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THE NON-DISCIPLINARY WILLIAM JAMES

PAUL J. CROCE

ABSTRACT:

William James crossed many disciplinary fields in his career. He composed his theories, especially in psychology, philosophy, and religion, in contexts that did not yet contain sharp disciplinary boundaries, and in fact, many were just starting to take modern shape. His biographical roots in science and religion and his commitment to understanding their relation to each other fostered thinking that emphasized the interrelation of the parts of his work. These forces encouraged James to be a non-disciplinary thinker. He did not ignore disciplines, but he also did not stop at their boundaries on his path toward understanding experience. He was also committed to viewing the world without reliance upon various dualisms of science and religion or related contrasts between material and immaterial dimensions of life, including empiricism and idealism, objectivity and subjectivity, body and mind, and the natural and the spiritual. And so the non-disciplinary James was also the non-dualist James, experiencing and thinking without assuming contrasting poles of thought. In addition, he was also ready to work on either side of these divisions, and so his non-disciplinary affiliations also contributed to his facility for bridge building, his “hankering for the good things on both sides of the line,” as he said in Pragmatism. And these mediating dimensions of James suggest still further ways to use his insights to facilitate understanding across intellectual and cultural divides.

“He approached philosophy as mankind originally approached it, without having a philosophy, and he lent himself to various hypotheses in various directions.”

George Santayana, 1920¹

George Santayana could be both admiring and impatient. His comments show his mixed feelings for the way his former teacher and friend seemed to be in the discipline but not of it. Alfred North Whitehead blurted out that James was “that adorable genius,” as if he were some kind of philosophical marvel unconnected to any disciplinary tradition at all, and he explained his general comment by specifying that his genius was “greatness with simplicity.”² These observations show some cardinal features of James’s career: his tendency to work outside disciplinary boundaries with a spirit of irreverence for authority and for its standards, the contribution of his sharp insights to many professional disciplines, and the appeal of his fluid style to various audiences. And Santayana hints at another trait that Whitehead addresses: James’s simplicity or unmediated way of interpreting; he commented directly on experience and used his thoughts to guide experience, by implication with use of philosophical categories as means rather than as ends in themselves.

Santayana and Whitehead noticed aspects of James which I characterize as “non-disciplinary,” and which I will explore on three levels. These correspond to James’s relations to the disciplines before, during, and after his career as a philosopher: first, the personal and social reasons for his lack of attraction to disciplinary affiliation, even as he remained eager for philosophical reputation; second, the support from his non-dualism for his non-disciplinary stance; and third, the legacy of James’s position especially for education and politics, where most students and citizens operate without the insights or the inhibitions of disciplines. Early in his career, he worked before the formation of firmly-defined disciplines, and this pre-disciplinary stance contributed to his non-disciplinary affiliations and influences. These distant relations to the disciplines have produced frustration for some readers, listeners, and students of his thought, but they provide a synthesizing way to understand his theories, especially in relation to each other, and they suggest on-going applications of his ideas and example, especially for the mediation of differences.

EARLY CAREER: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

William James grew up irreverent. He was raised in a family of five children; his mother offered steady support while his father used his wealth and spiritual commitments to educate the children with extensive travel, wide exposure to diverse experiences and beliefs, and an insistence on avoiding specialization in their work. With the only rule of the house being such

freedom, the elder Henry James was eager for the children to be sound characters and sturdy thinkers before taking on specific work, goals both chronologically and thematically prior to vocational achievement. As with the defiance of formality and social convention in his antinomian spiritual philosophy, the father put a priority on being before doing: the maturing person each child was to become was more important than the eventual work they would take on. This existential imperative had a particularly decisive impact on the eldest son William, who shared many of his father's interests and raised the parent's expectations for the son to extend the family's spiritual commitments into the scientific fields that were gaining more authority and influence in the middle-to-late nineteenth century. When William James went to scientific school, however, he met a more rigorous and materialist brand of science than his father expected, but he carried the elder James's irreverence on his circuitous path to becoming a psychologist and philosopher. He learned much from the sciences, but more for use of their insights rather than to dwell in scientific commitment.³

James's experience of science from home to school to teaching and writing in his own voice reflected social trends in scientific fields of the time: in his scientific work, he avoided commercial ties; his father would appreciate that. And his position with a moratorium time in his youth to choose his vocation while studying widely and then teaching science would confirm that he was living away from the marketplace that defined the "professions" in the nineteenth century. His experience and his views differed from the mainstream trends for knowledge workers in his critique of specialization; this too would please his father, but his defiance of focused work was not a reversion to the older ideal of the generalist who in effect grazed among the specialties. Instead, James was challenging the intellectual premise of the specialist scientists in their increasing commitment to a materialist philosophy. This intellectual stance complemented the social practices that would confine inquiry to one aspect of life, and such specialization was a tacit endorsement of a dualist vision of the world with scientists set to work on bodily dimensions of life and nonscientists either confined to idealistic speculations on an ethereal mind or recruited to provide methodological support for the more substantial work of science. A philosophy that reduced experiential factors to material explanations both grew from and reinforced the social goal of the new university scientist working for "pure science." This emerging vocation brought removal from direct market demands, but also practical usefulness to

society with devotion to “investigating the principles and laws of the material universe,” as astronomer Benjamin Gould declared, and with British anatomist and aggressive advocate for independent and reductionist scientific research Thomas Huxley widely presented as the ideal.⁴

While still in scientific training, James wrote a critical review of Huxley himself. But first, he praised the British Darwinist’s science, especially his anatomical research. He slyly noted that these positive words would grant his review “perfect respectability” that would serve “as a shield” for his critical commentary. The young science student took issue with Huxley’s “faith” in current scientific assumptions, and especially his use of them as a “battering-ram” to assert that all “phenomena of life ... result directly from the general laws of matter.” Huxley’s own specialization in anatomy, with his attention to the physical dynamics of the body, encouraged the philosophical focus on material explanations of phenomena. In place of this materialist assumption prevalent in most professionalizing science, James proposed a “Program of the Future of Science,” which would support open inquiry, without philosophical materialism: Hence his eagerness to “Let ... all ... be admitted to the speculative arena. But let it be on an equal footing with all comers, all to wear the speculative colors, no odds given, and no favors shown.”⁵ By contrast, science guided by materialism gave favors to its own approaches, and this enabled pure science to produce materialist answers to specialized questions, all very focused and cautious with judgments, and hesitant to inquire about the broad implications of the work. Academic fields were becoming modern professional disciplines and subject to their organizing influence, after all, the word “discipline” means not only a subject of study, but also behavior in accordance with rules, implying obedience and control; disciplinary influence, therefore, could set limits on inquiry. James’s irreverence for disciplines emerged as a feature of his impatience with the increasingly narrow scope of research; it was of a piece with his philosophical commitment to pluralism in his epistemological and metaphysical inquiries, and it suggested his critique of scientific caution in “The Will to Believe.” The single-topic focus of specialized work and the single emphasis on material dimensions of life, if treated as the norm, would rob inquiry of its richer textures, and suggest a thinner portrait of humanity.

James brought these concerns about materialism into his own steps from science to philosophy, which he reached through the new field of psychology. Within the institutionalizing trends in education and the specializing trends in the disciplines, the very emergence of the discipline of psychology gave James a loose but energized relation with the field. There was no

place to study psychology when he began his career in the 1860s, so he “originally studied medicine in order to be a physiologist,” gaining background knowledge but still not working directly within psychology. Meanwhile, he maintained persistent interests in philosophy, first as reflective curiosity, then in deeper study with friends especially in the Metaphysical Club, but his appetite was often blunted by worry about the dangers of excess speculation, which left him “never to have done with doubt”; with his philosophical interests, he searched for ways to maintain the “grounds of ... faith.” The medical and physiological learning provided some frameworks for inquiry that established comfortable outer boundaries to his speculations. In philosophical orientation, he was already committed to inquiry into natural facts from the empirical focus of his scientific study; and in particular, physiology provided knowledge of the bodily settings for philosophical speculation. So he did not turn to psychology (or philosophy) by taking up study in the discipline, but instead he thought philosophically, with his philosophy deeply informed by current physiology, and so he entered psychology, in effect, by a kind of back door. Part of his entrée was in social context because there was no field yet, and part was from his personal path; or as he put it with more poetic cleverness, his entry to psychology was “from a sort of fatality,” from the combination of vocation in physiology with avocation in philosophy. So looking back from 1902, when the discipline of psychology had become fairly robust with university positions, graduate training, and authoritative publications, he could make an irreverent declaration with deadpan honesty: “the first lecture in psychology I ever heard being the first I ever gave.”⁶

When James was making his early vocational choices, he distanced himself from professionalizing assumptions, but he was also working his way into professional work. But which field to choose was as yet unclear: he was a trained scientist; he hoped for philosophy; he adopted the fledgling field of psychology. In the early 1870s, he readily identified as a scientist; with his medical degree in 1869, and his extensive study of anatomy and physiology, he sometimes called himself a biologist. Still, years of introspection and reflection on the methods and implications of science, including in the Metaphysical Club made him vow that “philosophy I will nevertheless regard as my vocation and never let slip a chance to do a stroke at it.” So he decided “to stick to biology for a profession,” but only “in case I am not called to a chair of philosophy.” He began his teaching career with a physiology course in 1873, and he continued

to teach anatomy and physiology for the next few years. He took a step in the direction of his philosophical interests in 1875 when he introduced a course on “The Relations between Physiology and Psychology.” His personal path in mediation of his scientific and introspective interests became the basis of his innovative approaches in physiological psychology, and at the same time, he was a pioneer in the development of a psychology laboratory at Harvard, where his appointment was upgraded to full time in 1876.⁷

Despite these achievements, they remained merely means toward his long-term end of gaining an appointment in philosophy. He realized that writing would be the vehicle toward improving his visibility and chances. He acted in effect as an intellectual entrepreneur, hoping to write himself into the job he hoped for—both by writing to gain status and writing to articulate his own fit for a future hiring. Since 1865, he had been composing numerous reviews, which placed him in a broad community of discourse in science, philosophy, psychology, and contemporary intellectual issues in general. These dozens of reviews, ranging from notes to brief essays, placed him mostly on the receiving end of new developments, a place well suited to his stage of career. In 1878, he started producing longer articles, allowing him to develop ideas contributing to the discourse. For example, expanding on propositions he had developed in his review of Huxley, James wrote “Are We Automata?” in which he critiqued the reduction of mind to brain action; and his “Sentiment of Rationality” and “Remarks on Spencer” were bold arguments for the role of psychological choice and personal will in philosophical orientation—and these would become some of the founding texts of pragmatism.⁸ Even before writing philosophy texts informed by his psychological training, he set out to explain that mix of fields.

In 1876, James made a public case for the kind of philosophy he was beginning to formulate. Writing in the *Nation*, a magazine of general intellectual interest, “The Teaching of Philosophy in Our College” articulated his own internal debate about how to reconcile philosophical reflection and scientific inquiry. The essay is justifiably well known for its endorsement of contemporary reform arguments to grant the natural sciences greater authority and influence in teaching and research. He stated that “physical science is becoming so speculative and audacious in its constructions, and at the same time so authoritative, that all doctrines find themselves, willy-nilly, compelled to settle their accounts and make new treaties with it.” In the wake of scientific advances, especially in physiological psychology, “The sleepest doctor-of-divinity-like repose must soon be awakened.” Philosophers would simply do their jobs better, if they would “go through a

thorough physiological training.”⁹ So far, he seems to be calling for a scientific housecleaning of philosophy to get with the very kind of program that he had been criticizing in Huxley.

Part of James’s rallying cry was self-interest. His description of the kinds of philosophy that would be emerging in the next generation bore a decided resemblance to the kinds of training he had acquired. He remained fascinated with philosophical questions, but enthusiasm alone would not earn him a position. His claim to professional standing was in science, particularly the fields that were building toward a physiological approach to psychology. His comment toward the end of the essay was transparently autobiographical given his ambitions to earn a philosophy professorship: “the study of the nervous system and the brain” is so important to philosophy that “she ... must and will educate herself accordingly. Young men who aspire to professorships and who will bear this in mind will, we are sure, before many years find a number of vacant places calling for their peculiar capacity.” This essay was, then, on one level, a translation of his vocational worries into confident public prose and an attempt to position himself favorably in the changing stream of academic fashion.¹⁰

An emphasis on James’s career goals and the quotable flair of his statement about the authoritative force of science can, however, obscure his intentions in the essay as a whole. The lines about science were designed to redress an imbalance he had seen in the teaching of philosophy, which had for too long neglected science. In the essay, he emphasizes the need for philosophy to come to terms with science not so that philosophy will become subordinate to science, but in order to wean philosophy from religious orthodoxy. And in doing so, he was not objecting to the beliefs themselves but to their claims to legitimacy through authority—no matter its source. This was a more comprehensive version of his Metaphysical Club friend Chauncey Wright’s call for a philosophy that “denies nothing of orthodoxy except its confidence.”¹¹ And so James argued that extreme commitments to either religion or science can each be dangers for philosophy.

James begins the essay in critique of contemporary philosophy teachers who emphasize doctrinal “safeness” rather than free reflection “on the world and our position in it.” He once again held up Germany as a model because there, “philosophic speculation has gone on as a rule without any reference to its ecclesiastical consequences.” By contrast, “in England and this country, ... whilst speculation on political and practical matters has been free as air, metaphysical thought has always been haunted by the consciousness of the religious orthodoxy of the country.” This religious

dogmatism has had a doubly pernicious influence because “we are bribed beforehand by our reverence or dislike for the official answer.” As a result, philosophic discourse becomes polarized between the deferential impulse to harmonize with orthodoxy and the “skeptical” desire which becomes “polemical” in its eagerness to overturn orthodoxy—a trait he repeatedly criticized in his reviews. James found “dismal shallowness” in both “the spiritualistic systems of our textbooks of ‘Mental Science’” and “the free-thinking tendency which the *Popular Science Monthly* ... represents.” He rejected each camp, both doctrinal religious belief and modern scientific enthusiasm, because “the result in both cases alike is mediocrity.” In other words, philosophers have either acceded to the accepted certainties of orthodox religion or, in rebelling against them, have turned to an equal but opposite dogmatism about scientific answers. “The form of philosophical problems and discussions, in short,” he lamented, “is too apt to be set for us by the existence of the Church”—to support or to decry its doctrines.¹²

He found historical allies in his rejection of dogmatism: “All we contend for is that we, like the Greeks and the Germans, should now attack things as if there were no official answer pre-occupying the field.” Despite his admiration for ancient thought, he was actually repulsed by fawning for the Greco-Roman world. Just as he admired the ancient Greeks as historical examples rather than as fixed icons, so he objected to required training in the Greek language. After all, “Greek is but a language among others.” More important would be to imitate the Greeks in spirit, and “teach all sciences in a liberal and philosophic manner” rather than to march students through “dry, grammatic” exercises. How much better, James argued, “to give young men a wider openness of mind and a more flexible way of thinking than special technical training can generate.” He proposed hopefully that this approach would coincide with the mental instincts of college-age students: “youth is certainly the time when the impulse to metaphysical reflection is in its flower,” even as he realized that such pedagogical ideals could not always be reached. The openness that James advocated, would lead to the teaching of philosophy as “the reflection of man on his relations with the universe.” Freed of specific religious or scientific answers, philosophy’s “educational essence lies in the quickening of the spirit.” Far from advocating scientific or any other authority, he even noted that “what doctrines students take from their teachers are of little consequence.” Better for students “to catch from [their teachers] the living, philosophic attitude of mind” and an “eagerness to harmonize” different points of view.¹³

For all of James's desire to balance science and religion, there are still important ways that his essay on "Teaching Philosophy" displays his commitment to science. First, because of the institutional establishment of religion, advocacy for science training was the need of the hour. He also acknowledges the perspectives of enthusiasts for science. He is, for example, "willing here to concede the extreme Positivistic position" in its doubts about "the attainment of universal truths"—but he linked this rigorous position with suggestions that positivists should also doubt the "universal truths" generated by their own scientific zeal. In his own field of study, he admired the insights of Gustav Fechner and Hermann von Helmholtz, but he did not treat them as untouchable icons in the professional canon. In fact, he even doubted whether Fechner's psychophysical law "is of any great psychological importance," and he found that Helmholtz's inferences "are not the last word of wisdom in the study of perception." And yet, the popular view of these scientific achievements illustrates a problem in the comprehension of science. "People who do not understand them will remain persuaded that they are of portentous moment" and will therefore treat them as part of a new dogma based on science. James wanted to be sure that philosophers avoided substituting science in place of the traditional reverence for religion. His essay on the teaching of philosophy reflected his own career at this time. James was eager to teach beyond department boundaries and his success in proposing new courses added to his enthusiasm. His course combining physiology and psychology brought some psychology to the advanced students of physiology at the Lawrence Scientific School, and his undergraduate courses over the next few years were even bolder institutionally because they would bring scientific physiology to philosophy. His own tortured path toward these steps and his eclectic interests served as prime assurance that he would not teach his science only as materialism. By 1876, he had finally moved past both his first preliminary vocational steps toward security in science and his personal concerns for excessive philosophical introspection.¹⁴

Despite all his bold promises in print and to himself, James's hopes for broad, relentless inquiry in philosophy teaching foundered in part from the limits of his physical energy. Even in 1876, he complained that he had only "a little spoonful ready for each day." But as usual with his claims of inactivity, he also mentioned the things he did accomplish. He continued to teach full-time, he published more and more each year, and he read widely in his vocational fields and outside them. The lighter reading was not part of his professional work, but it contributed to his developing philosophy—and it stimulated the nonmaterialistic questions that he asked of his scientific studies in

psychology. He also thought of it as his chance, “outside of his work,” to read and reflect in order to “cultivate the ideal,” because “I think a professor in addition to his *fach* [subject, discipline], should be a *ganzer Mensch* [whole person].” Charles Peirce was already aware that James was succeeding in his broad teacherly goals. He said that even beyond James’s technical proficiencies, “he is eminently the man to have a good effect on the minds of his pupils.”¹⁵ These interests intersected with his psychology and complemented it as he sought to balance humanistic concerns with scientific knowledge in his professional constructions.

When he wrote his manifesto for the teaching of philosophy, James was still a few steps removed from teaching or writing philosophy. There lay his hopes, but he was then preoccupied with his current job teaching biology as he liked to call his courses in anatomy and physiology. He complained however, that “all the men here,” in the university setting and especially the students and teachers of science in his immediate proximity, “seem so dry and shopboard like.” These were not the aspects of science he hoped to bring to the “Teaching of Philosophy in Our College.” In keeping with his public manifesto, one of the ways he kept his own courses lively was to treat the materialism of scientific inquiries as questions, rather than as answers for psychology or philosophy. Moreover, his simultaneous extensive humanistic reading reminded him that “I ... can’t breathe without some suggestion of contact with lives of other people—vigorous ones, I mean.” And this reminded him of his primal attraction, beneath the physiological study, to the field of psychology: “I like human nature,” he blurted out disarmingly. He set out to understand humanity and its relation to nature using the tools of philosophy and science, but he was also simply pursuing his own curiosity.¹⁶

James’s efforts to position himself for philosophy paid off: he received an appointment as Assistant Professor of Philosophy in 1880. He was well versed in science but he was not beholden to the claims of its enthusiasts. James’s intellectual position on science, especially the way he distanced himself from materialism, also had broad social appeal; after all, the rising materialism had intellectual plausibility within the scientific disciplines and even practical applications for technology and industry, but it was still viewed with worry and suspicion by much of the public and by wary cultural leaders. When James sought a position as a Lowell lecturer in 1878, he hit just the right tone in response to these worries, presenting himself honestly as a knowledgeable practitioner in the material work of science, but he added, “I can safely say that I am neither a materialistic partisan nor a spiritualistic bigot.” As historian of

higher education Julie Reuben points out, despite the increase in specialization within the disciplines, especially in the sciences and as spurred by scientific methods and assumptions, university leaders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries retained the traditional hope for synthesis and even unity of knowledge, which would include some form of continued harmony of religion and science.¹⁷ So while structures of specialization were transforming higher education around the model of the modern research university, its leaders looked for ways to mitigate the distancing effect that those trends generated between the professors and the public. James's own impulses to find moral dimensions in knowledge and his openness to religion, even if in its less institutional and more spiritual varieties, appealed strongly to educational leaders not only at the Lowell Institute, but also at his home institution, Harvard. They would not, however, be as pleased with the way that James mediated his science and scholarship with his religious and moral messages, especially his non-dualism, which would erode the very unity they were trying to achieve.

James's path into psychology also defined his path out of it—or out of his exclusive commitment to it. Those late 1870s essays that helped to define pragmatism, and that helped to launch his career in academia, were part of his plan to write “a psychological work on the motives that lead men to philosophize.” His psychology texts in the 1890s ranged from the thorough and authoritative *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to the accessible and practical *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (1899), and they shared that same impulse to philosophize that he had shown in brooding personal troubles, discussions with friends, and early essays in philosophical psychology, even if now emerging after pages of physiological facts and psychological analysis. James became a leader of the new discipline of psychology, but he himself viewed the field or any related discipline as a means to a broader end of understanding human nature. This could be called James's philosophical core, which pervaded his career from youthful speculation and psychological research to his urgent scrambling to complete the arch of his philosophy with *Some Problems of Philosophy*, only published posthumously in 1911. The philosophy profession formed in his lifetime, often influenced by the norms of science and the impress of psychology, as Francesca Bordogna insightfully shows; as James grew impatient with these trends and persisted with irreverent treatment of its norms and an often non-professional range of styles, James in a sense continued on his path of speculation begun in his youth, with his commitment to

“general philosophy.”¹⁸ Santayana captured the spirit of his work by saying that James had a philosophy “without having a philosophy,” and that it was rather simplistic, a philosophy “as mankind originally approached ...” human curiosity about meaning and searched for orienting direction in life, with little concern for technical precision. With less literary flair, but perhaps with more suggestions for contemporary use, I have called this strand the “non-disciplinary” James.

MATURE CONTRIBUTIONS: JAMES THINKING WITHOUT DISCIPLINE

James swam in a sea of troubles in his youth, including his long search for a vocation; throughout, he maintained philosophical goals, even if he did not yet have philosophical answers. Some of his first philosophical thoughts emerged in reflection about vocational choice, about what discipline to choose, and indeed about disciplining his own active and worried mind toward particular directions. While in his own troubles, he found it easier to enunciate his inchoate theories in the form of advice to others about their vocational choices. This stance lent a calm assurance to his comments, for example, to Tom Ward, a confidante since they had traveled together on the natural history expedition to Brazil in 1865 (itself a vocational exploration of this branch of science): “Results shd. not be too voluntarily aimed at or too busily thought of.” Meanwhile, rather than worry about gaining particular vocational achievements, he had to take it on faith that, “from a long enough daily work at a given matter,” some decent results—with particulars unforeseen—would be “*sure* to float up of their own accord.” As the young James persistently read physiology and hoped for work in psychology but also kept meeting setbacks from health problems, personal discouragements, and even from awkwardness with women, he tried to build up his confidence, without waiting on particular accomplishments; this would be the spirit of his later theory of “precursive faith” in “The Will to Believe.” The germ of his concise theoretical statement of the 1890s, that “faith in a fact can help create the fact,” was already present in the experiential comment of the 1860s: “even when you seem to yourself to be making no progress,... if you but go on in your own uninteresting way [results] must bloom out in their good time.” This outlook, he reported, has had a “potent effect in my inner life.” It spurred his motivation despite discouragements, because it “gave me a willingness to work where I saw no object to be gained.” Even when he had little yet to show for it, he felt confident that in time “the result would come up as it were of its own accord.” When writing to his fellow

student of physiology, Henry Bowditch, he could take deep solace that, “however discouraging the work of each day may seem, stick at it long enough, and you’ll wake up some morning,—a physiologist.” Before he had a label for it or precise argumentation to describe it, James had developed his own private will to believe in the ambiguous vocational path he was on, a belief he maintained even though he had few results yet in evidence. This would allow him to act with purpose, not based on an ideal or on final certainty, but because of his hope derived from immediate positive steps. He would build on these ideas to develop goals that were based not on the past or on an abstract ideal, but on the future in the making, what Ramón del Castillo describes as James’s focus on the “unattain[able] future.”¹⁹

While James was on this self-disciplining path before entering into a particular vocational discipline, he found reinforcement for his emerging views from a number of sources. He was captivated by ancient Greek sculpture because of its simple directness of expression. While admiring the “sobriety” of some works in Dresden’s Zwinger Museum, he reported with amazement that they are “simply standing in their mellow mildness without a *point* anywhere in the whole thing.” And he concluded his commentary by suggesting the losses that have emerged with modern progress and sophistication: “their things are simple—ours are at best simplified.” Ancient art has the simplicity of harmony with nature as given, unaware of modern complications and longings. Ancient art is simple, whereas modern art has a “laboriously attained simplicity,” an artificially constructed harmony, an attempt to return to something lost. In the same spirit, toward the end of his life, he noted that most philosophies are attempts to improve our understanding compared to the results of experience, which has its “disappointments and uncertainties,” but which is “perfectly fluent”; theories offer simplified explanations of more directly simple experiences, or as he expressed this idea more grandly, theories are attempts to “restore the fluent sense of life again, and let redemption take the place of innocence.” He did theorize, but he maintained that philosophies are “ever not quite” compared to experience itself, which offers the really real, if also the uncountably large and undigestable real.²⁰

James also found reinforcement for his patient approach to developing his vocation and for his uses of philosophy from yet another ancient model. As Emma Sutton has pointed out, reading Stoic philosophy encouraged his hope to worry less about the broad direction of fate

beyond individual control, and instead attend to our personal responses to fate's overwhelming immensity. Theories may be pale replicas of robust experience, but they are vital tools for human understanding and personal direction. The Roman Stoic and emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote a philosophy for personal consumption, like James's own private writings before he turned to teaching and publication; we know the Roman's work as a book published much later, the famous *Meditations*, but the text as written was a set of notes "To Myself," to reinforce his "inner citadel" of personal will—it was philosophy as guide to life's troubles, philosophy as mental and volitional exercise. James noted that "old Mark" presented a model for "a life in which your individual will becomes so harmonized to nature's will" that you will "cheerfully ... acquiesce in whatever she assigns to you." James did not yet know his own vocational direction, but he admired the Stoic proposal to quell the longing, "knowing that you serve *some* purpose in her vast machinery wh. will never be revealed to you." This was not life without purpose or life with fixed purpose—the most stark positions emerging, respectively, from scientific or religious thought—but life with purpose unfolding. Marcus's reminders confirmed his goal to live a life, "easily & patiently, without feeling responsible for its future." For James as for Marcus, this meant daily work without waiting on results—and it also meant that personally, when he did achieve results, he was not dependent on them for personal affirmation, and vocationally, he was less inclined to maintain commitment to a particular channel of work.²¹

This path of patience about results supported his sense of direction, but it could also be unsettling especially when amplified by his considerable ambivalence and indecision. Reading French philosopher Charles Renouvier confirmed his resolution and gave him a theoretical framework and reason to support it. Renouvier's critique of certainty would allow him to make a virtue of his own ambivalence: uncertainty was not just a burden; it could also be liberation—the positive side of uncertainty was freedom. After years of striving for a firm will in the face of his youthful troubles, which included finding support in the examples of the ancients and urging resolution in others while he sought it for himself, James first read Renouvier in 1868. Much reading and many troubles later, and after he completed his M. D. the next year, the moral significance of the French philosopher's message sank in. In 1870, he wrote his well-known diary entry, recording that Renouvier's *Essais de critique générale* had inspired his moral courage to believe that "my first act of free will shall be to believe in free will." He explained his admiration because with this philosophy "an *act* [is] enthroned in the heart of philosophic

thought. Liberty is the centre of gravity of the system, which henceforth becomes a moral philosophy.”²² He said it, but it was still difficult to do. The ambivalent young physiologist had been trying action steps for years, and he would only start to see the fruits of his efforts in the next few years with his professional and personal achievements. But now he had a philosophical plan to express and match his fledgling efforts; Renouvier crystallized his own personal goals and in the process confirmed the supportive role of philosophy as a means to personal insight.

The French philosopher affirmed still more of James’s thought: although Renouvier “took his stand on Kant,” James noticed that he repudiated the strict duality of phenomenal and noumenal, the materially knowable and the ineffable, and rejected both the claim of certainty through empirical science and the quest for certainty in morality and religion. And so, like James, Renouvier maintained that materialism was a philosophy brought to science, but this philosophy was not the science itself. He compared Renouvier favorably in contrast with the “slouchy dumping of materials” about our physiological states that was emerging in the new physiological psychology. The senior philosopher also affirmed James’s insights from Charles Peirce in the Metaphysical Club about the central importance for science of its commitment to inquiry as a path to discovery, while also affirming Peirce’s insight that the path of inquiry could only produce probabilities, not certainties. Renouvier went on to propose that while certainty of philosophic premise should not direct human understanding or belief, it is an important part of inquiry, but only at its end not its beginning. Even though “all yard-stick criteria of certitude have failed,” leading to the conclusion that “there is no certitude,” James said in summary of Renouvier’s insights, “all there is is men who are certain.” Renouvier therefore provided confirmation of ideas in formation and philosophical sanction for pursuit of these threads: the free-will philosophy built on non-dualist premises, with denial of metaphysical certainties, but with support of psychological certainties—all these ideas served to rekindle James’s philosophical commitment. Renouvier convinced him of the “the *possibility* ... of absolute beginnings,” for the start of his own career and for an opening outlook for his own philosophical orientation.²³

Attention to interaction across dualist distinctions pervaded James’s career. This shaped his emphasis on the relation of his fields of work in psychology, religion, and philosophy, and his interest in the relation of material and immaterial parts of life. In the last decade of his life,

James gave full articulation to his own philosophical beginning, his most profound contributions to philosophy that began from reflections outside the field. While specialization in the disciplines thrives on various dualisms, with claims to essential distinctions of parts of the world, James pointed to the relationships within our experience. He had learned about non-dualist philosophies from Renouvier and others, and as early as 1863, he was already thinking in terms of the intimate integrity of parts of the universe: “Nature only affords *Thing*. It is the human mind that discriminates *Things*. We think of individuals, units, things.... The division is artificial.” In the last decade of his life, in his essays in “radical empiricism,” he placed the conventionally dualist “subject or ... knower” and “the object known” as features of the same “pure experience,” simultaneous and in intimate relation. As he insisted, they “coexist.” While acknowledging the contrasts of each side, he was repeatedly driven to search for the natural settings, the intimate relations, and even the common underlying sources of each of these human traits—and the common features of different academic disciplines. Of course the pairs, expressed in objective and subjective parts of experience, are different from each other, but they each display, respectively, ingredients from material and immaterial dimensions, as expressed in bodily and mental parts of life, and in disciplinary domains often surrounding, respectively, science and religion. But they are all part of natural experience. This allowed for evaluation of experience without the preconceptions of neighboring philosophical assumptions. James proposed that these contrasting dimensions, manifesting in objective and subjective parts of experience, form a seamless relation, with “unity ... aboriginal” in the “stream of thinking.”²⁴

The resulting non-dualism of his theory of “pure experience” went deeper than interaction of material and immaterial events; instead, he proposed their simultaneous existence. His evaluation took experience, as did ancient sculptors, simple and direct, prior to theoretical categorization; and so his non-dualism was in effect a pre-dualism, with attention to experience before the distinctions of thought. The “stream of thinking” only begins to capture the character of experience understood pure, as lived with mind in body; it could just as readily be called the “stream of ... breathing” with brain action and nerve input, or simply the stream of “muscular adjustments”; these are the physical events that are happening while consciousness attends, discriminates, and chooses paths; they are as much part of consciousness as its immaterial thoughts. Neither the immaterial nor the material events could exist without the other. The subjective or objective reckoning of experience each offers useful discriminations, but each also

serves as expression of something deeper. With radical empiricism, “the self-same experience [is] taken twice over in different contexts,” and because of that, dualism may be useful for analyzing and organizing understandings and actions, but it is artificial, and so he avoided commitment to its picture of the world. He proposed “no separateness needing to be overcome” in metaphysical portraiture of the world, even as he acknowledged that perceived separateness can be used in the work of the world.²⁵

James recognized an “aboriginal sensible muchness,” as he explained in *Some Problems of Philosophy*, but he also acknowledged that from “out of this” field of data, “attention carves out objects, which conception then names and identifies forever--... and all these abstracted whats are concepts.” Especially in Western culture, the “substitution of a conceptual order” for original experience includes dualist concepts. James did not present his radically empiricist philosophy in direct contrast with dualism, but instead his vision included an overall picture of lived experience, with dualism as a conceptual choice, often quite useful. This is a way to understand the relation of major parts of his philosophy. He introduced his first public expression of pragmatism with an image that suggested his radical empiricism: the “trackless forest of human experience.” This “fulness [sic] is elusive,” but “the human intellect” supplies “spots, or blazes” which “give you a direction and a place to reach”; these “formulas” and “conceptions,” including some quite “technical,” signal that “we can now use the forest”—it is “no longer a place merely to get lost.” Such theories, or “philosopher’s phrases,” however useful, still leave “unexpressed almost everything” in original experience, or in the words of his original metaphor, “they do not give you the integral forest with all its ... wonders.” So his radical empiricism serves as a constant warning for philosophies, including pragmatisms, to avoid mistaking their blazes for the whole of the forest; theories after all are not the whole of experience. Just as pragmatism is a way of “settling ... disputes” between philosophical positions, so it can also serve as a way to integrate the roles of different disciplines when addressing problems. With this framework for his pragmatism, this supportive but chastened approach to our conceptual worlds, James maintains that “theories become instruments, not answers to enigmas.” And with this pragmatic sense that ideas are tools, disciplines then are collections of these tools; they collect facts relevant to their inquiries, and even claim a kind of possession of them—after all, as James said of the forest of experience, “the blazes give a sort of

ownership.”²⁶ And theories within the discipline evaluate the meanings of those facts, and their implications and potential uses. James’s radical empiricism and pragmatism, his theories of experience and of use, have extensive implications for experiential use.

