1891.06.03, (00460).

²³ I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for *William James Studies* for pointing out this element in James's social thought.

²⁴ *Dewey Correspondence*, 1891.11.22, (00461).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1903.12.19, (00802). Brackets added.

²⁶ *Dewey Correspondence*, 1904.11.21, (00902).

²⁷ *Dewey Correspondence*, 1909.02.24, (04580).

²⁸ *James Correspondence*, volume 10, 1902–1905, 215. The cited passage is found in a parenthetical note.

²⁹ According to Sleeper, "Whereas James remained, as even a sympathetic critic has remarked, 'self-centered and abysmally ignorant of massive social inequities,' Dewey's melioristic conception of philosophy drove him to unrelenting criticism of those inequities." This passage is quoted from *The*

Necessity of Pragmatism, 202. The “sympathetic critic” he mentions is none other than John J. McDermott. Sleeper refers to McDermott’s review of Barzun’s *A Stroll with William James*, published in *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 1 (1984): 127.

³⁰John Dewey, “Social Absolutism,” *John Dewey, The Middle Works, 1899–1924, Volume 13: 1921–1922*, Edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 315.

³¹James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 173.

³²*Dewey Correspondence*, 1942.08.08, (15238).

³³John Dewey, “The Pragmatic Acquiescence” *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925–1953, Volume 3: 1927–1928*, Edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 149.

³⁴John Dewey, “Contributions to Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology” *John Dewey, The Middle Works, 1899–1924, Volume 2: 1902–1903*, Edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 204.

³⁵See, for example, Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of and Idea*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1960).

³⁶*James Correspondence*, volume 10, 1902–1905, 138.

³⁷First published in *Psychological Review* 9 (1902): 217–30.

³⁸John Dewey, “Interpretation of Savage Mind,” as found in *John Dewey, The Middle Works, 1899–1924, Volume 2: 1902–1903*, Edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 39.

³⁹William James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1897/1956), 184.

⁴⁰John Dewey, “Moral Philosophy,” *John Dewey, The Early Works, 1882–1898, Volume 4: 1893–1894, Early Essays and The Study of Ethics, A Syllabus* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 132.

⁴¹John Dewey, “Three Contemporary Philosophers,” *John Dewey, The Middle Works, 1899–1924, Volume 12: 1920*, Edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 211.

⁴²Consider for instance the pioneer movement and the Haymarket affair.

⁴³Ralph Barton Perry, *The Moral Economy* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909).

⁴⁴*James Correspondence*, volume 12, 1908–1910.

WILLIAM JAMES AS AMERICAN PLATO?

SCOTT SINCLAIR

ABSTRACT

Alfred North Whitehead wrote a letter to Charles Hartshorne in 1936 in which he referred to William James as the American Plato. Especially given Whitehead's admiration of Plato, this was a high compliment to James. What was the basis for this compliment and analogy? In responding to that question beyond the partial and scattered references provided by Whitehead, this article briefly explores the following aspects of the thought of James in relation to Whitehead: the one and the many, the denial of Cartesian dualism, James's background in physiology, refutation of Zeno's paradoxes, religious experience, and other kinships. In the end, the author agrees with Robert Neville that James had seminal ideas which could correctly result in a complimentary analogy with Plato. Therefore, a greater focus on the important thought of James is a needed challenge in contemporary philosophy.

Michel Weber provided a very helpful article in two parts entitled, "Whitehead's Reading of James and Its Context," in the spring 2002 and fall 2003 editions of *Streams of William James*. Weber began his article with a reference to Bertrand Russell: "When Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) visited Harvard in 1936, 'there were two heroes in his lectures – Plato and James.'"¹ Although he goes on to affirm that Whitehead could have said the same, Weber either overlooks the fact, or is not aware, that Whitehead actually did compare James to Plato in his January 2, 1936 hand-written letter to Charles Hartshorne, as printed by Whitehead's biographer, Victor Lowe:

European philosophy has gone dry, and cannot make any worthwhile use of the results of nineteenth century scholarship. It is in chains to the sanctified presuppositions derived from later Greek thought My belief is that the effective founders of the renaissance in American philosophy are Charles Peirce

and William James. Of these men, W. J. is the analogue to Plato, and C. P. to Aristotle, though the time-order does not correspond, and the analogy must not be pressed too far. Have you read Ralph Perry's book (2 vols.) on James? It is a wonderful disclosure of the living repercussions of late 19th century thought on a sensitive genius. It is reminiscent of the Platonic Dialogues. W. J.'s pragmatic descendants have been doing their best to trivialize his meanings in the notions of *Radical* Empiricism, Pragmatism, Rationalization. But I admit W. J. was weak on Rationalization. Also he expressed himself by the dangerous method of over-statement (2.345).²

What was it about William James that both reminded Whitehead of Plato and in doing so made James such a crucial source for Whitehead? In responding to this question, Weber is a good beginning point. Weber's stated goal was to "quote all the explicit occurrences of James in Whitehead's corpus and to weave them into a synthetic argument (Weber 1.18)." While in basic agreement with Weber, I propose some expansions and extensions to his article which should more fully complete the response to the question of the Plato/James analogy.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Weber uses a Whiteheadian quotation from *MT* listing "four great thinkers," as being Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, and James, to orient his background discussion. Without revisiting this section, suffice it to say that Whitehead saw Plato and James as having the similar creative genius, flashes of insight, or intuitive capacities which were later systematized by their followers. Appendix One of this work lists in *chronological order* all the explicit references given by Whitehead to James as cited by Weber, along with some additional implicit references which I later describe.

It is fair to say that from his youth Plato was Whitehead's favorite ancient philosopher as illustrated by his famous comment: "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato (*PR* 39)."³ Consequently, the naming of James as the American Plato seems to be the highest possible Whiteheadian praise. Upon Whitehead's arrival at Harvard in 1924, he is described as starting

his first lecture by saying “what an honor it was to be at Harvard – the university of William James (Lowe 2.141).” The praise of James is in the opening pages of *Science and the Modern World* (SMW, 1925), where Whitehead speaks of William James as an “adorable genius” (SMW 2) and later Whitehead identifies James as contributing to “the inauguration of a new stage in philosophy (SMW 143).” William James once wrote in a letter to his brother Henry of his problem in writing his great treatise, *The Principles of Psychology*: “I have to forge every sentence in the teeth of irreducible and stubborn facts” (Lowe 2.159). If imitation is the highest form of flattery, then Whitehead’s repeated use in his writings of James’s expression “irreducible and stubborn facts” also demonstrates Whitehead’s implicit admiration (SMW 2,3).⁴

In the Preface of *Process and Reality* (PR, 1929), Whitehead names Bergson, William James, and John Dewey as those that he is “greatly indebted to” and he writes that “one of my preoccupations has been to *rescue* their type of thought from the charge of *anti-intellectualism* (PR xii, my italics).”⁵ On the issue of James’s anti-intellectualism, Marcus Ford seems to agree with Whitehead when he writes: “For all its originality and insightfulness, James’s thought is unsystematic and often confused” (91).⁶ In attempting to systematize James’s thought, Ford provides eight “salient concepts” which he then uses to compare with features of Whitehead’s system. His conclusion, which is consistent with Craig Eisendrath’s basic thesis, is that “Whitehead’s process philosophy provides the basis for just such a development [i.e., of James’s thought]. This is hardly coincidental; one of Whitehead’s aims was to ‘rescue’ James’s philosophy . . . I think that Whitehead succeeds in this (Ford 107).”⁷ Although it is beyond the focus of this work to detail Ford’s book, it certainly supports the importance of the James-Whitehead relationship. Near the end of his life Whitehead seems to return to this topic in stating that James’s “system of philosophy remained incomplete (*Dialogues* 333; Weber 1.22)” So what elements of William James’s thought were so appealing to Whitehead?

That question is partially answered by the last and longest reference to James written by Whitehead in *Modes of Thought* (1938):

Finally, there is William James, essentially a modern man. His mind was adequately based upon the learning of the past. But the essence of his greatness was his marvelous sensitivity to the ideas of the present. He knew the world in which he lived, by travel, by personal relations with its leading men, by the

variety of his own studies. He systematized; but above all he assembled. His intellectual life was one protest against the dismissal of experience in the interest of system. He had discovered intuitively the great truth with which modern logic is now wrestling (*MT* 3; Weber 1.20).

Although this description provides a generalized assessment of James, Whitehead still does not provide the particular aspects of James's thought that seem to be necessary to rank him with Plato and Aristotle.

FOCI OF COMPARISON

Weber organizes his comparison of Whitehead and James around "stylistic similarities" and four "*explicit* conceptual points . . . epochal theory of time, the concept of feeling, the functional concept of consciousness, and the definition of the concept of religion (Weber 2.26)." While this is fine as far as it goes, the following expansions of some of his points and extensions to additional points should more fully address why Whitehead compared James to Plato.

James's pragmatic description of "The One and the Many:" Weber is correct in identifying the first explicit indication of Whitehead's familiarity with James in an article entitled "Mathematics" which is contained in the 11th issue of *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1911) and reprinted in *A Philosopher Looks at Science* (PLS 108; Weber 2.29-30). In the process of explaining the philosophical history of "the one and the many," Whitehead provides the footnote: "Cf. *Pragmatism: a New Name for some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907)." Although the footnote does not provide specific pages and does not even bother to name William James, it does demonstrate his knowledge of James's work -- Whitehead had presumably read the book. Whitehead's reference is apparently to James's lecture four, "The One and the Many," in which James uses a pragmatic method to try to explain what he calls after "long brooding over it . . . the most central of all philosophic problems"(8).⁸

Unfortunately, Weber only comments on this reference in the last few pages of his Epilogue, almost as an afterthought. There are at least three important points to be made of this early Whitehead-to-James reference. First, the philosophical topic of the one and many in general has a rich history among various philosophers, but Plato has to be considered to be a

central source. The topic is featured in *Timaeus* to which Whitehead repeatedly refers.⁹ Consequently, this early Whiteheadian reference to James would have suggested the James-Plato analogy, which this work is considering. Second, James's discussion in this chapter pragmatically depicts the relation of the one and the many through expressions including continuous "hanging together," lines of influence, causal unity, generic unity, some degree of teleological unity of purpose, and aesthetic union. These various expressions are suggestive of precisely the speculative and interrelational philosophy that Whitehead later produced in *PR* in which the "one and the many" was given priority. In fact, Whitehead chooses to call creativity, many, and one his ultimate notions or Category of the Ultimate of his entire cosmological philosophy (*PR* 21).

Finally, this first Whiteheadian reference to James also explicitly relates Whitehead to pragmatism, which James is promoting in this book, although naming Charles Sanders Peirce as the founder. There are two aspects to this. First, I think that Whitehead had a developmental relation to pragmatism. In the first stage, between 1911 and approximately 1926, he either did not refer to pragmatism or used it in ways that connoted negativity or skepticism. The second stage began shortly after *RM* (1926) and extended to the completion of *PR* (1929). During this stage Whitehead made only positive references to pragmatism, associates it with his critical move in asserting the cosmological principle, and referred to it more often than in any other period. The third stage began after the completion of *PR* and continued until his death in 1947. This stage has fewer references to pragmatism and increased explanations of its meaning. Although it is beyond the scope of this work to document this proposal, Appendix Two provides a chronological listing of Whitehead's many references to pragmatism – inspired at least to some degree by James's pragmatism.

A second aspect of Whitehead's relation to pragmatism is associated with his assessment of religion. In *RM*, Whitehead writes about a stage in religious evolution of "uncriticized [i.e., unexamined] belief:" "the stage of satisfactory ritual and of satisfied belief *without impulse towards higher things*. Such religion satisfies the pragmatic test: It works, and thereby claims that it be *awarded the prize* for truth (*RM* 28, with my italics)." After describing this unexamined stage of religion that does not seek for higher things, he seems to take on a derogatory tone in maintaining that it still wants to be awarded the prize for truth, even though it never sought higher things. Although Whitehead does not explicitly refer to James in this

reference, one of the supposed benefits of pragmatism given by James in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907) is religious: “she [pragmatism] widens the field of search for God Pragmatism is willing to take anything She will count mystical experiences if they have practical consequence. She will take a god who lives in the very dirt of private fact Her only test of probable truth is what works” (157)¹⁰ Since James’s pragmatic basis for religion was fairly well known, it is difficult to not think that Whitehead’s criticism included him, to some degree.

James’s denial of Cartesian Dualism: The first extended treatment that Whitehead provides on James in *SMW*, which Weber organizes under the heading “the functional concept of consciousness,” is in the ninth chapter where he praises James as bringing about “the inauguration of a new stage in philosophy (*SMW* 143).”¹¹ He quotes the following statement from James’s 1904 essay, “Does Consciousness Exist:”

To deny plumply that ‘consciousness’ exists seems so absurd on the face of it – for undeniably ‘thoughts’ do exist – that I fear some readers will follow me no farther. Let me then immediately explain that I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function. There is, I mean no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made; but there is a function in experience which thoughts perform, and for the performance of which this quality of being is invoked. That function is *knowing*. ‘Consciousness’ is supposed necessary to explain the fact that things not only are, but get reported, are known.¹²

The significance of this passage for Whitehead is that it marks a break from the mind/body dualism that had been initiated into philosophy approximately two hundred and fifty years earlier by Descartes. James essentially rejected the problematic dualistic model in asserting that consciousness was not a separate substance that was distinct from matter. Rather, James asserted that consciousness was a *function* of experience. In Whitehead’s unusually plain words, “James

is denying that consciousness is a ‘stuff’ (SMW 144).” Weber nicely details what is at stake with the concept of substance, which does not need to be repeated here.

Weber later considers panpsychism, which immediately arises as a result of denying mind/body dualism. He details what he calls a 2x4 hermeneutical matrix in detailing the intricacies of panpsychism. Without attempting to directly respond to Weber’s discussion, I want to make two comments. First, there is interpretative diversity on this issue in regard to James. For example, Lamberth comments that “interpreters of James disagree widely as to whether, and to what extent, he endorsed some form of panpsychism” (248).¹³ Lamberth himself thinks that James held what he describes as a moderate version, or “pluralistic panpsychism, “that eschews the fundamental mind/matter dualism of his colleagues in favor of both a pluralistic metaphysics of pure experience and a correspondingly pluralistic notion of causality” (250). Second, Whitehead’s philosophy conceives the ultimate units of experience, or actual entities, as having physical and mental poles, which his later commentators have variously called panpsychism or panexperience.¹⁴ Weber is correct that Whitehead himself did not use either term. Although James’s position was certainly useful to and was stated in Whitehead’s argument in *SMW*, Lowe argues that James’s possible influence on Whitehead was just one of many in regard to panpsychism. It seems probable that Whitehead would have conceived his own explanation as being systematically superior to James (whether this conception is justified is another matter) and perhaps one example of why in his letter to Hartshorne he wrote, “I admit W. J. was weak on Rationalization.”