LEGACY: JAMES APPLIED...IN CONSTELLATIONS WITHOUT DISCIPLINE

James’s relation to philosophy began with irreverence and caution about the dangers of speculation, grew with his cultivation of its insights for personal direction, and culminated in trend setting for the field. He has had on-going influence in psychology from largely introspective insights that have spurred research programs into his theories of consciousness, the self, emotion, attention, and more; his “science of religion” was at the fountainhead of the new psychology of religion, which became a founding discipline of modern religious studies; his careful scrutiny of psychical experiences gave support to that controversial field; and of course his will to believe, pragmatism, radical empiricism, and pluralism are still used and debated in ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. This is the best-known James, and these uses of his thought highlight his disciplinary affiliations, either from his lifetime or in later application. These are vitally important subjects, but these do not encompass the whole of his identity, significance, and potential legacy. There is “another side of James,” to adapt from Loren Goldman’s translation of Ernst Bloch’s 1942 critique of the American philosopher.²⁷ James also thought outside of these disciplinary lines of work. With his importance both inside and outside the academy, he can bridge these realms. Given that whole swathes of culture and even of intellectual life occur and thrive outside of the reach of disciplines, these other dimensions of James can serve as particularly significant guides to non-academic ways of thinking. With his thorough importance in the academy, he can serve as an intellectual emissary to a wider world.

Of all the domains outside the disciplines, I choose two for immediate attention: college education and politics. These are fields where James did some work, although that work was not central to his corpus.²⁸ They are also fields where the subject matter of philosophical and other academic investigators regularly appear, albeit in generalized and simplified forms, even while the prime actors in education and politics, namely undergraduate students and politicians, pay little attention to the disciplinary insights of academics. And yet the ideas of philosophers and other academics have been, and could be still more, valuable enrichments to classroom dialogue and public discourse. Impediments to such communication reside on both sides: academic work

has indeed become more specialized, with language more refined; and students and political workers often partake of an impatience with intellectual refinements, preferring thought based on immediate experience, with support from images, emotion, personal testimony, or brief summaries of complex issues. The history of this turn to simplifications of complex issues is itself complex, but it can be summarized as a widening gulf between sophisticated realms of knowledge and interpretation, and an indifference to, or even an anti-intellectual hostility for academic enterprises. This story is part of the history of democratization, with popular sovereignty challenging the power of monarchical and aristocratic elites in the early modern world, and then turning that anti-elitism against intellectuals especially since the nineteenth century.²⁹ Professors may be an already overworked class of people, but the fruits of all their efforts are still often unwelcome and generally underutilized in the culture as a whole.

William James presents ideas, and has ways of presenting them especially in his non-disciplinary dimensions, that may be useful at this juncture in our history. Whitehead's aside about his simplicity, and Santayana's slur about his "philosophy ... without having a philosophy," suggest just the approaches that academics can actually adopt for letting their ideas have a wider audience, even as of course James is not the only academic example on this path. And James himself recognized that such approaches are not counsels to water down academic discourse itself; rigorous pursuit of information and understanding within areas focused enough to provide depth will always be the chief calling of academics—and will produce the deepest wells of knowledge and understanding. But if non-academics cannot drink fully of the waters of specialized discourse, perhaps they can get fair tastes of its richness. James's example suggests a way to do just that: he did in fact do this rigorous work directed toward his fellow academics, but he also spoke and wrote in ways that others could understand; and he did this not instead of his intellectual insights, but by taking the fruit of it for clearer consumption. Robert Richardson even presents four different styles that James used in different texts, ranging from his "technical writing" and "exposition [for]... students," to his writing for educated non-specialists and a "public style."³⁰ With these styles, James shows the wisdom of the teacher who detects the need not just to say things of significance, but also to speak to the particular student's—or particular audience's—own condition. This wisdom can apply to academic work in general and may

enable its practitioners to bring a leaven not only to students in our classrooms, but also to politicians and citizens in the public.

Non-academics generally do not think with the benefit of disciplinary frameworks, but they still grapple with intellectual questions. For example, students wonder about the plausibility of various divergent spiritual messages and even about the meaning of life, especially about the direction of their own careers; and politicians deal with issues of free will when deciding about the merits of regulations or incentives to promote social values. There are two key differences in the ways they approach such questions: first, while academics emphasize theories and schools of thought, non-academics emphasize stories, and without the narrative of a story, academic discourse can seem stale and unreal to those uninitiated to the ways disciplinary analysis; as one of my students said about his course on the French Revolution, “we have spent so much time on historiographies of schools of interpretation, that we have not even learned what actually happened—it’s as if there weren’t even any guillotines!” And second, non-academics make judgments about their experiences by emphasizing lived and felt convictions rather than privileging the results of inquiry. There are many ways to characterize this difference, including the distinctions between heart and head, emotional reactions and reasoned judgment, or even the anecdotal impulse and the verifiable conclusion. Although even academics cannot fully adhere to the reasoning or even the objectivity of inquiry, these aspects of thought have greater value within the academy. While conviction and inquiry are not the exclusive products of religion and science, they have their roots in these distinct sources of authority for emphasizing realms of experience and deciding areas to value and ways to make judgments. Disciplines provide academics with the paths toward understanding experience through theories that are designed to organize information, show relations of different perspectives or even defend particular positions about the relative importance of different parts of experience; disciplinary work provides academics with ways to make sound judgments on experience based on the knowledge and interpretations brought by constant inquiry. But to non-academics, these methods can seem like abstract removal from experience itself; academic bridges can seem like walls to understanding.

James’s philosophy is, of course, a philosophy grounded in direct contact with experience. The first step of radical empiricism is an insistence on taking experience “pure,” which in the language of non-dualism is recognition of experience unmediated by the idealistic emphasis on the knowing mind or by the empirical emphasis on the objects known; and so with

radical empiricism, experience is understood with the “total conflux of its parts” which can then be understood in different ways by different people when that experience is “taken in one context or in another.” This is an approach that is potentially supportive of the non-disciplinary emphases on direct experience for understanding and making judgments. And yet James here is still offering a theory of experience, which can seem highly abstract to non-academics, even if they can detect a friend in the court of academia. James did offer still more support to non-disciplinary thinking. In 1903, during the same season when he was composing the essays that would become the *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, he declared that universities, including his own should maintain a “tolerance of exceptionality and excentricity,” and in fact, “our undisciplinables are our proudest products.” And he practiced what he preached: Perhaps because of his own experience entering academia in such unstructured ways, he was an ardent friend to eccentrics, such as Thomas Davidson, founder of the Ethical Cultural Society, and freelance philosopher Benjamin Blood. He himself approached education in terms of cultivation of individuality rather than as training toward disciplinary precision; and he frequently invited students, especially the eccentrics, to his home near campus and during summer vacations in Chocorua, NH, and Keene Valley, NY.³¹

James also integrated undisciplined thought into his own writing. Sometimes this took the form of actual stories to illustrate his theories. For example, to make his point about differences in human perspectives on the world and our tendency to “blindness” about the perspectives that others treasure, James told his own story. While traveling in the mountain country of North Carolina, he saw cleared land that to “my mind was one of unmitigated squalor,” truly “hideous, a sort of ulcer” compared to the “sacred ... beauties” of wild nature. But then he observed that to the owner of the land, “these coves under cultivation” represented “personal victory” and “sang a very pæan of duty, struggle, and success.” He admitted that in his first impressions, “I had been losing the whole inward significance of the situation.” He presented the theme of his theory as a report of growing personal awareness: “I had been blind to the peculiar ideality of their conditions as they certainly would have been to the ideality of mine.” In addition to stories, James also made extensive use of metaphors, which are after all brief word pictures operating much like stories in conveying lived experience in a concrete way. For example, James expressed his theory about the active human mind with its “subjective

interests” and spontaneous variations as adaptive traits in “Remarks on Spencer’s Definition of Mind”; and then in *Principles*, he presented the mind as “a theatre of simultaneous possibilities.” He supplemented this metaphoric expression of his abstract theory with yet another metaphor: “The mind, in short, works on the data it receives very much as a sculptor works on his block of stone.” The stone is the “primordial chaos of sensation,” which gives to each of us “mere matter ... indifferently”; the mind is the artist at work in the studio of experience, and “by slowly cumulative strokes of choice,” individual experiences are sculpted, but “other sculptors, other statues from the same stone.”³² In his philosophy, the theories themselves and even the way he told them built bridges to the mental worlds of citizens who think outside disciplinary boundaries.

James provided still more support to non-disciplinary thinking from the beginning of his philosophical career with his 1879 essay “The Sentiment of Rationality.” It presents an argument about the sources of philosophical commitment. Before their elaborations, and their refinements within the canons of disciplinary specialization, commitments to theories themselves begin with a “feeling of sufficiency, ... [an] absence of all need to explain.” This is a description of the work of assumptions in our minds, which provide “perfect fluency” precisely because they are ideas not questioned or explained. He said that this theory grew from “psychological work,” and it was directed toward “the motives which lead men to philosophize”; and indeed, he was using his psychology of selective attention and field theory, with each mind focusing on a portion of its field of potential awareness, its own center of attention, with margin or fringe of consciousness trailing off from that center.³³ James points out different sentiments of rationality that form the basis of most philosophical orientations; from these assumptions, he argues that the rest is details, or more precisely, from these cores, philosophies grow with their nuance, elaboration, and footnotes to factual and authoritative sources. The framework presented in the essay suggests a way of understanding the character of disciplinary and non-disciplinary thinking: they each have different sentiments of rationality.

Inquiry and conviction are crucial, respectively, to disciplinary and non-disciplinary thinking. The roots of these words further help to illustrate their mental uses: *Inquiry* means the action of seeking, seeking to know by asking or questioning, and it derives from the Latin word “quaerere” meaning to seek, strive for, or ask, and this is also at the root of “quest,” which lends “inquiry” its connotations about an earnest seeking through its use of questions. A *conviction* is

a strongly held belief, a settled persuasion; it derives from the Latin word “convincere” meaning to convince, to prove; and “convince” in turn is built on “con” (with or wholly with) and “vincere” (to conquer), or with conquest, as in a belief taking wholesale conquest of one’s mind. Inquiry is at the center of disciplinary thinking with values placed on questions, with each answer producing more questions, and with the particular information and understanding gained according to the methods of the particular discipline. Conviction is a chief value of non-disciplinary thinking, often achieved with the methods of storytelling and with answers, generally providing guidance through direction or purpose, more important than the questions of constant inquiry. Thinking based on inquiry or on conviction each exhibits a sentiment of rationality, with each providing a “perfectly fluent course of thought,” because they respectively satisfy the assumptions and functional needs of different people with different ways of thinking and different uses for those thoughts.³⁴ James supported this framework with his functional psychology and his philosophy of pragmatic use. And in addition to this framework for understanding the differences between thinking based on inquiry and thinking based on conviction, James also provides examples from his own work that support each side. He was a fully credentialed member of the academic guild of professional abstractionists known as philosophers, he wrote with immense knowledge and subtle nuance, and he circulated readily within academic discourse. However, in addition to befriending eccentrics and shifting his style to appeal to popular audiences, James also immersed himself in the world of convictions with his arguments in defense of religious and other beliefs when faced with ambiguous choices, and with his writings about the worlds of religious experiences that thrive on convictions rather than inquiry. As with his non-dualism that did not displace dualism, these paths did not displace his inquiries, but existed alongside. In fact, he readily mingled both intellectual postures: for example, with his “science of religion,” he directed his inquiries into religious convictions, and with “The Sentiment of Rationality,” he proposed the place of convictions within inquiries.

William James was ready to cross disciplines because he was ready to meet experience directly with his non-dualist mingling of not only religion and science, but also idealism and empiricism, subjectivity and objectivity, mind and body, the spiritual and the natural, and the immaterial and the material in general. The disciplines have become epiphenomena of deeper boundaries in the conventional wisdom about the dualist shape of the world. With disciplines as

with dualisms, he did not so much seek to heal the divisions—although he welcomed such efforts—but to confront experience afresh either without their dividing direction, or by using their insights as tools, as means for investigation, as entry tickets to pools of experience, rather than as last words in their own right. So he did not ignore disciplines, but he also did not stop at their boundaries on his path toward understanding experience. And so the non-disciplinary James was also the non-dualist James, experiencing and thinking without assuming contrasting poles of thought; he also worked with a “hankering for the good things on both sides of the line,” as he said in *Pragmatism*, and he encouraged inquiry in divergent realms, while maintaining skepticism about them as well.³⁵

This view of James without discipline can shed light on his philosophical reputation and on the relation of the James studied in different disciplinary fields: it suggests that his reputed inconsistencies constitute reflections of some rather decisive ambivalence, with his openness to different sides reflecting his unblinking evaluation of the disparate realms of life; meanwhile, his contributions to different fields constitute in effect grand inconsistencies in his work which would become embedded into dramatically different schools of thought within psychology, philosophy, and religious inquiry. According to dualist assumptions, those differences appear as clashing contrasts—hence his infamous inconsistencies—but generally to James himself they are alternative paths in constant relation and divergent use. Beyond his academic significance, this non-disciplinary view of James can also shed light on his potential to reach broader audiences, including in the classroom and in politics, through expressions to translate disciplinary insights by giving them clarity and vividness, and through genuine hearing of the non-intellectual concerns of genuinely non-disciplinary thought. James’s type of sympathetic understanding will not solve all problems, but that was not his point. He sought to manage them, even sometimes deflating them by examining their assumptions and relations. In his mature philosophy as in his youth experiences, when surrounded by a sea of troubles, he sought ways to thrive despite their burdens.

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ECR: *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, 1987.

EPH: *Essays in Philosophy*, 1978.

ERE: *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, 1976 [1912].

ERM: *Essays in Religion and Morality*, 1982.

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ML: *Manuscript Lectures*, 1988.

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SPP: *Some Problems of Philosophy*, 1979 [1911].

TT: *Talks to Teachers on Psychology, and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, 1983 [1899].

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NOTES

¹ Santayana, *Character and Opinion*, 42.

² Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 3; Jacques Barzun, *A Stroll With William James*, 262.

³ This summary of James's early life (with an emphasis on vocational issues) is based on a number of biographical works, including my own: see for example, my *Eclipse of Certainty*; Simon, *Genuine Reality*; and Richardson, *William James*.

⁴ Paul Lucier, "The Professional and the Scientist, 727, 731. Lucier emphasizes the enduring distinction in practice through the late nineteenth century between the professional with commercial relations and the "men of science" who engaged in pure research; and he points out the irony of purists who were enabled to free themselves from "pecuniary considerations" precisely because of newly robust salaries at the new research universities whose endowments from successful capitalists were "designed to prevent the corruption of the pure (science) by the impure (money)" (729 and 728). Also see Haskell, ed., *The Authority of Experts* on the social power of professionals and its scientific sources; and see Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science*; and Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture* for evaluation of the role of scientific standards of thought and the "scientific ethos" among professionals.

⁵ James, James, review of Huxley, *Lectures on the Elements of Comparative Anatomy* (1865), in ECR, 197-205; to Charles Eliot Norton, Sept[ember] 3, 1864; and Nov[ember] 17, [1864], in CWJ, 4:93 and 94; and "The Mood of Science and the Mood of Faith" (1874), in ECR, 116.

⁶ James to an unnamed correspondent, August 16, 1902, CWJ, 10:590; cited without full date in Perry, TCJ, 1: 228; Diary [1], April 10, [1873], James papers, Houghton Library bMS 1092.9 (4550), [87], and portions of this diary also in Perry, TCJ, 1:343.

⁷ James, Diary 1, Feb[ruar]y 10, [18]73, portions of diary entry also in TCJ, 1:335. On James's work in the 1870s and with the Metaphysical Club, see the references in note 3 and O'Donnell, *The Origins of Behaviorism*, 52-109; and Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*. James founded the Harvard psychology laboratory—pioneering work but a modest enterprise—likely in 1875. G. Stanley Hall challenged his priority in establishing laboratory psychology in 1895; see Robert S. Harper, "The Laboratory of William James," 169-73; Herbert Nichols, "The Psychological Laboratory at Harvard" *McClure's Magazine* (1893); and Ross, *G. Stanley Hall*, 243-44.

⁸ James, "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence," in EPH, 7-22; "The Sentiment of Rationality," in EPH, 32-64; and "Are We Automata?," in EPS, 38-61. On the significance

of these early essays, see Thayer, *Meaning and Action*; Seigfried, *James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*; and Croce, "Psychology as the Antechamber to Metaphysics."

⁹ William James, "The Teaching of Philosophy," in EPY, 5-6. O'Donnell, in *The Origins of Behaviorism*, presents this essay as evidence of James being "professionally expedient," and he makes frequent reference to this article as a "manifesto" in a "campaign ... for the application of scientific method to philosophy" (92 and 106). Wilson, *Science, Community, and the Transformation of American Philosophy*, emphasizes the "shift from theologically oriented moral philosophy to professional academic philosophy (38), based on the emulation of science. In this trend, Wilson depicts James among psychologists who recognized an opportunity to gain authority for their philosophical speculations by applying the methods and values of science to their work. Bordogna, in *William James at the Boundaries*, also places the essay in debates about competing disciplines, but emphasizes James's focus on "philosophy as the 'architectonic' science," providing the "framework" for university teaching and research (78).

¹⁰ William James, "The Teaching of Philosophy," in EPY, 6.

¹¹ Chauncey Wright to Francis Abbot, July 9, 1867, in *Letters of Wright*, 103.

¹² William James, "The Teaching of Philosophy," in EPY, 3-4.

¹³ William James, "The Teaching of Philosophy," in EPY, 4-5. On his attraction to ancient thought, see Sutton, "Marcus Aurelius, William James, and 'The Science of Religions.'" Although he is showing some mainstream gender assumptions in his references to "men" and "man," James was fairly open to women's ways of knowing; for example, in an 1862 notebook, he observed with reference to British philologist Francis Newman, "women do not generalize much, they rather seize on particulars." James contrasted this approach with the generalizing that shapes "moral rules," the type of position that his spiritual father objected to; and the young James would himself "seize on particulars" in contrast with abstractions in his natural history field work with Louis Agassiz, his research in scientific psychology, and his pragmatic philosophy; [Notebook 2], Sept[ember] 23rd 1862, James papers, 22. For pursuit of feminist themes in James and pragmatism, see Charlene Haddock Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996); and Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ William James, "The Teaching of Philosophy," EPY, 4 and 6; and James to Charles Eliot, Dec[ember] 2, [18]75, in CWJ, 4:527.

¹⁵ William James to Tom Ward, December 30, 1876, in CWJ, 4:552; and Charles Peirce to Daniel Gilman, Sept[ember] 13, 1877, in Cope, "William James's Correspondence," 615.

¹⁶ William James to Tom Ward, December 30, 1876, in CWJ, 4:552.

¹⁷ James, “Remarks on Spencer’s Definition of Mind as Correspondence,” and “The Sentiment of Rationality,” in EPH, 7-22 and 32-64; and to Augustus Lowell, May 19, 1878, in CWJ, 5:12; O’Donnell, *The Origins of Behaviorism*, 92; and Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*.

¹⁸ Bordogna, *William James at the Boundaries*, 221.

¹⁹ William James to Thomas Ward, Jan[uar]y [7, 18]68; and April 4, [1869]; and to Henry Bowditch, Aug[ust] 12, [18]69, in CWJ, 4:250-251, 371, and 385, Castillo, “The Anxiety of Experience,” 3. Previous commentators have interpreted this advice about not expecting results too swiftly in terms of James family psychological dynamics; for example, Lewis, in *The Jameses*, suggests that James engaged in “bland filial forgetfulness” because he had not been warned “against reaching too rapidly for results” (190). This does not attend to the way this thinking grew from his 1860s reflections and would grow into his later theories as a kind of future-oriented teleology. More specifically, in *Principles of Psychology*, he virtually quotes his private writing of twenty-two years earlier: “Let no youth have any anxiety about the upshot of his education.... If he keep faithfully busy each hour of the working day, he may safely leave the final result to itself” (131); and the concept of “percursive faith” in the *Will to Believe* (29) expanded the application of the idea about future results to include belief in general, not just his youthful concern for belief in his vocational abilities. This is a good example of biographical context funding future theory (see my forthcoming *Young William James*), and an illustration of his view of the role of concepts offering generalizations on experience (SPP, chapter 4). In addition to its links to his later philosophy, James’s advice not to be anxious about results also shows him applying elements of the eastern religious sensibility that he referred to when worrying about “maya,” or the illusions of the physical world; in Hinduism and other eastern traditions, there is also an urge to avoid being too anxious about results, but instead to follow one’s destiny (or kharma) and let results flow indirectly from that (Diary 1, April 10, [1873], [87]).

²⁰ James, Diary [1], April 11, [1868], 15 and 18; ERE, 45; and WB, 6.

²¹ Sutton, “Marcus Aurelius, William James, and the ‘Science of Religions’;” James to Thomas Wren Ward, June 8, [18]66, in CWJ, 4: 140-141.

²² LWJ, 1:147 quoting Diary [1], [83]; James, “Renouvier’s Contribution to *La Critique Philosophique*,” in ECR, 266. James was particularly influenced by the first part (“L’Homme et ses Fonctions Constituantes”) of the second essay (*Traité de psychologie rationnelle d’après les principes du criticisme*, tome premier) in Renouvier’s *Essais de critique générale*; see especially chapter 13, “La Liberté: État de la Question; Solution Provisoire,” 305-31. Also see Philippe Devaux, “à propos du

‘Renouvierisme’ de William James,” who doubts the depth of the “influence renouviériste” on James, suggesting that he only read the French philosopher carefully in 1876, and calling the influence a confirmation of James’s own sentiments (396). James’s citing of Renouvier’s influence before that time is, therefore, an indication of James’s own awareness of the power of the will and the elusiveness of certainty in the philosophical reflections of his own diaries, discussions, and reviews.

²³ William to Henry James, Senior, Oct[ober] 5, [1868], in CWJ, 4:342; and “Bain and Renouvier,” a review of Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, third edition (1876) and Charles Renouvier, *Essai de critique générale* (1876), which was the book’s second edition, in ECR, 322 and 325. Renouvier called himself a “Néo-Criticist,” and he showed his clear Kantian leanings with his critique of both empiricists and rationalists, and with his eagerness to define the precise limits of human knowledge; John Brooks, *The Eclectic Legacy*, 150; and also see Long, “The Philosophy of Charles Renouvier,” 153 and 126; and Logue, *Charles Renouvier*, 108, 3, and 23.

²⁴ Notebook [3], James papers, 59; ERE, 4, 18, 51, and 19.

²⁵ ERE, 19, 27, and 42. Myers, in *William James*, makes a similar observation: “Pure experience is the stream of consciousness as it is before any conceptualization or distinction-making is applied to it” (312); however, Myers shows little interest in the simultaneous bodily dimensions of consciousness. In 1890, for his psychology text, James evaluated the “stream” functions of the “stream of thought” (PPS, 219-278), bracketing the deeper questions about the character of the “thought” itself; this reinforces the intellectual and social evaluations of James at this phase of his career adopting (or at least working with) a provisional dualism and operating within the psychology profession. In the radical empiricism essays, he took on those deeper questions about the processes of consciousness itself and asserted its simultaneous mental and physical attributes. On his hopes to produce “my metaphysical system,” see “The One and the Many” (1903-1904), in MEN, 3-61 and 323-326; the topic is forecast in his references to monism and pluralism in his 1884 “Introduction” to *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James* (ERM, 3-63); by 1902, his “hopes hardened into a definite project, a book with radical empiricism as its theme” (Ignas Skrupskelis, “Notes,” in MEN, 325); and this “epochmaking work” was widely anticipated, for example, see F. C. S. Schiller in *Humanism*, who expected it to be “a more hopeful and humaner view of metaphysics” (xiii).

²⁶ SPP 50-51; “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” (1998); and *Pragmatism* (1907), in PRG, 258, 28, and 32.

²⁷ Ernst Bloch, “Eine Andere Seite bei William James,” 60; quoted in Goldman, “Another Side of William James: Radical Appropriations of a ‘Liberal’ Philosopher,” 6.

²⁸ See for example Garrison, et al., eds. *James and Education*; Coon, “‘One Moment in the World’s Salvation’;” and Miller, *Democratic Temperament*.

²⁹ See for example, see Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*; Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*; and Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*.

³⁰ Richardson, *William James*, 360 and 511-12.

³¹ “The True Harvard,” in ECR, 56, 69, 76, and 77; see “Thomas Davidson: Individualist;” and review of Blood, *The Anæsthetic Revelation* (1874), in ECR, 86-97 and 285-288; and also see “The Ph. D. Octopus” (1903) for his critique of the “heavy technical apparatus of learning” in professional training, in ECR, 68; and Simon, *Genuine Reality*, 272.

³² TT, 133 and 134; PPS, 277.

³³ “Sentiment of Rationality,” in EPY, 32, 33, and 64; on center and margin or fringe, see PPS, 249 and 446; PBC, 149; and [Notes for the Lowell Institute Lectures on Exceptional Mental States], in ML 64. On his field theory, see Eugene Fontinell, *Self, God, and Immortality: A Jamesian Investigation*, 25-80; William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds*, 203-211; and David Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience*, 82-96.

³⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*; and *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed June 25, 2011.

³⁵ PRG, 14.

ANOTHER SIDE OF WILLIAM JAMES: ON RADICAL APPROACHES TO A “LIBERAL” PHILOSOPHER

LOREN GOLDMAN

ABSTRACT

Though William James left no comprehensive political philosophy, current scholarly consensus holds that his pluralism underwrites a robust imperative for creative freedom and hence some form of Liberal politics. Earlier in the 20th century, however, things were different: James was initially considered an ideological dogmatist and a forerunner of Fascism and syndicalism. This article examines two such readings in the work of Georges Sorel and Ernst Bloch, and argues that these philosophers pinpoint a weakness at the heart of James’s political vision often ignored by contemporary acolytes: his lack of a social theory. Given that the challenge of Pragmatism is to begin with concrete problems, it then interrogates the possibilities and limitations of James as a political thinker in modern society. It concludes by drawing several Jamesian lessons gleaned from these provocative misreadings.

Pragmatism... is at once the voice of its age and an echo blent with many others. It is a reverberation, though, which has magnified its sources of sound, assumed a certain unity of tone, and increased to clangorous proportions. The *Zeitgeist* forms itself in this one of its Protean shapes, the logos is made flesh, and assumes the power of conscious activity...Its values are those actually aimed at by syndicalism and Fascism.

-William Y. Elliott, *The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics* (1928), 32-33.

INTRODUCTION

Given the generally accepted view today that William James's work lends itself to a robust and even radical Liberal democratic individualism, the above epigraph's last sentence may cause something like intellectual whiplash: the pluralism that contemporary scholars admire in James is precisely the reason for W. Y. Elliott's rejection of Pragmatism as a viable political philosophy.¹ Nor was Elliott a crank; *The Pragmatic Revolt* was originally an Oxford dissertation written while a Rhodes Scholar, after which its author trained a generation of political theorists at Harvard, including the renowned Pluralist Robert A. Dahl. Indeed, such readings were surprisingly common in the first half of the twentieth century.² Most infamously, Benito Mussolini reported in 1926 that

James was of great use to me in my political career. James taught me that an action should be judged rather by its results than by its doctrinary basis. I learnt of James that faith in action, that ardent will to live and fight, to which Fascism owes a great part of its success...³

James's influence notwithstanding, Mussolini continued, "it is to Georges Sorel that I owe the greatest debt." If Sorel – the sometime reactionary, sometime revolutionary author of *Reflections on Violence* – may now seem a natural source for Mussolini, it remains difficult to identify anything remotely Jamesian in the Fascist idea of a corporate state. Nonetheless, the affinities were clear to many in the era, and Sorel's last published work was *De l'utilité du pragmatisme* (1921), a paean to James as a thinker whose writings could reinvigorate the scientistically overdetermined French Republic. James, the ostensible forerunner of radical Liberal individual pluralism, was read by his European contemporaries as a forerunner of Fascism and syndicalism, ideologies of absolute certitude and individual subordination to the group antithetical to what we now consider James's fundamental philosophical project. How can this be? Though these approaches now appear to miss the mark, might they not teach us something about what can be done with James in politics? What, indeed, is the political import of James's work?

I raise these questions not because I believe James was a Fascist, but because such creative misreadings of James's thought helpfully problematize our own relationship to his work.

This article is not meant to be an attack on James: I admire him as I do practically no other thinker in the history of philosophy. He may not always be at the center of my own theorizing, but he is undoubtedly the most humane, most lively, and most human thinker I know. Rather, my concern is with a certain complacency – a certain blindness, if you will – in contemporary readings of James, a complacency that ignores his insight that each of us projects an idiosyncratic philosophy, “our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means,”⁴ onto what we encounter in the world. We often congratulate ourselves in the process, finding our own image in historical thinkers. James could not have been one of us, however, and that is precisely the point of his philosophy. In putting our contemporary James against the relief of a James foreign to us, we can learn more about our own interpretive presuppositions and the live options of political thought filtered through our own time and place, not to mention learning to appreciate yet more complexities of a thinker who contains multitudes.

A few provisos before setting out. First, since James’s writings have many moving parts, I range broadly in what follows, ignoring distinctions over which specialists often battle.⁵ As James writes in *Pragmatism*, the core of his thought is the pragmatic method, which he took to mean the application of C.S. Peirce’s celebrated maxim that the practical consequences of entertaining a conception are the entirety of the conception itself.⁶ The resulting “attitude of orientation” toward effects rather than first principles is described by James as the Pragmatic “corridor” linking the various rooms of theory’s hotel.⁷ Pluralism, vitalism, radical empiricism and the will to believe occupy different chambers, and the writers I examine here dip in and out of these and other aspects of James’s thought. Insofar as all of these aspects have potentially controversial political implications, I do not feel it remiss to treat the various critiques I entertain as of a piece in the question of the upshot of a Jamesian politics.

Furthermore, in posing this question we should keep in mind that James wrote little on politics proper.⁸ Some have thought to find such a vision in his personal activism, and James’s sustained opposition to American Imperialism was particularly notable.⁹ When James did make political interventions, however, they were typically Jamesian: incisive assessments of topical concern rather than extensive examinations of power or the state or any other traditional concern of political theory. Even in a piece like “The Moral Equivalent of War,”¹⁰ which certainly *looks* political, one finds not a philosophy of politics but a policy proposal intended to be as psychologically gratifying as the manly urges prodding us to war in the first place. James

approached politics by and large as the psychologist he was, in terms of its enervating or invigorating effects on an individual's experience. Thus despite references to a personal political program (James called himself both an anarchist *and* a socialist), and despite the fact that he undoubtedly adhered to democratic principles of equality and representation (even if he did put greater weight on the efforts of an intellectual elite), exactly what a post-James Jamesian politics might be is open to dispute.¹¹

I believe the answer to the question of a Jamesian politics is enormously complicated, far more complicated than contemporary Liberal scholars of James appreciate, and that we can glean important insights into these complications from radical (mis)interpretations of his work. I begin, then, with three recent appropriations of James for varieties of Liberal individualism. Afterwards, I excavate two now-forgotten, untranslated texts on James by Georges Sorel and Ernst Bloch, each a major figure in the radical politics of their respective times. The James arising in these treatments is wild and woolly, a forerunner of syndicalism and Fascism, and a self-opaque ideological apologist for the loss of autonomy in late capitalism. Bloch and Sorel are, incidentally, hardly the only critics of James from this era, but their European perspective in times of crisis lends a particular urgency to their charges. Finally, building on the insights of these older thinkers, I offer my own take on James's limitations of a political philosopher, in which his pluralism allows him to skirt the crucial question of the nature of social power. Without claiming this James is the only James available, I suggest that this lack should give us pause before embracing him wholeheartedly as a guide to working through political problems in the current world.

What we can learn from Bloch and Sorel's readings of James is then not something directly about James's political philosophy, but rather something cautionary about deriving a full-throated political theory from a Jamesian approach to experience. Bloch and Sorel, that is, are anything but individualists, and concomitant with their rejection of individualism is a rejection of Liberalism. Reading James from their vantage points throws down the gauntlet to any blithe embrace of James's place in theorizing the constellation of possibilities for contemporary politics. However much we may chafe at the contours of Bloch's and Sorel's own political theories (though I think Bloch, especially, has more to offer than normally assumed) and at the distance of their interpretations from the spirit of James's texts, they nonetheless offer valuable insights into the limitations of his work usually ignored in the largely celebratory

treatments common in today's literature. In particular, James's individualism, coupled with his general disregard for the role of institutions in shaping the modern self, threatens to make his corpus ill-suited for a rapidly changing world in which power is rooted in social structure and hence beyond the reach of individual intervention. James is a lovely and lovable thinker, true, yet we should not allow his charm to blind us to the reality that his attitude toward social institutions is neglectful despite himself.