One last aspect of James’s denial of mind/body dualism is worth noting. Whitehead points out in *SMW* that Cartesian dualism had resulted in a “division of territory” in which science pursued the material and mechanical universe (predicated on Descartes’ substance of bodies and extension) and philosophy explored the epistemological basis for the mind knowing materiality and (via psychology) explored the internal workings of the mind (Descartes’ substance of mind and thought). Although Whitehead describes this artificial division as not being “a simple business” (SMW 145) since there are obvious “interplays” between the investigatory territories predicated on Cartesian substances, yet there were resulting advances in knowledge during the epoch of dualistic prominence. Whitehead saw in *general* the advances in physiology leading to the demise of this artificial division, and in *particular* he thought the work of James was an important if not crucial part. James had studied chemistry, anatomy and

physiology at Harvard; experimental physiology in Europe; and psychology. In describing the difference that medical physiology made, Whitehead writes: “The career of William James is an example of this change in standpoint. He also possessed the clear, incisive genius which could state in a flash the exact point at issue (*SMW* 147).” The final reference in *SMW* to James is where Whitehead depicts Descartes and James as being inaugurators of new stages in philosophy, yet not offering final solutions and not being “the most characteristic philosophers of their respective epochs (*SMW* 147).” As previously mentioned, Ford thinks that Whitehead himself was successful in extending or “rescuing” James’s thought.

James’s Temporal Atomicity?: In what Weber discusses under the title “epochal theory of time,” in describing the extensive continuum of entities in *PR*, chapter II, Whitehead cites the following passage of James:

Either your experience is of no content, of no change, or it is of a perceptible amount of content or change. Your acquaintance with reality grows literally by buds or drops of perception. Intellectually and on reflection you can divide these into components, but as immediately given, they come totally or not at all (*PR* 68).¹⁵

In his footnote that references William James, Whitehead adds, “My attention was drawn to this passage . . . by Professor J. S. Bixler” (*PR* 68, FN 4).¹⁶ Although Whitehead interprets James as holding a view of “drops” or “buds,” Rosenthal disagrees: “Much is made by Whiteheadian scholars of the fact that James speaks of drops or buds . . . [but] his supposed turn away from continuity and infinitesimals to finite drops is perhaps not the move to discreteness that it may at first seem . . . [rather] they ‘correspond logically to the ‘infinitesimals’ (minutest quanta of motion, change, or whatnot) of which the latest mathematics is supposed to have got rid.”¹⁷ Regardless of the way James intended to be understood, or perhaps better described as the way his position developed through time, Whitehead interpreted him as holding the perspective of “drops” of experience. Although Whitehead’s footnote reference to Bixler did not provide an exact reference, on the page of Bixler’s book which quotes the same James reference that Whitehead quoted, Bixler writes: “This it will at once be seen is much nearer a pluralistic theory

of reality [i.e., atomistic] than is the theory of the ‘experience-continuum’ which James also sets forth” (54). This suggests that Whitehead simply understood James on the basis of Bixler’s interpretation – either rightly or wrongly. Whitehead’s actual entities correspond to a “pluralistic theory of reality,” while he also accounts for the “experience-continuum” through actual entities being influenced by their predecessors. Lowe thinks that Whitehead was probably acquainted with James’s *Psychology*, in addition to having read Bixler’s book, and his enthusiasm for James is also demonstrated by his reference, in his 1936 letter to Hartshorne, to the two volumes of Ralph Perry’s books (with over sixteen hundred pages). However, he seems to be far from an expert in the interpretation of James and often seems to use his references to James to bolster the credibility of his own philosophy (Lowe 2.105).

Later in *PR*, when Whitehead describes his own pluralistic cosmology of actual entities, as being temporally and spatially atomistic, he describes it using the expression “a buzzing world.” He footnotes it with the statement, “This epithet is, of course, borrowed from William James” (*PR* 50).¹⁸ There are a plethora of similar expressions in James depicting the world of temporal and spatial atomicity, yet it is important to note that “James never outlined a system of the world on this basis.”¹⁹ Lowe considers pluralism as “the subject of the most obvious kinship between Whitehead and William James.”²⁰ When Whitehead uses the phrase “underlying substantial activity”²¹ for atomistic entities, or the philosophical designation “*causa sui*,”²² he most likely thinks that he is referring to the same notion as James. Whitehead may have had this in mind when he wrote of rescuing James’ “type of thought.” Ford’s analysis of similarities between James and Whitehead closely focuses on atomistic actual entities and their inter-relations.

I agree with Weber when he writes that Whitehead’s “atomism is plural but can be easily triangulated: Leibniz’s Monadology, Planck’s quantic thunder, and James’s interpretation of Zeno’s everlasting antinomies (Weber 2.26).” James provides a thorough discussion of Zeno’s paradoxes in *Some Problems of Philosophy* (80-95).²³ Whitehead explicitly identifies James in *PR* 68 as using these quanta of experience to overcome Zeno’s arguments or paradoxes, thereby refuting an infinitely divisible space-time continuum. James’s interpretation is probably also implicit in the similar discussion in *SMW* 125-127. Whitehead nuances his agreement with the discussion of James on Zeno’s paradoxes when he writes, “James also refers to Zeno. In substance I agree with his argument from Zeno; though I do not think that he allows sufficiently

for those elements in Zeno's paradoxes which are the product of inadequate mathematical knowledge (*PR* 68)." Since Whitehead's background and initial fame was in mathematics it is hardly surprising that he seems to claim a superior knowledge in this field, regardless as to the relative worth of either of their explanations of Zeno's paradoxes. Salmon in examining Zeno's paradoxes comments that "experience does seem, as James and Whitehead emphasize, to have an atomistic character."²⁴ Yet, in agreement with Grünbaum, Salmon denies that any metaphysical conclusions can or should be drawn from this, which is what Whitehead does in his theory of actual entities with temporal and spatial atomicity.

James's Religious Experience: At the outset it certainly seems that Whitehead took great interest in this aspect of James's thought. Bixler's book was entitled *Religion in the Philosophy of William James* and it is a revision of his PhD dissertation on the study of James's religious philosophy. A brief review of Whitehead's relation to religion is helpful here. Whitehead had grown up in a religious environment with his grandfather, father, and two uncles being clergymen and teachers in the Church of England; and he had an early personal commitment to Christianity (Lowe 1.14-26). However, in 1897 or 1898 when strong support of Newtonian physics began to crumble he became a pronounced and outspoken agnostic (Lowe 1.188).²⁵ Later, he changed his mind and thought that his philosophy required a concept of God, beginning in *Science and the Modern World* (1925), but more fully expressed in *Religion in the Making* (1926), and *Process and Reality* (1929).²⁶ In other words, during the general time period in which Whitehead was reading Bixler's books on James's thought on religion, Whitehead was himself making a philosophical move toward a religious perspective, yet an untraditional one. Although it is beyond the scope of this work to consider, I note that Earl Forderhase wrote a PhD dissertation entitled, "A Study of the Concept of a Finite God in the Philosophies of William James and Alfred North Whitehead" (1973, University of Oklahoma) which considers the similarities and dissimilarities between the two. With this background digression in mind, I return to Whitehead's interest in James's religious experience.