THREE CONTEMPORARY JAMESES

There are three closely related ways in which James has recently been read in political theory: as a Liberal concerned with personal freedom, as a democrat concerned with equal participation and access to human flourishing, and as a "radical pluralist" concerned with fomenting creative human self-discovery. Despite some differences, all three readings are variations on pluralist individualism, and all identify his political concerns as matters of ethical life rather than the institutions of government, finding in this emphasis a salutary corrective to traditionally state-centric theories. Colin Koopman's words are representative:

Should politics be a matter of institutional crafting? Or should it be a matter of ethical practice, a way of life? James is unequivocally in favor of the latter. He defends freedom as an ethic based on creative potential that is, he thinks, the only means of melioration.¹²

Koopman's reading emphasizes James's insistence on the enervating nature of large social institutions, which James characterized as the problem of "bigness."¹³ Institutions, that is, ossify rules and procedures in a manner that stymies the possibilities of individual freedom. Against the monism that such institutions reflect, James sought a pluralism about social change that could only exist when the creative potential of each person was maintained. Koopman accordingly focuses on James's attempted reconciliation of social ideals and our individually creative contributions to the formers' realization. As such, James bridges a divide common to contemporary pragmatism and political theory more generally, that between a "utilitarianism" of a public philosophy and a "romanticism" of private action.¹⁴ For Koopman, James should be read as an essayist in the true sense of the word, a thinker whose writings are exercises in creative

individual freedom *for* social melioration, and whose commitment to the construction of a better social whole was expressed in his personal political activism.

In line with this anti-institutional James is Joshua Miller's interpretation of him as a thinker of the "democratic temperament."¹⁵ Miller sees the pith of James's political contribution in the "conception of mutual respect" one can excavate from his pluralism. This aspect of James's work "combined tolerance, based on the faith that others are equal in value and possess a share of truth, with the conviction that failure to perceive this equality results from an inevitable cultural process."¹⁶ This inevitable cultural process is the idea that human conceptions of the good life are predicated on the ideational circumstances of one's formation, and it is this awareness of one's own limitations that drove James, in Miller's reading, to so adamantly oppose American Imperialism.¹⁷ Although James never wrote a political philosophy, the link to democratic politics is thus nonetheless clear: "Mutual respect is the ideal relationship among citizens in a democracy."¹⁸ To be sure, James valorized action over abstraction, and yet the democratic temperament engendered by mutual respect sets up a bulwark against a decisionist appeal to action for action's sake. The call of individual creativity willy-nilly is ideally tempered by our epistemological pluralism.

A more interesting yet still currently identifiable James is found by Kennan Ferguson, for whom the philosopher is a prophet of radical pluralism. James's pluralism is radical in that it is *prescriptive* and not merely *descriptive*. Unlike political pluralists for whom value pluralism in society is a fact the state must recognize yet oversee so as to avoid the breakdown of order,¹⁹ James's pluralism is a normative demand that looks past statist equilibration and encourages a creative confrontation with difference across all domains of social life. Both versions of pluralism teach that "multiple ways of knowing, living, and experiencing do exist."²⁰ The crucial difference for a Jamesian politics is its embrace of these multiplicities. "What has been forgotten since James," writes Ferguson, "...is how these different epistemological forms profoundly affect one another; that they hold intrinsic value for that very reason; and that the contestations that result do have and should have the power to transfigure us."²¹ While this reading of James is not incompatible with a Jamesian politics of personal freedom and a democratic temperament, Ferguson adds to this relatively benign picture an edge of substantive confrontation and alterity. The freedom he identifies at the heart of James's thought is enjoined not merely for creative self-expression in a milieu of mutual respect but for an ethic of transforming one's very identity. To

be a Jamesian individual is to confront difference head-on as a condition for the development of one's own unique mode of being.²²

FORGOTTEN STRANDS: TWO "MARXIST" READINGS OF JAMES

When we shift focus back to earlier in the 20th century, the progressive James familiar to contemporary readers becomes obscured. In this section, I take up the two "Marxist" appropriations of James in reverse chronological order, starting with Ernst Bloch's 1942 essay "Eine Andere Seite bei William James" ("Another Side of William James")²³ and then turning to Sorel's 1921 *De l'utilité du pragmatisme* (*On the Utility of Pragmatism*).²⁴ The scare quotes are for Sorel's sake, for while Bloch sits squarely within Western Marxism's mainstream, the former is more ambiguous. Nonetheless, both were appreciative of James like few others of their ideological persuasion,²⁵ and their remarks on his work's live possibilities put contemporary interpretations into sharp relief. Since one of my main claims is that how James speaks as a political thinker stems in large part from the concerns of one's own time, I preface my discussions of both Bloch's and Sorel's use of his work with the contexts in which they read him.

Bloch (1885-1977) was a figure of tremendous importance in 20th century German thought. His early work influenced Theodor Adorno and the circle comprising the Frankfurt School, and he collaborated with both Walter Benjamin and Georg Lukács. In Weimar and the early Hitler period, he was one of Germany's leading public intellectuals; *Heritage of Our Times* (1935) remains a watershed treatment of the rise of Fascism, and Thomas Mann allegorized an amalgam of Bloch and Lukács as Leo Naptha in *The Magic Mountain*. In the postwar period Bloch enjoyed international renown as a philosopher of hope, and he remained a powerful presence in German letters until his death. Much like his friend Walter Benjamin, Bloch is difficult to place among contemporary German Marxists. Like Benjamin, he was preoccupied with the analysis of culture and operated on the margins of the Frankfurt School. Unlike Adorno and Max Horkheimer, however, Bloch was not a pessimist; he was unapologetically utopian, albeit oriented towards "concrete" or actually possible utopia. And just as Bloch's utopianism set him apart from the Frankfurt School, it also set him apart from more orthodox "economist" Marxists of the German Social Democratic Party, for whom work on topics like religion made him appear misguided and even mystified.²⁶ Non-Marxists, too, found Bloch's hopefulness naïve: the philosophical anthropologist Max Scheler quipped that his work seemed a "running

amok to God” (*Amoklauf zu Gott*).²⁷ Bloch thus needed to show that his utopian hope could have traction in a world of economic and ideological overdetermination. To make this vision plausible, Bloch had to explain how the genuine novelty of utopia was possible and how concrete hope was more than merely wishful thinking. Bloch answered this question by explicating a schematic of potentiality at the apex of which stood “objectively-real possibility,” that which is genuinely capable of realization in the world *given the nature of what we know about the production of the world itself*.²⁸ Concrete utopia, the objective of any genuine hope, tracks solely with real possibility. To Bloch’s mind, Marx had unlocked the key to real possibility by seeing that economic production determined the contours of the experienced world. To this insight, Bloch added the certitude that humans could harness their own productive powers in order to realize utopian hopes.

This is the background against which Bloch wrote his short piece on James in 1942, in commemoration of the philosopher’s 100th birthday, and penned in American exile.²⁹ Pragmatism had had a woeful run in Germany, having been poorly received by the two philosophical factions of any real note, Marxists and Heideggerians.³⁰ The Nazi seizure of power had not helped its case, either, for the apparent willingness to determine truth according to practical exigencies many Germans found in James’s work in particular looked eerily familiar to Nazi opportunism: Thomas Mann’s 1935 anti-Nazi manifesto “Achtung Europa!” decried the movement’s aim to “establish a shameful Pragmatism [*Schandpragmatismus*] in Europe.”³¹ This suspicion of Pragmatism’s ductility, its ostensible lack a moral core, also explains Horkheimer’s tendentious attack on James and Dewey in *Eclipse of Reason*.³² In light of this German hostility to Pragmatism, Bloch’s essay on James is rather favorable, though it too ultimately accuses him of ideologically shilling for capitalism.

The title of Bloch’s piece encapsulates the meat of his reflections and gives the clue to what he thinks he’s doing with James that diverges from his compatriots’ almost uniformly negative assessment. Bloch wants to offer “Eine Andere Seite” – “Another side” or “A different aspect” – of the Pragmatist, one overlooked by his fellow Germans. Beginning with the observation that the advent of capitalism had made freedom into an illusion (“...even the previously independent small businesspeople have thoroughly become small cogs in industry, employees who can become nothing more than what they are”³³), Bloch notes that as a philosopher of creativity, James has become known (for German Marxists) as a “thinker of that

which has now become poison,”³⁴ namely the mystifying belief in free will in a world no longer free. The impossibility of autonomy is a common trope in Western Marxism, vividly captured by Adorno’s description of modern individuals as “nothing more than possessions of machinery” who act “as if they could still act as subjects at all, and as if anything actually depended on their agency.”³⁵ The “side” of James that is known, and which Bloch claims is the only side that James “expanded on” in his work is his philosophy “of pure chance.”³⁶ Bloch links this embrace of contingency and rejection of necessitarianism to James’s Pragmatism and pluralism insofar as the truth of an idea depends solely on a “pure success measure” of its working in practice, whatever sphere of life that practice concerns.³⁷

All of this is par for the course as go Marxist readings of Pragmatism. Where Bloch turns away from Horkheimer’s assessment comes in his acknowledgement of the “other side” of James, his faith in the “unlimited possibilities” of existence, and it is in this James that Bloch finds the kernel of the utopian “anticipatory consciousness” upon which he grounded his own philosophical anthropology.³⁸ Indeed, for Bloch, James meant Pragmatism to blaze a trail to his “intended main point” ignored by other Marxists, to discover “not the bad, but the good Possible” in life.³⁹ Thus Bloch emphasizes and interrogates the prospect of James’s appeal to the “ocean of possibilities,”⁴⁰ a claim raised by James “in a time when America certainly no longer represents the new world.”⁴¹

Unsurprisingly, Bloch complains that James’s insistence on possibility runs aground on the shoals of an administered world. The problem, Bloch explains, is not so much that James believes in the world’s openness to change, but that he does so without a nuanced conception of possibility. In combatting mechanistic determinism, James simply alit on its diametric opposite, a world of pure chance. As such, Bloch claims that freedom is never conceived by James to be something mediated through the objective processes underlying modern experience. Instead, freedom “is simultaneously malleable and supposedly unbounded; it is emphasized enormously, but merely as a will choosing between arbitrary, supposedly infinite chances.”⁴² What this understanding of freedom-cum-possibilities lacks is concrete mediation, and Bloch identifies its ontological basis in the social conditions of market society. As Bloch explains in his Hegelian-Marxist idiom,

Contingency is far from being a dialectical moment of necessity...; just as little does it allow us to glimpse the determination, with contingency included, of

objectively expectable, genuine [*eintretbar*] possibilities. Instead, the anarchy of the capitalist economy, of the opaque, is projected onto a whole world full of “Tychism.”⁴³

Because he maintains a purely subjective concept of freedom as arbitrary self-expression, James leaves no room for the determination of which possibilities of the ocean are worth pursuing for the fact that he can give us no answer to the question of which possibilities may be pursued. In other words, Bloch accuses James of endorsing freedom for the sake of its salubrious psychological effects, without concern for the mode of freedom being exercised or whether that freedom has any traction in the world. With this claim, Bloch returns again to critique the first side of James in standard fashion: “Precisely because such a Pragmatism is not based on truth, neither a *theory* of objective possibility nor *The Possible* itself can come out of it.”⁴⁴ Contrary to James’s intention to find the “good” Possible, he ends up sketching “a closed asylum, not an open world.”⁴⁵

Now this is quite critical, of course, and the reader may wonder how Bloch is appreciative of James at all. The answer comes in the essay’s last paragraph, where Bloch suddenly switches gears (and tone) to announce “And yet: these are – possibilities [nonetheless], and James was one of the few bourgeois thinkers of his time to take notice of this mode of being.”⁴⁶ Notwithstanding his lack of a “meteorology” of concrete possibility, James had the courage to retain a vision of alterity in a time when conceivable alternatives to the domination of mechanism and Mammon were well nigh unthinkable. To be sure, even if this “other” – i.e. non-Pragmatist – side of James is “most unclear and even imperceptible to [James] himself,” his search for an “open track in a vast country”⁴⁷ bespeaks the truth of an ineliminable, emancipatory orientation seldom voiced under capitalism. With the idea of an ostensibly free will, James means to express that “out of the night, the hand of Tyche still extends him possible roses.”⁴⁸ In sum, despite his misgivings about James’s lack of a social theory of concrete possibility, Bloch lauds what he perceives to be the rational kernel of hope for a better future underlying James’s writings.

On balance this may seem to be faint praise indeed. Moreover, Bloch’s dogmatic certainty in Marx’s materialist social theory undoubtedly shaped his reading of James’s Pragmatism. There is simply no squaring Bloch’s declaration that, unlike Pragmatism, “Marxism

is not something true because it is useful, but rather because it is true, it is useful (for the abolishment of classes),”⁴⁹ with James’s (equally dogmatic?) epistemological and ontological pluralism. In the context of his own intellectual universe, however, Bloch’s willingness to countenance the potentially revolutionary implications of such an “American, all too American”⁵⁰ thinker reflects a certain openness to and even insight into James’s political import rare among Marxist thinkers of his time. For Bloch, James is a prophet unarmed, and Bloch’s own project of establishing the concrete basis for hope by dint of a social theory attuned to the structure of power in the world can be seen as a description of the weaponry needed to realize the better future James descried. I must also say that this critical diagnosis of James’s inattention to social structure *thanks to his pluralism* is something from which contemporary appropriations of James as a political thinker could gain, whether or not one accepts Bloch’s particular understanding of the nature of domination. I shall return to this point later in my own reading of James’s politics.

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Georges Sorel’s engagement with William James was deeper and longer-lasting than Bloch’s, and Sorel even considered himself a Pragmatist, this while declaring himself a Marxist, to boot. That said, Sorel is a difficult thinker to make systematic sense of, as his opinions had short half-lives and his eclectic blend of philosophies reflects selective and idiosyncratic interpretations unusual even among the radical and reactionary circles in which he mixed.⁵¹

Sorel (1847-1922) began life as an engineer – a bridge-builder, in fact – and came to philosophy after his retirement in the late 1880s. From then until his death he was an astonishingly productive and central figure among Parisian intellectuals. The unifying thread of his thought is moral urgency. In all of his incarnations, Sorel was concerned to reinvigorate a sense of heroism, action and creativity he believed had been lost under conditions of modern, mechanized life. Initially a provincial conservative, Sorel turned to Marx in the 1890s, finding in his work a scientific diagnosis of the ills of modernity. The vicissitudes of his encounter with Marxism need not detain us,⁵² but by the turn of the century Sorel had become the foremost thinker of radical syndicalism, the quasi-anarchist political theory that sought to replace the state with federations of autonomous trade unions. 1906 saw the publication of the book for which he is remembered, *Reflections on Violence*, a call to arms that set out moral arguments for his curious brand of Marxism and endorsed the general strike as the primary tactic of revolutionary

social transformation. This work brought him international renown and made him something of an oracle for other radicals: Lenin (certainly) and Mussolini (possibly) made pilgrimages to meet him.⁵³ Soon thereafter, Sorel began his flirtation with the far Right, making common cause against parliamentary democracy with *Action Française*, an anti-Semitic, nationalist and monarchist organization founded in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair and a forerunner of today's *Front National*.⁵⁴ In his last years, Sorel was an enthusiastic supporter of both Bolshevism and Fascism, which Jeremy Jennings notes "seems to represent a fitting end for a man who had made contradiction his hallmark."⁵⁵ Sorel's final work was *De l'utilité du pragmatisme*, an appropriation of William James for his own political program of moral reinvigoration and the culmination of a decade spent reading James in translation.

Before getting to Sorel's take on James, it will be helpful to contextualize his thought against the background of his *Reflections on Violence*.⁵⁶ Though complicated in terms of its influences, Sorel's argument is rather simple. Bourgeois society is decadent, having anesthetized the masses into political silence and habituated them to uncreative lives of drudgery. The state, moreover, is complicit, a tool of class domination; as Marx and Engels famously wrote, "[t]he executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."⁵⁷ Political participation by socialist parties within the state is accordingly betrayal, and the state must be destroyed if the working class is to overcome its malaise. Fortunately, Marxism offers not only a diagnosis of the ills of society; the concept of class struggle offers the promise of reinvigorating the heroism and moral élan lost under capitalism. The sort of fighting spirit Sorel envisions as the corrective to modern indulgence can only be excited by irrational "myths": "men who are participating in great social movements always picture their coming action in the form of images of battle in which their cause is certain to triumph."⁵⁸ Thus Sorel argues for his most notable contribution to the history of political thought, the tactic of the general strike. Rejecting the evolutionary strategy of parliamentary participation, he proposes a messianic confrontation with the powers of bourgeois society through an extended national work stoppage. On the one hand, as an end in itself, this tactic provides the image of battle around which martial virtue may coalesce. On the other hand, the general strike is an instrument of the consolidation of class-consciousness. Having lost control of the means of production, the state will undoubtedly react with force towards the strikers, at which point its repressive nature will be revealed. The myth of class struggle will then come to life, and in this apocalyptic confrontation

with the vastly outnumbered representatives of capital, the laboring masses will seize upon the battle to “create a new individuality” for themselves,⁵⁹ thereby achieving the moral regeneration of humanity and its liberation from the shackles of the duplicitous parliamentary state in one fell swoop.

In sharp contrast to *Reflections on Violence*, *De l'utilité du pragmatisme* is on the surface a strikingly unpolitical work. It is instead a sprawling argument for Pragmatic pluralism and experimentalism in the philosophy of science and religion, though its concerns have powerful affinities with his anti-rationalist, anti-individualist and creativity-valorizing social theory, and Sorel's language drips with the imagery of battle he had called for in his discussion of myth in *Reflections*. James is of especial value for “the important part he has taken in the fight against the servants of *scientism*,”⁶⁰ whose apriorism has led them to miss life's vital texture as well as to ignore the experimentalist method inherent in genuine scientific inquiry. There are thus two aspects of Sorel's appreciation of James, one concerning the Pragmatic method in determining truth and another concerning the space carved out for the reinvigoration of action thanks to James's insistence on religious experience. For present purposes, I am particularly concerned with the latter aspect of Sorel's reading, and will leave alone his parallel concerns with philosophy of science.

As the title suggests, *De l'utilité* is not meant as a treatise on James's Pragmatism, but as an examination of the possible uses of his Pragmatism for Sorel's own concerns. Part of the reason that Pragmatism had yet to gain a wide audience in France, he explains, is that James's formulations, though having the air of universality, were often the tacit products of the American experience. As such, Sorel writes that “it is only by rethinking the philosophy of William James in a European mind that one can give it the fecundity, the force and the surety of application one demands of any classical doctrine.”⁶¹ Sorel does not jettison all of James, and aspects of his interpretation speak directly to its political import in a relatively untouched sense, albeit refracted through Sorel's idiosyncratic language. Most notably, Sorel links James's conception of religious experience to the will to believe and explains their common value in terms familiar from his political work. The beliefs of religious experience, Sorel writes, “can be called *mythical*, giving this term the meaning I assigned it in the *Reflections on Violence*. Whether these beliefs be true or false, they possess the poetic power of action of myths.”⁶² While Sorel sees a direct correspondence between myth and religious belief as foundations for the recreation of the self,

he finds James's melioristic optimism the peculiarly American product of a young nation whose history lacked revolutionary conflict between economic classes. Such a sunny disposition is inapplicable in a France just coming out of the devastation of war, whose previous 20 years had exploded, so Sorel thinks, the simple faith in democracy he reads in James.⁶³

In this reflection on James's underlying democratic faith, Sorel appeals to what he perceived to be the explicit authority structure underlying knowledge. Sorel worried that James's work could appear to easily to become subjectivism, though he did not think James himself was a subjectivist.⁶⁴ To counter this possibility, Sorel introduced the concept of different "cities" [*cités*] of truth whose agreement legitimated claims of knowledge, not unlike Peirce's community of inquiry. Sorel, never a democrat, strongly held the need for moral and epistemological stability to be anchored by intersubjective agreement among a vanguard of citizens. Where Peirce was concerned with science and relegated knowledge of the conduct of life to the wilds of irrationality,⁶⁵ however, Sorel pluralistically enumerates three distinct cities of knowledge. The authority securing science is the "city of intellectuals" [*cit  savante*]; that securing artistic judgment is the "aesthetic city"; finally, that securing moral value he terms the "moral city."⁶⁶ The problem Sorel finds in James is his inattention to the particular constitution of the moral city he himself inhabits; that is, James falsely suggests that his own democratic optimism should be universal, without the pluralist appreciation that other moral cities might alight on different social formations as the best means of progress.⁶⁷ As such, the accusation is that James does not recognize the bounded horizons of his own American perspective: he is, ironically, not pluralist enough to translate effortlessly into a French context. In the case of his own contemporary France, Sorel claims his pessimism towards democracy to be the result of its experimental failure,⁶⁸ and in declaring this faith moribund for the French moral city, he recalls the hostility to parliamentarism from *Reflections on Violence*.

The pluralist-cum-authoritarian politics in Sorel's reading of James jars with what we take to be the Liberal pith of the latter's work today, yet the moral end of invigorating a satisfactory life through struggle is hardly foreign to James's moral ideal of a strenuous mood. Undoubtedly Sorel's rejection of democracy goes hand in hand with an anti-individualism James would have found anathema, and which shares far more with the Fascism Sorel is supposed to have inspired than the creative freedom James sought to effectuate. In a certain way, however, Sorel's pluralism about modes of political lives out-Jameses James himself. His is not Bloch's

James, whose ostensible Liberal individualism is a mystifying ideological artifact of a world well lost and whose conception of freedom is detached from the concrete, dialectical possibilities of reality. Indeed, on the latter point, Sorel's James is valuable precisely *because* he denies the relevance of "truth" in considering the creative possibilities of action. In Jennings' words, the epistemology and methodology found in *De l'utilité du pragmatisme* can be summarized by "the notion of man acting upon reality, of man imposing his will and order upon the world."⁶⁹ For Bloch such an idea is the apotheosis of arbitrariness. Nonetheless, in Sorel's pluralism of cities, in his attempt to rethink James with his own European mind for a European context, Sorel too suggests a problem with James's inattention to social conditions similar to Bloch's complaint of James's self-opacity. This is a point from which we still can learn, other substantive issues with both "radical" interpretations of James notwithstanding, and to which there is almost no attention paid in contemporary assessments of James as a Liberal political thinker.

In contradistinction to recent, celebratory readings of James, then, the radical interpretations offered by Bloch and Sorel tell a different story. Their primary lesson is not that James offers resources for corporatism or revolutionary action, as W. Y. Elliott or Kung-Chuan Hsiao suggested, but that attention to the social context in which James was able to make his claims – a bourgeois American context – enables us to critique James's inadequately realized sense of the political.⁷⁰ By contrast, rather than criticizing James's inattentiveness to social power's institutional structures, contemporary scholars appreciatively embrace this lack, making James's vice his virtue. I noted at the outset that I find each of these contemporary Liberal interpretations significantly more compelling than those of Bloch and Sorel as readings of a Jamesian politics given the letter of his texts. If this is what James teaches us politically, however, that institutions or social conditions need not be addressed, I think it points to a profound deficiency in the very possibility of doing anything particularly useful for a Pragmatist political theory. Of course the worries faced by the contemporary thinkers I address – all professors at American institutions of higher learning – are quite different than the worries faced by our earlier thinkers: Bloch was in exile from Nazism during the highpoint of Fordist American industrialism and at the advent of the military industrial complex; Sorel was a disappointed revolutionary fixated on moral degeneration who found himself within earshot of a war that killed fully one third of Frenchmen under 25. The use made of James is bound to be different in each case, as James himself would appreciate. In any event, to try to get yet another

handle on the possible political import of James somewhere located between all of the above, I now offer my own considerations on James as a thinker of politics, beginning, like our contemporary thinkers, from his moral pluralism.

JAMES, PLURALISM, AND THE POLITICS OF GOOD INTENTIONS

One way to crystallize the lessons learned from Bloch and Sorel for a critical reading of a Jamesian politics today is to focus on his conception of social melioration. What are we to do on James's account to effectuate social progress? What, that is, can be done to bring society closer to its moral ideals? In this light, we can see that even when James suggests solutions to social problems, his understanding of politics reflects a blindness to the institutional conditions of social power that betrays a naïveté about the levers of potential change in the modern world. This interpretation begins from James's insistence in his ethical writings on heroic action as the personal measure of moral value, a baseline that makes it well nigh impossible to articulate a structural critique of social power, let alone to foment the sort of collective movement that could lead to the world of radical alterity envisioned by James's contemporary acolytes.

James's concern in his ethical writings lies not in specifying the paths by which we may attain virtue, but in exhorting readers to overcome their insensitivity to the myriad ways in which other individuals derive value in their lives and to accept the strenuous mood of moral action. In these writings, we see the full sweep of James's pluralism as well as his individualist presumption that social progress occurs mysteriously thanks to the heroism of great men. James is thoroughly agnostic when it comes to the content of one's moral ideals so long as their pursuit does not infringe upon other individuals' ability to do the same. What matters is that every individual discover their idiosyncratic moral vocation, for "[w]herever a process of life communicates an eagerness to him who lives it, there the life becomes genuinely significant."⁷¹ I say "discover" because the process by which one comes to recognize what makes one's life significant is obscure: James explains that the "higher vision of an inner significance"⁷² we each possess is a "vital secret"⁷³ that occurs to individuals suddenly and without warning, often in the most banal situations. The idiosyncrasy of each individual's moral ideal should then caution us against harshly judging others' pursuits, and James condemns "the stupidity and injustice of our opinions, so far as they deal with significance of alien lives."⁷⁴

Yet while the content of another's moral ideals is no ground for judgment, James valorizes the heroic form of active life these ideals foment, and this concern pulses through the essays published together with "The Will to Believe." In "Is Life Worth Living?", James answers his titular question in the affirmative with the proviso that it is so "no matter what it bring, if only such combats may be carried to successful terminations and one's heel set on the tyrant's throat."⁷⁵ Life is struggle, and moral convictions are nothing if they do not lead us to decisive action in the face of uncertainty. Belief being willingness to act, moral belief is the willingness to act for one's ideals amid the flux and arduousness of existence: "it is only by risking our persons from one hour to another that we live at all."⁷⁶ A strenuous mood in morality is what enables us to keep striving even when risk appears overwhelming, and the will to believe requires such determination, since, as James never tires of repeating, "often enough our faith beforehand in an uncertified result *is the only thing that makes the result come true.*"⁷⁷ Elsewhere James explains that without risk and struggle, moral ends have little appeal. What excites us "is the everlasting battle of the powers of light with those of darkness: with heroism, reduced to its bare chance, yet ever anon snatching victory from the jaws of death."⁷⁸ In and of itself, idealism does not suffice for the moral life; we also need a passionate willingness to act with joy in service of those ideals. Religious faith offers just the sort of cosmological narrative capable of satisfying the human need for struggle, as we can each cast ourselves as warriors in the battle of Good with Evil. Hence "even if there were no metaphysical or traditional grounds for believing in a God, men would postulate one simply as a pretext for living hard."⁷⁹ James does not, however, retreat from his pluralism in extolling the strenuous mood of morality. James admits that "[w]ishing for heroism and the spectacle of human nature on the rack, I had never noticed the great fields of heroism lying round about me, I had failed to see it present and alive,"⁸⁰ and he urges his readers not to fall prey to traditional conceptions of virtue. Nowadays, James explains, while it may appear that "higher heroisms and the old rare flavors are passing out of life," we can find contemporary analogues "in the daily lives of the laboring classes."⁸¹ That said, James rues the "barrenness and ignobleness of the more usual laborer's life" consisting "in the fact that it is moved by no such ideal inner springs."⁸² Toiling as they do more for bread and tobacco than for ennobling ends, the laboring classes are in the thrall of expediency contrary to the strenuous mood that makes life significant.

One might expect James to provide a solution to the dearth of opportunity for ennobling struggle by offering a critique of the systemic social structures relegating men to moral cowardice by trapping them in a cycle of exploitation, but here is where we reach the limits of James's pluralism as a tool for political theory. The ground of James's pluralism resides in "a secret and a mystery":⁸³ each individual's discovery of their own moral vocation. As such, the spark of strenuous morality is particular to the person, which breeds in James an aversion to systematic social solutions to what is very much an individual problem of discovery. Despite recognizing the oppressive potential of economic structures that force one to ignore ideals for the sake of mere existence, for example, James maintains that one's moral vocation is a personal, private matter entirely up to the individual. Action takes precedence in belief, but it is not action directed towards collective or structural transformation: "There is only one way to improve ourselves, and that is by some of us setting an example which others may pick up and imitate till the new fashion spreads from east to west."⁸⁴ For fear of paternalism, James refuses to posit any potential institutional or systematic levers for change in the world, and thus his pluralism leads him away from programmatic political plans and towards an anarchistic individualism in which heroism is the primary virtue of public life and the motor of progress.

This anarchism is evident in many of James's occasional writings on politics. In all of his interventions, James ignores the systemic reasons for social ills in favor of a detached psychological understanding of their causes. State action can be helpful, but it does not get to the roots of the problems and is hence generally played down. Lynching, for example, must be combated with "heroic" means, including strong social legislation and the execution of mob inciters, though James attributes its appeal not to structural racism but to the fact that illiterate whites have no other outlet for their passions.⁸⁵ Similarly, while James recognizes that war is a grave ill, he treats armed conflict as a result of the need for men to express their vital energies, not as a consequence of politics in the international system. His solution is accordingly to find a different outlet for our "military feelings" in the creation of a national civil service into which would be conscripted all young men who would otherwise have sought to sow their martial oats in fighting.⁸⁶ The same goes for James's vehement opposition to imperialism and colonialism, brought into focus by the brutal American occupation of the Philippines and the support it garnered from his one-time student Theodore Roosevelt. Rather than seeing imperialism like his contemporaries J.A. Hobson and V. I. Lenin as a structural imperative of capitalism,⁸⁷ for

example, James viewed it as a psychological problem of blindness towards the inner lives of others, in this case the Filipino population.⁸⁸ And even when James does flirt with a structural solution, as in his discussion of the antagonism between labor and capital, he suggests that such social change is beyond the means of humanity and retreats to a psychological solution. As he puts it, “the distribution of wealth has doubtlessly slowly got to change: such changes have always happened and will happen to the end of time.” This comment comes in passing, however, and is immediately followed by the claim that such change will not make “any *genuine vital difference* on a large scale” for the parties involved insofar as social change cannot foment the spark of moral vocation.⁸⁹ The real problem in the labor question, James writes, is that each side “ignores the fact that happiness and unhappiness and significance are a vital mystery; each pins them absolutely on some ridiculous feature of the external situation; and everybody remains outside of everybody else’s sight.”⁹⁰ When confronted with what are essentially social and structural problems, James’s solution is a psychological exhortation to think about them differently. Space constrains further discussion of this point, but it should be noted that James’s neglect of the institutional context in which we come to our habits extends to his characterization of religion by its subjective experiential qualities alone,⁹¹ which Charles Taylor complains misses the central significance of ritual in Catholicism,⁹² a worry that can be voiced as well about its appropriateness for Judaism, Haitian *vodun*, or any other faith linked to cultic practice. The problem for James and political philosophy is not that he is a relativist, but that his understanding of the construction of ideals and the structural circumstances that enable or impede their pursuit is facile.