In William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (*Varieties*, 1902) he writes: "Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the *feelings, acts, and experience of individual men in their solitude . . .*"²⁷ I presume that since Whitehead discussed *The Varieties* with Price in August, 1945 that he had in fact read the book well before

that time (*Dialogues* 333; Weber 1.22). In fact, it may have been prior to 1926, since Whitehead wrote in *RM*: “Thus religion is *solitariness*; and if you are never *solitary*, you are never religious (*RM* 17).” Although Whitehead does not explicitly reference James, their common usage of *solitary* along with similar perspectives on religion in the surrounding paragraphs is highly suggestive, yet it is admitted that others in the period also used similar language. For example, although Charles Sanders Peirce, writing in 1893, does not use the term ‘solitary’ or ‘solitariness,’ he seems to be somewhat similar when he writes: “Religion, though it *begins in a seminal individual inspiration*, only comes to full flower in a great church coextensive with a civilization.”²⁸ In addition to the perhaps implicit reference to religion as *solitariness*, I suggest that the last page of *AI* where Whitehead writes of the union of “Zest with Peace” (*AI* 296) is reminiscent of, if not an implicit reference, to James’s conclusions in *Varieties*, where he wrote of new zest and a temper of peace (*Varieties* 418).

There are a number of commonalities between the two on religious matters. Both affirm a God much more finite than the traditional omnipotent and omniscient concept of traditional Christianity. Both affirm a God in more active and intimate relationship with creation. That is, their God functions within personal experience which may entail that which is often called mystical. For James, “our power of moral and volitional response is probably our deepest organ of communication with the nature of things. But in the *Varieties* the deepest organ of communication is . . . when man feels the touch of a Power greater than himself” (Bixler 166). For Whitehead, each becoming entity has the particular influence (Whitehead’s technical language is “ingression”) of God for its unique experience, yet the entity also has self-determinacy of the final concrescent outcome that may have accepted or rejected God’s influence of novelty.

Other “kinships”: Victor Lowe, while acknowledging the *general* influence of many philosophers on Whitehead, defends him from any suggestions of *overly strong* influence from particular philosophers, including Bergson, James, and Alexander. In order to complete a review of the aspects of James’s thought that appealed to Whitehead, it is helpful to observe his listing of “kinships” between the two, even though it is a bit repetitive from that described above.²⁹ Lowe calls the “buzzing” world of pluralism the most obvious kinship. He next notes the “remarkable agreement” of the radical empiricism of James and the “peculiar” empiricism of

Whitehead. Although James would have been suspicious of the rationalistic aspects of Whitehead's speculative philosophy, he would have been in agreement with Whitehead's assertion that "The chief danger to philosophy is narrowness in the selection of evidence (*PR* 337)." Both wanted an empiricism that was not limited to mere consciousness predicated on the five senses (Whitehead's presentational immediacy). James preceded Whitehead in calling the most basic component of immediate experience "feelings" of the others and wrote of "the plain conjunctive experience" (i.e., the stream of consciousness which seems to be a continuous experience, yet is predicated on the function of consciousness arising from the discrete buds or drops of experience). Whitehead employs a similar concept of feelings with perception through "causal efficacy" creating the same sense of continuous experience, with "causal efficacy" having primacy over presentational immediacy. I am in agreement with Weber's discussion of this in his "the concept of feeling."

EPILOGUE

Why did Whitehead describe James to be the American Plato? In general, Whitehead thought that they had similar creative genius, flashes of insight, or intuitive capacities that inaugurated new philosophical eras. Furthermore, this study has considered the comparative foci of: "the one and the many," the denial of Cartesian mind/body dualism, temporal atomicity, religious experience, and other kinships. Although I am in basic agreement with Weber, additional details have been developed. Although Whitehead is obviously complimentary toward James and was influenced by him to some degree, I agree with Lowe's and Weber's position that this did not rise to the level of being an overly strong influence, or lead to "borrowings."

Beyond his honorific attribution, was Whitehead justified in his critiques of James? Although a full consideration of this question is beyond the scope of this work, an affirmative answer seems to be generally accepted by James's interpreters. Beyond the previously mentioned agreement of Marcus Ford, Robert Neville may be representative when he writes: "True, James lacked the technical flair in systematic metaphysics of Peirce or Whitehead. But he had seminal ideas that helped pave the way around modernism" (85).³⁰

Finally, given the relatively light consideration of James in many university's philosophy curriculums, Whitehead's enthusiasm, both for James's thought and his subsequent influence on

philosophy, was apparently premature. I hope that Whitehead is better understood as being prophetic toward what may result from more intense study and research of James in the postmodern future. The greater emphasis on the study of the philosophy of both William James and Alfred North Whitehead would certainly be helpful.

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APPENDIX 1: SURVEY OF WHITEHEAD'S REFERENCES TO JAMES

<u>Whiteheadian Book (date)</u>	<u>Usage</u>	<u>Page References</u>
<i>PLS</i> "Mathematics" (1911)	Cf. <i>Pragmatism: a New Name for some Old Ways of Thinking</i> (1907)	108
Harvard Lecture (1924)	the university of William James	Lowe, 2.141
<i>SMW</i> (1925)	adorable genius	2
	<i>Implicit</i> : irreducible and stubborn facts	2, 3
	<i>Implicit</i> : Cf to <i>PR</i> 68 (Zeno)	125-127
	inauguration of a new stage in philosophy	143
	To deny plumply that . . .	143-144
	. . . possessed the clear, incisive genius	147
<i>RM</i> (1926)	<i>Implicit</i> : religion is solitariness . . . (Varieties)	17
<i>S</i> (1927)	<i>Implicit</i> : stubborn facts	36-37
<i>PR</i> (1929)	charge of anti-intellectualism	xii
	Epithet . . . borrowed from William James	50
	The authority of William James (Zeno)	68
<i>AE</i> (1929)	and again in William James	101
<i>AI</i> (1933)	I may add that William James . . .	231
	<i>Implicit</i> : Zest with Peace (Varieties)	296
Note (Jan. 2, 1936)	W. J. is the analogue to Plato	Lowe, 2.345
<i>ESP</i>	infused philosophy with new life (1937)	94
	From Greece to William James (1936)	155
<i>MT</i> (1938)	Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, and William James	2
	Finally, there is William James . . .	3
	Harvard is justly proud . . .	174
<i>Dialogues</i> (1954)	(Prologue) <i>floruit</i> of William James	8

William James's definition . . .	79
William James call[s] success the 'Bitch Goddess'	111
'subtle-soul'd psychologist,' William James	183
Party for the Whiteheads given by	314-315
Like an affable archangel	317
Noble portrait of William James	319
His system remained incomplete	333-334

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY OF "PRAGMATIC" OR "PRAGMATISM" IN THE WORKS OF WHITEHEAD

<u>Whiteheadian Book (date)</u>	<u>Usage</u>	<u>Page References</u>
<i>M</i> (1911)	No references found	
<i>PLS</i> "Mathematics" (1911)	Cf. <i>Pragmatism: a New Name for some Old Ways of Thinking</i> (1907)	108
<i>PNK</i> (1919, 1925)	Physical object 'works' for pragmatic philosopher	93
<i>CN</i> (1920)	Pragmatist will swallow anything if it works	2
<i>R</i> (1922)	The only guarantee for correctness is the pragmatic	60
<i>SMW</i> (1925) ³¹	The creed justified itself by the pragmatic test	50
<i>RM</i> (1926)	The pragmatic test: it works and claims prize	28
<i>S</i> (1927)	Pragmatic appeal to the future	31
	Pragmatic prominent in modern thought	45
	Obviousness of the pragmatic aspect	46
	Pragmatically the direction of individuals to actions	74
	The indirect check of pragmatic consequences	80
<i>PR</i> (1929)	Metaphysics cannot satisfy pragmatic tests	13
	Pragmatic use of the actual entity	82
	Superjective is pragmatic value, Hume's principle	87-88
	Pragmatic justification	133

	Presentationality immediacy of utmost pragmatic use	167
	Appeal is to pragmatic consequences	179
	The very meaning of truth is pragmatic	181
	Objective consideration is pragmatic	220
	Our test in the selection . . . must be pragmatic	337
<i>FR</i> (1929)	Pragmatism is nonsense apart from final causation	26
	The pragmatic function of Reason	27
	Reason as a pragmatic agent	28
<i>AE</i> (1929)	No references found ³²	
<i>AI</i> (1933)	Pragmatically it experienced supreme justification	131
	Anti-intellectualism tinges American Pragmatism	223
<i>ESP</i> "Analysis of Meaning"	pragmatic sufficiency	93
(1937)	Pragmatic justification	97
	When the pragmatists asks whether it works	98
<i>MT</i> (1938)	Philosophy is on a pragmatic basis	106
<i>PLS</i> "Mathematics and the Good" (194	"Does it work?" is a reference to theory	16

NOTES

¹ Weber, Michel, "Whitehead's Reading of James and Its Context," (in two parts) *Streams of Williams James*, Part 1: Vol. 4, Issue 1 (Spring 2002), 18-22; and Part 2: Vol. 5, Issue 3 (Fall 2003), 26-31. Weber's reference is "So has I. B. Cohen told H. Putnam," 1.18.

² Lowe, Victor. *Alfred North Whitehead: The Man and His Work*. 2 vols. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985 and 1990. Also: Hartshorne, Charles. *Whitehead's Philosophy – Selected Essays, 1935-1970*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972, ix (where a partial copy of the hand-written note is reproduced).

³On his youthful interest in Plato see: Whitehead, Alfred North. "Autobiographical Notes." *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*. Ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp. La Salle: Open Court, 1971, 7. Also noted in Lowe, Victor, "The Influence of Bergson, James and Alexander on Whitehead," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 10 (1949), 267-96, 278. Cf Weber 1.18.

⁴ Also: S 36-37. Weber calls this "his motto," but only cites *SMW* 3, Weber 1.21.

⁵ According to Lowe “Bertrand Russell had treated all three of these men as guilty of anti-intellectualism,” 2.239; Weber cites the *PR* quotation, 1.22

⁶ Ford, Marcus Peter. *William James’s Philosophy – A New Perspective*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1982.

⁷ Ford responds to: Eisendrath, Craig. *The Unifying Moment: The Psychological Philosophy of William James and Alfred North Whitehead*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971. On the one hand, Ford disagrees with many of the details of Eisendrath’s work, but on the other hand agrees with the basic thesis that aspects of James’s and Whitehead’s philosophies are extremely compatible.

⁸ James, William. *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. 1907. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2003.

⁹ E.g., *Timaeus* is said to be “one of two cosmologies that has dominated European thought,” *PR* xiv., and “[In *Timaeus*] Plato’s guess reads much more fluid than in Aristotle . . . and more valuable,” *CN* 17-18. The collection of relatively few personal books surviving his death in the Whitehead archive at Johns Hopkins University Library includes two copies of *Timaeus*.

¹⁰ James, William. *Essays in Pragmatism by William James*. 1948. Ed. Alburey Castell. New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1966.

¹¹ Weber helpfully points out that Whitehead similarly asserts that “William James and John Dewey will stand out as having infused philosophy with new life,” *ESP* 94, Weber 1.19.

¹² James, William. *William James: The Essential Writings*. Ed. Bruce W. Wilshire, James M. Edie preface. New York: State University of New York Press, 1984, “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?”, 163; Quoted in two parts, within *SMW* 143 and 144.

¹³ Lamberth, David C., “Interpreting the universe after a social analogy: Intimacy, panpsychism, and a finite god in a pluralistic universe,” in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, Ruth Anna Putnam, editor, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

¹⁴ Charles Hartshorne calls Whitehead’s position panpsychism in his: *Whitehead’s Philosophy – Selected Essays, 1935-1970*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972, 52. In contrast, David Griffin calls Whitehead’s position panexperience in his: *Unsnarling the World-Knot: Consciousness, Freedom, and the Mind-Body Problem*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, 78.

¹⁵ James, William. *Some Problems of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, 80.

¹⁶ The reference to Bixler seems to be Bixler, Julius Seelye. *Religion in the Philosophy of William James*. Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1926, 54.

¹⁷ Rosenthal, Sandra, "Contingency, and Time: The Divergent Intuitions of Whitehead and Pragmatism," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. 32 (Fall, 1996), No. 4, 542-567, 565-6 FN 62.

¹⁸ "Buzzing world," or more exactly "blooming, buzzing confusion" is often cited, but seldom with an exact reference. E. g., by: Kraus, Elizabeth M. *The Metaphysics of Experience – A Companion to Whitehead's Process and Reality. Second edition.* New York: Fordham University Press, 1998, 12. Also Weber, 21. It is from: James, William. *The Principles of Psychology, Volume 1.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, chapter XIII, "Discrimination and Comparison," 462.

¹⁹ E.g.: "bubbling vat," "a mosaic philosophy . . . of plural facts," "large extent chaotic," "'pure experience' is the name which I gave to the immediate flux of life," "stream of feeling . . . confluent with some particular wave or wavelet," "hanging-together," "stream of experience," "mere restless zigzag movement of a wild *Ideenflucht*, or *Rhapsodies der Wahrnehmungen*," "every single event is ultimately related to every other, and determined by the whole to which it belongs," "dust-mind theory," "distributed and strung-along and flowing sort of reality which we finite beings swim in," "the turbid, restless lower world," "drop-wise . . . pulses . . . [of] discreteness," "stream of time, snap-shots taken as by a kinetoscopic camera," and "you can hear the vibration of an electric contact-maker, smell the ozone, see the sparks, and feel the thrill, co-consciously as it were or in one field of experience," James, William. *Essays in Radical Empiricism, A Pluralistic Universe.* Gloucester: Peter Smith publisher, 1967, *Radical Empiricism*, 41, 42, 46, 93, 100, 107, 160, 162; *Pluralistic Universe*, 76, 188, 213, 218, 231, 235, 268. Lowe comments that James "never outlined . . ." 2.226.

²⁰ Lowe, Victor, "William James and Whitehead's Doctrine of Prehensions," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (1941), 113-126, 113.

²¹ E.g., *SMW* 107, 123, 165.

²² E.g., *PR* 7, 86, 88, 221, 222. Both Descartes and Spinoza had previously used this expression.

²³ Also, James, William. *Essays in Radical Empiricism, A Pluralistic Universe.* Gloucester: Peter Smith publisher, 1967, 228-245.

²⁴ Ed. Wesley C. Salmon. *Zeno's Paradoxes.* Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1970, 17-20.

²⁵ Lowe is not sure of the exact date.

²⁶ Although Whitehead's conceptual move to God is usually initially attributed to *SMW* (145, 161, 173-9, e.g. "God is the ultimate limitation, and His existence is the ultimate irrationality," 178) a likely earlier reference is in *CN* (1920), where he writes: "We can imagine a being whose awareness, conceived as his private possession, suffers no transition, although the terminus of his awareness is our

own transient nature,” 67. This is cited by: Ford, Lewis S. *The Emergence of Whitehead’s Metaphysics – 1925-1929*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984, 187.