James’s laissez-faire social heroism is even more explicit in his discussions of the grounds for political hope, in James’s case towards “the reign of peace and in the gradual advent of some sort of socialistic equilibrium.”⁹³ James takes his cue from contemporary theories of evolution, but sets himself squarely against Spencer’s social Darwinism. His opposition to Spencer does not stem from the prioritization of struggle in social life, of course, which James fully endorsed, nor does it stem from Spencer’s amoralism. Rather, James denies Spencer’s structural determinism, arguing that social change is and has always been the product of “Great Men.” Whereas Spencer would claim that social transformations “are irrespective of persons, and independent of individual control,” “due to the environment, to the circumstances, the physical geography, the ancestral conditions, the increasing experience of outer relations; to everything,

in fact, except the Grants and the Bismarks, the Joneses and the Smiths,” James offers that they are “due to the accumulated influences of individuals, of their examples, their initiatives and their decisions.”⁹⁴ As James sees it, the true moral of Darwin’s story is not that the environment is all-powerful, but that evolutionary variation operates at a “molecular and invisible”⁹⁵ level over which we have no control.⁹⁶ These variations are compatible, moreover, “with any social, political, and physical conditions of environment.”⁹⁷ Evolution proceeds along without any input from us, and particular adaptations take hold serendipitously according to the mutual interaction of the agents and the contexts in which they find themselves. Melding his individualism with an evolutionary framework, James argues that environments “select” certain men for greatness, whose actions then directly or indirectly cause the “mutations of societies.”⁹⁸ Since we can never know how or when such great men are produced, the social theorist “must simply accept geniuses as data, just as Darwin accepts his spontaneous variations.”⁹⁹ The community, James writes, “may evolve in many ways,”¹⁰⁰ but we have no control over its direction – geniuses will crop up and steer us forward, whether we like it or not. Our hope lies in the possibility that some good men will arise and we may learn to imitate their examples. Thus evolutionary theory gives James what he calls “the lasting justification of hero-worship.”¹⁰¹

Against this evolutionary background, James’s essay “The Social Value of the College Bred” brings the question of political agency directly to bear on democracy. The value of a college education, he explains, resides in enabling us to “learn what types of activity have stood the test of time”¹⁰² such that we moderns can imitate history’s example and strike out into the world with boldness. This learning is essential for democracy, which must, more than any other regime, have its “sons and daughters skilful.”¹⁰³ James’s worry is that the low intellectual level of the masses – the personal significance of their lives notwithstanding – jeopardizes our democratic future. Indeed, we cannot know if democracy will ever succeed, but insofar as it is like a religion, we must persevere on its path. The college bred accordingly play a role of particular importance in our democratic future insofar as this class (“*les intellectuels!*”) can help it “catch the higher, healthier tone” of ideal ends.¹⁰⁴ In James’s words, “we alumni and alumnae of the colleges are the only permanent presence that corresponds to the aristocracy in older countries,”¹⁰⁵ and our hope resides in maintaining the tried and true ideals of truth and justice. If we are to be “the yeast-cake for democracy’s dough... we must see to it that culture spreads broad sails.”¹⁰⁶ Culture is here meant not anthropologically, as Dewey was to subsequently

employ the term,¹⁰⁷ but in the sense of high culture. And why should we expect high culture to lead towards progress? Because it is the repository of permanently worthwhile ideals, the “ceaseless whisper” of which, “give them but time, *must* warp the world in their direction.”¹⁰⁸ The hope for democracy or the democratic temperament then lies in the encouragement of an elite stratum of individuals, themselves following the noblest ideals in American history, who may act as moral beacons for those less fortunate. In this, democracy is like moral progress, to be predicated on the actions of those few individuals graced by circumstance who can lead us to the Promised Land. James explains this philosophy of history best in a passage from “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” worth quoting in full:

The course of history is nothing but the story of men’s struggles from generation to generation to find the more and more inclusive moral order. *Invent some manner* of realizing your own ideals which will also satisfy the alien demands – that and that only is the path to peace! Following this path, society has shaken itself into one sort of relative equilibrium after another by a series of social discoveries quite analogous to those of science...The anarchists, nihilists, and free-lovers; the free-silverites, socialists, and single-tax men; the free-traders and civil-service reformers; the prohibitionists and anti-vivisectionists; the radical Darwinians with their idea of the suppression of the weak – these and all the conservative sentiments of society arrayed against them, are simply deciding through actual experiment by what sort of conduct the maximum amount of good can be gained and kept in this world... The pure philosopher can only follow the windings of the spectacle, confident that the line of least resistance will always be towards the richer and the more inclusive arrangement, and that by one tack after another some approach to the kingdom of heaven is incessantly made.¹⁰⁹

In sum, though James believes progress only to arise from an active engagement with life, his psychological individualism and pluralism, not to mention his sheer delight in the kaleidoscope of human aims, leaves him disinterested in the institutional and structural means by which a democratic public can orient its collective self towards a more just and humane future. Contemporary readings of James try to make much out of his Liberal inclinations, but without

some social theory of how the modes of power operate in practice, it is difficult to see what sort of compelling political theory Jamesian Pragmatism *alone* can yield.

CONCLUSION

I have three points to make in conclusion. Firstly, the surprising result of reading our illiberal Jameses may be that James is exposed as a rather deficient thinker of politics proper. I will go out on a limb here and stipulate that politics is fundamentally about social power. This power is exercised in myriad ways, to be sure, but not all ways are equal. Some institutions and structures have more power over us, both in the simple sense of power as something that affects from outside, as it were, as well as in the more complicated sense in which power is creative of our subjectivity itself. Ironically, in refusing to differentiate between nodal points of power's instantiation, contemporary appropriations of James in fact disempower the very individuals they mean to liberate. In this regard, Bloch's analysis of James's failing is acute. My complaint is no doubt controversial, as it goes to the heart of a practically interminable debate that has been at the center of political theory now for decades, and I believe the domain of politics to be essentially contested: it is incorrigibly plural, and "the political" itself is present in the specification of domain as well as the very negotiation between competing conceptions.¹¹⁰ While the aversion to institutional politics in James may be termed political in its very turn away from more traditional sites of politics like the state or the battlefield, the eruption of individuality James favors cannot occur without a prior reorganization of the conditions of power structured by the institutions of social life. James may be a theorist of politics in a different register, but this register is predicated on a congeries of institutions that must be addressed if claims of a "new" politics are not to collapse into mystification or romanticism.

Secondly, the difficulty of fitting James neatly into any single political tradition (James's aversion to the state and his potentially reactionary vitalism, not to mention his obsession with manliness, all problematize his assumed place in the Liberal pantheon) may ultimately be salutary, reminding us that the very categories with which we theorize politics are ideal types, classificatory schemes abstracted from the texture of lived political experience. To want to pigeonhole James into any one category to the exclusion of others is very much to ignore the complexity of James's thought and personality. As such, the absence of a book by James entitled

My Political Philosophy is a blessing in disguise for those who want to struggle, in a Jamesian manner, with the awesome burden of thinking life *in situ*.

Finally, James's pluralism may mean that he just *cannot* have a single political philosophy by definition – his work by its very nature is polysemous, speaking to multiple readers simultaneously in multiple registers. We should not forget James taught that “*a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him* and carry an image of him in their mind.”¹¹¹ It's fair to hazard the thesis that this could be extended to readers of James's work. Furthermore, insofar as James strove to explore the philosophies every individual implicitly *lives* – “I know that you, ladies and gentlemen, have a philosophy, each and all of you, and that the most interesting and important thing about you is the way in which it determines the perspective in your several worlds”¹¹² – it would be perverse to imagine that there ever could be total agreement about his work. For a pluralist, the circumstances of one's personal philosophy as well as the circumstances of one's social environment speak too strongly against this assumption.

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NOTES

¹ See also the classic Hsiao, *Political Pluralism*.

² For a survey of other then-contemporary authors finding affinities between Fascism and Jamesian Pragmatism, see Diggins, "Flirtation with Fascism," 489-490.

³ Cited in Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 575.

⁴ James, *Pragmatism*, 9-10.

⁵ Thanks to Alex Livingston for pushing me to be clear about this point.

⁶ See Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," 132.

⁷ James, *Pragmatism*, 32.

⁸ As one indication of the paucity of James's political work, Gerald Myers' thematically organized authoritative bibliography of James does not include a chapter on politics.

⁹ On James as a public intellectual, see Cotkin, *William James, Public Philosopher*. For James against Imperialism, see Lentricchia, "The Return of William James." Anti-imperialism is also a theme in Joshua Miller's *Democratic Temperament: The Legacy of William James*.

¹⁰ James, "The Moral Equivalent of War."

¹¹ For anarchism, see James, *Pragmatism*, 20-22. For Socialism, see James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," 667. James's adherence to democratic principles of equality and representation are evident throughout his work, but see "The Social Value of the College Bred." Despite his elitism, James did not propose, à la Mill, formally disproportionate voting rights or representation; see Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, 181 ff.

¹² Koopman, "William James's Politics of Personal Freedom," 180. To foreshadow a claim I will pursue in my conclusion, I should note that this anti-statism problematizes the label "Liberal" I attach to James in my title, as this particular tradition has been closely related to the priority of the state as the guarantor of liberty. Insofar as James dedicated *Pragmatism* "To the Memory of John Stuart Mill/ from whom I first learned the/ pragmatic openness of mind/ and whom my fancy likes to picture as/ our leader/ were he alive to-day," however, the moniker is not entirely off the mark. See James, *Pragmatism*, 3.

¹³ Koopman, "William James's Politics of Personal Freedom," 179.

¹⁴ Ibid., 183. Koopman's equation of utilitarianism with what he calls "pure socialism" seems suspect to me, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this article.

¹⁵ Miller, *Democratic Temperament*. For a similar reading of James as a democrat, with especial emphasis on James's debt to Dewey, see Weber, "James, Dewey, and Democracy."

¹⁶ *Democratic Temperament: The Legacy of William James*, 58.

¹⁷ In this regard, James is close to another deeply ambiguous political thinker, Edmund Burke. For Burke's principled opposition to colonialism, see Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, chap. 3.

¹⁸ Miller, *Democratic Temperament: The Legacy of William James*, 59.

¹⁹ Representative examples are Hsiao, *Political Pluralism*, Elliott, *The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics*, and Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy*. Ferguson has an admirable précis of varieties of post-James political pluralism; see chap. 2. “The Descent of Pluralism.”

²⁰ Ibid., 11.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Of the three interpretations offered here, Ferguson’s is the most attuned to what James celebrated as the “strenuous mood” of moral activity, but comes nowhere close to the violence of Sorel’s conception of struggle, as we shall see in the next section. Ferguson is not alone in his reading of James as a radical pluralist; see also William Connolly, *Pluralism*, chap. 3.

²³ Bloch, “Eine Andere Seite bei William James.”

²⁴ Sorel, *De l’utilité du pragmatisme*.

²⁵ See, e.g., Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* and Novack, *Pragmatism Versus Marxism*.

²⁶ Recall that the “humanist” Marx known to contemporary scholars from works like *The Paris Manuscripts* and the *German Ideology* were only published for the first time in the early 1930s.

²⁷ Wiggershaus, *Die Frankfurter Schule*, 81.

²⁸ See *The Principle of Hope*, v.1, chap. 18, 19 for Bloch’s pithiest statement of his layers of possibility. For an overview, see Godfrey, *A Philosophy of Human Hope*, 74-76.

²⁹ Bloch’s essay was written in James’s own Cambridge, MA.

³⁰ Joas, “Amerikanischer Pragmatismus und deutsches Denken.” Hubert Dreyfus reports, however, that Heidegger’s teacher Emil Lask was deeply influenced by Dewey’s logical theory, and that Heidegger can be seen as “radicalizing” pragmatist insights. See Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 6n7.

³¹ Mann, “Achtung Europa!,” 526.

³² Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, chap. 1, “Means and Ends”.

³³ “Eine Andere Seite bei William James,” 60. All translations from the German are mine.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 13.

³⁶ Bloch, “Eine Andere Seite bei William James,” 61.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. See also Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, part II.

³⁹ Bloch, “Eine Andere Seite bei William James,” 61.

⁴⁰ Bloch cites this phrase several times in English.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 63. Bloch is paraphrasing Lenin on Marxism.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ For Sorel's intellectual milieu, see Jennings, *Syndicalism in France*, chap. 3. Jennings' *Georges Sorel* remains the best introduction to his thought.

⁵² See Ibid., chaps. 3-5.

⁵³ Recall that before he embraced Fascism, Mussolini was a socialist – a colleague of Antonio Gramsci's at *Avanti!*

⁵⁴ Hence it is hardly surprising that Mussolini cited Sorel as his central philosophical influence. See the above quoted extract in Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, v. II, 575., and compare Mussolini and Gentile, "Foundations and Doctrine of Fascism," 51. Perry and Myers have both put paid to Mussolini's invocation of James as an influence; see Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, v. II, 575 ff. and Myers, *William James, His Life and Thought*, 414-415.

⁵⁵ Jennings, *Georges Sorel*, 159.

⁵⁶ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*.

⁵⁷ Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," 475.

⁵⁸ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 20.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁰ *De l'utilité du pragmatisme*, 1. All translations from the French are mine.

⁶¹ Ibid., 21-22.

⁶² Ibid., 75n3. Though Elliott does not quote this passage, and deals only very briefly with *De l'utilité du pragmatisme*, he makes this equation of the will to believe and the general strike myth the centerpiece of his criticism of the "Pragmatic revolt" evidenced in Sorel's political philosophy. See *The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics*, 120 ff.

⁶³ Sorel, *De l'utilité du pragmatisme*, 171.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁵ Peirce, "Philosophy and the Conduct of Life."

⁶⁶ See, *De l'utilité du pragmatisme*, 127, 132, 160-162. Sorel describes these cities in terms of the actual historical development of knowledge in France and America, but the concept is clearly meant to not remain historical.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 168-170.

⁶⁹ Jennings, *Georges Sorel*, 174.

⁷⁰ Thanks to John Holzwarth for this phrasing.

⁷¹ "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," 134.

⁷² Ibid., 138.

⁷³ Ibid., 132.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 132. James was of course no stranger to this blindness, as his narration of his encounter with the cove settlers in the mountains of North Carolina shows.

⁷⁵ "Is Life Worth Living?," 47.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "What Makes a Life Significant?," 153.

⁷⁹ "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," 161.

⁸⁰ "What Makes a Life Significant?," 154.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 162.

⁸³ "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," 144.

⁸⁴ "The Gospel of Relaxation," 126. James's predilection for action as the first step in belief is here particularly clear.

⁸⁵ "A Strong Note of Warning Regarding the Lynching Epidemic." James's conception of hero-worship is here also operative; poor whites who participate in lynching are "victims" of the leaders of the mobs. Get rid of the leaders, and you get rid of the mobs.

⁸⁶ James, "The Moral Equivalent of War."

⁸⁷ See Hobson, *Imperialism and Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

⁸⁸ Cotkin, *William James, Public Philosopher*, 136.

⁸⁹ "What Makes a Life Significant?," 165.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ See *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lecture II.

⁹² See Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, chap. 1.

⁹³ “The Moral Equivalent of War,” 170.

⁹⁴ James, “Great Men and Their Environment,” 164.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁹⁶ Scholars in the tradition of liberal egalitarianism have subsequently made genetic manipulation a topic for justice theories; see Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State*, 113 ff.; Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All*, 73 ff.

⁹⁷ “Great Men and Their Environment,” 168.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁰¹ “The Importance of Individuals,” 194.

¹⁰² “The Social Value of the College Bred,” 108.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ See my “John Dewey’s Pragmatism from an Anthropological Point of View,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, forthcoming.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Perry writes that “[t]he root of James’s politics is to be found not in his ethics and philosophy, but in the fact that he belonged to the educated class.” Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 2:290.

¹⁰⁹ “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” 157.

¹¹⁰ On the “essential contestedness” of politics, see Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts” and Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, ch. 1.

¹¹¹ *The Principles of Psychology*, 1:294.

¹¹² *Pragmatism*, 9.

THE COMIC MIND OF WILLIAM JAMES

RAMÓN DEL CASTILLO

ABSTRACT

In this paper I contemplate humour as an essential ingredient of William James's philosophical temperament. First, I compare James and Santayana in terms of their diverse humours. This comparison allows me to characterize tentatively the contrast between irony and comicalness. Second, I explain the connection between James's own humour and the difference between cynic and sympathetic temperaments as he described them. Third, I explore with Bergson and Chesterton the ethical dimension of the ironic and the comical. Fourth, I examine the relations between irony, humour and faith, a topic that requires not only some comparisons between James and Kierkegaard, but also with Niehbur's view of laughter and religion.

"The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason."

Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*.¹

INTRODUCTION

I would like to propose here that taking James seriously demands a certain reconsideration of the type of humour that he embodied and inspired. My idea is that James's humour was not ironic, since it was tinged by an affectionate stance, alien to distant and cool spirits.

In order to make clearer the relevance of humour, and the contrast between types of humour, I will begin discussing some aspects of the antagonism between James and

Santayana.² I think that the intricate relation between them could be seen as a clash between two very diverse styles of humour that helps us to understand much better the deepness of James's humour. Both Santayana and James did like to laugh and made others laugh. They were not like those philosophers who feel their profundity and rigour threatened by laughter. However, Santayana and James laughed in two different ways, and this disparity has a lot to do with their respective philosophical temperaments. We can understand philosophical temperaments, indeed, in terms of the style in which each philosopher laughs and makes other laugh, voluntarily and involuntarily. Of course, philosophical temperaments can be defined by different traits, but laughter should also be considered among them, and types of humour taken, if not as another criterion, at least as a significant symptom. Despite some philosophers will never admit that humour can be as deep as philosophy, or that philosophy sometimes can be as amusing as humour, transferences between both spheres are intriguing. Rephrasing a wisecrack by Terry Eagleton in his "The Critic as Clown",³ one could say that if after all philosophical seriousness can be put into the funny, then that seriousness was not as serious as it seemed. Moreover, if the funny can be an adequate medium for such seriousness, then one can also think that humour is not as light as it seemed at first sight. If humour becomes deep without losing its character, then it could equal the serious in elaboration but paradoxically, exceeding it in simplicity.

Now let me connect a little more some philosophical types with types of humour. James was not a joker, it is true, but as it is well known he exhibited a fine sense of humour. Ralf Barton Perry highlighted James's peculiar "way of making fun of people, himself included", and his "delightful absurdity and peculiar art of loving caricature." Perry also commented:

There where light as well as serious forms of James's vivacity. He wore bright neckties. He had a highly developed sense of fun, and was usually himself its principal fomenter. He had his days feeling "particularly larky", but some degree of larkiness might be expected at any time. Thus he wrote to Flournoy as he was completing his second series for the Gifford Lectures: "the old spirit of mischief revives in my breast, and I begin to feel a little as I used to"— In the family circles to which James belonged laughter was a major activity. Its waves and detonations not only cleared away the vapors of neurasthenia, but were fatal to any "airs" of pretension or pose. There was wit, but it was gayety

and elaborate nonsense which was the characteristic domestic product. In the days of James boyhood, when juvenile theatricals were in order, it was he, according to the testimony of his brother, that supplied “the motive force”, imagined “the comprehensive comedies”, and served as “the constant comic star.”⁴

Perry described here essential marks of James unique type of humour. However, the crucial point is that this frame of mind in James was neither a passing feature of a young and immature comic star, nor it was just an external ingredient of an old and mature philosophical star. James’s mood was much more than a consequence of his unusual and weird education or than a picturesque and accessory envelopment of his thought. It was both an elaborate composition and an ingredient of his logic, an art of living and a procedure of thinking.

As Jacques Barzun also observed, many readers think that their failure to follow James’s ideas is due to defects in James’s logic, when the real difficulty was another.⁵ “Gaps and contradictions can be found [...] some by conflict unresolved”, but “in that regard they resemble the writings of every thinker without exception”. The real problem

in James as writer of philosophy is his irrepressible humour. He shares with Swift, Lamb, Samuel Butler, Shaw, Chesterton, and Mark Twain the disadvantage of having used yet one more rhetorical means which, though legitimate in itself and generally pleasing, somehow distracts all but the fittest readers. Most people seize on it as an opportunity to escape from the serious thought just preceding and thus miss the seriousness in the next, the humorous one. The great humorist always runs the risk of not being taken thoughtfully, while the normal men of ideas, faithful to solemnity, invariably are.⁶

From this perspective, James’s humour was a serious issue, in spite of the fact that it can occasionally be seen as a distraction from the deepness to which it actually serves. Humour is often understood as a mere exhaust valve of thinking, as a waste of superfluous energy, or as a mechanism of relaxing. In the case of James, however, humour was more like a mechanism of lighting, connected to a relatively fragmented but illuminating style of thinking. As Chappman said

His mind was never quite in focus, and there was always something left over after each discharge of the battery, something which now became the beginning of a new thought. When he found out his mistake or defect of expression, when he came to see that he had not said quite what he meant, he was the first to proclaim it, and to move on to a new position, a new misstatement of the same truth —a new, debonair apperception, clothed in non-conclusive and suggestive figures of speech [...] a logic that was not the logic of intellect, but a far deeper thing, limpid and clear in itself, confused and refractory only when you tried to deal it intellectually. You must take any fragment [...] by itself, for the whole meaning is in the fragment. If you try to piece the bits together, you will endanger their meaning.⁷

However, if James's humour was an instrument to delve into reality, never an evasion from it, it always expresses an existential way of being, perhaps even a sign of certain moral character. As Barzun also suggested, James's lightness was tinged by weightiness, and his sense of humour never operated as a protection

Cheerfulness, gaiety, the habit not so much of repressing as of resisting gloomy thoughts —all this may be dismissed as marks of the shallow optimist, but... James was precisely not that. Indeed, to Chappman's discerning glance, a deep sadness lay behind James's playfulness [...]. His humour [...] came, if not from, then with his reasoned view that "better" is not fated but possible. Such an attitude proved its worth by being contagious [...]. In short, it was not modern humour, self-derisive, as a prophylactic.⁸

Barzun's remarks are particularly accurate here, because, firstly, he places James's humour as a mood distant both from too idealistic optimism but also from too realistic scepticism, and secondly, because what Barzun classifies as prophylactic humour is closer to irony than any other variety of humour. If one disguises the funny with seriousness one can be prophylactic. But if one reveals the seriousness hidden in the funny, one can get more involved in a deeper and many times quite an embarrassing dimension of reality. While irony separates spirit from reality, keeping a cautious distance from it, other types of humour avoid distances and carelessly connect spirit with a reality that turns embarrassing. Ironists can be self-derisive in

some circumstances, yet only in order to maximize their own protection from reality. Humorists, on the contrary, are self-derisive due to their sometimes too indiscriminate engagement with reality.

JAMES AND SANTAYANA

Probably this is the reason why the elegant Santayana had a brilliant but cruel perception of James's sense of humour. For Santayana the problem with James was not an irrepressible mocking character, but rather an uncontrollable spontaneity and an irrepressible love for oddity. There was in James, surely, an expansive and impatient openness, an anxious will to take in and enjoy any possible situation which sprang from his over-belief that any particular point of view and experience could always possess a shred of truth in it. Perry talked of a "cosmic sympathy by which he rejoiced in strange and varied otherness"⁹ that, certainly, some of his adepts and followers —almost seriously—took as a sign of holiness. Santayana, however, always laughed at this urgent tendency to human contagion, taking it as a symptom of a histrionic and unbalanced sensibility:

For one thing, Williams James kept his mind and heart wide open to all that might seem, to polite minds, odd, personal, or visionary in religion and philosophy. He gave a sincerely respectful hearing to sentimentalist, mystics, spiritualists, wizards, cranks, quacks, and impostors... He thought, with his usual modesty, that any of these might have something to teach him. The lame, the halt, the blind, and those speaking with tongues could come to him with the certainty of finding sympathy; and if they were not healed, at least they were comforted, that a famous professor should take them so seriously; and they began to feel that after all to have only a leg, or one hand, or one eye, or to have three, might be in itself no less beautiful than to have just two, like the stolid majority.¹⁰

The judgments of William James were indeed impulsive, and his descriptions impressionistic, based on a penetrating but casual spurt of sympathy or antipathy [...].¹¹

His love of lame ducks and neglected possibilities [...] took the form of charity and breadth of mind, then seemed rather the doctor's quick eye for

bad symptoms, as if he had diagnosed people in a jiffy and cried: “Ah, you are a paranoiac! Ah, you have the pox!”.¹²

These passages contain extraordinary portraits of James, in spite of, or rather because they are really tinged by irony. They get to capture not only remarkable traits of James’s character, but also essential ingredients of his pluralistic philosophy. Santayana’s descriptions exaggerate the contractions involved in James’s sympathy, as if the very exultation in his acts would be the mark of an incurable weakness, and therefore a mistaken device of compensation against an alleged deficit. To the eyes of Santayana, indeed, a real understanding of facts and lives, of situations and persons, cannot be based on illuminations and insights. If philosophy wants to adopt a full comprehensive point of view, as he called it, it requires something else than sudden insights and effusive raptures. The understanding of how things and people *really* are cannot be grounded on picturesque and lyrical diagnosis. In the case of James, however, the impulse to see too much good in everything—the indiscriminating approval that he was prone to feel towards everything—forced him to reject prematurely any external point of view. As Santayana proclaimed

[James] was worried about what ought to be believed and the awful deprivations of disbelieving. What he called the cynical view of anything had first to be brushed aside, without stopping to consider whether it was not the true one.¹³

Here we face some important questions: What did James himself understand by cynical view? What had the cynic type of thinking to do with other types described by him? And, if—as Santayana said—James’s eye was more akin to a charitable doctor’s view before troubles Was a *clinical* view just the opposite to the *cynical* view?

I will try to answer these questions later, but before we leave Santayana behind in our discussion, let us make clearer some important points. First, James’s idea of sympathy was not as simplistic as an ironist like Santayana believed. Even if James came occasionally closer to absurdity he was not the sort of old-fashioned romantic that neo-classicists as Santayana sometimes recognized in him. James never glorified madness in a romantic vein, as if mental illness were synonymous with genius. And he did not precisely because he knew very well that insanity is not a joke, and that too often it is really irreconcilable with a good

life. A clinic eye, *pace* Santayana, can be interested in more things than a melodramatic celebration of the odd and the extraordinary. Second: James was quite aware of the confines of our imaginative powers and affective capabilities. This acceptance, however, far from being the same as passiveness is its very opposite since it draws the lines of action, instills attitudes that prepare for it, distinguishes friendly and unfriendly forces and eventually prepares for new and in-between things.¹⁴ However, Santayana never did full justice to this other bitter side of James, the James who talked very seriously about our inexorable blindness and our limited sympathy, and the James that saw tolerance as a virtue that helps to avoid the injuries provoked by an almost incurable blindness, rather than the result of overcoming this same blindness. What Santayana also didn't understand is that James never considered this acknowledgement of our ignorance, this acceptance of our limits, as a motive for existential withdrawn, aloofness, or pessimistic scepticism. On the contrary,

The 'man of the world's' scepticism... is at its finest in those generous characters who show it with regard to fortune, what she gives and what she withdraws and with regard to particular misdemeanours and shortcomings of their friends, which are not allowed seriously to alter the general impression of their character in the long run. Such people can laugh at fate, are flexible, sympathize with the free flow of things, believe ever in the good, but are willing that it should shift its form. They do not close their hand on their possessions. When they profess a willingness that certain persons should be free they mean it not as most of us do with a mental reservation, as that the freedom should be well employed and other similar humbug but in all sincerity, and calling for no guarantee against abuse which, when it happens, they accept without complaint or embitterment as part of the chances of the game. They let their bird fly with no string tied to its leg.¹⁵

Without doubt, Santayana would have smiled again before this type of declaration, as, from the cynic point of view —the perspective of an alleged external observer— there are always invisible strings that have tied free soul's legs. In other words: even if James acknowledged some frames of acceptance, Santayana would distinguish between the cynic tempers who, unable to reach grapes, decide they were sour, and the sympathetic characters who hope that the very nature of facts forces to turn calamities and evils into benefits and goods, as if the very conflicts in one level of reality moved them to another where they can be redeemed.

It is not surprising, in consequence, that when Santayana adopted his most distant poses, James expressed his most acrimonious critique about Santayana, notwithstanding all the admiration he felt for him. Santayana —he said— is “the oddest spectator of life —seems as if he took no active interest in anything”.¹⁶ Or as he also stated in a letter to Eliot:

Santayana is... a spectator rather than an actor by temperament, but apart from that element of weakness, a man (as I see him) of thoroughly wholesome mental atmosphere. He is both a ‘gentleman’ and a ‘scholar’ in the real sense of the words, an exquisite writer and a finished speaker... with his style, his subtlety of perception, and his cool-blooded truthfulness.¹⁷

Of course, for a cynic mind as Santayana, such a portrait might have been enjoyed just as the highest of the praises as he could add a cynic qualification to James’s own assessment: he certainly was an odd spectator, but just because he played the role of a *guest* actor in the American Scene.¹⁸ Reversing ironically James’s own words against him, he could supply an ironic counter-portrait: James was an amateur actor rather than a trained actor, but apart from that element of ingenuity, he was a man of thoroughly wholesome spiritual atmosphere. James was both a genteel man, and a dear professor in the real sense of the words, a cultivated writer and a picturesque speaker, with his lack of style, his impulsiveness of perception, and his boil-blooded truthfulness.¹⁹

CYNICAL AND SYMPATHETIC

In this section I would like to examine the distinction that James himself made in the first chapter of *A Pluralist Universe* between a *cynical* and a *sympathetic* type of thinking. Whether a temperament (the cynic or the sympathetic), comes from a specific type of philosophical view or it is the other way around —an entire philosophy rationalizes or sublimates a temperamental attitude (cynical or sympathetic), is not at stake now.²⁰ Rather, I will emphasize here the relation of James’s broad contrast between the cynic and sympathetic types with diverse types of humour.

Many of James’s typologies are well known. In *Pragmatism* he distinguished between “tender-minded” and “tough-minded”, probably the most popular of his classifications. In *Varieties* he also pointed out not only the difference between the “healthy-mindedness” and

the “sick-soul”, but also the provocative opposition between what he called the “psychopathic temperament” and the “philistine type”.²¹ Moreover, far from acting as a happy and naive mediator between extremes, James often emphasized the difficulties of reconciliation and the permanent conflicts not only between generic types of persons, but also between contrary impulses fighting within the same person. Being true that he acted before his audience as a mediator and go-between type of intellectual, it is also true that he emphasized many times the irreconcilable and everlasting *clash* between many types.²²

In some previous works, of course we can find classifications between types of thinking that could have some analogy with the contrast between cynic and sympathetic temper. In “The Dilemma of Determinism”, for example, James seemed to associate a *cynic* temperament with French naturalism. Renan and Zola, he explained, shared with other types of thinking some fatalist presuppositions which induced ethic indifference. Both Renan and Zola,

are athirst for the facts of the life, and both think the facts of human sensibility to be of all facts the most worthy of attention... the one ignores the distinction of good and evil, the other plays the coquette between the craven unmanliness [...] and a butterfly optimism. But under the pages of both there sounds incessantly the hoarse bass of *vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas*, which the reader may hear, whenever he will, between the lines.²³

Two main facts of human sensibility —James remarks— are plainly ignored by this type of thinking: satiety and horror, the feeling that one takes no more pleasure from facts of life, and the terror at the world’s vast meaningless grinding. There is “no possible *theoretic* escape” from these states of mind, no matter how cool devices the naturalist spirit can design...

whether, like Renan, life is looked upon in a refined way, as a romance of the spirit; or whether, like the friends of M. Zola, we pique ourselves on our ‘scientific’ and ‘analytic’ character, and prefer to be cynical, and reduce the world to a ‘roman experimental’ on an infinite scale”, in either case the world can appear to us potentially as what the same Carlyle once called it, a vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha and mill of death.²⁴

The fact that James prefers to invoke the melodramatic excesses of Carlyle before giving credibility to French naturalism is quite significant, but to discuss it would lead us too far. More instructive for our purposes is that he considers as the opposite temperament to this sort of cynicism a practical mood that incorporates a delicate sensibility and a willingness to bring about some external good. The essence of this philosophy of external conduct, James adds, is not any intellectual evasion, but acceptance of things and “recognition of limits, foreign an opaque to our understanding.” This sort of acceptance means that the individual can feel in peace after bringing some external good, however small or partial, since “in the view of this philosophy the universe belongs to a plurality of semi-independent forces, each one of which may help or hinder, and be helped or hindered by the operations of the rest.”²⁵ In other words: a sympathetic temperament aware of limits, but resolute, is a temperament akin to a pluralist universe.

Anyway, regardless of the force of those remarks from “The Dilemma of Determinism”, I think that what James said on the rivalry and conflict of selves in *Principles* is much more important in connection with the typology he eventually presented in *A Pluralist Universe*. The curious fact is that in *Principles* James opposed the sympathetic temper not with the cynic one, but with an existential attitude inspired by ancient stoic doctrines.

The Stoic receipt for contentment was to dispossess yourself in advance of all that was out of your own power, —then fortune’s shocks might rain down unfelt. Epictetus exhorts us, by thus narrowing and at the same time solidifying our Self to make it invulnerable²⁶ [...]. This Stoic fashion, though efficacious and heroic enough in its place and time, is, it must be confessed, only possible as an habitual mood of the soul to narrow and unsympathetic characters. It proceeds altogether by exclusion. If I am a Stoic, the goods I cannot appropriate cease to be *my* goods, and the temptation lies very near to deny that they are goods at all. We find this mode of protecting the Self by exclusion and denial very common among people who are in other respects not Stoics. All narrow people *intrench* their Me, they *retract* it, —from the region of what they cannot securely possess. People who don’t resemble them, or who treat them with indifference, people over whom they gain no influence, are people on whose existence, however meritorious it may intrinsically be,

they look with chill negation, if not with positive hate. Who will not be mine I will exclude from existence altogether; that is, as far as I can make it so, such people shall be as if they were not.²⁷ Thus may a certain absoluteness and definiteness in the outline of my Me console me for the smallness of its content.

Sympathetic people, on the contrary, proceed by the entirely opposite way of expansion and inclusion. The outline of their self often gets uncertain enough, but for this the spread of its content more than atones. *Nihil humani a me alienum*. Let them despise this little person of mine, and treat me like a dog, I shall not negate *them* so long as I have a soul in my body. They are realities as much as I am. What positive good is in them shall be mine too, etc., etc. The magnanimity of these expansive natures is often touching indeed. Such persons can feel a sort of delicate rapture in thinking that, however sick, ill-favored, mean-conditioned, and generally forsaken they may be, they yet are integral parts of the whole of this brave world, have a fellow's share in the strength of the dray-horses, the happiness of the young people, the wisdom of the wise ones, and are not altogether without part or lot in the good fortunes of the Vanderbilts and the Hohenzollerns themselves. Thus either by negating or by embracing, the Ego may seek to establish itself in reality.²⁸

I would propose that the main issue here is not the explicit mention of antique stoic philosophy, or the rigour and exactitude with which James distinguishes between different versions or phases of it²⁹, but the broad description that he provided of the "rivalry of different selves" (in his own terms), or in other terms, the psychological survey of the conflict between two main economies of self-regard; two primary modes of connecting the self and the world, the former being characterized by exclusion and reduction and the latter by inclusiveness and extension.³⁰

Let me now consider explicitly and with more detail the main distinction that I referred to, the one that James established in the first chapter from *A Pluralistic Universe* ("The Types of Philosophic Thinking"). He says there:

If we take the whole history of philosophy the systems reduce themselves to a few main types which, under all the technical verbiage in which the ingenious intellect of man envelops them, are just so many visions, modes of feeling the

whole push, and seeing the whole drift of life, forced on one by one's total character and experience, and on the whole *preferred*—there is no other truthful word—as one's best working attitude. Cynical characters take one general attitude, sympathetic characters another [...] Perhaps the most interesting opposition is that which results from the clash between [...] the sympathetic and the cynical temper.³¹

According to this survey of existential drives, indeed, materialistic and spiritualistic philosophies would be the rival elaborations that result from the clash between cynic and sympathetic tempers. The spiritualistic philosophy, at once, would subdivide into two species, a more intimate and a less intimate one. The less intimate would be dualistic (theism), but the more intimate would break into two subspecies, the one being monistic (absolute idealism), the other pluralistic (James's own option: radical pluralism).³² It is clear that in *A Pluralistic Universe* James's aim was to vindicate his own philosophy against a rival spiritualistic philosophy (absolute idealism), but it would be interesting to reconsider how he describes the sources from which the main division between the materialistic and spiritualist philosophies spring off.