²⁷ James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. 1902. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2004, 39. Weber rightly points out that Whitehead retained a copy of *Varieties* in his surviving books, Weber 2.30.

²⁸ Peirce, Charles Sanders. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. 6 vols. Eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965, 6.443.

²⁹ Lowe, Victor, “William James and Whitehead’s Doctrine of Prehensions,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 38, No. 5, 1941, 113-126.

³⁰ Neville, Robert Cummings. *The Highroad Around Modernism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, 85.

³¹ Cf, “true rationalism must always transcend itself by recurrence to the concrete in search of inspiration,” *SMW* 201.

³² Although there is no usage of pragmatism Whitehead writes, “Geometry and mechanics, followed by workshop practice, gain that reality without which mathematics is verbiage,” *AE* 48.

WILLIAM FAULKNER, WILLIAM JAMES, AND THE AMERICAN PRAGMATIC TRADITION.
By David H. Evans. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008. 289 pp. \$40.00.

Is there any book reviewer whose eyebrow does not rise a fraction of an inch when she or he opens a new book to its Table of Contents and discovers a listing of five chapters: the typical earmark of a revised dissertation? I should hasten to note that the eyebrow shifts not out of any bias against dissertations *per se*, but out of sympathy for the challenges inherent in transforming the masterwork of one's Ph. D. program into a piece with necessarily different objectives. A dissertation is meant to show a very small audience just about everything one knows. The genre notoriously tempts the writer to be a tad too clever, to make somewhat outlandish arguments for the sake of being original, and to deploy a mass of syllables when considerably fewer would be preferred. A book is written to show as large an audience as possible some things that they don't know. It is addressed to people who like to get answers fast and want to be able to rely on the information they are given. Above all, it must enable its readers to see something they haven't seen before and to persuade them that this new vista is worthy of their attention. The needful metamorphosis is by no means an easy one, and the writer who does it successfully deserves sincere respect. In his book *William Faulkner, William James, and the American Pragmatic Tradition*, David H. Evans merits this kind of respect a great deal of the time; his work is thoughtful and often supremely compelling. If he has not fully freed himself from the bugbears of dissertation writing, he nonetheless gives encouraging signs of excellent scholarship to come.

The core of Evans's project is to illustrate that, despite Faulkner's own assertions that he was not a pragmatist, the novelist's work shared and perhaps emerged from some classically Jamesian assumptions about the nature of truth, for instance: That truth is contingent rather than fixed and is the product of factors like emotion, time, and narrative; that our apprehension of the world depends on the postulates we are willing to believe and on the stories we happen to find credible; and that passionate belief can matter more than fact. My copy of Evans's book is full of marginalia that say "Nice!" and "Good." He is very persuasive, for instance, in arguing that rationality is another name for the unimpeded flow of thought, and that Faulkner's famously dense and never-ending sentences reflect a sense that truth is always on the move and creating itself, rather than hardening into concrete form. Evans's observations regarding *Absalom! Absalom!* are especially lush and rewarding, as when he investigates the Emersonian subtext of both James's and Faulkner's approach to history. Evans is also firmly in command when he

analyzes Faulkner's ventures into the gothic as explorations of subjectivity and the suppression of the self.

In short, Evans does some memorable work in this volume as a thinker. As a writer, he is somewhat less effective. It is here, perhaps, that the dissertation malaise finally catches up with him, in the form of a need to take a strong, clean idea and festoon it with needless polysyllables. The following sentence and a half is symptomatic. Evans begins with a neatly turned phrase: "But if the future is not necessarily good, it is necessary." So far so good, but then comes a semicolon, followed by superfluity: "ceaseless change is the consequence of our irreducibly temporal condition. Neither atemporal transcendental principles nor the benign values of the past can guarantee that such change will be anything but ambiguous and uncertain." Anyone who has been to school long enough to decode Evans' verbiage here probably does not need his help to understand his point — that nothing stays the same, and you can never be sure what will happen next. I'm still not sure I know what was meant by "the cotton belt gemeinschaft" to which Evans refers in an early sally, though he succeeded in making me curious enough to wonder what I was missing.

Though his instincts are generally sound, Evans pushes the argumentative envelope a bit far when, in a key contention, he suggests that the pragmatist's conception of truth is personified in the figure of a confidence man. Evans's play on the word "confidence," simultaneously invoking its meaning of "faith" or "reliance" and its associations with the deceitful "con," is initially entertaining, but he fuses the two meanings so insistently that he seems to forget that believing in someone and getting rooked are two different things. He goes so far as to suggest that the con man, through his frauds and deceptions, establishes a sense of community and human bonding — that his larcenies are "a heroic act of creation." Well, they *aren't* heroic, and they *destroy* confidence and community, as anyone who was scammed by Bernie Madoff will tell you. Evans is perhaps onto something when he suggests that all communities arise out of our willingness to trust narrative fictions, but his further extrapolation that all social arrangements are con games plunges needlessly into a nihilism that neither James nor Faulkner was likely have approved.

Evans's book is, at its best moments, a generator of marvelously provocative insights. At other times, he is just trying a bit too hard. My advice is threefold: read this book for its many

flashes of brilliance; beware of the overheated prose and occasionally extravagant arguments; and never lend David H. Evans your watch.

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WILLIAM JAMES: POLITICS IN THE PLURIVERSE. By Kennan Ferguson. Series, *Modernity and Political Thought*, Morton Schoolman (ed.). Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007. Pp. xxv + 111. \$25.95.

Kennan Ferguson's *William James: Politics in the Pluriverse* is the latest in a growing list of books which propose to take William James seriously as a political thinker. James was long ago canonized for his work in psychology, epistemology, and (according to many) ethics. But his contributions to social and political theory are often downplayed, disregarded, or even outright denigrated. The standard assessment is well represented by Cornel West's evaluation of James in his important *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (University of Wisconsin Press: 1989). West put the point simply and forcefully: "In regard to politics, James has nothing profound or even provocative to say" (60). It is Ferguson's wager, as it was that of George Cotkin in *William James, Public Philosopher* (Johns Hopkins University Press: 1990) and of Joshua Miller in *Democratic Temperament: The Legacy of William James* (University of Kansas: 1997), that there is something in the political and social thought of William James worth recovering today.

Ferguson takes up this project by focusing on James' pluralism. His view is that James is a pluralist in the first place and a pragmatist only secondarily. James's pluralism, Ferguson argues, better captures the core of his thinking in all of its dimensions, though especially with respect to his hitherto misunderstood political thought. One might say that in betting on a Jamesian political philosophy Ferguson lays nearly everything on pluralism.

This strategy of bringing James into focus through the lens of his pluralism is particularly timely given recent scholarly debates. There have been vigorous exchanges on these matters over the past few years amongst pragmatists. Some provocateurs, including Robert Talisse in his impressive *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy* (Routledge: 2007) as well as in earlier articles leading up to that book, have argued that pragmatists cannot be pluralists. Many have responded to the provocation by defending the connection between pragmatism and pluralism. Ferguson adds to these debates (though he unfortunately does not cite them) a possible new third position. The claim is

neither the bristling challenge that pluralism undermines pragmatism nor the standard view that pluralism flows from pragmatism, but rather the sensible idea that pluralism can proceed where pragmatism is not already in place in such a way as to prepare us for the latter.

Ferguson's book opens in Chapter One with a recounting of James's visit to the utopian community of Chautauqua in upstate New York. James recognized in Chautauqua an American iteration of sweetness and light. But flowing out of those perpetually running soda water fountains was a slow and steady decay. With everything so well prepared for the visitor, there was nothing for the visitor to do except to atrophy into a readymade routine. Ferguson suggests that we find the paradigmatic motivation for James's pluralism in his reaction against the hotel world of Chautauqua where struggle is not only unnecessary but also impossible.

This sets the stage for the end of Chapter One and Chapter Two where Ferguson contrasts Jamesian pluralism to contemporary liberal pluralism. This is the core of the book for it is here that we find the crux of Ferguson's interpretation of James's politics and the contribution it can make to political theory today: "liberal pluralism and James's radical pluralism are distant cousins" (9). At the core of Ferguson's contrast here is an interpretation of contemporary liberalism as a theory that accepts plurality but with the goal of subsuming it within greater unity. Is this an accurate interpretation of liberalism today?

If Ferguson is right that contemporary liberals countenance pluralism only as a descriptive fact to be overcome by a wider norm of political unity, then surely James helps us go beyond this. But we should consider at this point exactly what part of such a liberalism James presses past. Ferguson suggests that James moves past the descriptive pluralism of the liberal in that he not only describes pluralism but more importantly prescribes it (cf. 10, 15ff.). Yet I find it tough to see how anyone could coherently prescribe pluralism: for there are always doctrines which demand the cessation of some other doctrines (e.g., evangelism towards atheism) and so prescribing pluralism requires ruling such doctrines out, even though pluralism was supposed to rule nothing out, but invite all in (this, by the way, is also Talisse's argument).

Another option is to see James not as moving beyond liberalism descriptivism about pluralism but rather only the liberal attempt to subsume of pluralism in a higher unity. Rawls's liberalism professes to describe a fact of "reasonable" pluralism, but a better name may have been "shallow" pluralism. James, by contrast to Rawls but in anticipation of later liberals like Isaiah Berlin, accepts the irreducible fact of "deep" pluralism. One need not prescribe deep pluralism to descriptively accept it as an unavoidable condition of our political modernity. James can thus be seen as rejecting any liberal attempt to subsume plurality in a greater unity without being seen as prescribing pluralism. This raises the possibility that perhaps Ferguson attributes to liberalism a view which describes only some, but certainly not all, liberals.

If the core issue at stake in Jamesian versus liberal pluralism is not that of prescriptivism and descriptivism, but rather that of subsuming plurality under unity then we ought to assess Ferguson's interpretation of liberalism in terms of this issue. I find Ferguson insightful in his diagnosis of a prevalent "statism" in contemporary liberal theory according to which liberal pluralists aim to subsume plurality under the unity of the state. But does this diagnosis really extend to all liberal pluralists? It surely describes the liberal pluralism of John Rawls and the tidal wave of work which it washed in. But does it capture Isaiah Berlin, Bernard Williams, Amartya Sen, and Martha Nussbaum as precisely as it does Rawls? Does it even come close to describing John Dewey? Ferguson seems to suggest as much. But I worry that liberalism is here being painted with too big a brush. This little review is not the appropriate venue for a pointillist rendering of liberalism in enormous detail, so let me just register a worry that some may have about Ferguson's argument: liberalism for some is sufficiently capacious to accommodate Jamesian pluralism as Ferguson develops it. If this is correct, then Jamesian pluralism is perhaps not an alternative solution to the ills of liberalism so much as a statement of the work that liberalism now ought to engage itself in and, in the case of at least a few contemporary theorists, is already attempting. James's pluralism is perhaps a viable path forward, but I think it unnecessary and unpragmatic (in the colloquial sense) to suggest that it is an anti-liberal path. So here is a suggestion: replace "liberalism" with "statism" in Ferguson's argument and there you have a nice liberal pluralist argument against liberal statism.

Any pluralist, statist, liberal, pragmatist, or Jamesian who cares about these important matters will benefit from the questions Ferguson's book raises as well as the answers it proposes. This book further repays reading in that it offers interventions into other debates of interest to we who read, interpret, and love the work of William James. I have here focused almost exclusively on Ferguson's centermost themes of the pluralism made available by James, but there are indeed other worthy topics broached in these pages. One is the interconnection between James's philosophy and politics in terms of his reciprocal pluralism and anti-imperialism (Chapter Three). Another is the Jamesian pluralization of the role of sovereignty in international affairs (Chapter Three). Another theme engaged with particular ability in the book concerns the relation between Pragmatist and Continental Philosophy as anticipated by the invigorating interchange between William James and Henri Bergson at the beginning of the twentieth century (Chapter Four). As this last issue has gained some interest in recent scholarship, I will conclude with a brief consideration of Ferguson's treatment here.

Ferguson aims to contest the familiar narrative that recent American 'theory' takes its antifoundationalist aspirations over from French 'postmodern' thought. He favors an alternative narrative according to which French pomo-ism is itself a borrowing from an earlier iteration of American pragmatism-cum-pluralism. The birth of antifoundationalism in recent intellectual discourse is thus actually a rebirth of an originally American, or at least originally Jamesian, contribution. Ferguson uses the interchange between James and Bergson to make his point. He concludes that, "The connections between the two thinkers, their mutually constituted recognition that truth and thought often have lacunae between them, echo throughout the century that followed them" (61). But in tracing this mutual influence Ferguson moves much too quickly to satisfy the intellectual historian. He also neglects the work of other intellectual historians on related matters, most notably Chapter Three of James Livingston's *Pragmatism, Feminism, and Democracy* (Routledge: 2001).

The lines of influence between James and Bergson which Ferguson traces should, he concludes, serve as cautions against interpretations of philosophy that are "intrinsically ahistorical" such that they "reinforce boundary disputes within philosophy rather than investigate what seemingly difference branches can say to one another" (64).

Ferguson is himself as Jamesian as one can get in offering this point. He is asking us to not close off our philosophies to one another, but to let them interact to see what we might make of such engagements across the divide. This restates the pluralistic message of the book in a context where it very much needs to be heard.

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WILLIAM JAMES AT THE BOUNDARIES: PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF KNOWLEDGE. By Francesca Bordogna. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 392 pp. \$39.00.

One could say many things about this book. It was the subject of the author's dissertation. She has been mulling over the topic assiduously for fifteen years. It is a masterful document of scholarship in the tradition of the sociology of scientific knowledge. There are hints of post-modernism throughout, including some unsubstantiated conjectures about James the man from that point of view. There are many little points about which one could quibble. Regardless, it has a central focus that, in my mind, is the single most important contribution to James scholarship since John McDermott and Charlene Haddock Seigfried identified radical empiricism as the core of James's metaphysics. The idea that Professor Bordogna puts forward is that the reason James does not seem to fit anywhere, yet everyone can find a place to stand under his umbrella, is that he was not just all over the place but actually took a decided stand against the categorization of knowledge systems developing at the time in the form of the specialization of thought in the West.

Science was in; philosophy, religion, and the humanities were out, relegated to the dust bin of a previous era. Sociology, psychology, and anthropology became different domains of knowledge. Psychiatry was based on medical science, while psychology, trying to pass itself off as a natural science after physics, became a social science in the pecking order of the reductionistic sciences. Philosophy survived by veering off into symbolic logic and the mathematicalization of thought, thereby subsuming itself for the next 100 years under the presuppositions of the scientific method in the form of what came to be known as analytic philosophy. Professor Bordogna tracks all these changes but at a much more detailed level, digging out the various contested points of view in the late 19th century that were resolved in the direction of the systems of knowledge we have in place today that most highly value the rational ordering of sense data alone, which have, in my opinion, become the basis for a misbegotten definition of the whole of reality. Professor Bordogna, however, can be forgiven if she did not make anything more out of this position that James took than a statement about James himself and the possibility that Jamesian ideas could have a future influence on cross-disciplinary communication and how we see the relation between knowledge and personal experience.