The former [defines] the world so as to leave man's soul upon it as a soil of outside passenger or alien, while the latter insists that the intimate and human must surround and underlie the brutal.³³

[...] The inner life of things must be substantially akin anyhow to the tenderer parts of man's nature in any spiritualistic philosophy. The word "intimacy" probably covers the essential difference. Materialism holds the foreign in things to be more primary and lasting, it sends us to a lonely corner with our intimacy. The brutal aspects overlap and outwear; refinement has the feebler and more ephemeral hold on reality.³⁴

James admits that the contrast between the materialist and the spiritualist philosophies could "cut across by other sort of divisions, drawn from other points of view than that of foreignness and intimacy"³⁵ but it is clear that seeing the entire world as something distant or seeing it as something near, makes one of the most remarkable differences between these two types. Both tempers are compelled to design some order or unified vision, and the conflict is

open, since “the intimacy and the foreignness cannot be written down as simply coexisting”.³⁶ Obviously James vindicates one more time the pre-eminence of sympathetic temper:

The majority of men are sympathetic. Comparatively few are cynics because they like cynicism [...]. It is normal, I say, to be sympathetic in the sense in which I use the term. Not to demand intimate relations with the universe, and not to wish them satisfactory, should be accounted signs of something wrong.³⁷

This way of seeing things is problematic, since this time James suggests that establishing intimate relations with the universe is a sort of natural pro-attitude, an elemental mode of being-in-the world, and that the blockade of this openness would be the cause rather than the effect of a cynic view of life. However he is not saying that this spontaneous way of seeing the world qualifies it as a paradise. On the contrary, sympathetic temper is a reasonable reaction toward a perilous, multifarious and chaotic world.³⁸ But independently of this, in what concrete terms could we interpret the idea of an intimate satisfactory relation with the universe? How is the massive contrast between two ways of being in the world actually experienced in real life? In *A Pluralist Universe*, James associates with each type different attitudes towards history³⁹, but I would say that the most striking translation of the general contrast is in terms of social consequences

From a pragmatic point of view the difference between living against a background of foreignness and one of intimacy means the difference between a general habit of wariness and one of trust. One might call it a social difference, for after all, the common *socius* of us all is the great universe whose children we are.⁴⁰

Interpreted in this way, the metaphysical dimension of cynicism and sympathy acquire a much more practical meaning.⁴¹ To some extent, both existential modes could be taken as habits and emotional dispositions developed in a social medium.⁴² We could think that both drives could oscillate inside some individuals, while in other cases one of them could dominate hierarchically their personalities. In the case of the cynical —James says— “we must be suspicious of this *socius*, cautious, tense, on guard”. But in the case of the

sympathetic “we may give way, embrace, and keep no ultimate fear.”⁴³ Sympathetic tempers trust —James affirms — and cynic tempers tend to be cautious. Sympathetic moods are more extroverted, cynics much more introverted, if we want to use a more psychological term. The former are akin to hopeful engagement, the latter prone to sceptical retirement. In each case, a whole economy of the self in its exchange with other selves is at play too.

We could even go further and attribute more social habits to each temperament. Cynics can be elegant, edifying and polite in public, although they privately despise the common desires and ends. A narcissistic impulse pressures them to save their authentic self from the crowd. In any case, even when they express their discontent, they will never act like irreverent questioners or impertinent jesters. They can practice a sweet cruelty, but never scandalously; they can display, at the same time, sophisticated sociability and brilliant witticism, good etiquette and exquisite criticism. Irony requires some imposture and some composure at once, a delicate art by which individuals can express criticism of norms at the same time that they preserve themselves from marginalization. They can be judged as elitist or as aristocratic. But in this case, they can vindicate disenchantment and moderation as a civilizing virtue. They don’t see social life as an experience or a revelation, but rather as a practical compromise.

From this cynic perspective, to be sure, sympathetic tempers would seem too ingenuous, since they depend too much on common hopes. They are too emotional and sentimental, since they think that being in tune with their fellows is the checkpoint of sociability. Enthusiasm is for them a virtue, notwithstanding it can sometimes degenerate into zeal. They throw themselves into frank and open fellowship, and their criticism has more of a sincere *exhortation* than of an objective and sharp *explanation*. Their manners can result comic because of their imprudence, if not impertinence, and even if their insights cannot operate as a durable source of knowledge, at least provide a chance for an enhanced perception of human relations.

We could suggest more comparisons, but there is an important issue that should be made clear. From James’s point of view, openness and trust are *not* manifestations of a naïve attitude. A world lived as a background of intimacy is still an opaque and ultimately unfathomable world. Sympathetic tempers respect too much the world to believe that human beings can carry it under their scope. Worth noting is that, for James, the acknowledgment of these limits is analogous to the tolerance and respect they show to their fellows. The relation of human beings with the cosmos is analogous to their relation with the *socius*. They trust in

achieving satisfactory relations, but “the universe, like one’s neighbour, is never wholly disclosed to outward view, and the last word must be consent that the *other* should be *itself*. In metaphysics, as in human relations, the chief source of illumination is sympathy.”⁴⁴ In consequence, sympathetic minds take this universe as a hospitable realm not because they comprehend it, but even in spite of their own ignorance. Feeling at home in this world is not the same as feeling that one actually inhabits an always approachable and explicable world.⁴⁵ Similarly, they don’t trust because they know how to penetrate their neighbour’s lives, or because they hope to include all desires and hopes of individuals into an all-inclusive community. In conclusion: Foreignness is not totally absent from a sympathetic view of the world, only that, unlike a cynic view, it is understood without adopting the delusion of an external spectator.

IRONY AND COMICALNESS

I think that the contrast between an ironic temper and a comic temper could be particularly useful to understand James’s vindication of the sympathetic perspective. But you could certainly ask: Why two types of humour could help us better appreciate the opposition between the two ways of seeing the world that James distinguished in *A Pluralist Universe*?

The first reason is that humour can express in an abridged form a sort of existential mood. We can find cases of a more elaborated humour that would represent theatrically the triumph of an indifferent self over any calamity, including death. And we could also find examples of a more involuntary humour, expression of an affectionate attitude towards life and death. Diverse types of humour, indeed, administrate in different degrees the acceptance of evil, mostly dwarfing it, but in honour of very different ends.

The second reason is that humour is *social* by definition. If you want to produce laughter you have necessarily to presuppose a social background, a lot of implicit norms, and a considerable amount of common beliefs. Humour cannot exist except in a social medium. Humour, indeed, is a double-edge sword of social action: it can work as an agency of solidarity, but also as an instrument of exclusion, as a gesture of affection, and as a tool for cruelty at the same time. We laugh together making a joke of ourselves because by doing this we soften our own inflexibility, demanding a more sensitive community. But we can also laugh together when we desire to humiliate other individuals, trying to exclude them from our community. Humour always expresses a form of sociability, whether it be by affirmation or by negation, by extension or by reduction.

The question is: since James marked the difference between cynic tempers and sympathetic tempers as a difference connected with social life, could we consider varieties of humour if not as an epitome at least as an abridged expression of each type of temperaments? There could be, in addition, a more procedural reason to do this.

As it is known, James remarked in *Varieties* that hallucinations, illusions, morbid impulses, imperative conditions, fixations or obsessions, borderland madness, crankiness, loss of mental balance, and many other insane conditions offer some advantage as objects of study for psychology, since they isolate “special factors of life and enable us to inspect them unmasked by the more usual surroundings.”⁴⁶ Abnormal conditions—he also remarked—enable us to understand normal faculties. For example, hallucinations give the key to the comprehension of normal sensation; imperative impulses help us to understand the psychology of normal will; obsessions and delusions give the same service for the faculty of belief; crankiness represents an extreme case of emotional susceptibility, since cranky persons pass immediately into belief and action, and when they get a new idea they have no rest till they proclaim it, or in some way ‘work it off’. A common person deliberates too much about a vexed question while a cranky mind looks resolutely for the action in need. Even the psychopathic temperaments—he adds—would contain “the emotionality which is the *sine qua non* of moral perception, and the intensity and tendency of emphasis which are the essence of practical moral vigor.”⁴⁷

Following James’s own logic, could we also take types of humour as an abnormal expression of normal social attitudes which could help us understand them? To some extent, the fact that the joker is often taken as mad indicates that there is some relation between humour and abnormal conditions, and that a good way to comprehend the ruling social habits is to observe seriously the unruly ones. Some other types of humour, however, could seem less abnormal, since they are less eccentric and provocative, although they express too veiled an attitude towards norms and models of sociability. In consequence, we could presume that varieties of comic behaviours could illuminate under diverse lights the logic of serious actions—jokes partially revealing the limits and possibilities of social action.

Here we could invoke too numerous theories of humour (elaborated by philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists⁴⁸), but I will pinpoint a small book written by one of James’s best friends: Henri Bergson’s *The Laughter*.⁴⁹ In this work, Bergson stated that laughing is an essentially human experience, and that human life itself requires laughing as one of its conditions. More exactly, laughing is an essentially *social* act, and it helps us to

understand how much our sense of community depends on the equilibrium between diverse forces.⁵⁰ Bergson is particularly eloquent in this point: social life requires from social actors both *attention* and *sensitiveness*, a constant *alert* that helps to frame appropriately the situations and the reactions to them, together with an *elasticity* that enable them to adapt themselves in consequence. “Tension and elasticity are two forces, mutually complementary, which life brings into play.” Communal life, in fact, would require avoiding two danger tendencies: easy automatism of acquired habits, and reduction of interactions between individuals to the simple conditions of their mutual adjustment or reciprocal adaptation. Laughter —Bergson remarks— would just operate as a corrective gesture, demanding less automatism and inertial action, but restraining at the same time absolute eccentricity or radical separatism. In other words, laughter would be a sort of warning sign, a reminder of the need to balance centripetal and centrifugal social impulses.

Different types of laughing, indeed, can be produced and enjoyed. The smooth smile, for example, has a more intellectual and rhetorical nature, as expression of a detached type of reflection and even of a veiled attitude of disapproval. The loud laugh, on the contrary, has a more practical and corporal nature and can be provoked by close examination of facts and by odd reactions. Bergson, indeed, marks the difference in a very interesting way

Sometimes we state what ought to be done, and pretend to believe that this is just what is actually being done; then we have irony. Sometimes, on the contrary, we describe with scrupulous minuteness what is being done, and pretend to believe that this is just what ought to be done; such is often the method of Humour. Humour, thus denned, is the counterpart of irony. Both are forms of satire, but irony is oratorical in its nature, whilst humour partakes of the scientific. Irony is emphasised the higher we allow ourselves to be uplifted by the idea of the good that ought to be: thus irony may grow so hot within us that it becomes a kind of high-pressure eloquence. On the other hand, humour is the more emphasized the deeper we go down into an evil that actually is, in order to set down its details in the most cold-blooded indifference [...] humour delights in concrete terms, technical details, and definite facts. If our analysis is correct, this is not an accidental trait of humour, it is its very essence. A humorist is a moralist disguised as a scientist, something like an anatomist who practises dissections with the sole object of filling us with disgust; so that

humour, in the restricted sense in which we are here regarding the word, is really a transposition from the moral to the scientific.⁵¹

Bergson's analysis is extremely useful for our purposes, not only because of his demarcation between a more oratorical style of humour and a sort of pseudo-scientific one, the former more linguistic, the later more experiential, but also because he decisively marks the contrast between irony and humour in terms of how one deals with the gap between *the real* and *the ideal*, between *what is*, and *what ought to be*.

We could illustrate this contraposition by considering different reactions facing contingencies, adverse situations, and evils. As Bergson says, the ironist states what ought to be done, and pretends to believe that this is just what is actually being done. A fact or situation is really disturbing but the ironist describes it as if it would not be, expressing indifference before it, or even as if it would be the contrary, a positive one.⁵² Repetition of a disturbance, for example, is a comic device, that can conclude with an ironic end if the sufferer expresses an unexpected indifference when the spectator would expect desperation.⁵³ Ironic minds, indeed, can face catastrophes as mere setbacks, and tragedies as insignificant calamities, before admitting their weakness. They tend, in consequence, to compensate resignation with the pose of a triumph.

In social and moral terms, the evaluative stance would be similar. Ironic characters are moralists, as Bergson says, but they evaluate actions, values, ways of being, or forms of life, expressing their approvals or disapprovals in the form of an oblique or indirect judgment.⁵⁴ Strictly, irony is not mere courtesy or politeness, it is veiled criticism of injustices, faults and vices, expressed in the prose and pose of an unmoved witness. If we would take Bergson's scheme far, we could also attribute to ironic character a specific mode of sociability, since they tend to act before otherness *as if* it were sameness. No matter how odd, bizarre, or non-ordinary a conduct or situation can be, the ironic temper will pretend to believe that this is just the case.⁵⁵ In many cases, the anomalous will be steadily subsumed into the accustomed, and the abnormal *as if* were normal. Or in other terms: ironic tempers prefer abstract assimilation of the odd than intimate acquaintance with it. They accept the other, and admit that it can have its place, but not that themselves need to adopt the place of the other. An important consequence of this attitude is the model of sociability that it inspires: apparently, it is a civilized one, since "others" are not humiliated. A society of ironical citizens could tolerate differences, indeed, though this tolerance would not imply that these differences were

recognized as such differences. Respect is not the same than sympathy, after all, and it can even be a more practicable virtue.

Let me come back now to the counterpart of irony, and develop it in the same line of Bergson's description. Humoristic tempers, he remarked, can describe with scrupulous minuteness what is being done, and pretend to believe that this is just what ought to be done. A fact or situation is really disturbing but the humorist *acts* as if the situation would consequently demand further responsiveness. Repetition of a trouble or a disaster, again, can trigger a comic situation, but this time the iteration of calamity does not conclude with distance and reservation, but with an unexpected increase of answerability, and even willingness to reconciliation. Ironic minds, we have said, tend to compensate fatal fate with the pose of a triumph, but humorists act as if evils were repairable and forgivable.⁵⁶

To some extent, comic tempers also adopt a pose of indifference and immunity before fatality, and sometimes they seem to remain triumphant after they have been cruelly vanquished. However, this sort of indifference and victory are not like the ironical ones, since their source is engagement and not distance, and its ultimate motive is not the safeguarding of the self, but rather the redemption of the situation. Comic selves, indeed, can be disjointed and deconstructed at the same time that the situation in which they become involved. Unlike a tragic hero, a comic character tends to dwarf situations, instead of magnifying it, but unlike an ironic comedian, they engage in the situation without reservation, as if they ignore both the gravity of the situation and their own limitations. In this sense, the humorist could be seen as the counterpart of a tragic hero.⁵⁷ On the one hand, they deflate the tragic situation, but on the other hand, they still take it with pathos outside the cynical view.

Whereas the ironist cynically tries to feel detached from facts, comic tempers become too absorbed by facts, trying to cope with them as they go along, in their pure —although tough— logic. Things should be better (as the ironist reminds), but being as they *are*, it is better to be coherent with them (the comic character tells us). Consistency is associated with the faculty of Reason, of course, but humorists could be seen as absolutely consistent with the sort of reality that they expose, and it is probably this sense of obligation what minimizes their excesses. Above all, comic humour involves the acceptance that human beings are always exceeded by the very facts. And this is the reason why ironists, in spite of their self-derisiveness, don't really laugh at themselves. Comic tempers, on the contrary, can laugh at themselves, since an essential ingredient of what they reveal is their own inherent insignificance. As Chesterton observed, comic humour always implies a confession of the disparity between the human dignity and the permanent possibility of indignity. Ironic wit, on

the contrary, stands for the indirect triumph of reason and of abstract justice that would denounce contradictions from an ideal point of view (a simulated elevated outside). Since ironic wit pretends to observe the scenes of human life as an independent and indifferent court, it would be equivalent to the divine virtue of justice —Chesterton added—, whilst the comical “is the equivalent to the human virtue of humility that to some extent, would be even more divine since, by the moment, captures much better the sense of mysteries.”⁵⁸

This humility, as I have suggested before, must not be mistaken with compliance or inactivity. Comic humour is grounded and inspires a stout sense of determination and trusting. Sometimes situations resolve in an equivocal but expedient composition; sometimes they remain precarious, perilous, uncertain and unresolved. But notwithstanding adversities and contingencies, comic tempers tend to feel reasonably hopeful. The solutions that they eventually manage, indeed, are fruit both of their smart ideas and of good changes in fortune, consequences of decisiveness and of good luck, of cleverness and coincidences, of resolution and change at one. Their relative successes will never mean the conquest of a powerful will, and even less the glory of a sovereign self. The small triumphs of comic tempers over the reverses of natural powers, setback of objects and hostility of human beings are in many situation consequences of almost acrobatic powers. However, unlike what happens with performances in the Circus, their skilful solutions are always product of chance. Chances defeat destiny, and the same circumstances that seem to be headed for disaster, miraculously transform themselves into a “salvation”. Comic characters are quite ingenious and valiant, but it is the fortuitous combination of events, many of them incoherent, what eventually leads to a sort of “happy end”. Humility, then, is the main trait of the comic character, even when seems to triumph as a hero.

Finally, and to conclude this section, let us consider the social dimension of humour in contraposition to irony.⁵⁹ We said that ironists react to the uncommon by assimilating it. Sometimes this attitude can be civilized, since it can avoid dramatic situations, and reduce anxiety. However, readapting a Jamesian *dictum* it could be said that avoiding humiliation is not the same as promoting recognition. Comic tempers, indeed, try to inquiry more about otherness and go deep into foreignness. They look for positive good, and not only for avoidance of evil. This effusive openness is problematic since, as we have also said, perception powers and imagination have limits, and in order to interact with something new or surprising we practically need to assimilate it in some degree. In spite of this, sympathetic characters adopt the pose of an intimate acquaintance, even though their own questions and

attitudes can reveal comically the confines of their own perspective. They try, at least, to be in the place of the other, and surrender their standards in favour of others. Ironists never do that, since, obviously, this sort of “conversion” could result in itself ridiculous and comic. Moreover, and this is a very important point, even when comic tempers meet the most common of things, the most familiar of beings or the more ordinary of the situations, they can turn them into something uncommon. Ironists point out how the world could look like if it weren’t as it actually is. Comic characters see the world in such a way that it stops being what appeared to be. They seem to have the gift to perceive the usual as unusual, or in other words: they can see the world as *jamais vue*, or the ever-seen as never-seen.⁶⁰ Again, in Chesterton’s words,

it is one thing to describe an interview with a gorgon or a griffin, a creature who does not exist. It is another thing to discover that the rhinoceros does exist and then take pleasure in the fact that he looks as if he didn’t. One searches for truth, but it may be that one pursues instinctively the more extraordinary truths.⁶¹

Humour, then, expresses a certain love for the ordinary, that is to say, for the ordinary as extra-ordinary and in its irreducible otherness. Comic tempers do not seek absurdity as an end by itself (although occasionally it can actually be carried by it), neither feel satisfied with easy surprise. What comic humour likes to reveal is not only the meaningless of the meaningful. It pursues to reveal the real as unreal, in order to acquire a higher degree of reality. But comic humour doesn’t destroy the links with common reason. On the contrary, it necessarily presupposes quite an amount of literal meaning in order to reveal its always equivocal and ambiguous nature (in effect, a behaviour can provoke laughter because it is *too deviant*, but also because it is *too literal*. Common sense requires to *know-how* following norms and acquaintance with a whole way of behaviour).⁶² Anyway, humour, in contraposition to irony, represents human beings as permanent *amateurs*, never as *connoisseurs*. Irony is an adult pleasure; while comic humour seems more childish (Freud talked extensively about this). As we have also said, ironic wit aspires to a tender-minded type of witticism, but comical jokes and situations inspire a much tough-minded type of criticism. The ironic wit emphasizes the gap between what it is and what ought to be, but to some extent it helps individuals to be more respected as brilliant and refined actors. Comic humour, in turn, also makes us conscious of gaps, but it does it by means of astonishment,

perplexity and amazement, it deflates our own performances as alleged good actors and returns us to the condition of beginners (children, outsiders, aliens, foreign, idiots).

This sort of “awakenings” can certainly reveal the uncanny hidden in the familiar, and provoke a strong feeling of estrangement and absurdity, but it can also encourage a renewed sense of sympathy. The awareness of the outrageous can paralyse us, and separate us from social life, but the comic re-elaboration can also renew our sense of sociability, and our trust and hope. Thanks to humour we can feel again “at home” but in an altered and more conscious way, since from that moment we know that homeless and wandering is actually a part of the human condition. Humour, in consequence, demarcates our illusions, but it does not destroy them; moreover, to some extent it supplies an indirect device to keep them alive. It deprives us from our familiarity with the world, but in spite of this (or rather because of this) it still invites us to establish intimacies and friendly bonds with it.

In conclusion: Bergson was right when he observed that some humorists can go *too* deep into facts, sometimes up to the point of producing distaste or revulsion, since they don’t care about etiquette, decorum and good manner as much as ironists do. They are not also as elusive and allusive as cynic observers or well-trained conversationalists. They can result straight rather than eloquent, and become indiscrete and rough; even verge on vulgarity and coarseness, but only because of their impulsive curiosity and the closeness of their look. They are like an anatomist —as Bergson says— but they don’t necessarily dissect facts with the sole object of filling us with disgust. This is an extreme case, where grotesque humour is used as a means of provocation or attack. In many cases, however, it operates as a mark to enlarge perception of the ordinary, intimating ways by which human intercourse could be improved. To be true, comical minds emulate or even parody the closeness of a clinical eye, but they do it with the purpose of illuminating (by their *actions*, more than by their *remarks*) if not the whole social life, at least, fragments or spheres of it. The relevant fact about humour, in definitive, is not the mere amplification of the awareness of evil, but rather the enlargement of sensitiveness. A clinical view, indeed, can be realistic and charitable at once. And if it is true that humour occasionally hurts, it ultimately looks for a cure.

FAITH AND HUMOUR

In the previous sections I have tried to reconstruct James’s notion of sympathy according to some theories on humour. However, some questions could still be in the air.

Since in *A Pluralistic Universe* James associated the sympathetic temperament with a *spiritual* type temperament, someone might object that for James the archetype of such temperament would ultimately be a *religious* type. This is true, but I would suggest that we can also find reasons to reverse the terms, giving priority to the *social* dimension of the sympathetic character. To some extent, James also saw religious-like types only as one expression of certain expansive and sympathetic impulses than could acquire some other mundane expressions.⁶³ James also admitted, for instance, that there are people that don't have religious or mystic experiences, but that live the social life and particularly the recognition of other human beings as a radical experience.⁶⁴ But if, as I have suggested, comic humour might reveal in a exaggerated way the hidden dimension of this radical experience, what sort of analogy is there between laughter and faith? Is comic humour, after all, a mundane equivalent of religious experience?

Well, we have seen that humour can work as an agency of solidarity, and a condensed form of practical knowledge which can make more flexible social intercourse. But of course, in some extreme cases, humour can operate like an astonishing shock, interruption or exception. It can also represent an offensive breaking of norms, rules and taboos, and a dangerous questioning of authorities. Maybe in these cases, one could remark, the comic insights and actions could be compared with mystic revelations. Some jokers, certainly, seem to have a special access to other reality than that mediated and organized by fixed structures, accustomed concepts and habituated feelings. They can have eccentric perceptions of experiences and habits. They can say and do certain things in a way that does not confer them absolute immunity but it grants them a certain degree of social exemption. However, there are some important differences: the comic perceptions are never considered a divine gift, as the religious or mystical ones could be. The ability of comic jokers to partially make explicit the implicit awards them with a temporary special status, but it never provides them with a supernatural power. They make visible the invisible, but their insights could be considered a revelation only in a derivative sense, since they don't really reveal some truer world beyond this world. They only reveal what we always had before the eyes.

As Mary Douglas remarked, access to another level of social reality could make us think of the joker as a minor-mystic:

Though only by a mundane and border-line type, the joker is one of those people who pass beyond the bounds of reason and society and give glimpses of a truth which escapes through the mesh of structured concepts. Naturally he is

only a humble, poor brother of the true mystic, for his insights are given by accident. They do not combine to form a whole new vision of life, but remain disorganised as a result of the technique which produces them. He is distinctly gimmicky. One would expect him to be the object of a hilarious mythology [...] but hardly the focus of a religious cult... he is always a subordinate deity in a complex pantheon. The joker as god promises a wealth of new, unforeseeable kinds of interpretation. He exploits the symbol of creativity which is contained in a joke, for a joke implies that anything is possible.⁶⁵

Douglas's remarks depend on a broader anthropological inquiry, but they are extremely instructive for our characterization of some types of humour. Sometimes, jokers can temporally break the social rules, other times they can interrupt the solemn rites. And they can release —as Douglas also says— the *pent-up* power of the imagination.⁶⁶ However, their insights are to some extent given by accident and they do not combine to form a whole vision, since they are too fragmentary and momentary. A joker embedded with a definite vision of a counter-life (of an alternative community) wouldn't be a real good joker.

This qualification of jokers as minor-mystics drives me to the final ideas that I would like to suggest. The main one is neither that some jokers could have been included by James in his *Varieties of Religious Experiences*, nor that he should have written a book titled, *The Varieties of Comic Experience*.⁶⁷ The question here is whether James would have taken humour as a human experience as deep as the religious experience, or if, on the contrary, he would have considered it as a second-range sort of human experience. Or even more: if he would have considered humour as a self-sufficient mode of being, or only as a previous phase of a real religious mode of being. In other words, even if the comic temper could be much more spiritual than the ironic one, couldn't it seem for James much less spiritual than a true religious faith, lived in its full intensity? Can humour, after all, possess the tone of existential authenticity?

To make clear this point would demand a more specific consideration of the religious-like side of James's personal mood, and secondly, of the general dialectic between the comic and the religious (as for example in Kierkegaard) or the incongruence between laughter and faith (as Reinhold Niebuhr posed). Since both topics exceed the scope of this paper, however, I will finish by pointing out some brief suggestions that, obviously, would require a further and deeper development:

1) With reference to James's own "religious" temper, one should not forget that as James himself sometimes expressed, his personal mysticism was often exaggerated, when in fact it was "rather a matter of fair play to let mystical ecstasy have its voice counted with the rest."⁶⁸ In spite of this, it is also true that James's gestures and poses (rather than any positive belief), could induce in others the impression of a religious-like character. Moreover, according to many interpreters, without any secular kind of "prayer" to sustain him, James himself could not have lived and acted.⁶⁹ Chappman's portrait of James, again, seems particularly relevant on this point:

There was, in spite of his playfulness a deep sadness about James. You felt that he had just stepped out his sadness in order to meet you, and was to go back into it the moment you left him. It may be that sadness inheres in some kind of profoundly religious characters—in dedicated persons who have renounced all, and are constantly hoping, thinking, acting, and (in the typical case) praying for humanity. Lincoln was sad, Tolstoi was sad, and many sensitive people, who view the world as it is, and desire nothing for themselves except to become of use to others, and to become agents in the spread of truth and happiness,—such people are often sad.

It is striking, however, how Chappman compensated the funny side of James with the serious one, as much as he balanced the religious seriousness that can be gathered from this character with an irrepressible hilarious tendency, a strange combination of devotion and anathema, fervour and heresy.

The great religious impulse at the back of all his work, and which pierces through at every point, never became expressed in conclusive literary form, or in dogmatic utterance. It never became formulated in his own mind in a stateable belief. And yet it controlled his whole life and mind, and accomplished a great work in the world. The spirit of a priest was in him,—in his books and in his private conversation. He was a sage, and a holy man; and everybody put off his shoes before him. And yet in spite of this,—in conjunction with this, he was a sportive, wayward [...]. Gothic sort of spirit, who was apt, on meeting a friend, to burst into foolery, and whose wit was always three parts poetry. Indeed his humour was as penetrating as his seriousness. Both of this two sides

of James's nature —the side that made a direct religious appeal, and the side that made a veiled religious appeal, became rapidly intensified during his latter years.⁷⁰

Contrary to what Santayana did when he described with irony James's sympathetic temper, Chappman is sensitive in capturing the ambivalence of a religious-like impulse that, to some extent, is not perceived as a *authentic* one, just because the hilarity that could surround even the more solemn of its manifestations. Probably what James sometimes associated with a religion of humanity, or with a social gospel, or with a civil creed, would require both attitudes: on the one hand, the fervour and sense of mysteries associated with religion, but on the other hand, a degree of irreverence thanks to which the human has always priority over any other authority.⁷¹ Anyway, the fact that this combination of attitudes was considered (ironically, both to atheists or believers) as an ersatz of religion, or that according to this critics James's spirituality was to religion what a torch to a fire or what a shock to a vision, is something that would require much more analysis.

2) The second issue is complex. Some types of sympathetic humour, as we have seen, are reminiscent of religious-like attitudes. Comic humour marks the limits of hope, but at the same time it simulates that it is beyond those limits. Is then a comic character an inveterate pseudo-religious character, or on the contrary, it constitutes a preamble to a serious and authentic religious view? Is humour just a mere suspension of the contradictions that it reveals and than only faith can really assume? And if a believer has an intense sense of humour, that is, if someone possesses a comic sense faith, then what does religion eventually becomes reduced to?⁷²

For the first, there are some remarkable difference between religious exceptional states, and the comic exceptions. According to James, religious experience provides something special to individuals: it transforms entirely their whole lives. No dimension of their life withdraws from it, meanwhile —we could say— humour insights only can alter lives of individuals too briefly and temporally. Humor, without doubt, can give neither sense to an entire life nor redeem human suffering, just because, as I have suggested, it restores too briefly and indirectly.⁷³ It can supply us some temporary lightness, but at the same time it reveals more intensely our burden and weight. It blows in us a sense of freedom, but it marks our own confines at once. Without doubt, as I said above, all this questions would force us to add, besides Santayana, new interlocutors to our debate, mainly Kierkegaard and Niebuhr.⁷⁴

Here I will only reconsider some remarks by Niebuhr who expresses sympathy for James's philosophy of religion but at the same time, expressed serious reservation about James's optimism.⁷⁵

On the one hand, Niebuhr's point of departure is relatively close to James's perspective, since he believes that Reason and philosophical systems cannot solve the essential contradictions of existence. But on the other hand, Niebuhr is distant of the ambivalences of James when he ultimately vindicates faith as the only stance that assumes fully those contradictions. Philosophy—he says—cannot give an adequate account of large areas of chaos in the world, and particularly of man's incongruent position in universe. A man who is too small, and yet feel too great, who is subject to vast forces and as insignificant as to defy any hope, but that, in spite of the limitations of time and space, is greedy on infinity, asserting sympathy with all existence.⁷⁶ This is the essential incongruence that neither materialist nor idealist systems of philosophy can solve as they usually pretend to do whether by reducing the spiritual dimension of man to the physical one, or by constructing a system of coherence in which mind is the very stuff of the universe. But if, all in all, philosophy cannot give account of the irrationality of a too multifarious world, and of the essential chasm that man is, where are the sources of wisdom?

Insofar as the sense of humour is a recognition of incongruity, it is more profound than any philosophy which seeks to devour incongruity in reason [...].

In many respects, [it is] a more adequate resource for the incongruities of life than the spirit of philosophy. If we are able to laugh at the curious quirks of fortune in which the system of order and meaning which each life constructs within and around itself is invaded, we at least do not make the mistake of prematurely reducing the irrational to a nice system. Things “happen” to us [...]. There is no question about the fact that there are systems of order in the world. But it is not so easy to discern a total system of order and meaning which will comprehend the various levels of existence in an orderly whole. To meet the disappointments and frustrations of life, the irrationalities and contingencies with laughter, is a high form of wisdom. Such laughter does not obscure or defy the dark irrationality. It merely yields to it without too much emotion and friction. A humorous acceptance of fate is really the expression of a high form of self-detachment. If men do not take themselves too seriously, if they have some sense of the precarious nature of the human enterprise, they prove that

they are looking at the whole drama of life not merely from the circumscribed point of their own interests but from some further and higher vantage point.⁷⁷

Niebuhr's view in this passage could seem similar in many respects to the one that we exposed above, though it diverges substantially. From his perspective, humour is certainly an expression of freedom and sympathy, but it can only procure relieve. It reduces pain, and makes it tolerable. By laughter, an unpalatable situation can become more sufferable and certain sense of dignity be preserved. But laughter cannot ameliorate insufferable forms of evil. In fact when it tries to face serious evil, it turns to bitterness and derisive condemnation, in part because it senses its own impotence, and also because it is overwhelmed by the very incongruence that exposes.⁷⁸ There can be a deep pathos, indeed, mixed with humour — Niebuhr admits—, but this is the very proof that laughter reaches its very limit.