The implications of her work, to me, are enormous for the way in which James has been interpreted, and give new meaning to the viability of James's agenda for the future direction of both the arts and the sciences and their relations in Western thought.

For instance, there is a standing joke among James scholars that psychologists only read James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), while philosophers only read his *Will to Believe* (1897) and his *Pragmatism* (1907), while religious scholars only read *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Each discipline tries to make James over into its own kind by cherry picking, without grasping the totality of his oeuvre. At the same time, the analytic philosophers try to make James over into a meliorist, and claim that pluralism means relativism, which is a philosophy that stands nowhere as compared to the power of logic and reason. Experimental psychologists who control the definition of psychology in the academy read James's *Principles* and find not a single principle in it. Religious scholars are not always adept at separating the generic experience of spirituality within the person, James's position in *The Varieties*, from denominational definitions of religion. With regard to the narrowness of the structures of knowledge, James was clearly pointing out the limits of Western thought from where he stood. From this vantage point, however, his detractors come across looking like fish out of water.

And where was this place? Professor Bordogna does not really develop this important idea except to define James's position on the individual, compartmentalized ideas of the rationalists, standardizers, and gatekeepers who were against James's kind of thinking at the time. We don't hear much about 'to what end?' But she does give a few hints, not the least of which is Bordogna's main thesis that James was a thoroughly original and independent thinker. This confirms for me the theme of Emerson's essay, "The American Scholar," delivered in 1837. There, Emerson, later to become James's God Father, called for the development of a point of view unique to American cultural consciousness. Transcendentalism subsequently became the first uniquely American philosophy independent of European roots. There can be no doubt that James was the consummate example of Emerson's American scholar as the inheritor of the Swedenborgian and Transcendentalist's intuitive psychology of spiritual self-realization, which he translated into a psychology of individual differences, a science of consciousness, the centrality of experience, and the case for the efficacy of belief in the more scientific era in which he matured. Pragmatism in James's hands, the off-spring of New England Transcendentalism, along with its co-founder Charles S. Peirce, and its spokespersons, such as John Dewey, then

became the first uniquely American philosophy to have international consequences as it became the orienting idea of the Progressive Era in the opening decades of the 20th century. But that lineage was cut off by Two World Wars and the intervening Depression. This brought Neo-realism, behaviorism, logical positivism, and analytic philosophy to prominence, narrowing the intellectual and spiritual scope of modern American thought. Our need today, in my opinion, is to recover this uniquely American Emersonian and Jamesean legacy, with its emphasis on “open-mindedness, inclusiveness, tolerance, antidogmatism, , respect for different points of view,” and a consciousness of others’ mental states and different lifestyles, if we are to move forward and grow as a healthy nation.

From this point of view Professor Bordogna’s book, though she probably had not intended it in just this way, will likely have an influence in the field of James studies for some time to come.

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36 ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: A WORK OF FICTION. By Rebecca Newberger Goldstein. Pantheon, 2010. 402 pp. \$27.95.

Readers of *William James Studies* may be familiar with Rebecca Goldstein, who holds a doctorate in philosophy from Princeton, because of her studies of Baruch Spinoza and Kurt Godel. Goldstein's philosophical interests often play out in her fiction, as well: including *The Dark Sister* (in which both William and Henry James appear as characters), *The Mind-Body Problem*, *Properties of Light: A Novel of Love, Betrayal, and Quantum Physics*, and most recently in *36 Arguments for the Existence of God*. Goldstein's latest book features Cass Seltzer, a professor of the psychology of religion, who has become an international celebrity with the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Illusion*—a title calling up James's famous book and Sigmund Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*. Deemed an “atheist with a soul” by his contemporaries, Seltzer wins acclaim for updating James's work, and both *Varieties of Religious Experience* and “The Will to Believe” are invoked throughout the novel. Goldstein's many characters – a messianic professor of faith, literature, and values; an orthodox rabbi; an adorable child prodigy mathematician; Seltzer's lover, a brilliant researcher in game theory; and an anthropologist intent on achieving immortality – bring up issues of belief, transcendence, and truth as the plot unravels. With chapters moving back and forth in Seltzer's life, unravels is as accurate a word as any for the progression of the narrative.

When the novel is not directly addressing questions of religion, it entertains as a spoof – like some novels by David Lodge and Richard Russo -- on the pretensions of academe. Central to the plot is the rivalry between Harvard and another university, here called Frankfurter, a few miles up the Charles in a dowdy town that Goldstein has dubbed Weedham. Harvard hopes to lure Seltzer away from Frankfurter to join its pantheon of intellectual stars, but the president of Frankfurter, a former Israeli paratrooper, aims to keep Seltzer “from going over to those shmendriks up the river.” Goldstein has a pitch-perfect ear for academic banter, and her renditions of faculty gatherings, including Seltzer's debate with the elegant Felix Fidley, a Nobel Prize winner in economics, and a believer, are impressively deft.

Although Seltzer comes away from the debate thinking himself a winner, neither he nor the novel makes a persuasive argument for or against the proposition: God exists. The argument that does emerge, however, persuasively speaks against fundamentalism and, more importantly, the unexamined life. “There are expansive, life-affirming emotions that can find a natural expression in the context of religion,” Seltzer says. “But when religion encourages what I can only describe as moral childishness that blocks the development of true moral thinking, then I do condemn it. When religion tells us that there is nothing more we can say about morality than that we can’t see the reasons for it, but do it if you know what’s good for you, then I do condemn it.”

Goldstein saves her most focused examination of thirty-six arguments for the existence of God in an appendix, where she lists and refutes such ideas as 4. The Argument from the Big Bang, which holds that if the universe came from nothing, then something outside of physical laws must have caused it to exist; or 7. The Argument from Cosmic Coincidences, which holds that uncanny coincidences “must have been designed in order to enhance our awed appreciation for the beauty of the natural world” by a supernatural being. In 32: The Argument from Pragmatism (William James’s Leap of Faith), Goldstein understands James to say that “The belief in God is a belief that effects a change for the better in a person’s life,” and therefore, it is in a person’s interest to make “the leap of faith.” But Goldstein questions what “a change for the better” really means; asserts that the argument “implies an extreme relativism regarding the truth”; and asserts furthermore that James ignores consequences to others besides the believer, such as victims of inquisitions, fatwas, and suicide bombers. Moreover, she believes that “‘The will to believe’ is an oxymoron: beliefs are forced on a person (ideally, by logic and evidence); they are not chosen for their consequences.” Perhaps she would have given James more credence if he had titled his essay, as he once thought he should, “The Right to Believe.”

Despite her dismissal of James’s thesis, Goldstein, like James in *The Varieties*, comes to the generous conclusion that faith cannot be justified by any single argument, but fulfills needs that many of the thirty-six arguments address. “The Argument from the Abundance of Arguments,” she writes, “may be the most psychologically important of the thirty-six. . . Religions. . .do not justify themselves with a single logical argument, but minister to all of these spiritual needs and provide a space in our lives where the largest questions with which we grapple all come together, which is a space that can become among the most expansive and

loving of which we are capable, or the most constricted and hating of which we are capable—in other words, a space as contradictory as human nature itself.”

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