As I have suggested above, humour is sympathetic and not cynic when it expresses some sort of indulgence or forgiveness, when it inspires forbearance and not only censure, mercy and not just judgment. However —Niebuhr adds— the contradiction between judgment and mercy can never be resolved when serious evil must be responsibly dealt with. When faced with radical evil, laughter only express derisiveness, and the forbearance which it contains tends to turn out judgment into harmful indulgence. It is not humour, but what Niebuhr's names a *parental judgment* the only agency that confronts with the necessity of “relating rigorous judgment creatively to goodness of mercy”, since it is a relation that can be achieved “only as the parent himself suffers under the judgments with are exacted.”⁷⁹

In other terms, humour can express both justice and mercy, but only when neither is fully nor explicitly defined. Humour is self-indulgent, since it delays or postpones a parental stance. Only an echo of humour remains in the painful experience of vicarious suffering: the indication that judgment and mercy belong together, even though they seem to be contradictory. When put on its limits, humour inexorably shows itself to be not only a by-product of self-transcendence, but the “no-man's land” between faith and despair. Humour, then, could be admissible as a prelude or vestibule to faith, and laughter as the beginning of prayer; even laugh at oneself could be the anteroom of confession and contrition.⁸⁰ However, all things considered, humour *cannot* be admitted in the temple —Niebuhr sentenced—. “There is laughter in the vestibule of the temple, the echo of laughter in the temple [...]. Laughter must be heard in the outer courts of religion; and the echoes of it should resound in

the sanctuary. But there is no laughter in the holy of holies. There laughter is swallowed up in prayer, and humour is fulfilled by faith.”⁸¹

The difficulties with this position is, first, that even if one would admit that humour is a succedaneum of self-transcendence, why should it be faith, rather than politics or arts, the only and true way to face essential contradictions? Why should faith be the only source of an authentic management of *justice* and *love*? Second: it is true that humour is not a radical self-transformative experience, and that its judgment seems guided by a pleasure principle (as if it can come to terms with a more affable side of the parental instance). But what if the religious appeal to parental judgment (the Judgment of God) would also have something to do with evasion? Maybe humour indicates Heaven’s door, but what if faith itself would close some other doors?

Pace Niebuhr, humour can express a concern about essential contradictions. Humour is not a caricature of transcendence, but a dignifying of immanence. It connects individuals with something else, but this something else is ultimately society itself with a more human face. Humour is not only a consolatory and indulgent evasion: it also foreshadows a less cruel and more caring community. And the sense of joy that laugh at ourselves inspires is not, *pace* Niebuhr, a mere by-product of the joy that being forgiven by a parental authority exclusively provides. It is also a practice of humility and of exuberance, of fear and engagement at one. And to some extent, it demands an infinite demand, since it substitutes God for the others as the last tribunal. Humour can express a serious, and even a tragic consciousness of radical evil, but it stops before sitting at the anteroom of faith, since it can be also welcomed in the waiting rooms of politics, maybe in company of serious art, and some other spheres of human action. It is not a previous stage of a superior mode of existence, faith, but a positive dimension of human experimentation; it is not an immature phase of a responsible commitment, but a permanent coming and going between the backstage and the stage, the background and the foreground of an all too human scene.⁸² Seeing that repetitive displacement as a mere sign of acquiescence and irreverence is to condemn humour to much less than what it can actually inspire: the perception that human demands cancel each other out and nearly come to produce a species of nihilism, but also that they also infinitely claim for their reconciliation.

After considering both James's religious ambivalence and the tension between faith and humour, I will finish with some hypothetical remarks.

As I observed, we don't know which sort of book James could have written on the varieties of humour. Probably, he would have included many more varieties than the ironic and the comic. And probably he would have contemplated examples representative of many different orders of human life. His method would not be to look for a definition of laughter, but rather to provide a miscellaneous album of examples. Anyway, I think, he could have contrasted the cynic and the sympathetic types of humour in terms of their moral and social dimension. And probably, even if he was closer to the sympathetic type, he would not exclude the ironist as an absolutely antisocial agent. He could contemplate contexts in which irony contributes positively to elevate human beings from banality, even if its ultimate end is self-affirmation of the self, rather than solidarity.⁸³

Probably James could also admit that some types of humour are the counter image of some religious moods, but I think that he would associate them more with the sweet madness of mystics and saints than with the tragic sense of history that pervade some religious minds. Probably these same religious minds would see in humour the same problem they see in mystics: they show how to be released from angst and adopt a joyful nonchalance of life, but they also induce the illusion of a view outside the world, rather than an engagement in history.⁸⁴ Niebuhr also criticized the lack in James of a serious interest in collective tragic experiences, and in the meaning of history, and his excessive concern in giving meaning to individual lives.⁸⁵ I think, on the contrary, that James's perspective was expression of a deep social concern, and that he also tried to think through the problem of man's collective destiny. He did not live the tragedies of the twentieth Century, but he was not the representative of a too optimistic XXth century, —as Niebuhr believed. He was too conscious of the problem of evil, and of the aggressive impulses of human nature, and in spite of the alleged optimistic tone of his famous little essay, he knew very well that sublimation of predatory impulses was not easy, and a moral equivalent of war is not a receipt but an infinite demand.⁸⁶ James was too serious to take evil as a joke.

James inspired a mode of sociability grounded in direct responsiveness rather than in responsibility. In a pluralistic social universe, one could say, righteousness and affection are combined in intimate piecemeal dealings between individuals. This mode of engagement does take as its checkpoint the acknowledgment of others in their specificity, but it does not

block a commitment with broader circles of relation or communal life. Without this mode of sensibility a society can be neither decent nor civilized, it can promote neither institutions nor citizens which don't infringe cruelty.

James's sense of humor, I hope to have shown, is as much relevant to understand this mode of sociability as the sad and "religious-like" side of his character and thought.⁸⁷ Without doubt, a good society requires much more than humour, but it can hope to conciliate justice and love without invoking any divine authority. After all, humour could be one of the doors to the chaotic corridor of social hope. For James, I also think, humour would also be connected with the difficult tension between freedom and acceptance. Probably he would take humour as a human key experience, not as a numinous transfiguration, but after all as a human prefiguration of a better life. I don't think that he would take some types of humour as the mere "no man's land" between cynicism and faith. He believed that it is not possible to give rational coherence to the many orders and spheres which are manifested in experience, but he did not think that the ultimate way to give coherence to a multifarious and incongruent world was religious faith. Humour also illuminates these incongruities, existential and social, but it can be another ally of moral imagination, or maybe a minor gender of poetic justice.

Anyway, James's own joyful side —I think— also probes that humor can also be an essential trait of a mode of existence realistically grounded in acceptance, but also animated by an illusion without relief.⁸⁸

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NOTES

¹ *Orthodoxy*, 11. James refers to this dictum in *A Pluralistic Universe*.

² See on this Del Castillo, R. "Portrait of an Anxiety: Santayana on James" and "Estetas y profetas: equívocos de Santayana y James".

³ "The Critic as Clown", *Against the Grain*, 149.

⁴ *The Thought and Character of William James*, vol. II. 686. Perry's quotations are from *The Letters of William James*, vol. I, 305, and from Henry James's *A Small Boy and Others*, 253). James's inclination to elaborated nonsense, of course, had to do with a fact that his brother Henry once remarked, namely: "the literal played in our education as small part as it perhaps ever played in any. And we wholesomely breathed inconsistency and ate and drank contradictions". Also the fact that, as Perry observed, James grew up in a circle in which *heresies* were more gladly tolerated than orthodoxies it also contributed to develop James's openness to eccentricities.

⁵ Stylistically speaking, James's prose was full of insights, examples, remarks, contrasts and abrupt turns. However, to take this sort of discontinuity as a lack of rigour would be to miss the core of the specific logic that he tried to develop.

⁶ *A Stroll with William James*, 294-295.

⁷ "William James", chapter II from *Memories and Milestones*, 21-22.

⁸ Barzun, *op. cit.*, 276. Chappman's quotation in Barzun's passage comes also from his *Memories and Milestones*, 28. I will come back to this passage in the last section of this paper.

⁹ Perry, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 701.

¹⁰ "Williams James became the friend and helper of those groping, nervous, half-educated, spiritually disinherited, emotionally hungry individuals of which America is full. He became, at the same time, their spokesmen and representative before the learned world; and he made it a chief part of his vocation to recast what the learned world has to offer, so that as far as possible it might serve the needs and interests of these people..." "The Genteel Tradition" (*The Genteel Tradition. Nine Essays by George Santayana*), 55.

¹¹ "James was a romantic individualist, generously sympathising with cranks, weakling, and impostors; they were entitled to prove themselves right, if they could, and to blaze a new trail through other people's gardens". "Apologia pro mente sua" (*The Philosophy of George Santayana*), 499, 583. "See also "Marginal Notes on Civilization" (*The Genteel Tradition*) 146.

¹² *Persons and Places*, 232. "He was really far from free, held back by old instincts, subject to old delusions, restless, spasmodic, self-interrupted: as if some impetuous bird kept flying aloft, but always stopped in mind-air, pulled back with a jerk by an invisible wire tethering him to a peg in the ground [...]. The bird flew up bravely, but when my eye was able to follow his flight, I saw him flutter, and perch, as if he had lost his energy, on some casual, bough" (*Ibid.*, 401, 405).

¹³ "The Moral Background" (*The Genteel Tradition*), 81. It is difficult to know what Santayana himself understood by a cynic view, but this passage from his autobiography is particularly eloquent: "Every need or passion evokes dramatic sympathy; but the contrariety among the passions gives that sympathy pause and evokes reason. Now reason, confronted with the chaos and hell of all these conflicting passions and needs, often takes a Mephistophelian turn. *Reason can never be malignant, because it is a complex of sympathies, but it may sometimes be cynical, when it shows how many needs are needless and how many passions artificial.* I confess that I often like the sayings of Mephistopheles and Iago as much as I dislike the conduct of Othello and Faust. In those sayings there is light; but in the action of these heroes there is no light, only the blind will of protoplasm to stir and to move on, or the blind errors of a bull fighting a shadow. As to the action of Mephistopheles or Iago, there is properly none. There is no human motive for it, only the traditions of a puppet-show, with devils popping up to do the mischief. And this explains the inhumanity of these stage villains. They develop reasoning in the modern drama without acquiring the generic animal needs and passions requisite to evoke reason in the human mind. The rational man cannot cease to be an animal, with the bias of his race and its passions. Reason can serve to control and harmonise these human interests; it cannot take their place" (*Persons and Places*, 512, my italics).

¹⁴ I paraphrase to E. Burke in “Acceptance and Rejection” (chapter I, “William James, Whitman, and Emerson”), *Attitudes Toward History*, 20.

¹⁵ Quoted by Perry, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 269. This remark could be compared with some earlier and more striking statements by a younger James. Perry transcribed a note where the young James said “The expansive, embracing tendency, the centripetal, defensive, forming two different modes of self-assertion: sympathy and self-sufficingness. (The two combine and give respect?)”. Coming up next, he added: “To ‘accept the universe’, to protest against it, *voluntary* alternatives. So that in a given case of evil the mind seesaws between the effort to improve it away, and resignation. The second not being resorted to till the first has failed, it would seem either that the second were an insincere *pis aller*, or the first a superfluous vanity. The solution can only lie in taking neither absolutely, but in making the resignation only provisional (that is, voluntary, conditional), and the attempt to improve to have its worth in the action rather than the result. Thus resignation affords ground and leisure to advance to new philanthropic action. Resignation should not say, ‘It is good,’ ‘a mild yoke,’ and so forth, but ‘I’m willing to stand it for the present’” (Perry, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 301-302).

¹⁶ *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 11, 34.

¹⁷ Quoted by Perry, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 270.

¹⁸ Santayana, as it is well known, felt himself like an alien among many Americans although he loved Americans like Henry James. He met Henry James in London. As he said: “Those were his last years and I never saw him again. Nevertheless in that one interview he made me feel more at home, and better understood, than his brother William ever had done in the long years of our acquaintance. Henry was calm, he liked to see things as they are, and be free afterwards to imagine how they might have been. We talked about different countries as places of residence. He was of course subtle and bland, appreciative of all points of view, and amused at their limitations” (*Persons and Places*, 287). On Santayana’s reference to Henry’s *external* point of view see also “The Genteel Tradition”, in *The Genteel Tradition*, 54). On James brothers and Santayana see also Ross Posnock, *The Trial of Curiosity. Henry James, William James and the Challenge of Modernity*.

¹⁹ Reading Santayana’s caricatures of James, one could imagine the ultimate motive of laughter. To Santayana’s eyes James seemed comical because he tried to be too flexible, when in fact his powers were essentially limited. Santayana’s judgments also tend to insinuate that James was more repetitive when he tried to be more spontaneous. See my “Portrait of an Anxiety”.

²⁰ See on the mutual dependence between philosophies and characters James’s own view in *A Pluralistic Universe*, 14, but also in the first chapter of *Pragmatism*.

²¹ In *Varieties* James was a critic of the “philistine” type, but in the chapter on the Healthy-mindedness he also attacked the “clerico-academic-scientific type”, the officially and conventionally “correct type”, the deadly “respectable type, for which to ignore others is a besetting temptation”.

This temptation, obviously, does not only imply the ignorance of the “religious type”, but also of many others “eccentric” types of thinking.

²² This tension is obvious in some passages of *Pragmatism* and *Varieties*. “The tough think of the tender as sentimentalists and soft heads. The tender feels the tough to be unrefined, callus, or brutal. Their mutual reaction is very much like that that take place when Bostonian tourists mingle with a population like Cripple Creek. Each type believes the other to be inferior to itself; but disdain in one case is mingled with amusement, in the other it has a dash of fear” (*Pragmatism*, 11). The comments on the “superiority” of sick souls at the end of chapter VI of *Varieties*, would also denote an implicit clash with too optimistic and incredulous types, although never a glorification of the suffering and evil which sick soul have to face with.

²³ *The Will to Believe*, 173.

²⁴ *Ibidem*. James supported this attack against Zola not only on Carlyle, but also on Emerson.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ “I must die; well, but must I die groaning too? I will speak what appears to be right, and if the despot says, then I will put you to death, I will reply, ‘When did I ever tell you that I was immortal? You will do your part and I mine; it is yours to kill and mine to die intrepid; yours to banish, mine to depart untroubled’” How do we act in a voyage? We choose the pilot, the sailors, the hour. Afterwards comes a storm. What have I to care for? My part is performed. This matter belongs to the pilot. But the ship is sinking; what then have I to do? That which alone I can do —submit to being drowned without fear, without clamor or accusing of God, but as one who knows that what is born must likewise die” Epictetus, translation by T. W. Higginson, 1866, 6, 10, 105 [quoted by James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 298, footnote 9].

²⁷ “The usual mode of lessening the shock of disappointment or disesteem is to contract, if possible, a low estimate of the persons that inflict it. This is our remedy for the unjust censures of party spirit, as well as of personal malignity”. Bain, *Emotions and the Will*, 209 [quoted by James, *op. cit.*, 298, footnote 10].

²⁸ *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, 298.

²⁹ In fact, after criticizing Epictetus, he adds as a conclusion: “He who, with Marcus Aurelius, can truly say, ‘O Universe, I wish all that thou wishest’, has a self from which every trace of negativeness and obstructiveness has been removed —no wind can blow except to fill its sails” (*Principles of Psychology*, 299). Here, James seems to include Marco Aurelio among the ranks of the expansive and sympathetic party. On stoicism and James, see Emma Sutton, “Marcus Aurelius, William James and the ‘Science of Religions’”, (*William James Studies*, 2004, vol. 4, 70-89). From old Stoicism to Spencer, see Barzun, *op. cit.*, 23.

³⁰ It wouldn't be difficult—I think—to see this opposition in relation to other typologies of James, and more specifically with some sub-types described in Lectures IV and V of *Varieties* ("The Religion of Healthy-mindedness"). However, since here I'm trying to see the religious tempers as subtypes of an expansive general type, rather than the inverse, I will not discuss these examples from *Varieties*. I think it is more interesting to know what James had in mind when he made use of the word "cynic". Remember that, as I have said, when in *Pragmatism* James talked of opposite types, mentalities, temperaments, he had still in mind the idea that a contrast between types is a clash of impulses, forces, or drives within the same individual. In *Pragmatism* he insisted that some individuals seem able to establish a *hierarchy* of impulses, becoming more representative of one type. However, some individuals *oscillate* between two types.

Consider now what he said in *Principles* after distinguishing the stoic and the sympathetic tempers: "A tolerably unanimous opinion ranges the different selves of which a man may be 'seized and possessed,' and the consequent different orders of his self-regard, in an *hierarchical scale*, with the bodily Self at the bottom, the spiritual Self at the top, and the extracorporeal material selves and the various social selves between. Our merely natural self-seeking would lead us to aggrandize all these selves; we give up deliberately only those among them which we find we cannot keep. Our unselfishness is thus apt to be a 'virtue of necessity'; and it is not without all show of reason that cynics quote the fable of the fox and the grapes in describing our progress therein. But this is the moral education of the race; and if we agree in the result that on the whole the selves we can keep are the intrinsically best, we need not complain of being led to the knowledge of their superior worth in such a tortuous way" (*Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, 313.)

³¹ *A Pluralistic Universe*, 14-15, 15-16. James observes that *both* characters presuppose certain powers of generalization and synthesis. They are not immediate or primitive reactions toward the world, but reconstructions of multifarious experience: "Cynical characters take one general attitude, sympathetic characters another. But no general attitude is possible towards the world as a whole, until the intellect has developed considerable generalizing power and learned to take pleasure in synthetic formulas [...] the intellect awoke, with its passion for generalizing, simplifying, and subordinating, and then began those divergences of conception which all later experience seems rather to have deepened than to have effaced, because objective nature has contributed to both sides impartially, and has let the thinkers emphasize different parts of her, and pile up opposite imaginary supplements" (*Ibid.*, 15).

³² *Ibid.*, 19, 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁷ *Ibidem*. He adds: “most of our existing materialists are such because they think the evidence of facts impels them, or because they find the idealists they are in contact with too private and tender-minded; so, rather than join their company, they fly to the opposite extreme.”

³⁸ James’s vision of Nature in *A Pluralistic Universe* is too far from Romantic idealizations (see *Ibid.*, 15). However, from a materialist and cynic view, his description would still seem too dramatic and non-objective. It would ultimately be —the materialist would say— a *psychological* view of how human beings *experience* Nature.

³⁹ Two attitudes towards *history* are also associated with each type. “A world with no history repels our sympathy” —James says—. Cynics, on the contrary would say that when one understand that human beings neither help nor hinder the universe, and recognize that the world stands *outside* of history, one possesses a key of real wisdom and even a door for happiness. Reason shows how much illusory history is, as it shows how many needs are needless and how many passions artificial. Sympathetic tempers, on the contrary, would tend to reaffirm the reality of histories, as well they tend to think that every need and passion, every “object of desire or aversion, ground of sorrow or joy that [they] feel is in the world of finite multifariousness, for only in that world does anything really happen, only there do events come to pass” (...) “I’m finite once for all, and all the categories of my sympathy are knit up with the finite world as such, and with things that have a history. *Aus dieser erde quellen meine freuden, un ihre sonne schneit mein leiden* [Goethe, *Faust*, I, 1663-64] (...) If we were *readers* only of the cosmic novel, things would be different: we should then share the author’s point of view and recognize villains to be as essential as heroes in the plot. But we are not the readers but the very personages of the world-drama. In your own eyes each of you here is its hero, and the villains are your respective friends or enemies. The tale which the absolute reader finds so perfect, we spoil for one another through our several vital identifications with the destinies of the particular personages involved (...) the world that each of us feels most intimately at home with is that of beings which histories that play into our history, whom we can help in their vicissitudes even as they help us in ours” (*A Pluralistic Universe*, 27-28).

Here James talks of a “world-drama”, but one could speculate about which genres would fit more rightly with his pluralistic view: maybe comic drama, Shakespearean comedy and also tragicomedy, less so comedy of manners, more akin to ironic minds. See on this, Del Castillo, R. “Los reinos de la ironía”.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴¹ A much more detailed analysis of the metaphysical dimension of these distinctions can be found in the excellent work by David Lambert “Interpreting the Universe after a Social Analogy: Intimacy, Panpsychism, and the Finite God in a Pluralistic Universe” (*The Cambridge Companion to*

William James, 237-259). If I interpret well his argument, Lambert takes social life as described by James as an analogy of the relation of human beings with a finite suprahuman consciousness (a reciprocal and contingent relation). I guess that from his point of view, my reading of James would sound a little bit deflationist, since I tend to invert the terms, seeing metaphysics as a veiled way of talking about society.

⁴² On the history of cynicism from antique cynics to Nietzsche see works by William Desmond, and other in the below bibliography.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ Perry, *op. cit.*, 389.

⁴⁵ A Cynic would consider this sort of argument as an anthropomorphic consolatory device, but they should be the ones to prove that there is available for a human being a non-human way of describing the foreignness of the world.

⁴⁶ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 28.

⁴⁸ Schopenhauer, Shaftesbury, Kant, Lipps, Jean Paul... too many names. I would remind, however, some brief comments on Freud. He compared the logic of dreams with the logic of jokes, but he also marked important differences (see comments by John Carey in his introduction to *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, vii-xxviii). What in *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) Freud named as *Humor* (and particularly the so-called, *Galgenhumor*, humour of the gallows or grim-humour) would be closer to what here I will consider an ironic type of humour, since according to Freud it is *the most self-sufficient type* of wit (*Witz*). In *Der Humor* (1927), indeed, Freud mentioned the same examples of grim-humour to illustrate a type of wit that is not a mere sort of release, but has something *grandiose*, since it operate as a triumph of narcissism: the self refuses to be affected by the injuries of reality, the external world cannot really touch it, and even the most terrible situations are transformed in nothing but occasions for an economized expenditure of affect. In these cases, humour —he said— is not an expression of resignation, but of active opposition: it represents not only the triumph of the self, but the triumph of the pleasure principle over any adverse circumstance (Freud's theory of humour from 1927 implies operations between the Ego and the Superego which would require much more space to be made clearer). According to Freud, whilst irony is a sophisticated and devised production, the comical would be an involuntary production of laughter and would possess a mark of ingenuity and infantilism.

⁴⁹ One reason why James would have liked this book is that Bergson follows a method similar to the method he followed in *Varieties*: don't try imprisoning the comic spirit within an abstract definition; rather try to get close to it by means of examples, variations and developments.

⁵⁰ Bergson, H. *Laughter. An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, 9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵² For example, it is raining too much, the day is really a bad day, but the ironist says: “What a wonderful day!” We can imagine a similar reaction before other bearable facts. Imagine that a steak served in an elegant restaurant is really like a stone. The ironist could say with politeness and indifference at one: “I haven’t enjoyed a steak like that for a long time.”

⁵³ Freud, by the way (*The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, 224-225), mentioned a tale of Mark Twain on his brother and a cow as an example of the mechanism of “saving emotions” by which irony often operates. However, the *context* of the joke, and more exactly, the modesty of the underground den that the cow destroys time after time, combined with the patience of the poor man that *repeatedly coaxes the cow and reconstructs the den*, shows that the purpose of the funny concluding remark “this is getting monotonous” is not just “saving pity” and the reinforcement of a self-sufficient self. It also expresses if only indirectly a degree of concern, negotiation and comprehension alien to irony.

⁵⁴ They criticise the actual state of affairs in the name of a higher one, maybe unapproachable, but superior just because of this same reason: if the idealized good could be realized as a matter of fact, ironist wouldn’t find any satisfaction in it.

⁵⁵ Imagine that an ironist meets an extraterrestrial with a different morphology, maybe several eyes, or only one. Before such surprise, he could say “Excuse me, sir... your face doesn’t look too familiar to me.”

⁵⁶ Imagine, again, that it is raining a lot. Before this fact an ironic temper —as we have said— will try to show indifference, and could walk as if the day was sunny. A comic temper could take an umbrella, but after looking seriously at it and to the dark sky, could throw the umbrella away and take a good row from the closet. Imagine again that a steak is served in a good restaurant, but it is really tough. Congruently with the facts, the comic character could take a handsaw and operate on the steak as if it were a piece of table, or a stone. Of course, this intensification could produce more laughing: if the handsaw is not enough, the comic character could take a hammer, or a set of tools, or a power-saw, which would surely destroy the table too, or in extremis, just some dynamite which would eventually soften the steak, but also destroy the restaurant, or the whole building. In spite of the result, there was good-will.

⁵⁷ See Bergson (*op. cit.*, 80) on the opposition between comedy and tragedy. Comedy has to do with moral or social imitable *types*; tragedy with *individuals* unique and inimitable. The first one uses common names as titles, the other proper names. As Kenneth Burke observed in *Attitudes Toward History* (42-43) in comparison with tragedy, humour downwards the situations. Or in other words: it takes up the slack between the momentousness of the situation and the feebleness of those in the situation by dwarfing the situation. It converts downwards, as the heroic converts upwards. So

meanwhile the hero promotes acceptance by magnification, making the hero's character as great as the situation that he confronts, the humorist tends to gauge the situation mistakenly. In a sense, the humorist also adopts a method of self-protection, but adopting a pose whereby the gravity of the situation fails to be registered. To this respect, comedy is something different from humour, since as Burke also remarks comedies make for a human frame of acceptance, but an essentially *human* one.

⁵⁸ "Humour", *On Lying at Bed and other Essays*, 135.

⁵⁹ We could use the same example mentioned above: imagine again an extra-terrestrial on the street, and an encounter with a sympathetic character. Why could this character become involuntarily comical from the perspective of an external observer? Probably because the character would exhibit a certain lack of moderation and caution. In the heat of the moment and too amazed by the fact that the alien possesses, for example, multiple eyes and arms, the sympathetic person could end of asking things like: "Have you also multiple sexual organs?" Tactlessness and indiscretion, then, are the comic side of the will to recognize otherness.

⁶⁰ I take this idea of *jamais-veu* from Scharfstein, B. A.: *The Philosophers. Their Lives and the Nature of their Thought*.

As Vladimir Jankelevitch said (*L'ironie ou la Bonne Conscience*), the ironist looks at reality through a spyglass or telescope but the other way around, so the nearest objects seem the more distant. Comic tempers—one could add—look at reality as if they see through a huge magnifying glass. The magnifying glass, indeed, also introduces a distance between subject and object, but not by moving the objects away, but placing them nearer, up to the point of *de-familiarizing* and turning them relatively odd and outrageous. Amplifying, anyway, is not the only procedure of de-familiarization. Repetition and analogy can also provoke a similar effect.

⁶¹ G. K. Chesterton, "Introduction in Defence of Everything Else", *Orthodoxy*, 3.

⁶² Humour can make explicit the nonsense always implicit in the common sense, or the ambiguity of the self-evident. Humour plays always with common sense, but not only with word-games, but also through breakdown of routines, or by alteration of accustomed perceptions and automatic actions. Comicalness, also, can reveal the constructed character of what we naturally live and provoke a sudden consciousness of the conventionality of conventions, a quick awareness of the unruly behind the ruled, or of the alternative and even divergent ways of following a rule, a path, or a course of action. On the social dimension of jokes, see Virno, P. *Motto di Spirito e Azione Innovativa. Per una logica del cambiamento*.

⁶³ See my "Varieties of American Ecstasy".

⁶⁴ I think, by the way, that this connection between spirituality and otherness is more obvious in the final section of *Human Immortality (Essays in Religion and Morality*, 100-101) than in "On a

Certain Blindness in Human Beings” (*Talk to Teachers on Psychology and to Students of Some Life’s Ideals*).

⁶⁵ Mary Douglas, “Jokes”, *Implicit Meanings*, 108.

⁶⁶ Douglas, by the way, offers a synthetic approach to the sources of laugh that manage to combine Bergson’s point of view with Freud’s.

⁶⁷ If in *Varieties* James included experiences of soldiers, and not only of saints, as examples of extreme existential fevers, Why not include humorists close to madness in a book on religion? Maybe, because humorists can laugh at both the glory of War and the glory of God. Anyway, if James would happen to write a book called the *Varieties of Comic Experience*, he would probably consider not only pieces by writers (Heine, Jean Paul, Swift, Sterne, Chesterton, Twain, Shaw), but also “testimonies” of ordinary people. I ignore if in James’s days there were something similar to *I Though That My Father Was God* (the true-life 180 stories of humour and sorrow that Paul Auster selected from thousands of short stories submitted by American people to his program for the National Public Radio), but I guess that this type of source would be for him as relevant as more explicit literary comic forms. On American humour, see in above bibliography works by Hollander, Rubin and Rourke.

⁶⁸ See letter to Taush, from 1909, where after saying this, that his mysticism is overestimated, he adds: “As far as I am personally concerned, it is the ordinary sense of life that every working moment brings, that makes me contemptuous of rationalistic attempts to substitute thin logical formulas for it” (Quoted in Perry, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 677).

⁶⁹ On James’s own position about the legacy of Christianity, and on different religious confessions (especially Methodism) see also Perry, vol. II, whole chapter on *Varieties of Religious Experience*. See also the interesting comparison by Howard Feinstein (*Becoming William James*, chapter 15) between the attitude towards praying by Henry James Sr. and William James. On the complexities of James’s approach and attitude see Proudfoot, W. ed., *William James and a Science of Religions*, and Carrete, J. ed., *William James and the Varieties of Religious Experience. A Centenary Celebration*, and Suckiel, E. K.: *Heaven’s Champion. William James’s Philosophy of Religion*.

⁷⁰ Chappman, *op. cit.*, 25.

⁷¹ The fact that according to some interpreters (Santayana, again, but also Chesterton) two of James’s forefathers, Emerson and Whitman, turned out to be forced and even ridiculous when they treated each man as a God and God as a sort of comrade, is also connected with the ambivalence of James’s alleged religiosity. As Chesterton said, humanism and religion are not rivals on the same conditions, since one is the pond and the other the fountain, the former the torch and the later the fire. In other words: Humanism still depends too much on what it tries to overcome, while it does not procure something as effective and universal as the old Christian Tradition (See Chesterton, “Is

Humanism a Religion”). Santayana, on his part, was much more sensitive to the world of Emerson, but he criticized severely Whitman’s primitivism (see “Emerson” and “The Poetry of Barbarism” in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*).

⁷² Lack of humour in some religions could seem a symptom of fanaticism and intolerance, but probably not because humour is irreverent but rather because it sometimes takes more seriously what religion itself only wants to take superficially. After all, thanks to humour we learn to appreciate not only the arrogance of Reason, but also of Faith.

⁷³ In terms of community things are also different: religious life, no matter how personally it is lived, can be transformed and absorbed by dogmas, institutions, and authorities. Humour is more refractive to organization.

⁷⁴ Kierkegaard’s in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, for example: “the power in the comic is a vitally necessary legitimating for anyone who is to be regarded as authorized in the world of spirit of our day” (vol. I, 281). Also: “it does the comic an injustice to regard it as an enemy of the religious” (*Ibid.*, 522) The comic —Kierkegaard also remarks— is present in *every* stage of life, because where there is life there is contradiction, and wherever there is a contradiction, the comic is present (*Ibid.*, 513-514).

And since the comic is present everywhere, every existence could be assigned to a particular sphere by knowing how it is related to the comic (*Ibidem*). “Irony —he says— is the *confinium* between the aesthetic and the ethical. Humour is the *confinium* between the ethical and the religious.” (*Ibid.*, 501-2). Or in other words: if irony moves the self from the immature immediacy (the aesthetic stage) to the mediated and mature awareness and management of contradictions (the ethic stage), humour moves the self from an immanent resolution of contradictions that, however, are only really assumed in a stage which breaks with immanence, the religious stage (*Ibid.*, 531-532n.). Irony, to some extent, keeps distance from a full recognition of contradictions, since it only reveals them indirectly, by masquerade, camouflage or disguise. Humour, on the contrary, unveils contradictions with a deeper pathos, taking them not as misfortunes, changes or setbacks, but as paradoxes intrinsic to human existence. “The *vis comica* does not suffocate pathos, but merely indicates that a new pathos is beginning” (*Ibid.*, 521). If irony helps to come to terms with finitude, humour hints a sort of pathetic release from finitude and, therefore, could be considered a previous stage before faith and transcendence (*Ibid.*, 291). In consequence, even if humour “want to try its hand at the paradoxes, it is not faith and it does not take in the suffering aspect of the paradox or the ethical aspect of faith but only the amusing aspect” (*Ibidem*). Humour does embrace a more intense and decisive relation to suffering than irony, but it eventually transmutes pain into joke, and merely revokes the suffering in the form of jest (*Ibid.*, 447).

For Kierkegaard, then, a comic perception of the world never provides a permanent mode of consciousness, as the religious one does. With faith, the individual “discovers the comic, but since in eternal recollecting he is continuously relating himself to an eternal happiness, the comic is a continually vanishing element” (*Ibid.*, 554). In conclusion, even if Christianity is the most humorous of all forms of religion and even if humour is developed from Christianity itself, humour is still humour, and existential authenticity does not seem actually safe in its hands (For other sources in addition to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, see *The Humor of Kierkegaard. An Anthology*, edited and introduced by Thomas C. Oden).

James’s acquaintance with Kierkegaard was mainly mediated by Harald Höffding. See on this H. C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard*, 329. See also, Jonathan Chipp, *A Critical Comparison of W. James and S. Kierkegaard on Religious Belief*.

⁷⁵ See above citations from Niebuhr’s prologue to 1961 edition of James’s *Varieties*.

⁷⁶ “Humour and Faith”, *Discerning the Signs of the Times. Sermons for Today and Tomorrow*, 113. Niebuhr quoted a passage from *The Religion of Solidarity*, by Edward Bellamy, to illustrate this existential gap or contrast.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 130, 126.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 114-115, 116. “The intimate relation between humour and faith is derived from the fact that both deal with the incongruities of our existence. Humour is concerned with the immediate incongruities of life and faith with the ultimate ones. Both humour and faith are expressions of the freedom of the human spirit, of its capacity to stand outside of life, and itself, and view the whole scene. But any view of the whole immediately creates the problem of how the incongruities of life are to be dealt with; for the effort to understand the life, and our place in it, confronts us with inconsistencies and incongruities which do not fit into any neat picture of the whole. Laughter is our reaction to immediate incongruities and those which do not affect us essentially. Faith is the only possible response to the ultimate incongruities of existence which threaten the very meaning of our life” (*Ibid.*, 112).

⁷⁹ What is true of our judgments of each other, Niebuhr adds, is true of the judgment of God. It would be interesting to compare the idea of severe parental judgment, with Freud’s view of the consolatory side of the Superego in “Der Humour”.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 119, 111-112, 115, 131. Laughter at oneself —Niebuhr also says— is not able to deal with sins in any ultimate way, since humour does not tear down our arrogant, egoistic and irresponsible impulses. “There is something more than self-judgment in genuine contrition... it is the awareness of being judged from beyond ourselves” (*Ibid.*, 121). In definitive, even if the humorists stand off from themselves, and recognize their faults, humour is “the ‘no man’s land’ between

cynicism and contrition”, since one can continue to laugh at oneself, even after recognizing the depth of evil and the indignity of the sinner.

As Niebuhr says: “In an ultimate sense the self never knows anything against itself. The self of today may judge the self’s action of yesterday as evil. But that means that the self of today is the good self. We are to judge our actions through self-judgment. But we do not become aware of the deep root of evil actions in such judgments. We may judge our sins but we do not judge ourselves as sinners. The knowledge that we are sinners, and that inordinate desires spring from a heart inordinately devoted to itself, is a religious knowledge which, in a sense, is never achieved except in prayer. Then we experience with St. Paul that ‘he who judges us is the Lord.’ There is no laughter in that experience. There is only pain. The genuine joy of reconciliation with God, which is possible only as the fruit of genuine repentance, is a joy which stands beyond laughter though it need not completely exclude laughter. To suggest that the sense of humour is the beginning, but not the end, of a proper humility does not mean that the final fruit of true contrition destroys all vestiges of the seed from which it sprang. The saintliest men frequently have a humorous glint in their eyes. They retain the capacity to laugh at both themselves and at others. They do not laugh in their prayers because it is a solemn experience to be judged of God and to stand under the scrutiny of Him from whom no secrets are hid. But the absence of laughter in the most ultimate experience of life does not preclude the presence of laughter as a suffused element in all experience. There is indeed proper laughter on the other side of the experience of repentance. It is the laughter of those who have been released both from the tyranny of the law and from the slavery of pretending to be better than they are. To know oneself a sinner, to have no illusions about the self, and no inclination to appear better than we are, either in the sight of man or of God, and to know oneself forgiven and released from sin, is the occasion for a new joy. This joy expresses itself in an exuberance of which laughter is not the only, but is certainly one, expression” (*Ibid.*, 121-122).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 111, 131. On the tension between faith and humour see part III (“Toward a Theology of the Comic”) in Berger, P., *Redeeming Laughter. The Comic Dimension of Human Experience*, but also the remarks by Simon Critchley in “Laughter’s Messianic Power”, chapter I of his excellent *On Humour* (16-18). Even if Critchley suggests that there might be an analogy between “true jokes” and “shared prayers”, he doesn’t admit that humour is the glimpse of a supernatural world: “humour is not noumenal, but phenomenal, not theological but anthropological, not numinous but simply luminous” (*Ibid.*, 17). Critchley mentions Auden’s remarks in “Concerning the Unpredictable” (*Forewords and Afterwords*, 472), about the similarity between laughter and prayer: in both spheres —Auden says— men are equal; in laughter as individual members of the species, in prayer, as unique persons (in the *secular* sphere of work, on the contrary, man cannot be equal, but only diverse and interdependent). In fact, what Auden says is that a good human life is only possible if the *three* spheres are respected:

work without laughter and prayer turns into insane love of power; prayer without laughter and work into gnostic, cranky and pharisaic. And without prayer and work, the laughter turns ugly, the comic grubby, and the mockery cruel.

⁸² Also the back and forth movement between the unconscious and the conscious. Humour can reveal not only what we *should be* as rational beings, but what we still *are* as animals. The *gap* between the aims of the *intellect* and the needs of the *body* is also a permanent comic motive. Humour reveals in many cases, indeed, how reason helps to control and refine perilous desires, but also how it represses good ones. Anyway I tend to think that, from a Jamesian perspective, humour would have to do with something different than a Freudian economy of desire. The problem is that to make clear this point we would need to contrast James's notion of the subliminal self with Freud's notion of the unconscious. See Taylor, E., *William James on the Consciousness Beyond the Margin*.

⁸³ This point would require much more comments, including some ones on Richard Rorty's idea of irony, and probably Nietzsche's ideas on the weakness of the "last men" in his *Zarathustra*.

⁸⁴ Niebuhr's retrospective criticism of James's *Varieties* would have to do exactly with this. Seeing retrospectively James's contribution —Niebuhr says in 1961— one would say that he did full justice in his chapter on saintliness "to the quest for perfection in both the medieval ascetic movement and modern sectarian Protestantism. But he does not come to terms with the charge of Reformation thought, that the quest for perfection is bound to be abortive, since even the most rigorous human virtue cannot escape the ambiguity of good and evil, with which all human is infected. His chapter on mysticism reveals in what way mystic disciplines release from anxieties and contribute to a joyful nonchalance of life. But he does not come to terms with one defect on the mystic tradition: its tendency to flee the responsibilities of history and engage in premature adventures into eternity" (*Ibid.*, 7).

⁸⁵ "...History is always collective destiny. James surveys the effect of religious faith upon the health and wholesomeness of the individual, upon the capacity or incapacity to withstand the strains of life; upon the ability to give up old ways for new, and upon the ability to accept the perplexities of life not with sullen patience but with a certain amount of cheerfulness... all this criteria of religious vitality and relevance has been surrounded by collective problems and perplexities (*Ibid.*, 8). I think that Niebuhr overestimates James's concern with collective catastrophes, even if he only lived, and not as a soldier, a Civil War, and not two World Wars and a nuclear Age as Niebuhr. See on James and Niebuhr, Hook, S. *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life*.

⁸⁶ See on this, Del Castillo, R., "James y el malestar en la cultura".

⁸⁷ See an original reinterpretation of a Jamesian spirituality *without* God in Craig, M.: "James and the Ethical Importance of Grace". Also her book on Levinas and James.

⁸⁸ I want to express my gratitude to some people who helped to improve substantially previous drafts of this work: Santiago Rey, Paul Croce, Richard Bernstein, Alicia García, Sonu Shamdasani, Alfonso Cuenca and Antonio Gómez. This work has also been made thanks to the support of a research program FFI2008-03310/FISO, financed by the MCINN (Gobierno de España).

COMMENTS*

FRANCESCA BORDOGNA

I would like to thank Prof. Croce for inviting me to comment on this session, and Prof. Moller for his willingness to read (and fetch) my comments. It has been a privilege to read the papers, and I regret not being able to attend the session.

I will comment on the papers individually, beginning with Prof. Croce's paper. Paul Croce reminds us that, in addition to offering the contributions to the disciplines of philosophy and psychology, for which he is best known, William James also "thought outside of disciplinary lines of work." Inter alia, James addressed audiences who did not think within the disciplinary framework; sang the praises of "undisciplinables"; and at times used the kind of simple, non-technical, even picturesque language, which gave the shivers not only to his enemies, but also to some of his friends. He also "used metaphors to illustrate his theories," a practice which Prof. Croce associates with "undisciplined thought," in contrast to scholars who, instead, highlight the function of metaphors in well-established rhetorical traditions within specific disciplines.¹ Finally, James engaged in ways of thinking, which, Prof. Croce claims, were characterized by "conviction", rather than by "inquiry," the latter being for Prof. Croce a marker of disciplinarity. While other scholars have interpreted some of these features of James's work as illustrations of interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary modes of knowledge production, Prof. Croce suggests that we read these and other aspects of James's work as examples of what he calls a "pre-disciplinary" or a "non-disciplinary" stance." The difference is not only terminological. Both "interdisciplinarity" (a research mode in which an individual resorts

to the tools offered by a variety of disciplines) and “cross-disciplinarity” (in which “individuals from different disciplines” cooperate on projects of common interest)² presuppose disciplinarity. Disciplinarity, in turn, according to Prof. Croce, is predicated on dualism, on the assumption of a “dualist shape of the world.” In contrast, James’s pre-disciplinarity was “supported” by what Prof. Croce calls James’s “non-dualism.” The latter is a multi-faceted notion characterized by a willingness to think “before” binary distinctions, such as science and religion, but also material and immaterial, natural and supernatural, phenomenon and noumenon, subject and object, mind and body.

Prof. Croce, however, does not contend that James’s “non-dualism” led James to eliminate or erase the terms of the binary oppositions, such as “subject or knower” and “the object known.” These terms, instead, co-existed “in intimate relation” as “features of the same ‘pure experience.’” “Non-dualism,” he continues, “did not displace dualism.” Similarly the paper suggests that James’s “pre-disciplinary” thinking did not translate into the dismissal of the disciplines; on the contrary, in James pre-disciplinary and disciplinary work “existed alongside.” James even occasionally “mingled” those research modes, for example by proposing a “place for conviction within inquiry,” and by directing “his inquiries into conviction.”

The paper provides important tools for approaching James’s work and invites readers to search for examples of co-existence of dualism and pre-dualism, of disciplinarity and pre-disciplinarity in it. James’s theory of the emotions, at least as presented retrospectively by James in 1902, provides an example of the coexistence of dualism and a pre-dualist way of looking at things. The main claim of the theory, according to which the physiological “expression” of an emotion precedes the emotion as

a mental state, rests on the ability to discriminate between bodily and mental changes. In 1902 James retrospectively surmised that the “whole literature of the James-Lange theory” proved that emotions are “simultaneously affections of the body” and “of the mind.” Yet, in the same article James also used his theory of emotions to illustrate his anti-dualist “central thesis” that outer and inner, “subjectivity and objectivity, are affairs not of what an experience is aboriginally made of, but of its classifications.”³

The coexistence of dualism and pre-dualism in James’s retrospective reflections on the James-Lange theory raises the question of the origin of James’s anti-dualism. Anti-dualism in this example seems to be tightly linked to James’s metaphysical monism, according to which, as David Lamberth put it, “experience is prior to mind/matter,” this and other kinds of “splits[s]” being “built out of” the “pulse of pure experience.”⁴ Lamberth suggested that this type of monism became important to James in the mid-1890, rather than in the early 1900s, as previously thought. Would Prof. Croce want us to push further back the emergence of James’s metaphysical monism? Or, instead, shall we resist the temptation of associating closely non-dualism with metaphysical monism, and consider non-dualism as a much broader concept, of which metaphysical monism is only an illustration?

If I read it correctly, the paper associates ontological dualism with a dualism of perspectives and endeavors (e.g. science vs. religion), as well as more broadly with disciplinarity. But did James and his contemporaries necessarily look at disciplinary divides as “epiphenomena of deeper boundaries in the conventional wisdom about the dualist shape of the world,” as prof. Croce suggests? And, conversely, was pre-dualism always the correlate of pre-disciplinarity? In the Lowell lectures, for example, a form of

mind/brain dualism (as expressed in the claim that we own both a body and a mind) does not prevent James from inviting his interlocutors to practice a kind of science that would study both the mind and the body, ignoring the “fence” that physiologists and introspective philosophers were erecting to separate their adjoining “lots” in the field of knowledge. Here mind/body dualism does not translate into disciplinary partitions.⁵

To my mind the main insight offered by Prof. Croce’s paper is that James valued pre-disciplinarity because it facilitated the project of “confronting experience afresh,” that is, before imposing on it the conceptual nets produced, among other agents, by the disciplines, which, Prof. Croce suggests, James viewed as tools for organizing experience. James’s desire and willingness “to meet experience” directly in a non-dualist way is, according to Prof. Croce, ultimately what propelled James to “cross disciplines,” and, presumably, engage in the kinds of inter-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary projects that other scholars, including myself, have ascribed to different motives.

Prof. del Castillo’s paper, in contrast, presents a solidly “dualist” James, as far as philosophical typologies are concerned. It enriches our understanding of the relationship between James and Santayana by examining the different ways in which they laughed. And it uses the “contrast between an *ironic* temper and a *comic* temper” to complicate our understanding of one of James’s binary distinction between philosophical types: the “cynic” and the “sympathetic” tempers. Since Prof. del Castillo emphasizes “the importance of ‘portraits’ to understand philosophical differences,” I think it is fair to describe his project as belonging to a “history of portraits.” This kind of historiography includes a history of “temperaments,” if, by temperament we understand, with William James, and, in fact, with most late 19th-century psychologists, something rooted less in

the Kantian domain of culture than in the Kantian domain of nature: in other words, a person's temperament, as Kant offered and James and many of his psychological colleagues accepted, is what Nature makes of that person, rather than what a person can make of himself.⁶ Vladimir Jankélévitch, in his reflections on irony, capitalized exactly on that conception of temperament. Playing on the assonance between "humeur" (the Galenic bodily fluids) and "humour" ("l'*humour*, c'est-à-dire l'humeur"), he linked the idea of humor with that of temperament.⁷ Given that temperament, according to James is rooted in the constitution of the nervous system, and that it guides a person's ways of perceiving and "reacting to" the universe by means of physiological, perhaps even mechanical processes, it would seem that one can no more cultivate, say, a cynical temper, than get rid of a generalized anxiety disorder (pace cognitive psychologists). A "history of portraits", then, seems to capture the kind of person "one is", rather than the kind of person one desires or strives to be.⁸

Professor del Castillo's project, however, bears also similarities to a different kind of historiography of philosophy, namely the history of philosophy as a way of life. One could perhaps call this strain of Prof del Castillo's paper a "history of characters," accepting late 19th-century psychological theories according to which character belonged to the Kantian domain of culture, rather than to that of nature: in other words, character is what a person makes of herself, rather than the kind of person one is by nature. In this mode, Prof. del Castillo notes, we could take James's "description of the sympathetic character as an ethical view, or as a conception of good life," even as a practical template for self-transformative action by means of which a person could modify his/her ways of perceiving and dealing with nature and society. In this mode Prof. del Castillo notes that

the dispositions associated with the “cynic” and the “sympathetic” tempers can be cultivated: “ironists *try* to feel detached from facts, whereas comic tempers become absolutely involved in facts, *trying* to cope with them as they go along.”⁹ The cultivation of habits and of the emotions here serves as a philosophical exercise. Prof. del Castillo’s paper seems to suggest that, to some extent, “cynicism” (as defined in the paper) and a sympathetic approach to the cosmos, nature, society, and oneself can be regarded as prescriptions for cultivating both certain ways of acting toward others and oneself, and certain ways of perceiving the universe, nature, and society. In other words, cynicism and the sympathetic approach to reality may be regarded not only as innate, natural temperamental traits, but also as modes of life, dispositions one can somehow intensify by resorting, for example, to the techniques for the cultivation of the will, of character, and of the emotions which were ubiquitous in turn-of-the-twentieth-century psychological and self-help literature. Humor too, both of the ironic and of the comic variety, appears to be a philosophical practice. Humor, prof. del Castillo notes, breaks down routines and functions as an “agent of solidarity.” Irony instead, is a technique for generating distance and estrangement from reality and/or from the self.¹⁰

There are plenty of (now rather old-fashioned) “histories of portraits” and plenty of histories of philosophy as a way of life. What makes prof. del Castillo’s paper especially interesting is that it combines the two approaches. His is, at once, a history of portraits and a history of philosophical exercises; a history of the kind of person one is and a history of the kind of person one hopes to become; in short – if we accept for a moment late nineteenth-century psychology-- a history of temperaments and a history of characters. My question for Prof. del Castillo is whether the opposition between cynic

and sympathetic tempers is ultimately as irreducible for James as, if I read him correctly, he suggests it is. Can a cynic person ever become a “sympathetic character”? If not, how can James present the sympathetic type as an ethical guide? Or is that kind of “good life” possible only for people who are “sympathetic” by nature?

James’s politics of psychopathology, as analyzed by Dr. Sutton provides a genuine example of both a pre-dualist and a pre-disciplinary way of thinking: not only did James blur the boundaries separating health from morbidity, but he also showed the occurrence in healthy people’s everyday life of traits that, in a different context, might be regarded as pathological. With Dr.

Sutton’s and Dr. Goldman’s papers we switch to the theme of politics. After the initial wave in the 1980s and 1990s of works, which “politicized” William James, depicting him variously as a communitarian anarchist, a supporter of corporate socialism, a producerist, and more, in the last few years several scholars have expanded our understanding of how James may have been politically involved, by examining several cases of politics by other means. To give just a few examples, Jeff Sklansky has argued that, by redefining freedom as psychological freedom, James’s theory of the will suggested the possibility of reconciling ‘mental autonomy’ with material dependence. Sklansky does not necessarily agree with an earlier scholarly tradition, according to which the “new psychology” necessarily functioned as a set of blinkers, which “anxious intellectuals” could use in order to “avert their eyes from the alienating effects of industrialization.” Nevertheless he is keenly aware that James’s psychology, by reconceiving “political-economic dynamics as psychological phenomena,” “carried a profoundly political burden.”¹¹ Richard Gale, instead, has examined the political valences

of James's "great account of the lovers Jack and Jill," showing that it promoted respect for the sacredness of individual life and James's "principle of democracy, requiring us to respect other persons, even nations, and to adopt a live-and-let-live hands-off policy."¹² To give one last example, Deborah J. Coon analyzed James's interventions into the politics of medicine, the politics of psychical research, the politics of "normal" psychology, and, more generally, the politics of academia. She highlighted how, with those interventions, James aimed to combat the intolerance, "encroaching hegemony," disrespectful and patronizing attitudes of regular physicians, of the holders of the PhD title, and of many experimental psychologists.¹³ Dr. Sutton's paper on James's "politics of psychopathology" expands these analyses, by unveiling James's interventions on behalf of the mentally ill.

The politics of psychopathology, as Dr. Sutton argues, were especially important to James, who suffered from nervous insomnia, back pain, and bouts of neurasthenia, and thus viewed himself as belonging to "the social category" of the mentally "invalid." The paper shows that James's politics of psychopathology represented, at least in part, a response to the diffusion of aggressive theories of degeneration, which threatened to assimilate nervous disorders, such as those from which James suffered, to the extreme and unwelcome diagnosis of insanity. In contrast, James praised the social usefulness of the mentally ill and encouraged his contemporaries to "approach the morbid regions of human nature with, 'a certain tolerance, a certain sympathy' and 'a certain respect.'" Here it would have been interesting to consider not only James's theories, but also his (to be sure quite limited) clinical practice. For example, in 1890 James endeavored to 'treat' a case of double personality. The patient, an itinerant preacher named Ansel Bourne, had

suddenly disappeared from his home in 1887. Two months later he found himself in a different town, where he had been living under the name of “A. J. Brown.” While some clinical psychologists would have likely tried to suppress one of the two personalities, or aimed to subsume the least desirable personality within the more desirable one, James instead worked to preserve both. By means of hypnosis he endeavored to stage an encounter between the secondary personality and the wife of the primary personality, in order to make each personality aware of the existence of the other.¹⁴ While the therapy failed, this case illustrates how important, for James, it was to tolerate and respect not only the mentally ill, but even their parasitic or alternate personalities.

I can only address two points made in the paper. First Dr. Sutton shows that James challenged the idea of the existence of a clear-cut demarcation separating “health” from “morbidity,” in an effort to promote tolerance for the mentally ill. Challenging the distinction actually was not an unusual move in the late nineteenth century; for example, Theodule Ribot, in *Diseases of Personality*, established a continuum between mental health and mental morbidity. Yet one may wonder whether blurring the divide between the pathological and the normal could be necessarily, or univocally, reassuring. The episode of panic fear, which in *Varieties of Religious Experience* James famously ascribed to a “correspondent” of his, comes to mind. One evening, “whilst in a state of philosophical pessimism and general depression of spirits about [his] prospects,” James’s correspondent suddenly experienced a “horrible fear” of his “own existence.” “Simultaneously,” the narrator recounted, “there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum.” The realization that the difference between himself and the “idiotic” patient was a “merely momentary discrepancy”

engendered “such a horror” of the epileptic patient, that the narrator “became a mass of quivering fear.” Retrospectively the narrator concluded that the experience made him “sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others ever since,” thus eliciting precisely the kind of response James was hoping to promote, as Dr. Sutton shows, by blurring the divides between the healthy and the pathological. Yet, the price to be paid for that sympathy was high: the “fear was so invasive and powerful,” the narrator continued, “that I thought I should have grown really insane. He “awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of [his] stomach,” and for months “was unable to go out into the dark alone.”¹⁵ Whether the narrative described something James actually experienced, or whether it was James’s “contribution to family tradition of writing philosophically pithy ghost stories,” as Ruetenik suggested,¹⁶ one can wonder how James could expect his publics to be able to reconcile the vastly different emotional effects – horror of similarity and sympathy for the potentially similar-- engendered by the assumption of a continuum linking mental illness to mental health. At stake here, as well as in James’s second strategy – namely, the suggestion that the same behavior could be regarded as healthy in one context and pathological in another—was not only the normalization of morbidity, but also the pathologization of the normal. Furthermore, such a move, as James could not fail to appreciate, could result in the further expansion of the power domain of asylum superintendents and medical experts.

The second question is about James’s suggestion, in his drafted letter to Rockefeller, that insanity be reconceptualized as a functional disease. By redefining insanity as a functional disease, Dr. Sutton suggests, James not only hoped to remove the stigma that surrounded that disease, but also aimed to make it into a disease “which is

susceptible to mental healing methods.” Both points are well taken. Yet, one wonders to what extent the concept of a functional disease could do the labor Dr. Sutton suggests it did. In turn-of-the-twentieth-century America treatment for functional diseases was still prevalently somatic. Consider for example the prototypical functional disease, “neurasthenia.” While neurologist George Beard was willing to involve the patient’s mind as a “therapeutic means” in the cure of this ailment,¹⁷ most American neurologists, the medical group which most clearly subscribed to the concept of functional nervous diseases, still remained committed to somatic therapies. These included, e.g., diet, electricity, medication, rest, as well as treatments humiliating for the patient, such as forced feeding (both through the mouth and through “rectal injections”). Can Dr. Sutton tell us more about the actual use of mental therapies by American neurologists and other American medical practitioners committed specifically to a functional understanding of certain mental illnesses?¹⁸

Coming now to Loren Goldman’s paper, this paper belongs to a revisionist scholarship, which in the last few years has complicated our understanding of the political implications of William James’s philosophy. Anthony Marasco, for example, has shown that, far from leading necessarily to a defense of democracy, in some social and cultural contexts, such as early twentieth-century Italy, James’s pragmatism could in fact lead to a denial of democracy and to forms of proto-fascism.¹⁹ Dr. Goldman reminds us that even the single apparently most democratic feature of James’s philosophy – namely pluralism –appeared to some of James’s readers as leading to fascism.

My question is about the exact nature of the relationships between Sorel’s syndicalism and James’s pragmatism, especially James’s theory of truth. Dr. Goldman

notes that “Sorel ... considered himself a Pragmatist of a certain sort.” Yet Sorel was incensed when the Italian pragmatist Giuseppe Prezzolini, in a 1909 book on syndicalism lavishly praised by the syndicalist Benito Mussolini, depicted Sorel as a pragmatist.²⁰ Sorel had portrayed Prezzolini as a master of “mendacity”; he had contended that pragmatism led to “artificiality and even duplicity.”²¹ Sorel’s diagnosis in fact was absolutely correct in the case of Prezzolini’s and other Italian incarnations of James’s pragmatist account of truth.²² Yet precisely those versions of James’s pragmatist theory of truth were the instrument of choice that Prezzolini and other Italian pragmatists used for the intensification of action— a goal which they shared with Sorel as well as with William James. Can Dr. Goldman further explain how Sorel viewed the relationships between his syndicalism and James’s pragmatism, especially James’s account of truth? More precisely, did Sorel, like the Italian pragmatists, posit any links between “the Pragmatic method in determining truth” and the goal of the reinvigoration of action?

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NOTES

**Editor’s Note:* These comments respond to the papers as they were presented at the conference. Each author had the opportunity to revise his paper in light of these comments before publication. Emma Sutton’s paper, which is mentioned here, is published elsewhere.

¹David Leary, for example, provides examples illustrating how psychology, as well as a variety of “physical, biological, and social sciences have developed on the basis of certain root, or founding, metaphors.” See David Leary, “Psyche’s Muse: The Role of Metaphor in the History

of Psychology,” in D. Leary, ed., *Metaphors in the History of Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 14.

² See Richard H. Roberts and James M. Good, “Introduction. Persuasive Discourse in and between Disciplines in the Human Sciences,” in Roberts and Good, *Recovery of Rhetoric: Persuasive Discourse and Disciplinarity in the Human Sciences* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), p. 6.

³ James, “The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience,” in James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism. The Works of William James*, F. Burkhardt gen. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 71.

⁴ David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 80.

⁵ It may be worth noting also that several, among the many turn-of-the-twentieth-century philosophers and scientists who tried to reconfigure existing frameworks of disciplines, avoided predicating disciplinarity on ontological dualism, or on ontological regionalism. At the turn of the twentieth century important plans for the classification of the sciences suggested that sciences as different as physics and psychology dealt with the same subject matter, but from different points of view. For a discussion of turn-of-the-century debates on the advantages of classifications of disciplines “by point of view” rather than “by subject-matter” see, e.g., E. B. Titchener, *Systematic Psychology: Prolegomena* (1929).

⁶ See, e.g., Sergio Franzese, *L'uomo indeterminate. Saggio su William James*, Rome: D'Anselmi, 2000

⁷ V. Jankelevitch, *L'ironie*, Paris: Alcan, 1936, p. 106.

⁸ I have discussed the distinction temperament and character in late nineteenth-century psychology in “The Psychology and Physiology of Temperament: Pragmatism in Context,” *Journal for the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 2001 (37): 3-26.

⁹ Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Some of James's philosophical contemporaries – including some of James's European followers -- used it as a philosophical technique in order to produce effects of distance, as well as to prove by action the bankruptcy of both metaphysical and psychological determinism. Bordogna, “Asceticism and Truth: The Case of ‘Magic Pragmatism,’” Berlin, Max-Planck-Institute für Wissenschaftesgeschichte, pre-print 404, 2010.

¹¹ Jeffrey Sklansky, *The Soul's Economy. Market Society and Selfhood in American Thought, 820-1920* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 142-143, 146.

¹² Richard Gale, *The Divided Self of William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 248. On this point see also Charlene H. Seigfried, "James: The Point of View of the Other," in S. B. Rosenthal, C. R. Hausman, and D. R. Anderson eds., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, 85-98.

¹³ Deborah J. Coon, "Courtship with Anarchy. The Socio-Political Foundations of William James's Pragmatism," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard, 1988.

¹⁴ James, *Principles of Psychology. The Works of William James*, F. Burkhardt gen. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), vol. 1, p. 371.

¹⁵ James, *Varieties of Religious Experience. The Works of William James. The Works of William James*, F. Burkhardt gen. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, YEAR), 134.

¹⁶ Tadd Ruetenik, "Social Meliorism in the Religious Pragmatism of William James," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 2005 (19), 3: 238-249. Quotation on p. 239.

¹⁷ George Beard, "The Influence of the Mind in the Causation and Cure of Disease – the Potency of Definite Expectation" (1876), discussed in Eric Caplan, *Mind Games. American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 93-95. See also Barbara Sicherman's classical article "The Uses of a Diagnosis: Doctors, Patients, and Neurasthenia," *Journal of the History of Medicine*, January 1977, 33-54.

¹⁸ Eric Caplan persuasively argues that although "common sense suggests that there might be some causal relationship between the discovery of functional nervous/psychical diseases and the advent of psychological therapies, little evidence exists in support of this position." (Eric Caplan, *Mind Games*, op. cit., p. 45) Far from stemming from the concept of functional disease, Caplan argues, the birth (or return) of psychotherapy in America was prompted by Christian Science and the mind-cure movement, in which, as is well known, James was quite interested. James did indeed challenge "somaticism" (Caplan, 98), together with a "loose-knit" and "elite" group of professionals who were pioneers in treating mental diseases that had no organic basis." (E. Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States*, New York: Scribner, 1983; quoted in Caplan, op. cit., p. 98; the group, as Taylor has shown, included James's friends James Jackson Putnam and Morton Prince, and James's former student Boris Sidis). Nevertheless in the first decade of the twentieth century mental therapy still bore the stigma associated with Christian Science and the mind-cure movement.

¹⁹ Anthony Marasco, “Papini’s Corridor: Pragmatism, Democracy, and the Lure of the Irrational in the Later Work of William James,” Ph. D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2003.

²⁰ Giuseppe Prezzolini, *La Teoria Sindacalista* (Naples: Perrella, 1909), 273. Benito Mussolini, review of Prezzolini, *La Teoria Sindacalista*, *Il Popolo*, May 27, 1909. (Reprinted in E. Gentile ed., *Mussolini e ‘La Voce’*, Milan: Sansoni, 1976.)

²¹ See Prezzolini, *La teoria sindacalista*, 247-253.

²² Prezzolini retaliated and in a letter to Benedetto Croce depicted Sorel as “a pragmatist who writes bad things about pragmatism.”

WILLIAM JAMES AND THE ANTI-WAR CAMPAIGN: “ON THE MORAL EQUIVALENT OF WAR” AND A “CERTAIN BLINDNESS IN HUMAN BEINGS”

KIPTON E. JENSEN

ABSTRACT

This essay explores several philosophical objections to war in William James’s “On the Moral Equivalent of War” and “On a Certain Blindness.” More concerned with the interiority of war than just war theory, James provides a modicum of guidance if not also consolation to those readers who object to “war and forms of peace that mean the same thing as war,” i.e., social practices that are inwardly inconsistent with good will toward all life. The strength of one’s opposition to war depends on the correctness of one’s position, certainly, but it also requires a better understanding of the permanent enemy among us, namely, “the bellicosity of human nature.” Beyond the mere intellectual conviction that war is morally unacceptable, or that it is one’s “bounden duty to resist settling reasonable disputes in a violent manner,” one is also obliged – suggests James – to translate one’s beliefs into an active yet non-violent resistance to the human proclivity to settle disputes “quickly, thrillingly, tragically, and by force.”

Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did.

C.S. Lewis, *Chronicles of Narnia*,
“On the First Joke and other Matters.”

In the 20th century, quipped Saul Bellow, we became increasingly “cerebral but not too smart.” In the 21st century, I suspect, we shall succeed in making ourselves – as Lewis turns it – “stupider than we really are.” By the time that Secretary of State Powell claimed – in April 2003 – that “the hostilities phase is coming to a conclusion” and that it was “time for all of us to think about the post-hostilities phase,” my thoughts were already plagued by conscientious objections, both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, to our conflict in Iraq. Beyond the formal objections to war, as well as to “forms of peace that mean the same thing as war,” which is by no means irrelevant to contemporary non-violent anti-war campaigns, I believe that we still have something valuable to learn from William James about our prospects for slaying what he calls “the permanent enemy,” namely, “the noted bellicosity of human nature” (845). Although he was a self-proclaimed “pacifist” and an unabashed anti-imperialist, James was compelled to prescribe “preventive medicine” rather than “a radical cure” (846) in his address to the 13th World Peace Conference in 1904.

But before discussing James’s “Moral Equivalent of War” and “On a Certain Moral Blindness,” I wish to begin with a literary image as well as a personal account of my own uneven response to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. For those interested merely in the argument, this will seem beside the point; but for a philosopher like James, this emotive context is by no means unimportant.¹ I then turn to the inwardness of waging war and the motives for opposing war not only in James but also in Kant as well as Gandhi and Anscombe. By way of conclusion, I focus on what James calls our “bounden duty” to oppose certain forms of war as well as certain forms of peace that mean the same thing as war.

THE UNCLE ANDREW SYNDROME

When describing the founding of Narnia, Lewis suggests that “what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: it also depends on the sort of person you are.”

Ever since the animals had first appeared, Uncle Andrew had been shrinking further and further into the thicket. He watched them very hard of course, but he wasn’t really interested in seeing what they were doing, only in seeing whether they were going to make a rush at him. Like the Witch, he was

dreadfully practical. He simply didn't notice that Aslan was choosing one pair out of every kind of beast. All he saw, or thought he saw, was a lot of dangerous wild animals walking vaguely about. And he kept on wondering why the other animals didn't run away from the big Lion.

When the great moment came and the Beasts spoke, he missed the whole point; for a rather interesting reason. When the Lion had first begun singing, long ago when it was still quite dark, he had realized that the noise was a song. And he had disliked that song very much. It made him think and feel things that he did not want to think and feel. Then, when the sun rose and he saw that the singer was a lion ('only a lion,' he thought to himself) he tried his hardest to make believe that it wasn't singing and never had been singing – only roaring as any lion might in a zoo in our own world. 'Of course it can't really have been singing,' he thought, 'I must have imagined it. I've been letting my nerves get out of order. Who ever heard of a lion singing?' And the longer and more beautifully the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring (75).

This passage in Lewis reads like a parable, an allegory, and an admonitory lesson. It would be reckless or rash to apply, except perhaps in passing, the lesson of Uncle Andrew to our protracted conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. To argue about who suffers most from the Uncle Andrew syndrome, or who the animals represent, who is a lion, Who is Aslan, what is the text and melody of the song, why Uncle Andrew didn't like the song, and the like, misses the most interesting point about the process by which Uncle Andrew became stupider than he really was. The most pressing point concerns the formulation of a process by which we might become less stupid than we have become. This literary reference is intended to serve the same function as the ones that James felt compelled to use, e.g., Wallace Stevens, in his essay "On a Certain Moral Blindness."²

THE PLAGUE OF PHILOSOPHICAL POSTSCRIPTAE

In the early aftermath of 9/11, I turned to William James's 1910 "Moral Equivalent of War" for consolation; but consolation is not what I found there. Rather than bemoaning the

“bestial side of the war-regime” or providing a defense of pacifism or even a “promising line of conciliation,” James delivers “a dismal forecast” if not a paean to the higher aspects of militaristic sentiment and virtue. James understood how desperately hard it was to bring the peace-party and the war-party together; not altogether unlike Niebuhr, though they differ in so many other ways, James apparently believed that “we should fight their falsehood with our truth, but we must also fight the falsehood in our truth.” At least part of the difficulty, thought James, was “due to certain deficiencies in the program of pacifism which set the military imagination against it.” But I now realize, some ten years later, that James’s deflating analysis in the “Moral Equivalent of War” essay should be read against the backdrop of his other writings on the theme: e.g., his 1899 “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,”³ the 1903 “Address to the Anti-Imperialist League,”⁴ and his 1904 “Remarks at the Peace Banquet.”⁵

When we went off to war against Iraq, in March 2003, I pushed aside my reflections on the inwardness of waging war in James and Kant. After that, after our retaliation shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq, I found myself shell-shocked; the academic protests and pleading provisos seemed half-hearted to me. Though I attended quasi-collegial debates about what constitutes the lesser evil from the perspective of just war theory, the sort of discussions that abounded in academia in the wake of the war, arguments patently unsound because based on false or at least merely speculative premises,⁶ I found it difficult – even for someone considered to be a philosopher – to espouse if not also defend the old Socratic dictum that ‘it is better to suffer possible evil than to inflict it.’⁷

Much has happened since then, but there are several rather conspicuous things that haven’t happened that probably should have. I begin with myself, a closet conscientious objector. My passivity has rendered me complicit. On the anniversary of 9/11, this year, not unlike last year, my students and I discussed Gandhi’s doctrine of Satyagraha. In 1940, Mohandas Gandhi made the following appeal:

Your statesmen have declared that this is a war on behalf of democracy. There are many other reasons given in justification. You know that all by heart. I suggest that, at the end of the war, whichever way it ends, there will be no

democracy left to represent democracy. This war has descended upon mankind as a curse and a warning. It is a curse inasmuch as it is brutalizing man on a scale hitherto unknown. All distinctions between combatants and non-combatants have been abolished. No one and nothing is to be spared. Lying has been reduced to an art. . . . It is a warning that, if nobody reads the writing on the wall, man will be reduced to the state of the beast, whom he is shaming by his manners. I read the writing when the hostilities broke out. But I had not the courage to say a word. God has given me the courage to say it before it is too late.

The writing on the wall was not illegible, neither then nor now, even to someone trained to suspend judgment as long as possible. I fear that it is already too late for us to right the wrongs inflicted on Iraq, as well as our self-inflicted wounds, body and soul, but perhaps it is not too late for us to improve ourselves – that is, for us to *turn back* toward or discover for the first time our better selves.

Even if it is true that President Truman “slept like a baby” the evening after agreeing to drop bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the caveat that it would be a purely military target, which is absurd because bombs the size of cities do not discriminate between combatants and innocent civilians, I should like to think that the first night – when one is still in denial – was the easiest in what proved to be a long series of restless dark nights of the soul. (Some of us are still in a state of protracted denial.) This was certainly Miss Anscombe’s view at the time. Before the United States entered the Second World War, in 1939, Roosevelt denounced what he called

the ruthless bombing . . . which has resulted in the maiming and in the death of thousands of defenseless men, women, and children, has sickened the hearts of every civilized man and woman, and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity. If resort is had to this form of inhuman barbarism during the period of the tragic conflagration with which the world is now confronted, hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings who have no responsibility for, and

who are not even remotely participating in, the hostilities which have now broken out, will lose their lives.

And indeed they did. Innocent human beings are still losing their lives, almost daily, at the hands of terrorists of varying degrees, in Iraq and Afghanistan. And perhaps that was the case also under the old regime, though in different form. But I am interested in Roosevelt's point concerning what he considered to be the reaction to war, and the inhuman barbarism that accompanies warfare, in the hearts and "conscience of every civilized person": heart sickening and profoundly shocking. To engage in war will require us to overcome this heart sickness and to mollify the objections of one's individual conscience if not "the conscience of humanity." (Are our hearts still heart-sickened, is our conscience still profoundly shocked? Has the voice of conscience been muted? Do wars sanction hatred, so long as it masquerades under the guise of patriotism?⁸ Are we deafened to its whispers? Did it never exist? If it did, how did it die or where did it go? Has our collective moral conscience become uncivilized?)

We fail morally whenever we placate, cheaply, the demands of our individual or collective human conscience. On the occasion of war, and events leading to war, on questions of life and death, and to a conscience formed in a certain manner, our conscience will require us to object in word and deed to national decisions with which we would not want to be associated. *Not listening to one's conscience*, to what Plato called his inner voice, *not acting conscientiously*, i.e., in displaying one's willingness to act in opposition one's own conscience, or even merely *allowing one's conscience to become malformed or insensitive* constitute variant moral failures to fulfill the demands of conscience; these shortcomings, from a psychological point of view, may well require from us – in an effort to improve ourselves – something akin to confession if not repentance and compensation for wrongs committed. I must myself confess – at least to myself, out of reverence for the moral law within me – that I have been, practically, and to my regret, a closet conscientious objector to the war in Iraq. It is, at best, a sin of omission – a failure to act at a time when I should have. Increasingly, though imperceptibly in the beginning, it amounts to a failure in civic courage. These things continue to pique my conscience.

JAMES AND THE MORAL EQUIVALENT OF WAR

What we now need to discover in the social realm is the moral equivalent of war; something heroic that will speak to men as universally as war does, and yet will be as compatible with their spiritual selves as war has proved itself to be incompatible (James, *VRE*: 292).

The war against war, as well as the war against forms of peace which are synonymous for “war expected,” wrote James in 1906/1910,⁹ “is going to be no holiday excursion or camping party.” In the following section of this essay, I want to draw on two philosophers – first James and then Kant – as offering some guidance to us in our present threat of war. As philosophers and moral psychologists, James and Kant wanted to understand the *inwardness* of war-waging in order to better define the progressive task of political moralists in times of war (as well as in times of peace which mean the same thing as war).

Often, we do well to imagine the best of “what might be” in order to judge rightly the shortcomings of “what actually is.” This vision, if sufficiently vivid and vital, will have a leavening effect on society. This is, I take it, the importance of utopian literature from Plato to Rawls. But sometimes, as suggested in Niebuhr’s *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, the “best” functions as an enemy of the “good.” (It should be admitted also that the good-enough, whatever placates or assuages one’s conscience, is occasionally if not often the enemy of the better or best.) It is one of the great tragedies of aggregate existence, claimed Niebuhr, that we are unable to realize collectively what our conscience demands individually (1932/1960: 9). At the same time, conceding the difficult optimism involved in the crusade, I want to side with James who thought that it was “our bounden duty” to believe in an “international rationality” and thus an alternative to war in “every conflict of honest interests.”¹⁰

Wars are waged, among other places, within the imagination. Our collective imagination, and nationalism, is set afire by stories of military virtue: courage, self-sacrifice for the common good, loyalty, discipline, the capacity to trust, hardihood and cooperation. The military virtues loom large in our national – and for some of us, our individual –

imagination. This allegedly explains why James spends the bulk of his essay surveying the mythology of military virtues, drawing careful attention to tales of great courage yet illustrating also the extreme brutalities of war. James wants us to understand the opposing view, something he attempts to diagnose – similar to Freud, later, in *Civilization and its Discontents* – as a collective neurosis. To fail to understand the emotive context inherent in alternative perspectives, or to refuse to listen to the other side, constitutes – for James – a form of moral blindness. James understands that we honor the fallen by making their cause sacred to us; but James also suggests that this human tendency expresses a psychological principle rather than a moral argument. Perhaps the brutalities of war demand, because it is unthinkable to say that it was all in vain, a justification if not also revenge; our heroes and heroines are often those who revenge the good cause for which blood has been spilled. Loyalty to the dead is sometimes translated into the psychology of revenge, which asks no questions; our loyalty to unborn generations, who are difficult to imagine, pales by comparison.

Perhaps our success as a force for peace requires a form of discipline and courage not altogether unlike that typically assigned to military virtue. Or more to the psychological point, and James's main idea in this "Moral Equivalent of War" essay, it is only possible to weaken the war impulse by displacing or otherwise transferring the emotive context of military virtues away from the forum of war to, for example, the forum of civil service. (This suggestion animated the formation of the Civilian Conservation Corps as well as VISTA and the Peace Corps.) But is courage still courage, independent of the (virtuous or vicious) cause for which it is exercised? To take a stand against war, perhaps even in principle, as a pacifist might, does not mean that one is opposed to these military virtues, nor is it necessarily opposed to those soldiers within whom these martial virtues are personified; nor does it mean that the conscientious objector lacks these very virtues simply because they are applied to a different *albeit related* campaign, e.g., against human suffering or the bellicosity of human nature.

One need not be unpatriotic or cowardly – or selfish or lacking in all loyal relationships or undisciplined or weak or isolationistic – to oppose the drive to wage war. Our ethical heroes should also include men and women who overcome the tendency toward war in order to establish an enduring peace. Many pacifists, I consider myself but one case in point, are profoundly grateful for the sacrifices made by soldiers in defense of our national ideals of

freedom and democracy. (Many branches of my own family tree have been chopped-off prematurely, though voluntarily, by war; and I was myself in the military when I was a young man.) One of the shortcomings of our contemporary collective imagination is expressed in our national tendency to view a citizen's protest against war as unpatriotic if not treasonous; there is an analogical failure of our imagination to think that gratitude toward those who have sacrificed themselves for us in war constitutes an endorsement of war. And while it is possible to see or half-see things from the other perspective, or even from a wide array of perspectives, which is what the logic of plurality requires of us, it is still possible to disagree or oppose the efforts of those who see things differently than we do.¹¹

According to John Lachs, there are really four distinct forms of blindness that James conflates in his "On a Certain Blindness" essay – namely,

the primary form of blindness in James' line of sight is the failure to see how others view the world. This actually consists of two disabilities, the first that of not being able to see the world the way others see it, and the second that of closing our eyes to the divergent devotions of other people. . . [but] there is also a third form of blindness, that concerned with the emotive tone of experience or the way life feels to other people, . . . [together with an] inevitable corollary of such ignorance [i.e., the emotive tone of other people's experience] is a fourth sort of blindness, namely that to who others are (Lachs, 2008, 2 – 10; see <http://williamjamesstudies.org/3.1/lachs.html>.)

Our national psyche has changed significantly since the tragedy of 9/11, to be sure, and changed wildly since 1906/1910, when James was reflecting on the civil war and the Spanish-American war as well as the increasingly imperialist sentiment in America (and abroad); and certainly there is a greater chance of mass destruction now, due to advances in military technology, *but the psychology of terror may be essentially the same now as it was then*. Despite the anachronisms involved, William James may well provide some guidance to philosophers of a certain temperament at a time when we are already beginning to go deaf from the war drums. "The practical consequence of such a philosophy," writes James in the Preface, "is the well-known democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality – is, at any

rate, the outward tolerance of whatever is not itself intolerant” (TT: 4). Following Richardson, “James’s anti-imperial activism was not incidental; it grew naturally from his advocacy of pluralism and individual self-determination and from his conviction that we are mostly blind to the vital centers of the lives of others” (2007: 385).

Terrorism is devised to weaken if not destroy the enemy’s imagination: We can now imagine, or half-imagine, that what happened to the innocent victims of 9/11 could happen to us, or to those we love, and the more often we rehearse what happened on that day (watching, as we do, the unthinkable happen over and over again), the more insecure we feel. We wage war when we are afraid, or threatened, either in life or limb or perhaps even financial liability; we might even feel less afraid when we are part of a community mobilized to protect itself from the aggressor – in which case, it is the fear itself that links us to one another. Sartre goes so far as to say that there is no such thing as a ‘we-subject,’ but only an ‘us-object’ – i.e., it is only when we are objectified together that we develop a group identity.¹² (It should come as no surprise that national identities are reinforced if not invented by rehearsing an emancipation narrative, the story about how we overcame those who oppressed and objectified us.) At some point, we will display our finest military virtues in overcoming – to use James’s phrase – “the fear of emancipation from the fear-regime.” Inevitably, one might be tempted to say, outward-directed fear of an enemy turn to peripherally-directly fear of the enemy among us. This, perhaps, is the decisive damage done by terrorism. Fear unifies people. But can we, really, and in a sustained fashion, be unified also by hope? Can we even imagine it? Can we solicit the military virtues into a force opposed to war? Can we imagine a life liberated from all fear-regimes? How might it be accomplished? An “anti-fear campaign,” which could plausibly develop parallel to and interwoven with unavoidable militaristic campaigns, calls for visionaries who are committed absolutely to the ultimate purpose for going to war – namely, to secure a world in which the destinies of people “shall nevermore be decided quickly, thrillingly, tragically, by force.”

This anti-war campaign, James knew, is not for the weak-of-heart, but rather for those dedicated – with all courage, self-sacrifice, loyalty, discipline, hardihood, wisdom, and cooperation – to our collective emancipation from the reign of terror, to blue skies unclouded by the brutalities and aftereffects of war. But the regime of fear will not leave willingly when

our answer to fear-regimes is a larger regime of fear – i.e., when one patriotic leviathan is replaced by another. How will Palestinian and Israeli children free themselves from the fear of war, of terror, of personal violence used to promote dishonest or even honest if not ultimately noble interests? To overcome, to curtail or even contain, a terrorist will require a preparedness to meet threatening forms of terror with greater terror; but if the victory is resistance, and it has slowly become something very much like that, then it is a fight to the death if not cultural genocide. Though I understand those who argue that marching to war is a human obligation, a sacred duty to one's family and country, one established either by utilitarian considerations or by pangs of loyalty to those who have died bravely, let us not forget the oft neglected obligation to struggle against what Kant called the 'state of war' (i.e., "the tendency always to find a new pretext for war").

KANT'S PERPETUAL PEACE

Every up-to-date dictionary should say that 'peace' and 'war' mean the same thing, now *in posse*, now *in actu*. It may even reasonably be said that the intensely sharp competitive *preparation* for war by the nations *is the real war*, permanent, unceasing; and that the battles are only a sort of public verification of the mastery gained during the 'peace'-interval (James, 1910).

By 1904, and anticipating the world conflict on the horizon, James suggested that the anti-war campaign was weakened by "much [talk] of universal peace or of a general disarmament" (846). But James was certainly familiar, by virtue of his work with the World Peace Council, with Kant's institutional strategies for securing universal or perpetual peace. In 1795, when 'the wild cry of freedom' was not infrequently heard in the streets of Germany, during the French Revolution, Kant wrote a philosophical sketch of several preliminary articles for establishing perpetual peace among nations. In theory, no conflict exists between politics and morality; but in practice, the conflict will always exist – indeed, Kant seems to think that this is how it should be, since the conflict serves as "a whetstone of virtue." Politics and morality

unite in “resolutely standing up to evils and sacrifices that must be taken on”; on certain occasions, the collaborative relationship consists rather in “detecting, squarely facing and conquering the deceit of the evil principle in ourselves, which is the more dangerously devious and treacherous because it excuses all our transgressions with an appeal to human nature’s frailty.”

Political moralists part ways with politics, however, whenever politicians begin to treat morality as if it were

a universal *doctrine of prudence*, i.e., a theory of maxims by which to choose the most efficient means of furthering one’s own interests, which is to deny that morality exists at all. Politics says, “Be ye wise as serpents,” to which morality adds (as a limiting condition) “and as innocent as doves (*Perpetual Peace*, 2006: 94, Ak. 8:370).¹³

Whenever the two maxims cannot coexist, however, once Machiavellian strategies of retaining power are adopted, there emerges a non-trivial incompatibility between politics and morality.¹⁴ But as a conflict of honest interests, the disagreement is open to civil civic debate and collective deliberation and – at least in principle – arbitration and reconciliation. If it is our duty to protect human rights or, as Kant puts it, “make the state of public right actual,” and if indeed that is our espoused moral justification for intervening in other nations, we must ourselves accept and adhere to – by the principles of reciprocity as well as publicity – that same standard or maxim. If a nation is unwilling to bend a knee to international justice, by which we simultaneously and publicly submit ourselves to a higher authority [*Form der Publizität*], personified in allegedly unbiased institutions such as the United Nations, the resisting nation poses a very real threat to civil society; nations facilitate international cooperation only by fulfilling the necessary preconditions for negotiating genuine conflicts of interests. Even Hobbes believed that “nature provides inducements, both passionate and rational, for seeking peace.”

In his *Perpetual Peace*, Kant provides us with a set of regulatory principles for assessing “international rationality.” Of particular relevance, I think, is the *Sixth*:

No nation at war with another shall permit such acts of war as shall make mutual trust impossible during some future time of peace: Such acts include the use of Assassins (*percussores*), Poisoners (*venefici*), breach of surrender, instigation of treason (*perduellio*) in the opposing nation, et cetera (2006: 70, Ak. 8: 346).

These stratagems are dishonorable, says Kant, because “[s]ome level of trust in the enemy’s way of thinking [*Denkungsart*] must be preserved even in the midst of war, for otherwise no peace can ever be concluded and the hostilities would become a war of extermination.” (President Eisenhower understood this militarist thought all too well.) I think that James is thinking along these lines when he mentions his “bounden duty.” Peace without some level of trust would be permitted to occur, wrote Kant, “only in the vast graveyard of humanity.”¹⁵ Kant was concerned not only with the harm done to those nations who unjustly fall prey to a mightier nation’s distrust, he is worried also about those nations who triumph by the means of dishonorable stratagems. “Once they come into use, these intrinsically despicable, infernal acts cannot long be confined to war alone.” One of the great tragedies of war is that the mindset of a soldier [*Denkungsart eines Kriegers*] has a natural proclivity to “carry over to peacetime and thus undermine it.” One of the tasks of political moralists, as Kant called himself, is to protect or defend our national conscience and dove-like moral legitimacy at a time when the skies are darkened by war hawks. If morality is set aside in times of war, it will tend to be set aside also whenever there are rumors of war – at which point, recalling the quote with which this section of the present essay began, James thinks that war and peace begin to mean the same thing.

PACIFISM AND PACIFICISM

Philosophical pacificism,¹⁶ as James calls it, or what Alexander refers to as political pacifism,¹⁷ broadly construed, is a socio-political movement animated by the desire to provide an alternative to the institution of war. So stipulated, it is possible – suggests Alexander – that “there could be pacifists even in a world in which war had been abolished, or one in which there were no states.” Pacifism as distinct from “political pacifism,” or what James called

“pacifism,” is the position of the absolutist who says that “one may not kill another person under any circumstances.”¹⁸ Miss Anscombe, who might be classified as a pacifist but by no means a pacifist, once suggested that the illusion of pacifism had “corrupted enormous numbers of people.”¹⁹ But in the case of James, as well as Royce, it was perfectly consistent to be a “pacifist” as well as a “*via media* pacifist.” The anti-war campaign, which is not for the weak-of-heart, says James, may require both dispositions.

Thomas Friedman, who referred to the 9/11 tragedy as the beginning of World War III, recognized from the beginning how difficult it would be for us “to fight the terrorists as if there were no rules, and preserve our open society as if there were no terrorists.”²⁰ The moral restraint displayed in times of war, we might imagine, is the foundation from which future wars might be avoided. Perhaps the position of the philosophical *pacifist* – a doctrine advocating non-violent resistance to war and all forms of peace that mean the same thing as war – is intended to have a leavening effect on society, one that – one hopes, with difficult optimism – secures a *pacifist* compromise, which insists “that it is possible and desirable to settle international disputes by peaceful means.” The future I am willing to make certain compromises in order to secure is a society in which – citing again Niebuhr – there would be “enough justice, and in which coercion will be sufficiently non-violent to prevent . . . complete disaster.”²¹ What is enough justice? At what point is coercion sufficiently non-violent? What constitutes, really, apropos of war, complete disaster?

TENTATIVE CONCLUSION

The question of what is to be done in Iraq, certainly, and Afghanistan, but also now in Iran and indeed in America is still – in 2012, i.e., almost a decade into what Powell called the “post-hostilities phase” – up for grabs. The hostility phase is ongoing. In Iraq and Afghanistan, as elsewhere, the traditional strictures of just war theory are – *de facto* if not *de jure* – altogether ignored. The endgame is absurd. There are no winners. Where do we go from here? What is to be done? Who can ultimately guarantee perpetual peace, human rights, freedom, democracy, generosity, magnanimity, and the like? At what cost? What means are justified? How are we to distinguish honest from dishonest interests?

It is sometimes said that the first virtue lost to war, the first casualty, is truth; second, it is said, goes our conscience; and third, as a speculative hypothesis, is the democracy and freedom on behalf of which we allegedly marched off to war in the first place.²² The endgame, one might predict, if not absurd, is – at best – dismal. J. Wm. Fulbright once claimed that “having people understand one’s thought creates greater security than another submarine” – which we might amend with “another sortie of bombs.” But explaining one’s ideas is not enough; we must seek a means of putting our ideas into action.

Satyagraha, Gandhi’s policy of non-violent non-cooperation, is a movement that “aims at translating ideas into action.” The moral idealism that animates our non-violent opposition to war, similar to King’s strategy of non-violent but active resistance, which requires a stage of purification, must be expressed in sincerity and humility. Humility of that sort is an achievement. The strength of the movement, the social idealist will say, relies “upon the correctness of the position.” Perhaps that is the present problem. Non-violence, Gandhi teaches us, in its active form, is “good will toward all life” – pure love as described in the Hindu scriptures, in the Bible, and also in the Koran. Resist, actively but non-violently, all forms of ill will against life – i.e., conscientiously objecting to actions and policies as well as arguments that are inwardly inconsistent with good will toward all life.

Political idealism, perhaps even philosophical pacifism, is itself a collateral casualty of war. Camus defined the absurd as what happens when a rational mind confronts an indifferent if not bellicose universe.²³ Is not the first bounden duty – a duty of the imagination not unlike Niebuhr’s ‘difficult optimism’ – to believe that the universe is not indifferent to our folly, that the political community is not indifferent to the suffering of innocent children, and that the situation is not absurd? The task of translating pacifistic ideas into action is difficult because it requires a sustained conviction about the correctness of the position and also, quite simply, because it requires courage – at least the courage to voice one’s conscience. Without insisting on peace at any cost, as a philosophical pacifist, I consider it to be my bounden civic duty – to my fellow citizens but also to my children and to myself as an individual – to conscientiously object to disingenuous and unjust war stratagems as well as forms of peace that mean, at least inwardly, and following the logic of pluralism, the same thing as war. For James, but also for Kant and Gandhi as well as Niebuhr and Roosevelt, each person – and each community of civilized persons – has a ‘bounden duty to resist settling reasonable

disputes in a violent manner.’ Political pacifists and conscientious objectors are required to agitate for arbitration as an alternative to war, certainly, but it is also our bounden duty resist the “bellicose constitution of human nature” which makes us stupider than we really are. Courage is required of us not only to resist the wicked instinct to settle matters “quickly, thrillingly, tragically, by force,” but also to “speak out as individuals whatever truth, however unpopular, that is in you.”²⁴

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NOTES

¹ Although both parties, i.e., the peace-party and the war-party, as James calls them, claim that their position is more rational or more prudent or otherwise more realistic than that which is espoused by the opposition, James insisted – from the outset, in his “The Sentiment of Rationality” (1878) – that rationality is itself a feeling or emotion. “In the whole discussion,” writes James in *The Moral Equivalent of War*, “both sides are on imaginative and sentimental ground. It is but one utopia against another, and everything one says must be abstract and hypothetical.”

² Richardson explains the function of narrative in James in the Prologue to *William James in the Maelstrom of American Modernism*: “[James] understood, and he said repeatedly, how hard it is to really see things, to see anything, from another’s point of view. He had a number of blindnesses himself. But he did not abandon the effort to understand others, and he proposed that wherever some part of life ‘communicates an eagerness to him who lives it,’ there is where the life becomes genuinely significant. He himself looked for what he called the ‘hot spot’ in a person’s consciousness, the ‘habitual center’ of his or her personal energy. James understood the appeal of narrative, and so it is with a narrative that he made his point about joy” (2006: 7). Richardson is referring to James’s use of Stevenson’s “Lantern Bearers” in the opening pages of “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” (1899).

³ In that text, James comments on the logic of plurality: This plurality, he writes, “commands us to tolerate, respect, and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways, however unintelligible these may be to us. Hands off: neither the whole of truth nor the whole of

good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands" (BB, 264).

⁴ William James, "Address to the Anti-Imperialist League, November 28, 1903." *Report of the Fifth Meeting of the Anti-Imperialist League*. Boston: The New England Anti-Imperialist League, 1903. James declared his anti-imperialist commitments in 1900: "I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land."

⁵ William James, "Remarks at the Peace Banquet." *Atlantic Monthly* 94 (December 1904): 845-47.

⁶ It is difficult to argue the case when so much of the factual information is unavailable. No sound conclusions can be drawn without accurate premises. Secrecy of information stymies non-speculative analysis. "Plausible deniability" has been used as a stalling tactic since, at least in recent political history, the time of the Oliver North hearings.

⁷ This was, however, for the record, the collective response of the American Philosophical Association, Central Division, which met in Denver, as bombs were falling on Baghdad, in March of 2003.

⁸ "During times of war," writes Howard Thurman, in his *Jesus and the Disinherited*, written in 1949, "hatred becomes quite respectable, even though it has to masquerade often under the guise of patriotism" (1976: 74).

⁹ Although "The Moral Equivalent of War" was not published until 1910, James had been ruminating on the idea for a long time; already in 1902 James discusses the inner strength of the person who voluntarily accepts poverty, on the principle of refusing to enjoy anything that others do not share, as a viable candidate for the moral equivalent of war in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (see 253 ff., 292). The first version of the essay surfaced as a talk, "The Psychology of War," to the Stanford student assembly in 1906; it was there that James suggested that "the wars of the future must be waged inside of every country, between the destructive and the constructive ideals and forces" (ERM: 251-52).

¹⁰ Is this a reasonable dispute? There are, at the very least, reasonable grievances on both sides: though drawing the lines between the sides is practically impossible. Increasingly, the lines of resistance are smeared if not occasionally indecipherable. Distinguishing the "we" from the "they," the "us" from "them," even in the most harmless manner, as a means of contrast and clarification and self-identity, is perhaps an inevitable evil because it destroys the imagination. It must be terrible to die for a dishonest interest or, as the Vietnam veteran John Kerry put it, "to ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake."

¹¹ In his own example, James describes the difference in perspective on the value of a pristine woodland that is about to be clear-cut. James is heart-broken, not necessarily for good environmental reasons but rather because he enjoys viewing those woods from the ridge of a nearby mountain. But the owner of the property is inflated by the prospect of taming that land and turning it into useful farming ground. Though James comes to see or half-see it from the farmer's point of view, he still believes – and not just as a mountain climber – that the farmer should leave the woodland standing (see *MEW*, 1910).

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes, New York: Philosophical Library, 1956; also *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Sheridan-Smith. London: New Left Books, 1974.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, trans. D. Colcasure. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2006.

¹⁴ As a guide for those caught in such conflicts, where “the boundaries of morality do not yield to Juniter (the protector of power),” Kant suggests a motto culled from Vergil's *Aeneid*, VI, 95 (Lind): “Do not yield to misfortune, but press on more boldly/ than your fortune allows you.”

¹⁵ In the “Moral Equivalent of War,” James claims that “[h]istory is a bath of blood” and that “Greek history is a panorama of jingoism and imperialism – war for war's sake.” The “slaughter bench of history,” thought Hegel, himself an observer of the terror that followed the French Revolution, is the consequence of an unquenchable thirst for freedom and recognition when compounded by two of Hobbes's inducements to war, namely, diffidence and vainglory.

¹⁶ Rooted in Latin, ‘*pax*,’ meaning peace between states, pacificism was introduced into English, via the French, in about 1901 and expressed “an opposition to war as a means of resolution to conflict between states” or “the doctrine or belief that it is possible and desirable to settle international disputes by peaceful means.” Magellan, we learn, used it to name the Pacific Ocean due to its outwardly calm appearance. One form of the word, ‘*pacifik*,’ appears in Nathan Bailey's *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, in 1721, suggest “making peace or appeasing.” In Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, first published in 1755, “*pacifick*” was further defined a “peace-making, mild, gentle, appeasing.” Within the span of just more than thirty years, the word morphed from an active verb to include the use of it as an adjective; rather than thought in motion, pacific was a character trait.

By 1927, the *New Century Dictionary* cross-references ‘*pacificism*’ with ‘*pacifism*,’ and includes as part of its definition the “derogatory sense, the spirit, attitude, or procedure of those who

insist on peace at any cost.” These days, in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), pacificism is cross-referenced to pacifism and offers two definitions: (a) rejecting war and violence as a matter of principle, as well as (b) advocating a peaceful policy as the first and best resort. Specifically under ‘pacifism’ appears the following: “By ‘pacifism’ I mean the advocacy of a peaceful policy; by ‘pacifism’ (a word invented in the twentieth century) the doctrine of non-resistance.”

Perhaps the definition offered by Ayto in the *Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1999) will serve us best. Explaining the distinct Americanization of the term, he presents a succinct etymological history of ‘pacifism,’ creating the idea that perhaps the best way to understand what ‘pacifism’ means is to observe what the word eventually came to mean in its new form: “Pacifism first appeared in 1902, but the derivative pacifist is first recorded in 1906. At first a neutral term, it acquired decidedly contemptuous overtones during World War I.”

¹⁷ “Political Pacifism,” *Social Theory and Practice*, Vol. 29, 2003; also see ‘On the Distinction between Pacifism and Pacificism’ in Barbara Bleich and Jean-Daniel Strub (eds) *Pacifismus: Ideengeschichte, Theorie und Praxis*, Bern: Haupt Verlag, 2006 pp. 107-24. Alexander defines pacifism as “a doctrine concerning political morality, and in particular political institutions. In the light of this, it is striking how many recent philosophical discussions of pacifism—mainly, but certainly not only, those that are hostile to it—characterize it predominantly if not exclusively as what might be called a doctrine of personal refusal” (596).

¹⁸ Thomas Nagel, “War and Massacre,” in Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel, and Thomas Scanlon (eds.) *War and Moral Responsibility* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 3-24, at p. 6. Similarly, claims Alexander, Narveson claims that the pacifist is distinguished by believing “not only that violence is evil but also that it is morally wrong to use force to resist, punish or prevent violence” (see “Pacifism: A Philosophical Analysis,” p. 63).

¹⁹ See Anscombe’s “War and Murder,” in *Nuclear Weapons: A Catholic Response* (London and New York, 1961): “Now pacifism teaches people to make no distinction between the shedding of innocent blood and the shedding of any human blood. And in this way pacifism has corrupted enormous numbers of people who will not act according to its tenets. They become convinced that a number of things are wicked which are not; hence seeing no way of avoiding wickedness, they set no limits to it” (56-57).

²⁰ In “World War III” of *Longitudes and Attitudes* (Anchor Books: 2003), 33; originally published in *New York Times*, 9/13/2001.

²¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Scribner: New York), 1960, 22.

²² Let us not forget the observation made by Shakespeare: "Beware the leader who bangs the drums of war in order to whip the citizenry into a patriotic fervor, for patriotism is indeed a double-edged sword. It both emboldens the blood, just as it narrows the mind. And when the drums of war have reached a fever pitch and the blood boils with hate and the mind has closed, the leader will have no need in seizing the rights of the citizenry. Rather, the citizenry, infused with fear and blinded with patriotism, will offer up all of their rights unto the leader, and gladly so. How do I know? For this is what I have done. And I am Caesar."

²³ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage, 1960), 21.

²⁴ William James, *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 251.